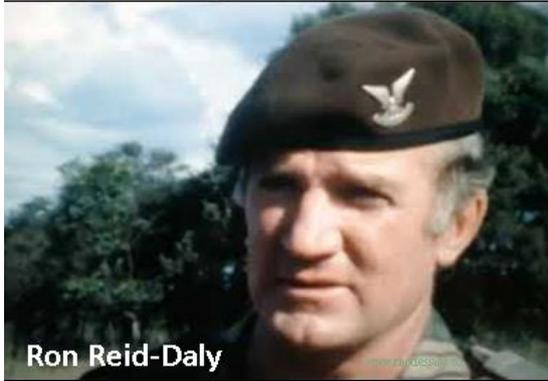




## Obituary for Ron Reid-Daly

Lieutenant-Colonel Ron Reid-Daly, who has died aged 81, was the colourful and outspoken founder and commander of the Selous Scouts regiment, whose unorthodox tactics during Rhodesia's bush war against nationalist insurgents were as effective as they were controversial.

As it was a secret unit answerable only to the commander of the security forces, the Selous Scouts



earned a fearsome reputation for "dirty tricks" in its exploits against guerrillas, a reputation that Reid-Daly, a long-serving professional soldier, sought – unsuccessfully – to counter long after the war.

In fact it was a small highly-trained body of men (black and white) which had undergone the most stringent selection course. It operated in groups of two or three men who posed as guerrillas, infiltrating insurgent groups and calling in air strikes to destroy them, often in neighbouring

countries where the insurgents were preparing to cross into Rhodesia.

It was, as Reid-Daly put it, "a good way of terrorising the terrorists" and it worked well, with the "Selousies" chalking up an impressive "kill rate".

With the collapse of the Portuguese empire, Rhodesia's long border with Mozambique was exposed and the Selous Scouts were obliged to expand to include a territorial unit.

The resulting drop in standards and discipline gave some senior officers in the Rhodesian army, always jealous of Reid-Daly's independence, ammunition to discredit him and his unit. Scouts were accused of poaching ivory in the Zambezi Valley, and when Reid-Daly discovered his office had been bugged he confronted Lt-Gen John Hickman, then commander of the Rhodesian army.

The exchange in an officers' mess led to a court martial of Reid-Daly on a charge of insubordination. There was obvious sympathy for the Selous Scouts' commander during the hearing. He was convicted, but given the lightest possible sentence of a reprimand. Incensed by the blot on his army record, Reid-Daly fought the sentence in the civil courts. When that failed he resigned his commission and left the country.

Ronald Francis Reid-Daly was born in Salisbury, then capital of the British colony of Southern Rhodesia, on September 22 1928. At school he excelled, in his own words, "at nothing that was not on the rugby field". His early ambition to become a farmer gave way to his sense of adventure and he signed up for service in the Rhodesian contingent of the Far East Volunteer Unit.

This unit was destined for service in Korea but was diverted to Malaya to fight the Chinese communist insurgents. The Rhodesian contingent, led by a young Peter Walls, later to become commander-in-chief of the Rhodesian security forces, became "C" Squadron of the British Special Air Service regiment, highly skilled in counter-insurgency warfare.

After three years of active service in the Malayan jungles, Reid-Daly returned to Rhodesia "and a



and a boring civilian life". Soldiering was now in his blood, and he joined the Southern Rhodesian Staff Corps, becoming an instructor at the School of Infantry. In 1961 he became the founder Regimental Sergeant Major of the newly formed Rhodesian Light Infantry.

He was commissioned in the RLI in 1964 and was appointed MBE after again seeing active service against the early insurgency by nationalist guerrillas crossing from Zambia. In 1975 Reid-Daly was on leave pending retirement. He was under pressure from his wife to "settle down and get a proper job" when he was summoned to see the army commander, Peter Walls, his old friend and colleague from the Malayan expedition.

Walls persuaded him to stay in the army to form and take charge of a new "combat and tracker" unit. The new formation would in reality be to recruit and train "pseudo terrorists" – preferably captured guerrillas who had been "turned" – to infiltrate their former comrades in the bush. The unit, said Walls, would be named the Selous Scouts after the legendary African hunter and tracker Frederick Courteney Selous.

Both men had become familiar with the technique of "pseudo gangs" during the Malayan campaign. Reid-Daly was enthused by the idea. Rejoining with the rank of colonel, he set about recruiting "the best of the best", as he put it. Men who had successfully undergone the stringent training programmes for the Rhodesian SAS and the RLI were given even more rigorous tests.

The Selous Scouts rapidly acquired the reputation of an elite unit, besieged by would-be recruits. "There was little we could do but try and turn the mythology to our advantage," Reid-Daly was to write later. "But many of the stories spun about us and what we were supposed to be up to made my hair stand on end."

Success often brings jealousy but the Rhodesian Security Forces, and the more specifically the Selous



Scouts were implicated in the brutal massacre of missionaries at Elim Mission in 1978. The truth was revealed in the release of a cable, sent from Cyrus Vance, US secretary of state, to United Nations ambassador Andrew Young, under the US Freedom of Information Act. It includes a report by the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, a unit in the US state department, which says a source close to Mr Mugabe had said "a ZANLA field commander had carried out the massacre on his own initiative and ZANU (Zimbabwe African National Union) was considering

how best to take disciplinary action".

There are claims that Mr Callaghan's Labour government chose not to investigate further as it feared disrupting the Anglo-American peace plan which was at a delicate stage. The Labour government believed if Mr Mugabe was excluded from the talks because of the behaviour of his guerillas, peace talks sponsored by Lord Owen would fail, according to Mr Griffiths.

Reid-Daly himself was, in fact, a ruddy-faced, genial man, with a ready sense of humour. His nickname among the hardened men he led was "Uncle Ron", and they were as ferociously loyal to him as he was to them.

Following his court martial he settled in South Africa, where he found, to his surprise, that the



reputation of the Selous Scouts had spread far and wide. "To my horror, I found myself approached by all manner of dubious people offering me weird and wonderful assignments as a contract killer, or bounty hunter. They were always amazed when I told them I was a simple soldier and not the man they were looking for."

In the early 1980s he did accept what he thought was solely a military appointment in the Transkei, the first of the South African "homelands" to be granted "full independence" by the then South African government. He was put in charge of the Transkei army and was joined by other former Selous Scouts to give basic military training.

In fact, the state's rulers, Kaiser Matanzima and his brother George, saw the presence of the Selous Scouts as a deterrent to the numerous others plotting to dethrone them. In 1987 the Matanzima brothers were overthrown in a bloodless coup by Major-General Bantu Holomisa, ironically one of the officers trained by the Selous Scouts. Reid-Daly was forced to quit the Transkei.

He decided it was finally time to hang up his boots. He retired to Simonstown, near Cape Town, to indulge in his hobbies of reading military history and watching rugby.

Ron Reid-Daly passed away at home on the 9th August 2010 after a prolonged struggle with cancer and diabetes. His wife, Jean, predeceased him, and he is survived by a son and a daughter.

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