



The Battle of Savate: 32 Battalion's Greatest Operation

Piet Nortje

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On 21 May 1980, under the codename Operation Tiro-Tiro, 32 Battalion attacked and routed a FAPLA brigade at Savate, a small Angolan town 75 kilometres north of the border with South West Africa. Fifteen members of 32 Battalion were killed in the action and many more wounded. It was the highest South African casualty rate in a single skirmish since the start of the Border War. Overall, however, Savate was a significant victory for 32 Battalion. FAPLA suffered heavy casualties and the invaders captured a great many vehicles, weapons, ammunition and other equipment.

Operation Tiro-Tiro, or the Battle of Savate as it became known, was the first time the SADF had engaged FAPLA in battle since 1975. And, despite the record number of casualties, it was 32 Battalion's biggest victory since its formation in March 1976. While the Border War came to an end in 1989 and 32 Battalion was disbanded in March 1993, to this day a remembrance service and parade is held annually on the Sunday closest to 21 May to commemorate the Battle of Savate and to remember 32 Battalion's victory and the price they paid.

Drawing from official documents in the Department of Defence Documentation Centre that have only recently been declassified and from testimonies of soldiers on both sides, The Battle of Savate is the definitive account of one of the greatest battles of the Border War, describing in detail the operation, its motivation and planning, its achievements and failures, and vividly recreating the experience of what happened on the ground.

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