

# Operation 'Colosseum'

## A South African Special Forces Raid Against SWAPO Angola, 13th November 1986

*A Battlefield: WWII Scenario*  
By R Mark Davies

Based on an original scenario by Johan Schoeman at [www.warinagola.com](http://www.warinagola.com)

### **Background**

During the mid-1980s, the Angolan Civil War was reaching its crescendo. Various peace initiatives had been tried and failed. FAPLA (the armed forces of the communist de facto government of Angola) was being massively reinforced by the USSR, while Cuban combat troops poured into the country. Meanwhile, UNITA, the chief Angolan rebel movement, led by the charismatic Jonas Savimbi, was once again being actively supported by South Africa and the USA. Both sides (and their foreign backers) were gearing up for the final confrontation; one that would culminate in some of the largest battles fought in Africa since the end of World War 2.

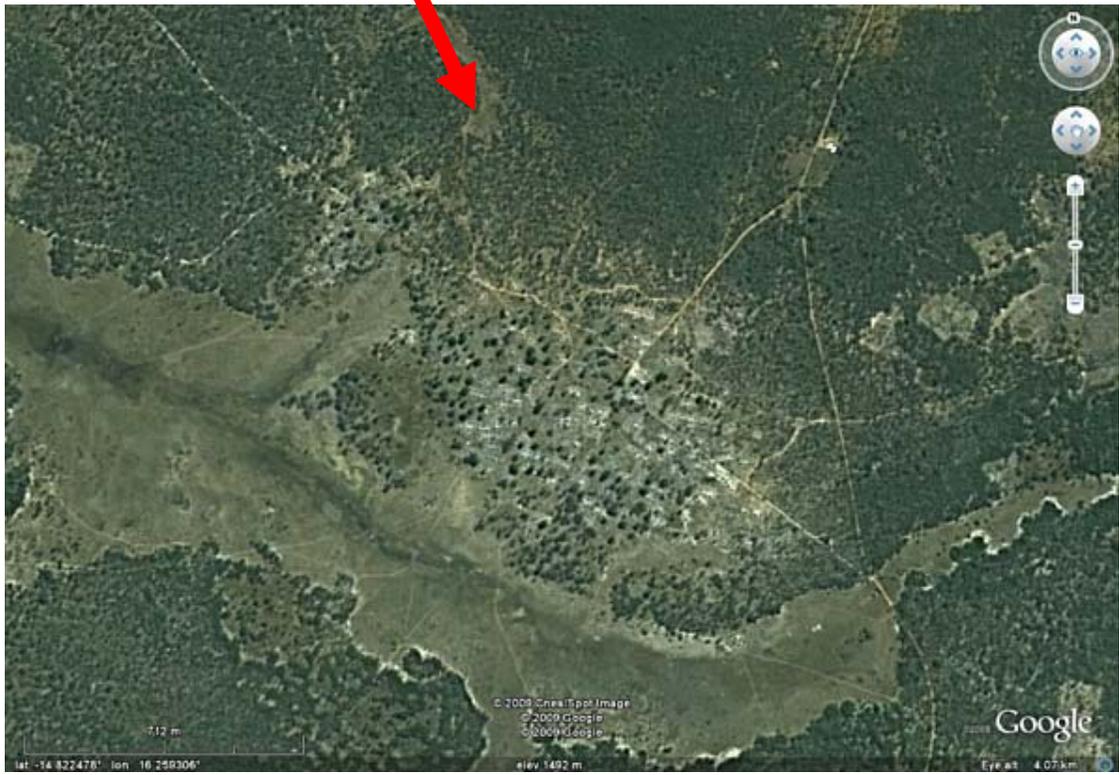
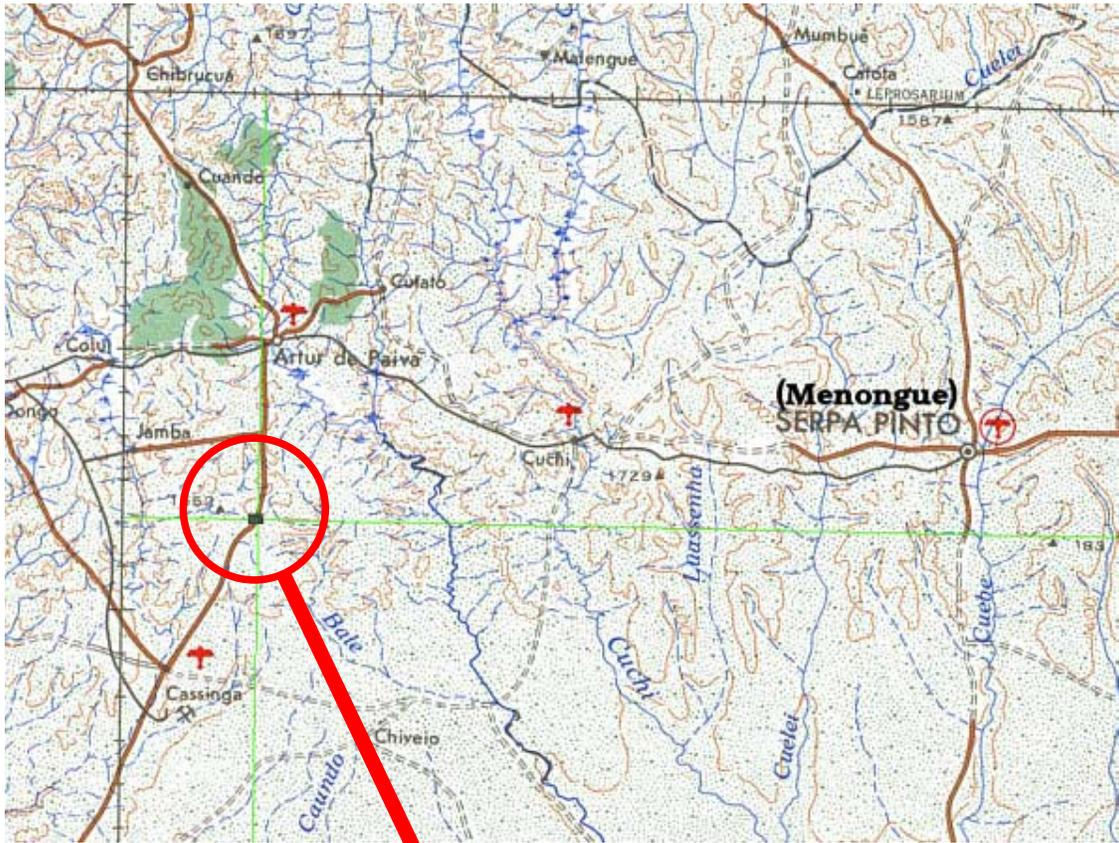
In the midst of this Angolan '*Götterdämmerung*', another war was being fought. The guerrillas of SWAPO (South West African People's Organisation – their armed wing was known as PLAN or People's Liberation Army of Namibia) continued to train and regroup within Angola, protected by FAPLA and Cuban troops. From their Angolan bases, SWAPO-PLAN guerrillas launched raids over the border into South-African controlled South West Africa (modern-day Namibia), using the vast expanse of trackless bush to evade the thinly-spread South African security forces.

The South Africans used a variety of highly effective methods to intercept and destroy these raids, but many still got through, thanks to the cover provided to the guerrillas by the bush. However, a great many of these successful raids were then tracked and intercepted on their return journey to Angola, but the damage had still been done. The South Africans therefore had to hit SWAPO-PLAN in its base areas, deep within Angola, and destroy the raids before they began.

The first of these anti-SWAPO 'External' operations into Angola was Operation 'Reindeer' in 1978, which included the hugely controversial airborne assault on the village of Cassinga. The South Africans claimed that they had killed hundreds of guerrillas, while SWAPO's allies (including the pro-SWAPO western press) declared that hundreds of civilian refugees had been killed. As always, the truth was somewhere in the middle: while some civilians were undoubtedly killed in the operation, SWAPO had been dealt a severe blow and there was a marked decline in SWAPO operations during the 1978/79 'Infiltration Season' while SWAPO dispersed its training, headquarters and support bases.

'External' operations against SWAPO-PLAN had proven their worth and there would be many more such operations over the following years; not only into Angola, but also into Zaïre, Mozambique, Botswana and Zimbabwe, ranging in scale from small special forces raids to large mechanised and/or airborne operations. However, by 1986 Angolan air defences had been expanded by a tremendous amount with the arrival of hundreds of the latest Soviet SAMs and radars, backed up by Cuban-piloted MiG-21s and MiG-23s that outmatched anything the South Africans could put into the air. Consequently, it was now virtually impossible to mount Cassinga-style, large-scale airborne or heliborne operations and the emphasis was now placed on deep-penetration by highly mobile columns of special forces.

In November 1986, one such mobile special forces column from the South African 5 Reconnaissance Commando Battalion, struck against a SWAPO-PLAN training base only so 30km from the scene of the earlier Cassinga raid...



## Terrain



The table measures 6' x 4'.

**Dense Bush (dark green)** – Dense area concealment. Soft cover. Half speed for Troops and Vehicles.

**Open Bush (light green)** – Sparse area concealment. Soft cover. Full speed for Troops and Vehicles.

**River Valley (buff)** – Open terrain. No concealment or cover. Full movement speed for all.

**Tracks** – Movement as for Open terrain (do not class as road movement)

**Streams** – Passable only to infantry, requiring a Breach action to do so. Impassable to vehicles, except at the bridges.

**The SWAPO Encampment** – The SWAPO encampment must be placed entirely within the central area of Open Bush. The SWAPO player must design his encampment by placing the following items on the table before the game starts:

- 6x Built Up Sectors (Wooden Buildings) – officers' quarters, stores and headquarters. These must be placed adjacent to one of the access tracks.
- 8x Earth & Log Bunkers
- 6x Heavy Weapons Pits
- 12 inches of Trenches (Dug-In positions – these may connect the bunkers & weapons pits)
- 24 inches of Low Walls and/or sandbagged breastworks (linear hard cover)
- 18 inches of Barbed Wire
- 15 tents each housing up to x2 Troop units (these confer no extra cover or concealment benefit on the occupants)

The camp must include a fenced or walled-in 'Motor Pool', which must be large enough to house all the camp's motor transport elements. The Motor Pool must be adjacent to one of the access tracks.

## Game Length

The scenario last for 12 turns, with the South Africans having the first turn.

# **Briefing for Commandant James Hill, Commanding 5 Recce Commando**

## **Situation – 0600hrs, 13th November 1986**

The intelligence on this camp was correct: your reconnaissance has revealed that the camp contains SWAPO terrorists in approximately battalion strength, of whom around half are recruits under training. There are some heavy weapons and defensive positions in evidence, but nothing more than you can handle. In any case, their drills seem sloppy and they like a good lie-in in the morning with only minimal sentries, so they should be totally unprepared for your attack.

## **Mission**

You are to assault the SWAPO-PLAN training camp with the intention of killing as many terrorists as possible.

## **Execution**

Friendly Forces – See the order of battle at Annex A to this order. You have split 5 Recce Commando into three 'commandos':

- The main assault group (designated '5/1 Commando') will remain mounted in Casspirs and trucks and at the 'Go' signal will conduct a fast, mounted assault on the camp via one or both of the bridges. You have a plethora of talented officers at your disposal (including some attached from 2 Recce Commando), so you could break 5/1 Commando down into smaller groups if you so wish (perhaps dividing it into two columns – one for each bridge?) – see the Order of Battle for details.
- 5/2 and 5/3 Commandos have infiltrated across the stream during the night and have formed blocking positions covering the roads leading north and west out of the camp. Their objective is to ambush any attempts by the terrorists to escape, as well as being early warning of any enemy relief forces coming from the north.
- For fire support you have a troop of 81mm mortars at your disposal and 5/1 Commando is amply supplied with heavy machine guns and 106mm recoilless rifles. The camp has been well reconnoitered by your operators, so you can freely designate targets for a preparatory fire plan.

Enemy Forces – The SWAPO training unit is of roughly battalion strength. Heavy weapons are fairly minimal – you have seen some DShK 12.7mm heavy machine guns in evidence, as well as some 60mm mortars, RPG-7 and SA-7. They also have a fairly well-stocked motor pool, with various types of Soviet softskins, so could mount a quick getaway unless you neutralise the motor transport first. There are a number of other SWAPO units and encampments within a few clicks, but you do not expect a coordinated reaction from them.

The real threat lies at Jamba, some 20km to the northwest, where there is a Cuban garrison of some 1,500 men, including a company of tanks, a battery of D-30 122mm howitzers (which are within range) a weak regiment of mechanised infantry and a flight of Mi-24 'Hind' gunships. The reason you have chosen to attack this camp is precisely because it is situated the furthest from the Cuban base at Jamba. The Cuban reaction to the Cassinga Raid in 1978 almost resulted in disaster for the Parabats: you must not let that happen to you.

Deployment – 5/1 Commando must deploy in the area of dense bush, south of the river. 5/2 and 5/3 Commandos may be deployed in the dense bush north of the river, but no closer than 2 inches from any SWAPO units or prepared positions.

All troops are to be deployed initially as hidden unit markers until they fire or are spotted by SWAPO. You may also deploy an additional twenty dummy markers anywhere within your deployment areas.

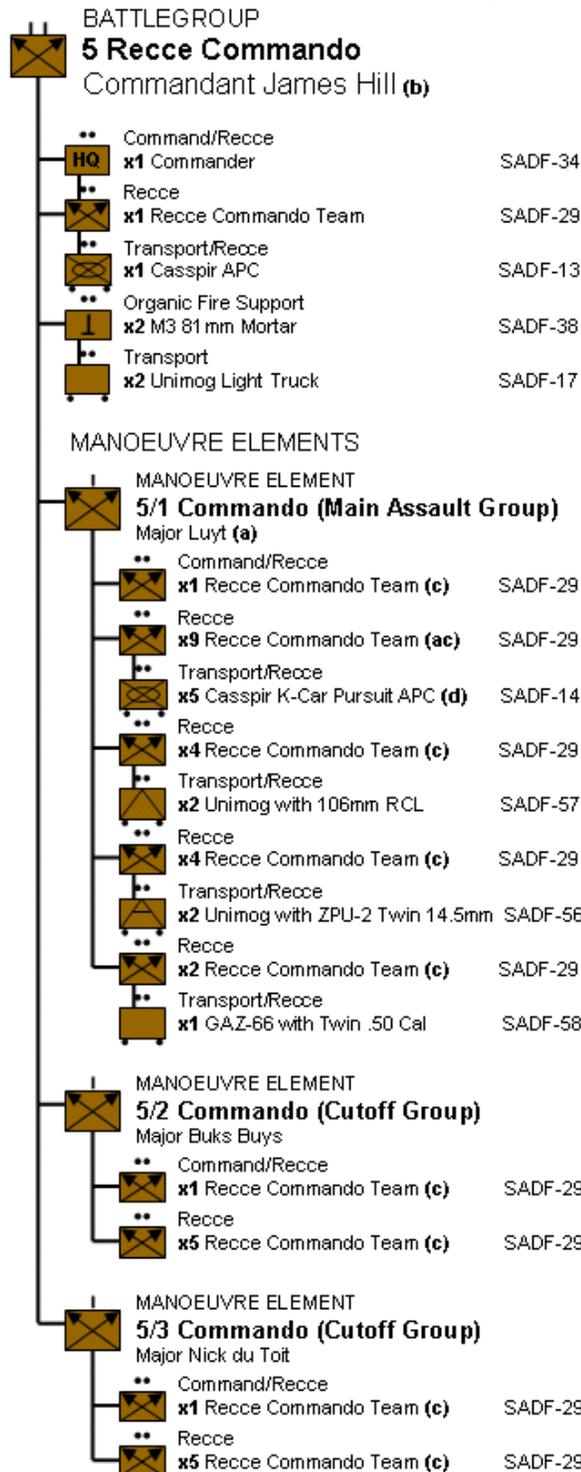
You have the first turn – you may pre-designate a fire plan for your 81mm mortars on to known SWAPO positions if you so wish. This may be planned after you have seen the layout of the SWAPO base, but before the SWAPO player positions any of his units.

Extraction – You must extract your forces (including the cutoff teams) to the south bank of the river by the end of Turn 12.

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## South African Order of Battle

Angola, 13th November 1986



(a) 5/1 Commando may be split into as many as four smaller Manoeuvre Elements: designate up to three Casspir-mounted Recce Commando Teams as command elements (Major Robbie Blake, Major Duncan Regardt and Major Steyn).

(b) All elements of 5 Recce Commando are classed as Élite.

(c) Note that the 'Tracker' card (SADF-29) has been used to represent the 3-4 man Recce Commando Teams. This gives the SADF player plenty of tactical flexibility, at the expense of individual unit firepower (though remember that their Élite rating will considerably beef up firepower anyway). Alternatively, these teams may be combined into 6-8 man sections to increase individual unit firepower – exchange **x2** Commando Teams for **x1** Light Infantry Section (SADF-26). This will give 5/1 Commando a total of **x10** Light Infantry Sections, while 5/2 and 5/3 Commandos will have **x3** sections each. Note that this must be decided before the game starts and may not be done in-game.



**5 Recce Commando**

# **Briefing For Major James Chitepo, SWAPO-PLAN Commander**

## **Situation – 0600hrs, 13th November 1986**

You have no idea what the hell is going on! Your orderly had just brought you your morning coffee and you were going over the day's training programme when suddenly, there was absolute chaos outside; mortar rounds exploding, machine gun fire, the crack and zip of bullets passing close by, all accompanied by shouts and screams outside!

## **Mission**

You are to organise the defence of the camp. Failing that, you are to survive, along with as many of your freedom fighters as possible.

## **Execution**

Friendly Forces – See the order of battle at Annex A for a breakdown of your training unit. Note that there is a large Cuban garrison some 20km to the northwest, comprising a weak mechanised regiment including APCs, tanks, 122mm howitzers and Mi-24 gunships. The Cubans should be able to come to your aid within a couple of hours, just as they did when Cassinga was attacked by Boer paratroops in 1978. The Cubans also have air superiority.

Enemy Forces – You have absolutely no idea! Thanks to the security provided by Soviet SAMs and the Cuban air Force, you had considered yourself immune to attacks by Boer paratroops and with the border some 300km distant, you had thought yourself similarly immune to ground attack. The most likely explanation is that this is an attack by UNITA rebels. It's not really your war, but UNITA rarely make any distinction between SWAPO and FAPLA.

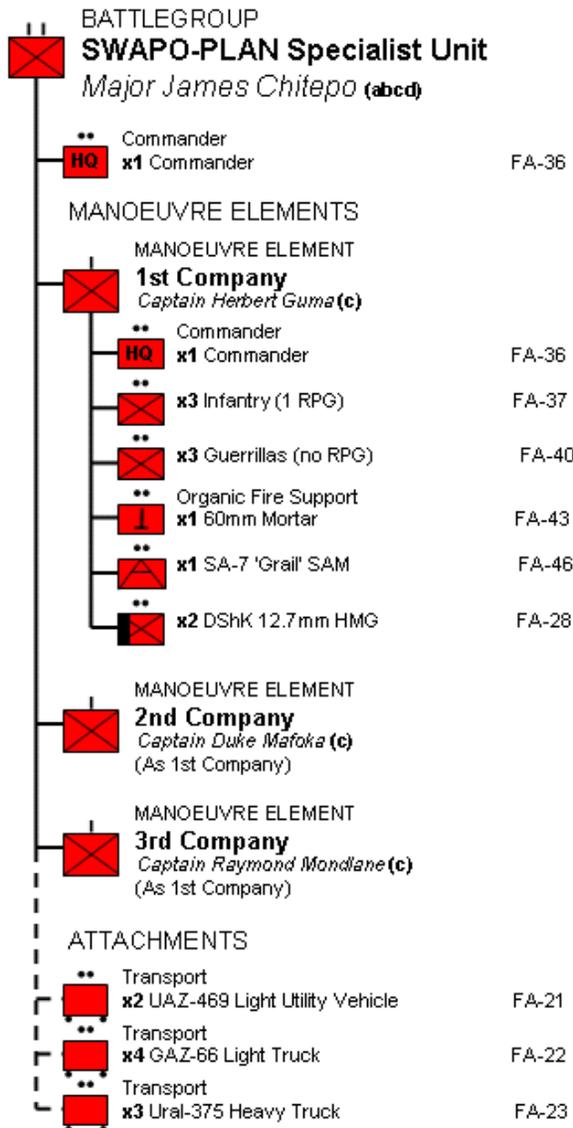
## **Deployment**

- You must set up your base camp as described in the Terrain notes.
- Your four Commander units must start the scenario each deployed in one of the six Built Up Areas. The other two BUSs are HQ and store buildings, so no troops may start the scenario deployed inside them.
- Your motor transport must start the scenario situated within the confines of the Motor Poll. The transport may not be moved until at least one Troop unit reaches one of the vehicles.
- Your DShK heavy machine guns must be deployed inside the heavy weapons pits or bunkers, while your 60mm mortars must be deployed inside heavy weapons pits. No heavy weapons may fire until the Indirect or Offensive Fire Phase (respectively) of SWAPO Turn 2. This is to simulate the time taken for the crews to get out of bed and the weapons to be manned. In the meantime, they may still be targeted by SADF fire and may still defend themselves against close assault.
- Each SWAPO Company must deploy one Guerrilla unit as sentries. These may be deployed anywhere within the base perimeter.
- All other SWAPO Troop units must be deployed within the tents.

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## SWAPO-PLAN Order of Battle

Angola, 13th November 1986



(a) This orbat is purely hypothetical, based on the known strength and weaponry of the SWAPO unit encountered in Op Colosseum.

(b) All SWAPO-PLAN elements are rated as 'Raw'. The regular SWAPO-PLAN training cadre is represented by the 'Infantry' units, whereas the recruits under training are classed as 'Guerrillas' (which have slightly worse ratings than the basic Infantry card).

(c) The SWAPO commanders' names in italics are fictitious, though based on known SWAPO commanders' names from the war.

(d) To increase SWAPO's chances, the umpire may opt to add an extra platoon of **x3** Guerrilla units to each company and could arm up to **x3** units per company with RPG. One or more DShK HMGs could also be upgraded to ZPU-1 (FA-29), ZPU-2 (FA-30), ZPU-4 (FA-31) or ZU-23-2 (FA-33) anti-aircraft guns. If that still isn't enough, add **x1** B-10 82mm RCL per company (FA-26).



## Scenario Special Rules

- All SWAPO sentries and heavy weapons positions are spotted at the start of the scenario.
- No SWAPO heavy weapons may fire until the Defensive or Offensive Fire Phase of the SWAPO Turn 2
- Only the SWAPO sentries may fire in the Defensive Fire Phase of SADF Turn 1 or the Offensive Fire Phase of SWAPO Turn 1. All other SWAPO troops are assumed to be too busy trying to extricate themselves from tents and buildings.
- SWAPO motor transport may not be moved until at least one SWAPO troop unit reaches one of the trucks. It may then be moved in the following SWAPO turn (NOT in the same turn).
- SWAPO forces may not claim the 'No Casualties' +1 Manoeuvre modifier at any point during the scenario.
- SWAPO forces may not claim the 'Commander' +1 Manoeuvre modifier during Turns 1 & 2.
- SWAPO forces may never claim the 'Ambush' +1 Direct Fire modifier during the scenario.
- If SWAPO forces suffer a Panic or Fall Back result in Manoeuvre or as a result of a close assault, they will move directly toward the nearest of the four points where a road exits the table. However, they will move toward the NEXT closest exit point if there are spotted or suspected SADF units between them and their nearest exit point (note however, that they will still move toward hidden unit markers).
- KO'd vehicles may be towed out by any other vehicle. The recovering vehicle must be within 1 inch of the KO'd vehicle. It takes one action to attach or detach a tow-cable. The combination moves at half speed while towing halved again if moving through Dense Bush).
- Call-for-fire tables for SADF and FAPLA/SWAPO may be found within the relevant national TO&Es available on the website. Otherwise, use the basic British and Soviet WWII call-for-fire tables found on the Battlefront: WWII playsheet.

## Optional Rules

- The **Machine Gun Grazing Fire** optional rules may be used for SWAPO DShK heavy machine guns. The rules and printable template may be found on the Fire and Fury website at the following link: <http://www.fireandfury.com/extra/mggrazing.shtml>
- The **Battlefront: Cold War Playtest Rules** may be found on the website, but to be honest, this is a very low-tech engagement and is can be played with the basic **Battlefront: WWII** rules.

## Victory Points

Ignore the usual **Battlefront: WWII** Victory Point system and instead apply this bespoke system:

### SWAPO Victory Points

40VP for each SADF Troop unit KO'd

100VP for each SADF Troop unit captured

30VP for each SADF Casspir KO'd (only 10VP if the SADF recovers it)

50VP for each SADF Casspir captured

10VP for each SADF truck KO'd or captured (only 5VP if the SADF recovers it)

### SADF Victory Points

4VP for each SWAPO Troop or Vehicle unit KO'd

6VP for each SWAPO Troop or Vehicle unit captured

10VP for each SWAPO Commander unit KO'd or captured

Very simply, the winner is the player with the most VPs. The VP 'weighting' may seem very unfair to the South Africans, but don't forget that they were fighting an undeclared war within Angola and the whole subject was very sore with the white South African electorate, let alone the black majority in South Africa and South West Africa! As in Iraq and Afghanistan now, any casualties at all would have serious political fallout at home, while to have them happen on a large scale, or even worse, to have men captured, was a political disaster.

## Unit Cards

The unit cards may be found in the **Prototype Card PDF Generator** on the website (to be found on the **Extras** page). Scroll down the list to find the relevant card numbers and highlight your choices while keeping the <Ctrl> key pressed to create a list. Once you've made your selections, press the button at the bottom and program will create PDF card sheets for you to print out.

You will need to select the following cards:

FA-21 – UAZ-469  
FA-22 – GAZ-66  
FA-23 – Ural-375  
FA-28 – DShK 12.7mm HMG  
FA-36 – Commander  
FA-37 – Infantry  
FA-40 – Guerrillas  
FA-43 – 60mm Mortar  
FA-46 – SA-7 'Grail'

SADF-13 – Casspir  
SADF-14 – Casspir K-Car  
SADF-17 – Unimog  
SADF-26 – Light Infantry  
SADF-29 – Tracker Team  
SADF-34 – Commander  
SADF-38 – M3 81mm Mortar  
SADF-56 – Unimog with ZPU-2  
SADF-57 – Unimog with 106mm RCL  
SADF-58 – GAZ-66 with Twin .50 Cal

## Modelling & Painting

### SWAPO-PLAN Guerrillas

These are quite straightforward to model: Essentially you can use virtually any of the 'Militia', 'Hardened Militia' and 'Regular' figures equipped with AK47, PK LMG or RPG from **Peter Pig's** 'AK47' range, while the trucks and heavy weapons are available from Peter Pig and/or **QRF**. Suitable 60mm mortars can be found in all WW2 American figures ranges. Note also that many SWAPO-PLAN guerrillas were female and Peter Pig produces very useful female combatant figures.

In terms of dress, SWAPO-PLAN guerrillas were very varied, with civilian items mixed in with combat uniform items from the USSR, East Germany, Portugal, Cuba, North Korea and others. Essentially then, the general theme would be various shades of green, most commonly mixed with green-grey 'raindrop' pattern items from East Germany and the occasional FAPLA/Portuguese camouflage item (roughly horizontal splashes of dark green and red brown on a light tan base) or Cuban/North Korean camouflage item (roughly horizontal splashes of dark green and red brown on a field grey base). Headgear was variously plain or camouflaged caps (some with neck curtains), floppy hats or berets.

There was no official painting scheme for SWAPO vehicles, though some were photographed with 'SWAPO' painted roughly along the sides in white paint, along with roughly-applied attempts at camouflage. The base colour would undoubtedly be Soviet Forest Green (as for FAPLA), though the USSR did supply many trucks in civilian colours and other vehicles may have been acquired from civilian sources (some were even stolen from SWA and driven over the border).

### South African Recce Commandos

These are slightly trickier to model than SWAPO. Recce Commando dress and equipment in the field was predictably individualistic, as with many special forces units the world over. Dress was usually a variety of camouflage items from a bewildering array of sources, including captured Eastern Bloc and FAPLA items.

Personally I would opt for **Peter Pig's** Hardened Militia figures, sprinkled with the odd Peter Pig bareheaded special forces figure (if you don't mind the M16s). The Recce Commandos did often use AK47s (and other Soviet weaponry) in the field and in any case, the R4 rifle looks near enough to an AK to pass muster in 15mm!

Note also that white Recce Commando operators would often 'black up' in the field. The idea was that with their largely ex-Soviet weapons, Recces could pass for a FAPLA patrol when spotted at a distance. This same concept was also employed by white members of 32 Battalion and the SWATF. However, a column of Casspirs would probably be a bit of a giveaway and make that idea irrelevant!

Speaking of Casspirs: **QRF** produce the only Casspir model available in 15mm (the master for which was designed by our fellow BF'er Martin Small). The QRF model comes supplied with the basic fit of twin .30 Cal LMGs (which is the basic type used as the 5 Recce Commando HQ vehicle), though the Recce Commandos, in common with other South African counter-insurgency units, beefed up the firepower considerably by adding .50 Cals (in twin mounts or in a triple mount containing one .50 and two .30s), as well as two or more flanking 7.62mm GPMGs.

Peter Pig currently produce a Unimog light truck, though QRF are also shortly to put one on production (Martin Small having again built the master). Both QRF and Peter Pig produce 106mm recoilless rifles and 81mm mortars, though neither has a ZPU-2 in their ranges (though both have a ZPU-1). QRF also produces a GAZ-66 truck.

The standard paint scheme for SADF vehicles was Dark Earth. However, some counter-insurgency units such as *Koevoet* and 101 Battalion '*Romeo Mike*' teams applied camouflage to their Casspirs in the form of dark green splotches, bands or tiger stripes, so it's entirely possible that the Recce Commandos followed suit. Callsigns were often painted or taped in white onto the rear doors.