

Shooting in the

A REVIEW OF MODERN CHEST WEBBING, BODY ARMOUR

AND SHOOTING PHILOSOPHY – AND HOW THEY INTERACT

Real world

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ORIGINS AND REALITY

After the Vietnam War, large numbers of veterans were drawn to southern Africa where the Cold War continued to be fought in the bush of Angola, Rhodesia, Mozambique and South Africa. The 'Bush Wars', as they became known, were very different to Vietnam, which had spanned the whole gamut of military operations; from small insurgent attacks to large pitched battles and even mass aerial bombing as characterised by the 'Linebacker' raids on North Vietnam late in the war. The Bush Wars on the other hand, were predominantly characterised by short, sharp skirmishes between small groups, usually away from centres of population. These were interspersed with a small number of heavy engagements around insurgent base camps. To counter the insurgents' numerical superiority, hit-and-run tactics, use of mines and the distances over which the conflicts were fought, security forces employed mobile forces using fixed and rotary-wing aircraft and mine-protected vehicles. The saying; "There is nothing new under the sun," has never been more applicable given current operations.



Pic Corporal Ricky Fuller

The Vietnam conflict had a number of influences on the Bush Wars, aside from the obvious use of helicopters and the influx of veterans.

Vietnam veterans had been exposed to Eastern Block tactics that employed fluid battlefield movement and quick engagements at short range to negate the US and allies overwhelming advantage in firepower. Their adversaries had very effectively employed weapons such as the highly effective AK-47 assault rifle with Chinese Communist (Chi Com) chest webbing. Chest webbing was an evolution of the crossed bandoliers needed to carry the large amount of ammunition that characterised Eastern Block infantry assault tactics, which relied on the heavy weight of fire from automatic weapons. These in turn were an adaptation of German WWII tactics, which had to deal with massed attacks by Russian troops on the Eastern Front.

Cross pollination of equipment and tactics was an inevitable outcome of the Vietnam-veterans' experience in the Bush Wars. Further driving the adoption of these procedures and weapons was the international arms embargo that encouraged the use of the large numbers of captured weapons that fell into the hands of security forces. Chest webbing also suited the rapid movement in and out of vehicles and aircraft and the fluid tactics necessary to react rapidly at short range in the scrub of southern Africa. Meanwhile, in the Western armies that had fought the Vietnam War, things remained static for long periods – as they tend to do when the motivation of combat to force innovation and change is lost. This meant that for another generation, the belt order of webbing that had been used in Vietnam, because of the necessity to carry ammunition, rations and so on during extended jungle patrols, became the accepted method of load carrying on the battlefield. This

ignored the many advantages of chest webbing for the freedom of movement, access to equipment and movement in confined spaces. Change was further inhibited because of many of the military-training systems being aimed at belt-order webbing, especially in relation to marksmanship training. For example the five marksmanship positions – prone, standing, kneeling, squatting and sitting – are all taught essentially for employment when using belt webbing. By the time the Bush Wars finally ended in defeat for nations like Rhodesia in the mid to late '80s, the basic Chi Com chest webbing that had initially been employed had undergone numerous improvements and was seeing limited service with mainstream armies. In the mid '90s the Pouch Attachment Ladder System (PALS) was developed as part of the US Modular Lightweight Load-carrying Equipment (MOLLE) system, which allowed the attachment of pouches to load-bearing equipment in a standardised way.



Pic Captain Lachlan Simond



Pic Brian Hartigan