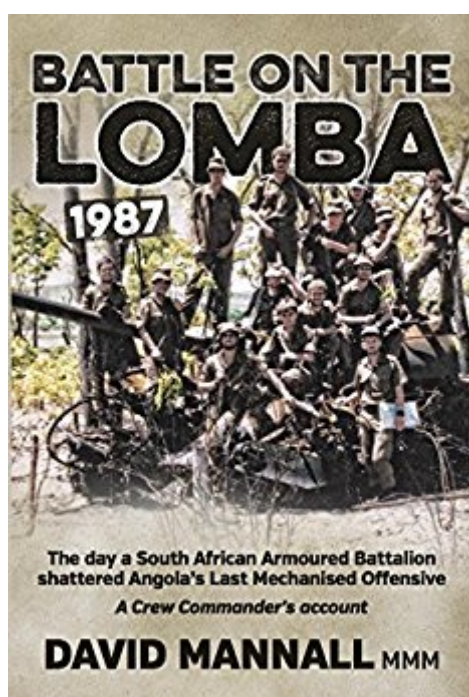


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Battle On The Lomba 1987: The Day A South African Armoured Battalion Shattered Angola's Last Mechanized Offensive - A Crew Commander's Account



Synopsis

The climactic death-throes of Soviet Communism during the 1980s included a last-gasp attempt at strategic franchise expansion in Southern Africa. Channeled through Castro's Cuba, oil-rich Angolan armed forces (FAPLA) received billions of dollars of advanced weaponry including MiG 23 and Sukhoi fighter jets, SAM 8 missile systems and thousands of armored vehicles. Their intent - to eradicate the US-backed Angolan opposition (UNITA), then push southwards into South Africa's protectorate SWA/Namibia, ostensibly as liberators. 1985 saw the first large-scale mechanized offensive in Southern African history. Russian Generals planned and oversaw the offensive but without properly accounting for the tenacity of UNITA (supported by the South African Defense Forces - SADF) or the treacherous terrain typical in the rainy season. The '85 offensive floundered in the mud and FAPLA returned to their capital Luanda. The South Africans stood down, confident their 'covert' support for UNITA had demonstrated the folly of prosecuting war so far from home against Africa's military Superpower. The South Africans were mistaken. Fidel and FAPLA immediately redoubled their efforts, strengthening fifteen battalions with even more Soviet hardware while Russian and Cuban specialists oversaw troop training. As Cuban and Angola fighter pilots honed their skills over the skies of Northern Angola, David Mannall, a normal 17-year old kid completing High School, was preparing for two years of compulsory military service before beginning Tertiary education. Through a series of fateful twists he found himself leading soldiers in a number of full-scale armored clashes including the largest and most decisive battle on African soil since World War II. This is the David and Goliath story that, due to seismic political changes in the region, has never been truthfully told. The author lifts the hatch on his story of how Charlie Squadron, comprising just twelve 90mm AFVs crewed by 36 national servicemen, as part of the elite 61 Mechanized Battalion, engaged and effectively annihilated the giant FAPLA 47th Armored Brigade in one day - 3 October 1987. Their 90mm cannons were never designed as tank-killers but any assurances that it would never be used against heavy armor were left in the classroom during the three-month operation and never more starkly than the decisive 'Battle on The Lomba River'. The Communist-backed offensive died that day along with hundreds of opposition fighters. 47th Brigade survivors abandoned their remaining equipment, fleeing north across the Lomba, eventually joining the 59th Brigade in what became a full-scale retreat of over ten thousand soldiers to Cuito Cuanavale. ## The myth perpetuated by post-apartheid politicians goes something like this "â [the SADF force that destroyed 47th Brigade on 3 October numbered 6,000 men and that all the hard yards were run by the long suffering UNITA!" The inconvenient truth is that there were just 36 South African boys on the frontline that day, but it is also true to say they would never have achieved such

a stunning victory without the support of many more. This is their story.

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Customer Reviews

David Mannall has written an excellent first-person account of a South African Defense Force (SADF) tank commander during Operation Moduler (November 1987) against Soviet/Cuban supplied FAPLA units in southern Angola, while allied with Angolan UNITA forces. What the book is really about is the coming of age of a young conscript soldier. Mannall begins the book as a recently graduated high school student, and we follow him as he goes through basic training and his induction into the SADF. Then, to his surprise, he's assigned to an armored car unit on the border, which quickly finds itself in combat in southern Angola. What makes this a good book, and part of a genre of first person accounts of war, is the book is told totally from the aspect of an enlisted soldier; his perspective and experiences. Parts of the book account for a young man's off time, alcohol, and, of course, his desire to lose his virginity. But most of the book provides true insight into his army experience in training and, more importantly, in war. At the same time Mannell provides insight into the SADF of the time; its training, organization, and weaponry, from a soldier's perspective. His first person descriptions of what it's like to be in combat, especially

in close combat, helps one to understand that to a soldier on the ground, in combat, it's not a neat and organized experience. Fighting in the African bush meant Mannall could only see the vehicles to his left and right, and sometimes not even those. There is confusion and a kill-or-be-killed perspective, while feeling that you're fighting for your friends – you don't want to let them down. Although there's nothing new in these experiences, his perspective is one that bears repeating. These are the experiences of any soldier in combat.

This is just a super read for any one! Being former active military from the same time (US Army) it brought back the best and worst times of the mid to late 80s. Mr Mannall's 1st person account of the SADF, the soldiers life on the boarder and the battle in Southern Angola is wonderful. I have read many accounts of these gentlemen and find that they are just like American soldiers with the same hopes, dreams and fears. The writing/story line is well thought out. He does not jump around or and things at the last second. I found a couple writing mistakes but it did not take away from the flow. Lots of great photos and maps that I can really understand. If you have read "19 with a bullet", "Troepie" or "Zulu Zulu Foxtrot" and loved them like I did you should really enjoy this book. Well done Mr Mannall mmm(what every that means?)

Just a great read from start to finish. A little slow at first but it quickly picks up speed and maintains it till the end. Mannal tells the story of his South African Defense Forces Armor Unit (SADF) in one of the last, and decisive, battles of the Angolan War. I am familiar with the area having spent time in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) in the 70's, (but that's another story) The fight against communist aggression was everywhere in central & southern Africa between the early 70's and late 80's, and Mannal tells the story well of his armor units defeat of a substantial better equipped Cuban/Russian/Chinese armed, and advised offensive. I recommend this book as it is well written, historically accurate, and told from first hand experience. .Welgedaan my broer !

Much like the stories that came out of Vietnam, the story of the Battle On The Lomba tells the story of a vastly outnumbered group of conscript soldiers led by a number of professionals who felt the heat of war, and were left to find their own way upon release from the South African Defense Force, with no support from a government discredited in the world's eyes. Individual heroism by these conscripts was swept under the carpet by an ungrateful hierarchy and a public kept in the dark. It's time for their story to be told, and in this book it is done with empathy and honesty. Dave Mannell writes a very gripping tale. Read it, absorb it, and realize that a conscript army can do wonders.

The Battle on the Lomba is in this book, and well-done. But the book is really about two years out of the life of an English-speaking South African draftee ('national serviceman') in an Afrikaner army and includes everything from his obsession about ending his virgin status to the complicated scams he got involved in that saw him chucked out of officer training, only to return to command status (not in rank, but in reality) at the Lomba. Good book, made me appreciate again why Western armies are so much better than their opponents -- subordinates are taught to think and act on their own initiative rather than simply blindly obeying orders. The training aspect is covered very well. Not that this prevented him being shot at by his own side, mind you, but read on.....

Excellent read - to fill in the gaps of what happened on the other side of the Lomba, while some of us were knee deep in crocodiles and Cubans...You have to give it to the Mech 'okes - They did a sterling job of softening up the Russians.An excellent account and I highly recommend it to anyone that was in any way involved with those last years of the conflicts of the so called South African Bush war and served in the South African Defense Force. I can only say I am proud to have served my country, in the greatest fighting force since the Spartans lost their 300, even if it did not seem so great at the time. I salute those that paid the ultimate price in that conflict.

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