

# Battle of Walvis Bay

by Matt Curtis

*This scenario is based off an action as described in Larry Bond's novel Vortex (Warner Brothers, 1991).*

South Africa's drive into Namibia had stalled by August 27. Commandant Henrik Kruger, who's 20<sup>th</sup> Cape Rifles had spearheaded the armored column aimed at Windhoek, was blocked by strong Cuban forces entrenched in the Auas Mountains. And things were no better to the west, as Pretoria's planners had over-estimated their ability to reinforce the deep-water port at Walvis Bay...placing an impossible burden on Colonel George von Brandis's 5<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Battalion.

For more than a week, von Brandis and his men had raced east on Route 52, stabbing toward Namibia's capital in what was originally intended to serve as a feint - a move aimed at diverting Communist reserves away from Kruger and follow-on SADF units. A string of early victories over Namibian border troops bolstered 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion's morale. But with the 20<sup>th</sup> CR stymied just north of Bergland, the unit's responsibilities soon spiraled out of control

Kruger's northern advance was blocked. So von Brandis was to continue to push on Windhoek. Yet civil unrest within South Africa, compounded by the military's manpower shortages, meant the Citizen Force troops initially marked for Walvis Bay were being sent elsewhere. The harbor was von Brandis's only source of supply. And its garrison of two infantry companies seemed dangerously inadequate. So now the colonel was ordered to bleed his units of firepower in order to screen his flanks and lines of communication.

Even this wasn't enough to deter the officer, at first. It was only after his men had destroyed a reinforced enemy battalion (complete with a company of T-55 tanks) in pitched battle just 50 miles from Windhoek that Von Brandis learned just how close South Africa was coming to losing this war. Cuban armor, shuttled in theater by Russian transports, had flanked him and was advancing south towards the former Germany colony of Swakopmund, no more than a day's drive from Walvis Bay.

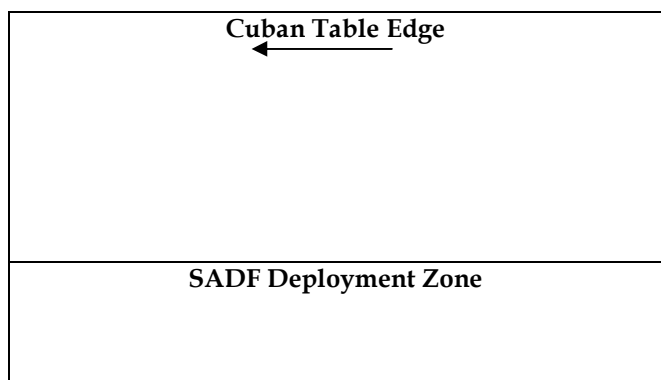
With Colonel Carlos Pellervo's 21<sup>st</sup> Motorized Rifle Battalion poised to capture the only SADF base for hundreds of miles, the 5<sup>th</sup> Mechanized had no choice but to turn around and go back, its officers and men praying for a miracle as their APCs and armored cars, now starved for fuel, began to die by the roadside.

## Set Up

Von Brandis and the 5<sup>th</sup> Mechanized have arrived mere hours before the Cubans. They've been able to locate some firing positions east of a railroad embankment that parallels a N-S road leading into Walvis Bay. They have not, however, been able to dig in. So rather than qualifying as an assault or deliberate attack, this scenario is a modified version of an "Encounter" as spelled out in the core rulebook.

## Rules:

The Cuban player deploys his units however he likes, as long as they are placed no more than 6" from his table edge and are facing the direction indicated by the arrow.



A linear piece of terrain - representing the embankment -- bisects the table length-wise as shown (the SADF zone takes up about 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of playing area). Standard LOS rules apply. Any vehicle placed in contact with the embankment, however, enjoys partial cover as it's considered to be hull down.

Before play starts, the Cuban player is allowed to test against his FAC's listed rating. If he makes his roll, MiGs assigned to strafe and bomb Walvis Bay have spotted the SADF units and the Cuban column is allowed to turn and face the opposition. If not, the South African player gets one free volley of weapons fire - in theory catching the Cuban player by surprise. The Cuban player is then allowed to pivot (without testing for command) and normal play begins.

The overall objective, for either side, is to break the opposition.

### **Cuban Forces (1700 pts, Breakpoint 13)**

- General Antonio Vega (CO) commands all Cuban forces stationed in Africa. In the novel, he directs just about *everything* the 21<sup>st</sup> Motorized Rifle Battalion does over the radio - apparently because he doesn't hold Pellervo in high regard: Infantry Stand plus Gaz 69.
- Colonel Carlos Pellervo (HQ) commands the 21<sup>st</sup> Motorized Rifle Battalion on paper: Infantry Stand plus BTR-60 PU APC.
- One FAC (CV 7 at 30 points)
- One FAO (CV 7 at 30 points)
- Three Motorized Rifle Companies: 9 Conscripts\* with 9 BTR-60 APCs
- Reconnaissance Platoon: 1 BRDM "Recce"
- Attached AT Platoon: 1 BRDM-2 Sagger
- Attached Tank Company: 3 T-62 MBTs
- Attached AA Platoon: 1 ZSU-23-4
- Artillery Battery: 1 122mm towed gun, off-board
- Air Support: 1 MiG-27 "Flogger" (6 attacks, 3 hits, 4 save)

\* = Each Company has one unit with an RPG-7 upgrade.

**Notes:** Vega is brought on to the table here because of his role in the battle. The rest of the Cuban TO&E is as close to the forces depicted in the book as possible. The FAO and FAC have been bumped up in terms of quality to reflect how they were described in the novel.

In terms of doctrine and general capabilities, the Cubans should be seen as a Warsaw Pact Grade 1 Army.

### **South African Forces (1245 points, Breakpoint 9)**

- Colonel George von Brandis (CO): Infantry Stand plus Ratel HQ APC.
- Major Jamie Hougaard (HQ): Infantry Stand plus Ratel HQ APC.
- Two Rifle Companies: 6 SA Regulars\* with 6 Ratel 20 transports.
- Armored Car Squadron: 2 Eland 90mm "Recce"
- AT Company: 2 Ratel "Swift" ATGM
- Mortar Company: 2 Ratel 81mms
- AA Troop: 2 Ystervaark SP 20mm guns

\* = Each company has one unit with an RPG-7 upgrade.

**Notes:** The battalion's normal complement of nine Ratel 20 APCs and infantry stands has been reduced to six here to represent the fuel shortages and fatigue which so crippled the unit in *Vortex*. Similarly, the armored car squadron has only two Eland 90s as opposed to the three units you would see on paper. The book has the SADF troopers abandoning "non essential" vehicles in the desert and references at least one APC being left behind. During the battle, the armored car squadrons are stuck in place due to lack of fuel and at least a few are forced to lay their turrets manually. The infantry, too, are on the point of collapse.

Finally, the Ystervaark and Ratel 81mms are included because that's what I own. If the SADF TO&E was based strictly off the novel, then the AA guns would be towed and the 81mms tubes manned by infantry. Point wise, my approach makes little difference. Same thing for the Swift ATGMs.