



## Viscount Down Book Synopsis

### **By Keith Nell**

There cannot possibly be a greater anxiety than being in an aircraft and knowing that it is going to crash. Sitting helpless in the seat with only a thin safety belt between life and death, terrified passengers hurtle forward in their doomed plane at a few hundred miles an hour toward an unknown place where fate awaits them. Absolutely nothing can be done to prevent this. Their only option is to sit and wait for disaster to happen. Perhaps for the families left behind this is the worst part of the ordeal. What were my loved ones last thoughts? Were they of me, of us? We put out of our minds the moment of impact as the plane hits the ground at well over 100 miles an hour; whole families perishing together, in a grotesque mix of shattered flesh.

But that which awaited the civilian passengers and crew on Air Rhodesia's Flight RH 825 flying between Kariba and Salisbury in 1978 defied any horror that they could have foreseen. All aboard the 'Hunyani' were holidaymakers enjoying the flight home when a SAM7 missile slammed into the starboard wheel bay and exploded with an almighty bang. With all starboard controls damaged and pressurized fuel lines feeding a raging fire that could not be put out, the stricken plane lurched in the sky and had to be put down fast. On the ground, another terrorist group watched the doomed aircraft plunging down toward earth. Even from a distance, the rumbling noise of the plane crash landing in the bush was loud and clear, followed by a huge explosion. With communist rhetoric still echoing in their minds about the white people who had stolen their land, they hurriedly fixed bayonets to their AK47's and ran toward the rising plume of smoke. In a cruel twist of fate, the miracle that there were survivors turned into one of the most heinous acts of barbarity known to mankind.

When the SAS parachuted into the crash site the following morning, a grizzly scene awaited them. Inside the smoking wreckage of the aircraft

## Viscount Down

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were the burned bodies of most passengers and crew, many still strapped in their seats. Nearby the wreckage lay the bodies of women, children and babies who survived the crash landing, only to have been bayoneted, bludgeoned and shot to death after leaving the wreckage. Out of 56 souls onboard, 18 survived the crash. Only 8 escaped from being butchered to tell the tale. Five months later, a second Viscount passenger carrying aircraft, the 'Umniati,' when it too was struck by a heat seeking missile and turned into a fireball in the sky, plummeting straight down at terminal velocity into a ravine, instantly killing all 59 onboard.

For most people at that time there was little or no interest in another tragedy on the Dark Continent. But for the small country of Rhodesia and its people it was a momentous event. The callous act of shooting down an unarmed civilian aircraft was an affront on humanity and the civilized world. For Rhodesians it was their darkest hour and one that changed the course of the war. The country waited for universal condemnation but nothing came.

This is the hitherto untold and epic account of unrelenting Rhodesian resolve to avenge the Hunyani and Umniati tragedies. The events herein are described in accurate detail, including a dramatic account from the Pilot's seat of the last minutes in the doomed aircraft. Included in the story are vivid descriptions of the social and economic pressures on the small war torn country plagued by brutal acts of atrocities in the name of liberation. It tells of the ethnic hardships affecting a young black boy growing up under tribal culture in the remote Urungwe where the Viscount Gang reigned and of how he was forcefully recruited to join Robert Mugabe's ZANLA army to fight the revolutionary war. A parallel is drawn with a white boy who grows up in European culture with different pressures who becomes a SAS soldier and is thrown into the scenario for which his specialized training and personality were ideally suited.

## Viscount Down

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In the most extraordinary circumstances, he is tasked through Special Branch to convert 100 former terrorists into highly trained undercover operatives to locate and assassinate hardcore ZIPRA terrorists, some trained in Moscow. His tenure as a white member of the Rhodesian security forces living alone in the bush for two months with heavily armed terrorists was an existence fraught with danger. Apart from the ever present worries about self preservation were the disciplinary problems arising from converting lawless undisciplined terrorists into highly trained undercover operatives.

The story tells of the coming together of these two former enemies, who from vastly different backgrounds and reasoning, become united in secret operations in the missile corridor between Kariba and Karoi where the Viscount tragedies occurred. After numerous clashes with ZIPRA forces, the SAS soldier and his right-hand man learn the whereabouts of Rhodesia's most wanted and loathed Viscount Gang. An immediate action plan is required in which letdown was not an option under any circumstances whatsoever. Failure to deliver long awaited justice would never be forgiven or forgotten.

This is a rare account by a member of the Rhodesian SAS. Described by a critic as a brilliant story that 'jerks the soul', it could only be told by someone who was there. I was there – but a mere pawn in the plans of Destiny. For many years, it didn't occur to me that to leave this story untold would surely be an injustice.

For the 107 victims who were killed in these disasters and their bereaved families and friends, this book is for you.

For more info and pre orders go to [www.viscountdown.com](http://www.viscountdown.com)

