

32 BATALLION

32-Battalion, known as "*Os Terriveis - The Terrible Ones*" by SWAPO, FAPLA and their Cuban allies, and this nickname became a proud one indeed. Their motto, *Proelio Proculsi* - means "*Forged in Battle.*" Their logo was a buffalo head. Colonel Jan Breytenbach was the founding commander of this most controversial unit in the South African Army because of the secrecy surrounding it. Since its inception in 1975 until it was disbanded in the 1990's it was the most feared Unit by its foes in Angola and South West Africa, and accounted for more enemies than any other Unit of the South African Defence Force. In 1975 the Unit comprised of 2 Rifle Companies, a Mortar Platoon, an Anti-tank Section and a Machinegun Platoon.

The civil war that followed the Portuguese withdrawal from Angola in 1975 ended in a triumph for the left wing Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA). The MPLA immediately driving its main contender for power, the right wing Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola (FNLA) together with its white mercenary recruits over the Angolan border into Zaire (Democratic Republic of the Congo) and South West Africa (Namibia). Many of the FNLA troops found a home in 32-battalion. There were also whites soldiers in the battalion originating from countries like Great Britain, the old Rhodesia, Portugal and the USA. They are the most decorated battalion in the army with 32 Honoris Crux medals.

After the 1989 Namibian settlement the unit was withdrawn to South Africa where they were deployed to effectively deal with MK infiltrations into the north of South Africa. During 1990 they were redeployed to deal with political troubles between armed ANC self defence units and armed units of the IFP.

Colonel Breytenbach wrote in his book, the Buffalo Soldiers as follow; "*By October 1976 FAPLA forces, with tremendous superiority in firepower, were occupying most of the Okavango River line from Cuangar to Mucusso. Woodpecker base was about 30 km from FAPLA's garrison at Mucusso. This raised fears that FAPLA might attempt a pre-emptive strike against us. To their minds, Battle Group Bravo was not South African but synonymous with Chipenda's FNLA and thus a legitimate target that the outside world would approve. So we were ordered to shift, yet again, to somewhere out of FAPLA's reach. I was told to seek a new location away from the Okavango River. Finally to keep Pretoria happy, I moved Battle Group Bravo's fighting element from Woodpecker to a place eight kilometres upstream on the Okavango River. The new operational encampment was called Buffalo Base. This perhaps, led to outsiders nicknaming our fighting men the Buffalo Soldiers.*"



“At the same time as it changed location to Buffalo Base, Battle Group Bravo was ordered to change its name. Radio Luanda had mounted a propaganda campaign against Bravo and its FANLA mercenaries. They called them *Les Affreux* – The terrible ones – a derogatory term originally applied to white mercenary forces in the Congo in the 1960s. The broadcasts maintained that Bravo was manned by treacherous Angolans recruited by a notorious American mercenary named Colonel Carpenter (who in fact was me). Commandant Delville Linford’s Bushman Battalion at Omega Base in the Caprivi got similar treatment at the hands of MPLA. The time was ripe for changes to our image. Delville and I reluctantly decided on new destinations. Battle Group Alpha would become 31-Battalion and Battle Group Bravo would henceforth be known as 32-Battalion.”

During the winter months large herds of buffalo gather in the Caprivi along the river next to buffalo camp. Colonel Jan Breytenbach decided to put a buffalo head on the cameo beret of 32-Battalion. Eddie Viljoen another commander took his change in 1985 and put a buffalo on the banner during a parade. The battalion was actually 32-Infantry Battalion and a springbok was supposed to be the logo. Senior officers Jan Geldenhuys and Jan Holiday saw the banner but did not make any comments. Since that day the buffalo was the logo of 32-Battalion.