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## 5th Brigade

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The 5th Brigade was a Special unit of the Zimbabwean army which was trained by North Korea military from August 1981 to September 1982. They were nicknamed [Gukurahundi](#) by [Robert Mugabe](#) when he announced the need for the militia. The name Gukurahundi itself was to become the name of the massacre that followed the creation of this special unit.<sup>[1]</sup>

This unit was different from other army units because it was directly under the Prime Minister's office and not integrated into normal army structures. The most distinguishing feature was their red berets although some wore in plain clothes. The 1st commander of the 5th Brigade was Colonel [Perence Shiri](#).

The military codes, uniforms & radio equipment of the 5th Brigade were not compatible with other army units.

The term Gukurahundi itself is a [Shona](#) vernacular word which means "the rain which washes away the chaff before the spring rains".

The 5th Brigade was responsible for the death of at least 20 000 people who were accused of supporting [ZAPU](#) in [Matabeleland](#) & the [Midlands](#) province of [Zimbabwe](#).

### How it began

When [Robert Mugabe](#) assumed office as the first Prime Minister of Zimbabwe on 18 April 1980, he was faced with the task of uniting a country which had been subjected to 90 years of increasingly repressive, racist rule. There had also been over a decade of escalating military activity, which had served not only to accelerate the process of liberating the majority, but also to create some divisions within it.

In addition, the new Zimbabwe had a powerful and hostile neighbour, South Africa. It was obvious that integrating a community that had serious divisions within itself would be no easy task.<sup>[2]</sup>

Mugabe himself had long been an assassination target, and attempts on his life continued. He escaped an attempt on his life near Masvingo during the election campaign. He and others narrowly escaped a "Rhodesian" assassination attempt planned to coincide with Independence Day in 1980.

In December 1981 South African agents attempted to kill him by blowing up the new ZANU-PF headquarters, and in July 1982 there was yet another abortive attempt on his life, involving exZIPRA combatants, when shots were fired at his residence in Harare.

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In addition, there were sporadic outbreaks of violence emanating from the guerrilla assembly points (APs) countrywide. Such outbreaks began before Independence and continued throughout the early 1980s.

This violence was committed by both ZANLA and ZIPRA ex-combatants, sometimes against civilians and quite often against each other: the causes of this were complex.

The net result of the unstable situation was that by early 1982, Zimbabwe had serious security problems in various parts of the country, particularly in the western half. Bands of “dissidents” were killing civilians and destroying property.

The Government responded with a massive security clampdown on Matabeleland and parts of the Midlands. What is apparent in retrospect and will be shown in various reports was that there were two overlapping “conflicts” going on in Matabeleland. The first conflict was between the dissidents and Government defence units, which included 4 Brigade, 6 Brigade, the Paratroopers, the CIO and the Police Support Unit.

The second conflict involved Government agencies and all those who were thought to support ZAPU. This was carried out mainly against unarmed civilians in those rural areas which traditionally supported ZAPU; it was also at times carried out against ZAPU supporters in urban areas.

The Government agencies which were engaged in this second conflict were primarily 5 Brigade, the CIO, PISI and the ZANU-PF Youth Brigades, as shown in many reports. These units committed many human rights violations, which compounded the plight of civilians who were once more caught in the middle of a problem not of their own making.

The Government’s attitude was that the two conflicts were one and the same, and that to support ZAPU was the same as to support dissidents. Rural civilians, the ZAPU leadership and the dissidents themselves all denied and continue to deny this allegation.

Thousands of unarmed civilians died, were beaten, or suffered loss of property during the 1980s, some at the hands of dissidents and most as a result of the actions of Government agencies.

## About Pindula

Pindula is a place to find information about local things on the internet. We do it a lot like Wikipedia, except everything is hyper-local. We started work on Pindula because we needed something like it. There’s so little useful information about local things online and we’re working to change that

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## References

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