

# RATELS ON THE LOMBA

## The Story of Charlie Squadron

Leopold Scholtz

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Charlie Squadron – the iron fist of 61 Mechanised Battalion Group (61 Mech) – led the way on 3 October 1987 during the climactic battle between the South African Defence Force and the Angolan forces on the Lomba River in southern Angola. *Ratels on the Lomba* places the reader in the midst of the squadron of young conscripts who were taken off to the Border War to fight in this battle.

Not only were they up against a vastly superior Angolan force in terms of numbers and weaponry, but they also had to deal with terrain so dense that their sight was severely impaired and their movement restricted. Also, even though SADF tactical doctrine clearly stated that tanks had to be countered by tanks, these conscripts had to take on the Angolan tanks in armoured cars with inferior low-velocity guns and thin armour, designed to keep out nothing more than small-arms fire.

Yet, during the battle on the Lomba the 47 Brigade of the Angolan forces was nearly wiped out. Scholtz's blow-by-blow account of a David vs. Goliath battle takes the reader to the heart of the action. It is honestly told and vividly described, thanks to interviews with veterans and diary entries that help to recreate the drama of the battle. It is an intensely human story of how individuals react in the face of death and how the war never left them, even when they returned home.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DR LEOPOLD SCHOLTZ is a former journalist and the author of seven books, including the popular *The SADF in the Border War* (also translated into Afrikaans). He was deputy editor of *Die Burger* until 2007 where after he headed Media24's European office in the Netherlands. He retired in 2013, but still regularly contributes analyses on international politics and current affairs to a variety of publications. In 1997 Scholtz was recruited in the Reserve Force of the South African National Defence Force where he served as staff officer (captain) at several headquarters.

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