

Meeting Notes for Thursday 5th March 2026

An Introduction to Rhodesian Gallantry Awards – The Silver Cross of Rhodesia

Maiden presentation by Rhys Fitter



Historical Context:

The presentation commenced with a brief history of Rhodesia in Southern Africa, the country that was named after the mining magnate Cecil John Rhodes.

The land that became Rhodesia was established by a few brave pioneers who had travelled north from the Cape Province and eventually arrived in the region in the 1890's. During their travels they encountered a few hostile tribes and safety challenges from disease and wild animals. A few notable conflicts occurred in these early days including the infamous slaughter of Major Wilson's Shangani Patrol on 3-4th December 1893 and the failed Jameson Raid attempt in 1896 where a group of privateers were assembled in Rhodesia and travelled south to try and take control of the Boer stronghold of Pretoria.

In the early 20th century, the soldiers of Rhodesia, many of whom were either from Great Britain or had British roots, distinguished themselves in the various volunteer regiments that were formed for primarily European conflicts namely the Great and Second World Wars.

During the presentation, mention was made of the South African Sharpshooters (S.A.S.), a small unit of volunteers (mercenaries) recruited in 1916 by Sir Abe Bailey a wealthy mine owner in South Africa, to become one of the first sniping contingents for the Allies on the Western Front in France during WW1. Due to the high standard of shooting skills that were demanded, most of the unit were eventually sourced from Northern and Southern Rhodesia. Despite being a contingent of only 18 men who finally arrived in France including their officer Lt. Neville Methven, they reportedly accounted for more than 2000 sniping related kills. Prospectively, this interesting topic may be the subject of another BMS talk!

During the early stages of WW2, there was a large contingent of Southern African troops that were fighting in the deserts of North Africa. Rhodesia was proudly represented in that conflict in the form of one of the Long Range Desert Group units that conducted covert operations behind enemy lines along with the newly formed

Special Air Service (another SAS!) to destroy the German Airfields and other Infrastructure.

After the Second World War, as with many of the Commonwealth countries, volunteer regiments stepped down. After the formation of Rhodesia Nyasaland in the early 1950's, a contingent of Rhodesian troops was re-assembled and were sent to assist Britain in the Malayan Conflict. The most notable of these was the Malayan Scouts which became 'C Squadron' SAS. Many of the members of this unit including their commanding officer Major Peter Walls were to subsequently go on to play a major part in the Rhodesian Bush War from 1960-80.

In the early 1960's, there was increasing pressure being put on British colonial countries by both the UK and the USA to replace colonial rule with proportional representation. This was unacceptable at the time to most of the of the white voters who were by far the minority at that time in Rhodesia. The Rhodesian Prime Minister Mr Ian Smith declared a Unilateral Declaration of Independence from Britain on 11th November, 1965. This act was not considered kindly by the British government who immediately placed political and trade sanctions on Rhodesia. With the reduction in the arms supply to Rhodesia and increasing tensions from neighbouring countries [most of whom had already gained their independence], the conflicts for the defence of the Rhodesian's homeland started to build up.



Photo above: Montage of medals, documents and photos on the backdrop of the Rhodesian flag. From the presentation 5th March, 2026 by Rhys Fitter.

The Silver Cross of Rhodesia ['SCR']:

The SCR was the second highest award for gallantry in the field, the highest being the Grand Cross of Valour, of which only two were issued. The warrant for the award was gazetted in 1970, and it was stated that the medal could be won for conspicuous gallantry or distinguished conduct under fire by any member of the Army or Air Force,

whether they were in regular, territorial or reserve service. The medal had a Maltese cross shape and was manufactured in silver. The third highest gallantry award was the Bronze Cross of Rhodesia ['BCR']. It was the same design in bronze but had different coloured ribbons depending on which service that the recipient belonged to. All SCR and BCR's were named with details of recipient's number, rank and name in small impressed capital letters.

Thirty-five SCR's was awarded from 1974 to 1980 including a second award bar to one recipient. The first award was made to Lt Dale Collett of the Selous Scouts in June 1974 with the last three being presented in September 1980. After 1980, the award name was changed by the new regime to the Silver Cross of Zimbabwe, an example of which was on display for the meeting.

A series of video extracts were then played to the meeting that had been recorded by the Rhodesian authorities at the time. They showed in graphic detail some of the actual contacts, para jumping and Fireforce which were essentially propaganda for local TV and cinema viewing relating to the conflict. Some of the footage featured the army servicemen who became SCR recipients. Some of these medal groups appear later in the talk.

Medal groups including the SCR shown:

The SCR is a rare award - six SCR groups were displayed from Rhys' collection which accounts for approximately one fifth of all the awards that were made during the conflict. For each of the medal groups there was a slide shown showing the medals, any known photos of the recipient and the gazetted citation text that was issued at the time of the award.

Group 1 – 644719 SGT RANGAYARIARI HUNGWE SCR; BCR who was a member of the Selous Scouts, the pseudo-operations group who were formed by Lt. Col. Ron Reid-Daly who mainly used turned terrorists for operations into neighbouring countries to infiltrate and gain logistical information on the terrorist camps. This would be radioed back to HQ who would then follow-up by sending out a Fireforce Group to attack the bases. This group is made rarer by the fact that the recipient had also been awarded the Bronze Cross of Rhodesia for previous acts of gallantry, of which there were **only five similar double gallantry awards** made during the war. [Photos below].

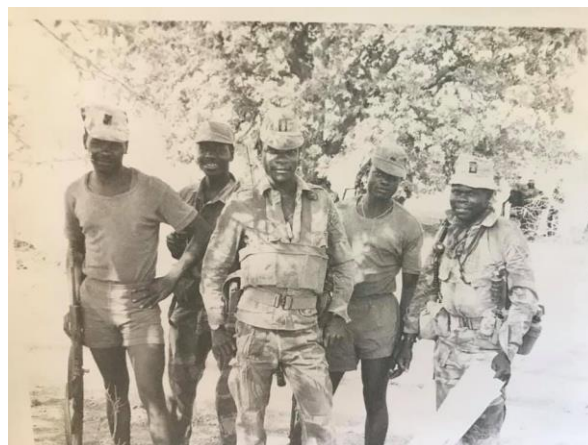


Group 2 – 727700 SGT JOHN “Jock” McKELVIE SCR 1st Battalion Rhodesian Light Infantry Support Commando. This group was also present with a British GSM that had Northern Ireland, Malay Peninsula & Borneo clasps. Sgt. McKelvie, like a number of the members of the Rhodesian Services involved in the Bush War, came from outside the borders in search of adventure and/or attempts to defeat the communist regime worldwide. Many of these soldiers stayed although after 1980, the lifestyle in Zimbabwe became unpleasant for the white community. [Photos below].



Group 3 – 644855 CPL CHAMUNOWRA SARIROWONA SCR 1st Battalion Rhodesian African Rifles (RAR) ‘B Company’. This recipient was one of several members of the RAR who were awarded the SCR. The regiment mainly consisted of black troops and white NCO’s and Officers although towards the end of the war it was one of the first units to appoint native officers. Included in this group was a 10-year Zimbabwe Service Medal, indicating that he remained in the army after independence.

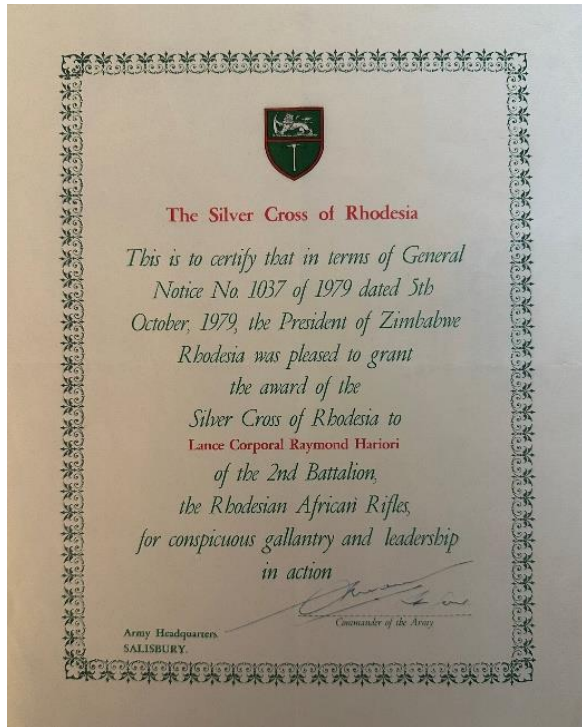
[Photos below].



Group 4 – 2ND LIEUTENANT BRUCE MALCOLM THOMPSON SCA 2nd Battalion RAR 'A Company'. His medal was one of three that were awarded posthumously for numerous courageous acts under fire. He was killed in action on 27th June 1978 on patrol with his unit whilst attempting to save the life of his machine gunner. A point of note: There were three SCR's and one BCR awarded to the members of Lt. Thompson's Officer Training Course. One of which will be described in more detail in Medal Group 6 described below. [Photos below].



Group 5 – 646688 LANCE CORPORAL RAYMOND HARIORI SCR 2nd Battalion 'B Company'. That so many SCR's were awarded to the RAR reflects that the regiment was involved in the greatest number of operational contacts during the war. Hariori received the award for numerous courageous acts in the field over a period of three and a half years. [Photos below].



Group 6 – 781133 LIEUTENANT PATRICK LAWLESS SCR 1st Battalion RAR 'Support Company'. This SCR was one of the last to be presented in Sep 1980. Lt. Lawless was the sword of honour recipient on his OTC course and after leaving Rhodesia went on to serve with the British Army in Northern Ireland, the 1st Iraq war in 1991 and also served with the United Nations in Yugoslavia. Whilst in the British Army, he obtained his pilot wings for flying helicopters and joined the Air Assault Group (Air Cavalry) as an attack helicopter gunship pilot. Amongst other notable engagements, he was responsible for the recruitment and training of HRH Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, to be a helicopter pilot. [Photos below].



Contributions from BMS members:

A BCR to the 2nd RAR was shown – The recipient was 643782 WOII Vanuvahone Rashayi of the first platoon 'A' Company. [medal group photo – see below].



Photo above: Medal group to WOII V. Rashayi. Left to right [obverses]: Zimbabwe Independence medal, BCR and Rhodesian General Service Medal. This BCR ribbon indicates army service.

[Photo: C Davies – apologies for slightly clipped image].

His citation reads as follows:

'In March 1976, after a long follow up, his platoon came under fire from a group of terrorists. In the opening burst, WO II Rashayi was hit in the leg. Despite his wound, he returned fire, drove a terrorist from cover and killed him as he turned to run. His stick then killed a second terrorist before the rest of the terrorists fled.'

His company, involved in another long follow up, came under fire and WOII Rashayi led his stick into the attack. All the terrorists were killed. In October 1976, WOII Rashayi killed a terrorist with a grenade. In 1977, WOII Rashayi's stick wounded and captured a terrorist from whom valuable intelligence was gained. In February 1977, he initiated a contact through a kraal by shooting the enemy section leader through the leg and killing the terrorist next to him'. [Gazetted Rhodesia Government Gazette 7th October, 1977].

Also shown [and for sale at 'Noonans' in March 2026] was a BCR in a group of medals awarded to WOII Albert Knight ['A.K'] Tourle. [The group hammered for £15,000].

His full citation was read out. In summary, Tourle had shown 'outstanding powers of leadership and bravery on two occasions 18-22nd July, 1968'.

Tourle had been killed by a lioness 10th April, 1972. [For further information, please refer to Noonan's lot archive no.623 18th March, 2026].



Photo above: Medal group to WOII A.K. Tourle, Rhodesia Light Infantry. Left to right [obverses]; BCR, Rhodesian GSM and Queen's Best Shot medal one clasp 1966. This BCR ribbon indicates army service.

[Photo: courtesy Noonans].

At the end of the presentation, BMS members were introduced to Brigadier (Retd) Pat Lawless, the recipient of the SCR and other medals in 'group 6' as discussed earlier. Pat very kindly joined Rhys and gave frank answers and insight to the many questions from the floor about his experiences in the Rhodesian Bush War.

What emerged from the general discussion about the citations to these SCR and BCR recipients was the extraordinary and often sustained levels of bravery, endeavour and commitment needed to merit the award in such tough conditions.

Anybody who is interested in learning more of the Rhodesian Conflict can view the many interviews with Ex-Veterans on the 'YouTube' channel "Fighting Men of Rhodesia" which includes a more in-depth interview from June 2022 (Episode 120) with Pat Lawless.

May I thank Chris Fitter and Rhys for producing these detailed draft meeting notes. Edited and additional material/information added by C. Davies. All photos produced with relevant permission and credits where indicated.

Chris Davies

BMS Secretary [Edited 17-24th April, 2026].