

## Film Review

---

ZANLA Comes to Town. Produced by Zimbabwe Heritage Trust.  
Length – 90 minutes.

---

APPLY titled ZANLA Comes to Town — ‘Good Evening General Peter Walls’, the documentary that tells the story of the attack of BP and Shell Petrol Depot in the then Salisbury on December 11 1978 is a remarkable story.

The attack of the depot can be described as the mission that turned the tide against the Rhodesians. It is the attack that delivered a blow that shook Rhodesians psychologically, politically, economically and militarily. The 90-minute production produced by Zimbabwe Heritage Trust (ZHT) is a comprehensive presentation of the monumental attack.

ZANLA Comes to Town is a remarkable story recounting how the decision to attack the depot was made and how the recruitment of those to carry out the mission was done and how the mission was accomplished.

The documentary examines every aspect of the attack, from its conception, planning and execution. It is composed of archive clips that show the genesis of the liberation struggle, from the First Chimurenga right up to the part of the Second Chimurenga that changed the face of the war.

Not only does it feature the guerrillas that delivered the blow that brought the Rhodesians down to their knees, but also the collaborators that made the mission a success.

The film brings to life a piece of history that was instrumental in bringing to reality present day Zimbabwe.

Key figures in the execution of the mission Air Marshal Perence Shiri, the then Provincial commander of Tete Province, Cde Member Kuvhiringidza, Cde Lobo, Cde Take Time, Cde Nhamo Mukumbuzi and Cde State Mudzvanyiriri are featured in the documentary narrating how they executed the attack.

Collaborators that include Mai Hwiza, Mai Muhwati, Mai Mverechena, Norman Hwiza, Nancy Mupfururirwa, Jeremiah Chipwanya and Zuva Nyika explain and describe how they aided the fighters.

And what were the qualities that saw the fighters succeed?

According to Air Marshal Shiri, smoking dagga at some point, a criminal record that included pick-pocketing and housebreaking were some of the qualities that they looked for in the combatants to undertake the dangerous and monumental mission.

The participants share a fascinating story that coming from secondary sources would be deemed fiction.

A letter signed by the ZANLA military commander, Josiah Tongogara, which the fighters carried, was the ‘passport’ that got them assistance from other guerrillas without questions asked as they trekked from Mozambique through Mutoko, Murehwa, Musana and Domboshava to the then Salisbury (Harare).

The film is awe-inspiring and shows how the water (the masses) and fish (the guerrillas) concept was critical in the success of the struggle.

The film interviewed an impressive cross-section of the key players of the attack. At every step, the daring fighters, from Domboshava to Mbare, right up to the moment of attack are assisted by chimbwidos and mujibhas (war collaborators) who were as much dedicated to the struggle as the guerrillas.

A cheetah vehicle sourced from Mr Rugaranganda was used for reconnaissance. It is used by one of the guerrillas in a manner that leads fellow comrades to jokingly remind him that he must not forget that he is a soldier in war.

The documentary does a good job showing how the mission’s success was hinged on other characters besides the gun wielding fighters. One of the chief architects of the attack, Cde Shiri, explains the grand idea behind the attack. “We were going into the urban area to weaken the enemy and to send a very clear message to the world that we were determined to liberate our country,” he said. “It was going to be proof to the world that Rhodesia had become porous.”

The documentary does not just present the summary facts about the attack, but goes in depth in its explanations of what transpired from recruitment to execution. For example, it explains how it was not just fighting skills that were a prerequisite. It gives detail about how the fighters left Mozambique right up to the moment the tanks were blown. The documentary is an impressive production that vividly brings to life the experience of the guerrillas and the collaborators.

After watching some productions that purport to tell the story of the struggle, ZANLA Comes to Town occupies the top notch. It is an enlightening production more fascinating because the story is told by the actual fighters. The documentary delivers a solid account of a very important point in the liberation struggle and effectively highlights the ingenuity, the courage, the determination and resolve that characterised the country’s liberators.

---

Evans Mushawevato  
News Editor, The Patriot  
[evansmu@gmail.com](mailto:evansmu@gmail.com)