

# FIGHTING AND WRITING: THE RHODESIAN ARMY AT WAR AND POST-WAR

LUISE WHITE

The white minority of Rhodesia (before 1964 Southern Rhodesia and after 1980 Zimbabwe) took its own independence from Britain rather than begin the orderly processes of majority rule and decolonization in 1965. A few years later Rhodesia began its counter-insurgency against the two guerrilla armies that sought to liberate the country. This counter-insurgency involved what was perhaps the most onerous conscription of anywhere in the world after 1945: by 1976, men 18-35 served for two years after which they were liable for reserve duty of 190 days a year at six week intervals. Rhodesia lost the war, and the minority rule of the nation, but not without a fight that has been mythologized by its supporters and its soldiers. In the years since 1980, and most especially since the years since 2000, former soldiers have memorialized their service, and the nation that no longer exists, in memoirs and monuments.



memorialized in Zimbabwe. I had the good fortune to go around these grounds with Steve Davis (UF PhD, 2010 and now an assistant professor at the University of Kentucky) and it is his photograph that I use.

*Luise White is professor of history.*

The memoirs have become a cottage industry for veterans of the Rhodesian forces. They do not all tell a story of military might and the small, brave nation fighting for its survival against guerrillas trained by communists in Eastern Europe. Instead they record all the ambivalence and anxieties of young men who are unsure of their claim to belong in Africa and who are willing to serve their country but only if they can go abroad for university after that. I have had a book project on the Rhodesian Army at war in the works for many years; what I had written was based on these memoirs and material from the Rhodesian Army papers that were briefly available (2003-07) in a now-defunct private museum in Britain. The more I read and wrote, however, the more I thought this project should be on the Rhodesian Army at war and in the post-war, looking not only at how white soldiers fought but how they memorialized, in words and constructions,