

# History of British Rhodesia and Zimbabwe: The First Universal Elections. Rumours of A Coup Against Mugabe. The February 14th 1980 Failed “False Flag” of Selous Scouts Mission

By [Adeyinka Makinde](#)

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**Robert Mugabe:** *Why are your men trying to kill me?*

**Lt. General Peter Walls:** *If they were my men you would be dead.*

*-Exchange between Mugabe, leader of the ZANU-PF political party and Walls, the head of the Rhodesian Armed Forces on March 17th, 1980.*

*The build up to the first universal elections in the history of Rhodesia, the country which after the elections would be reconstituted as Zimbabwe, was a tumultuous period. After the failure of internal settlement, the negotiations and hard bartering at the Lancaster House Conference, had, it was hoped, finally set the country onto the path of peace and national reconciliation. But tensions remained high during the campaign period.*

*There were rumours of a coup by the Rhodesian Army should **Robert Mugabe** win and a pledge by some White soldiers to continue the fight along the lines that the French O.A.S. had embarked once Algeria was lost. The Black political parties of ZANU and ZIPRA were accused of intimidating Black voters, and Mugabe threatened a civil war if he was disqualified by **Lord Soames**, the British Governor-General. Mugabe himself had survived two assassination attempts in Fort Victoria and Salisbury. The campaign was punctuated by episodes of violence, one of which involved the commission of a ‘False Flag’ operation by the Selous Scouts Special Forces unit.*



## Rhodesian Military Probed in Bombings

### From Wire Services

SALISBURY, Rhodesia — The possibility that Rhodesian government military personnel were involved in the bombings of Salisbury churches Thursday night was under investigation Sunday.

This followed the disclosure that two occupants of a civilian vehicle blown up the same night included a decorated black officer of the elite Selous Scouts, an outfit with a reputation for performing clandestine operations.

Although it is still just a theory being considered by investigators, an attack on churches could be linked with attempts by political rivals to discredit black political leader Robert Mugabe, whose avowed socialism is said to include the limiting of church freedom. Mugabe, a front-runner in elections set for the end of the month, denies this.

The Selous Scouts officer, Lt Edward N. Piringodo, and a fellow black scout, Cpl. Morgan Moyo, were killed Thursday night by an explosion within their car. The blast was near an Anglican church in Salisbury's black township of Harare.

Two hours later, two other Salisbury churches — one Presbyterian, the other non-denominational — were damaged by planted bombs detonated by timing devices.

The theory being checked by authorities is that the two military men may have been about to plant a bomb at the nearby Anglican church when it blew up accidentally in their car.

A third bomb was found the next morning near the rear entrance of the city's Catholic cathedral. It had failed to detonate. The bomb was found in a brown leather briefcase with papers referring to Mugabe's political party.

In the seven years of guerrilla-ver-

sus-government war, both sides were accused of committing many atrocities, and the black tribal people in the countryside were often caught in the middle.

The Selous Scouts are an elite government unit trained in clandestine operations. They have often been accused by guerrilla leaders of committing atrocities that subsequently were blamed on the guerrillas themselves. However, these claims have never been proven.

Neither the police, who are conducting the investigation, nor the army would comment on progress to determine responsibility for the attacks on the churches.

Shortly after the bombing, Brian Rogers, police superintendent, told newsmen that the blasts appeared to be part of a coordinated attack on religious institutions. He said that while the car explosion was probably accidental, it appeared to be related to the church bombings.

The religious issue that centers around Mugabe has been injected into the heated campaigning by nine black parties contending for seats in the parliament which will rule Rhodesia after independence elections held at the end of this month. Mugabe's principal opponents are former Prime Minister Abel T. Muzorewa and guerrilla leader Joshua Nkomo.

Mugabe, an avowed socialist with acknowledged communist support from both the Soviet Union and China, has denied that he advocates religious restrictions.

A Mugabe spokesman, Justin Nyoka, said the bombings of churches, were aimed at discrediting Mugabe, who appears to be out in front in winning voter support.

**On the night of Thursday, February 14th, 1980, the Black township of Harare** was rocked by an explosion in a Renault 12TL Sedan parked near St. Mary's Anglican Church. The occupants, two young Black men were fatally injured. Then a few hours later, two bombs exploded. One was at a Presbyterian church and the other at a non-denominational church. Another bomb would be found the following morning near the entrance of the city's Catholic cathedral. The bomb had been placed in a briefcase containing papers referring to ZANU-PF (Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front), the political party led by Robert Mugabe.

Residents of Salisbury, the capital city soon to be renamed after the township, woke up to read an advertisement in the local paper which warned that Mugabe would close all churches if he was elected.

There was a link between the explosions and the advert. The bombs which damaged the Presbyterian church and the non-denominational one had been set by a timer, as police would discover, by the now deceased occupants of the bomb-wrecked Renault. The advert also appeared to have been timed to coincide with the previous night's explosions, just as the undetonated bomb-in-a-brief case near the Catholic church was designed not to explode to implicate a political party because of the literature contained inside of it.

Police and agents of ZANU-PF were quick to put together the pieces of the jigsaw once the identities of the men who were blown up in the car were discovered. They were **Lieutenant Edward Piringondo** and **Corporal Morgan Moyo**, both members of **the Selous Scouts**,

a Special Forces unit of the Rhodesian Security Forces, which had gained a reputation as the most effective fighting outfit against the Black African guerrillas during the 2nd Chimurenga or 'Bush War'.

Formed in 1973 as a tracking unit, **the Scouts quickly germinated into a multi-racial outfit tasked with waging unconventional warfare.** Its members employed infiltration, abduction, torture, sabotage and blackmail. Many of the missions they undertook relied on deception, and such deception was used to either kill a large number of the insurgent enemy or to kill specific civilian targets in order to blame the Black African insurgents. They were also a key component in the waging by the White minority government of chemical warfare against their Black opponents.

Lt. Piringondo, an early African recruit, was a 27-year-old veteran of 'pseudo-operations', many of which involved infiltrating guerrilla bases. One such mission was carried out in November 1979 prior to 'Operation Murex', an attack on a ZIPRA brigade in the Kabanga Mission area of southern Zambia.

For this and other audacious assignments, Piringondo had won the Rhodesian Silver Cross (SRC), the country's second-highest military decoration for conspicuous gallantry. He had also been nominated for the Grand Cross of Valour which, had the Scouts not been disbanded, would have made him Rhodesia's most decorated soldier.

Piringondo was thus the sort of man on which the Scouts could call upon to perform a mission which was designed to implicate the military wing of Mugabe's Marxist-orientated party and paint Mugabe as anti-religion and anti-religious freedom.

But it was a mission too far for Piringondo and his accomplice in arms, Moyo, both of whom Mugabe would state with some relish had been "[caught and destroyed in their devilish trap](#)".

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*This article was originally published on the author's blog site, [Adeyinka Makinde](#).*

**Adeyinka Makinde** is a writer based in London. He has a keen interest in history and geopolitics. He is a frequent contributor to Global Research.

*Featured image: Lt. Edward Piringondo, a decorated member of the Selous Scouts (left), and clipping of the Monday, February 18th edition of the Hartford Courant (Source: Adeyinka Makinde)*

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