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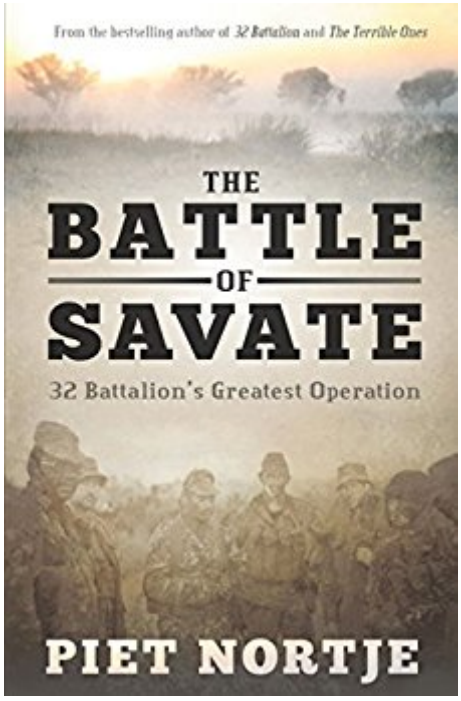
The Battle Of Savate: 32 BattalionÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s Greatest Operation



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Synopsis

On 21 May 1980, under the codename Operation Tiro-Tiro, 32 Battalion attacked and routed a FAPLA brigade at Savate, a small Angolan town 75 kilometres north of the border with South West Africa. Fifteen members of 32 Battalion were killed in the action and many more wounded. It was the highest South African casualty rate in a single skirmish since the start of the Border War. Overall, however, Savate was a significant victory for 32 Battalion. FAPLA suffered heavy casualties and the invaders captured a great many vehicles, weapons, ammunition and other equipment.Operation Tiro-Tiro, or the Battle of Savate as it became known, was the first time the SADF had engaged FAPLA in battle since 1975. And, despite the record number of casualties, it was 32 BattalionÃ¢â ¬â„¢s biggest victory since its formation in March 1976. While the Border War came to an end in 1989 and 32 Battalion was disbanded in March 1993, to this day a remem-brance service and parade is held annually on the Sunday closest to 21 May to commemorate the Battle of Savate and to remember 32 BattalionÃ¢â ¬â„¢s victory and the price they paid. Drawing from official documents in the Department of Defence Documentation Centre that have only recently been declassified and from testimonies of soldiers on both sides, The Battle of Savate is the definitive account of one of the greatest battles of the Border War, describÃ Â¬ing in detail the operation, its motivation and planning, its achievements and failures, and vividly recreating the experience of what happened on the ground.

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Customer Reviews

I didn’t know there were books on the Southern African bush war until I kept seeing mention of SADF troops in books on the Rhodesian war. When one reads about race segregation in SA it was surprising that it didn’t apply to South African units battling insurgents. These books have been an eye opener and gives one a different perspective on life in the SADF during this period.

Well written and gives an overview that one may not have had before of what really happened

I was part of CSI in Rundu and reported directly to Jose de Oliveira and enjoyed the book although there is some detail that is not totally correct.

Hint: I bought this book in a bookshop in South Africa; therefore, this is not a verified purchase.1. Approach and structure of the book: the author employs personal accounts and observations with all their subjective perceptions, suggestions and rumors to drive the account of the battle. While this approach reflects the chaos and confusion of the battle, it does not help to understand its course. Alternatively, employing the aforementioned personal accounts and observations to further elaborate on specific situations and to reflect and explain decision marking by 32 BN leadership would have resulted in a more systematic and understandable account of the battle. Colonel BreytenbachÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s summary of the battle included in the book provides a far better overview than the book itself.Furthermore, the chaotic and fluid nature of battles such as Savate requires detailed maps (on an hour by hour basis, at best). The book, however, contains only maps covering the theater of war and not a single one depicting the course of the battle.Similarly, organigrams of 32 BN, both of its general structure at the time of the battle of Savate and of the actual assault force, as well as of the chain of command in the SWA theater of war would have improved understanding.2. I do not want to narrate the battle itself, but I want to single out three points which influenced the course of battle significantly. First, the failure of intelligence, with intelligence personnel missing the air defense positions around the airfield. UNITA identified only an understrength battalion (300 soldiers); in reality, an entire FAPLA brigade (over a 1000 soldiers) manned the base. Similarly, UNITA guides employed by the CSI were unfamiliar with the terrain

despite claiming otherwise resulting in the recce teams getting dropped off at the wrong point. Secondly, the composition and constitution of the assault force: the assault force comprised a small command element, three rifle companies (A, C and F, totaling 270 soldiers), a mortar platoon and six recce teams. The rifle companies were about 40 percent understrength, with their white NCOs and officers on leave. The vacancies were filled with personnel from other companies as well as former Rhodesian soldiers on orientation training. Some of the mortarmen had been wounded on previous operations and not yet fully recovered, significantly limiting their ability to handle their mortars. As expected, these two points influenced the course of battle significantly. More time would have facilitated better intelligence collection and would have improved unit cohesion. The question remains whether the assault on Savate was so time-critical to justify the shortcomings already identifiable before the operation which caused the highest number of soldiers in killed in 32 BNÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s history.Third, and finally: units trained for low-intensity counterguerilla operations, i.e. patrols, raids on enemy supply points, ambushes, sweeps, etc., are neither psychologically nor tactically prepared for conventional high-intensity operations, as demonstrated by the breakdown of A company during the battle.However, whether these failures were followed by appropriate consequences regarding intelligence collection, cooperation with UNITA, planning and training in the aftermath remains unanswered.3. Finally, two questions arose when reading the book: the author mentions the mishandling and murder of several prisoners taking in the battle without commenting on it any further. It would have been interesting whether this was common during the Bush War. Furthermore, by not commenting on the incident any further, does the author tacitly approves this?Secondly, the large majority of 32 BN soldiers were Black Angolans who served for considerable long time, while whiteSouth Africans, both professional soldiers and national servicemen, served only for a short duration. Nevertheless, the vast majority of those commemorating the battle (ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Savate DayÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•) is white. While maybe out of the scope of this book, the reasons for this would be interesting to know.

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