

BOOK SHELF

set the format for this book, *Cartridges 101* does not provide load data – apart from a mention here and there for less well-known cartridges. Although, this is understandable, I felt mildly disappointed.

Cartridges 101 is the kind of reference book that is worth the investment because it is not a one-off read that you never pick up again – you will come back to it many times over the years. The cost is R295 excluding postage, and it is available directly from the author: telephone 072-281-6304, as well as from several leading gun shops – see his advert in this edition. **Gregor Woods**

Shadows in an African Twilight

By Kevin Thomas

When I was a boy living in South Africa, 'the Rhodesias' represented the Africa I craved but had seen little of. My first trip to Rhodesia was in 1966; I was so captivated I made it my second home. One reason I found his book so compelling is that I was in some of the same places and at much the same time as Kevin and can well understand the way he lived, hunted and fought.

Kevin Thomas, professional hunter and regular *Magnum* contributor, needs little introduction to our readers. He was born in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia in 1950, and grew up in the remote and pristine Save river valley, spending most of his boyhood hunting. He was fifteen when the Rhodesian government announced UDI and had little idea of what this would bring in his life. On graduating from highschool he entered the cadet game ranger scheme of National Parks & Wildlife Management and began a life of high adventure. He worked with young men who would later become well-known as game rangers and professional hunters: Oliver Coltman, Rupert Fothergill (Operation Noah) Tommy Orford, Paul Coetsee, Mike Bromwich, Barry Duckworth, Spud Ludbrooke and many more.

Shadows is 700 pages long and covers Kevin's life until 2008. His adventures as a game ranger were so numerous and interesting that it becomes impossible to choose examples to relate in a book review. Suffice to say, it is very well worth reading, and contains rarities such as witnessing the last ever (formerly annual) Shangaan fish drive.

By the mid 1960s, the bush war was picking up, and by 1967, ZIPRA guerillas were already trying to find a way through Wanke, the Zambezi Valley and other National Parks and Controlled Hunting Areas to infiltrate the country. Game rangers were among the first civilians to become involved in counter-insurgency operations, as they knew the areas involved, were generally excellent trackers, good shots and could survive in the bush.


Around this time, when Kevin married Brenda, they lived in a tented camp on the Sapi river near its confluence with the Zambezi. He was twenty-one and she nineteen – it was to become a lifelong partnership. Much of his work, under regional warden Paul Coetsee, involved problem animal control and his adventures were many and hair-raising, especially with lions and elephants. But this book is not just about adventures – Kevin is a keen observer and constantly describes and explains various phenomena, teaching the reader much of interest about the bush and its wildlife.

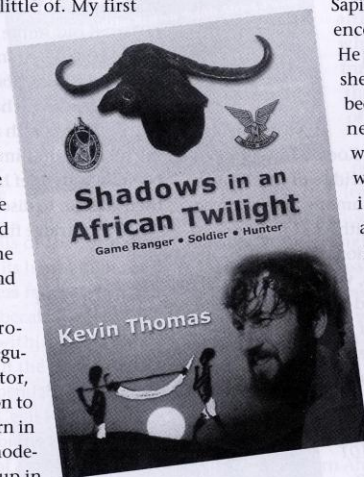
Inevitably, due to his fluency in local tribal languages, Kevin became increasingly involved in counter-insurgency work, and was particularly successful with the 'pseudo operations' pioneered by Mike Bromwich. These involved pretending to be fellow insurgents (or sympathetic to the cause) in order to obtain information on their movements and positions. In 1974 Kevin joined the regular army and soon became a member of the newly formed Selous Scouts. This section of the book cannot be described as

a 'light read', but it is a must-read if you want to know just what a dirty business war can be and want an understanding of how complex and risky, difficult and dangerous these operations were... and how important the role of intelligence gathering.

After the war, Kevin and his family moved to South Africa, where he worked for Dr Ian Player's Wilderness Leadership School. He went on to become a professional hunter, operating in various parts of southern Africa. The next section includes highly informative material on various game species from the biggest on down, and how to hunt them. It is filled with Kevin's personal anecdotes, and there is a section on rifles and calibres. Kevin eventually settled in the Eastern Cape, and there are sections on hunting with dogs, and on the safari industry in the East Cape.

In 2003 Kevin worked in the security sector in Iraq, and he describes his experiences and the characters he met during that conflict. Today he is back in the Eastern Cape and is still an active professional hunter.

In its own way, this book is African – it provides a partial history of wildlife management in Rhodesia as well as being the best account of the bush war I have yet read. It is a wonderfully informative 'how to' on African hunting and, in addition to being a useful reference work, it is an exciting and intriguing read. My only criticism is that I think it should have been split into two books, one on Kevin's bush war and Iraq experiences, and a second on his game ranging and hunting life. This massive softback sells for R300. Ex-Rhodesian servicemen, civil servants and pensioners can buy it for R200, but Kevin makes that offer only once he knows who the buyer is. It can be ordered directly off his book website at <www.uthekwanepress.co.za> or from <buffhunt@mweb.co.za>. I regret that due to pressure of work (and the length and complexity of Kevin's story), I have been tardy in writing this review, and of the 2 000 books printed, only 400 now remain, so get in quick. **Gregor Woods** 



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& TRAINING
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