

= John Alan Coey =

John Alan Coey ( 12 November 1950 ? 19 July 1975 ) was an American soldier who served in the Rhodesian Army as one of " the Crippled Eagles " , a loosely organised group of US expatriates fighting for the unrecognised government of Rhodesia ( today Zimbabwe ) during that country 's Bush War . A devout Christian and fervent anti @-@ communist ? the African @-@ American historian Gerald Horne described him as a white supremacist of the political ultra @-@ right ? he was the first American fatality of the war . He moved to Rhodesia to join its army in 1972 , the day after graduating from college in his home town of Columbus , Ohio , and served until he was killed in action in 1975 . He kept a journal throughout his service that was posthumously published as A Martyr Speaks .

Coey received United States Marine Corps officer training during his studies and was on track to receive a commission when he requested discharge and left for Rhodesia , asserting that the US government had been infiltrated by a " revolutionary conspiracy of internationalists , collectivists and communists " and that fighting for Rhodesia would allow him to better defend Western interests . He joined the Rhodesian Special Air Service ( SAS ) and passed out with the rank of trooper in November 1972 , receiving recognition as one of the army 's best recruits of the year . However , his political views led to an acrimonious fall from favour within the SAS , his expulsion from its officer training programme in October 1973 and ultimately to his leaving the unit four months later . He redeployed to the Rhodesian Army Medical Corps , from which he was posted to the Rhodesian Light Infantry ( RLI ) heliborne commando battalion in July 1974 , concurrently with his promotion to corporal . He thereafter served an instructor and commando medic in the RLI .

Though not an officer , Coey exerted some influence on tactical doctrine , making numerous suggestions to his superiors and pioneering the combat medic role in the Rhodesian Army , which caused him to be nicknamed " the Fighting Doc " . He was killed in action in the Kandeya Tribal Trust Lands in the country 's north on 19 July 1975 , shot through the head while running into the open to treat two fallen comrades . His remains , originally buried in Que Que in central Rhodesia , were reinterred in Ohio in 1979 . His journal and some of his letters home were compiled into A Martyr Speaks by his mother soon after he died , and published in 1988 .

= = Early life = =

John Alan Coey was born in Columbus , Ohio , on 12 November 1950 to George and Phyllis Coey , both devout Christians . While growing up , John was a keen Boy Scout and attained the organisation 's top rank , Eagle Scout . He attended Ohio State University 's campus in his home town , studying forestry , and during his studies enlisted in the United States Marine Corps ' officer training program as a cadet in its Platoon Leaders Class . During this time he also taught at a local Sunday school .

Like his parents , Coey was a fervent Christian , and held forthright views on communism , which he believed was an inherently evil system of government , geared towards the ultimate destruction of Christianity and the West ; he later wrote of the " murder " of 65 million people by communists in China and the Soviet Union since the October Revolution of 1917 , " and the souls of millions more ... indoctrinated with atheism " . In Coey 's opinion , only the retention of a society rooted in traditional Western culture and Christian faith would prevent this from happening elsewhere .

= = Military career = =

= = = Motivations = = =

Coey was on track to receive an officer 's commission into the Marines as soon as he graduated from college , but he became severely disillusioned by the course of the Vietnam War . Puzzled by America 's failure to win the war , he developed a theory that the United States government had

been infiltrated by a " revolutionary conspiracy of internationalists , collectivists and communists " , which he claimed was deliberately bringing about defeat in Vietnam to demoralise Americans as a precursor to bringing the United States under a totalitarian world government . His attention was caught by the situation in Rhodesia ( today Zimbabwe ) , where a war pitted the unrecognised government , made up predominantly of the country 's minority whites , against communist @-@ backed black nationalist guerrilla groups . Coey interpreted this as Rhodesia " holding the line " on the behalf of Christendom against communism , and surmised that he would better serve the United States and the Western world if he fought in the Rhodesian Army rather than the US Marine Corps . He successfully requested a discharge from the Marines just before he would have received his commission , and flew to southern Africa the day after he graduated from Ohio State in late March 1972 to join the Rhodesian Army .

Foreigners like Coey who volunteered for the Rhodesian Army received the same pay and conditions of service as local regulars . Ideologically and religiously motivated , Coey viewed himself as a kind of latter @-@ day crusader . He kept a thorough journal of his thoughts and experiences throughout his army service . " I believe God intended me to come here for some purpose , " he wrote soon after enlisting . " This action has cost me an Officer 's Commission , and ... my citizenship may be revoked , [ but ] this is the most I can do for my country under the circumstances . " He told the historian Gerald Horne that he believed communists had already compromised top levels of the US government , and that by serving in Rhodesia he was helping to unify " his people " against a foreign conspiracy . His religious views also affected his views on Zionism : he believed that the State of Israel 's existence prior to the Second Coming of Christ was contrary to scriptural prophecies , and that it should therefore be destroyed .

= = = Special Air Service = = =

Though foreign soldiers in the Rhodesian Army were only required to immediately commit to three years ' service , Coey volunteered on arrival for at least five . He joined the Special Air Service ( SAS ) , an elite commando unit . He was one of several foreigners in his barrack room , and they decorated their quarters with the flags of their home countries . Coey performed well during his initial training , and was recognised as one of the Rhodesian Army 's top recruits of 1972 ; after passing out in November that year with the rank of trooper , he was picked out in January 1973 for instruction as an officer . While training for this new role , he contributed articles to various Rhodesian and South African publications , sending work to the latter under the Afrikaans pseudonym " Johann Coetzee " . The political and religious views reflected in his journal continued : on 18 September 1973 , he expressed profound joy at the overthrow of Chile 's Marxist President Salvador Allende , and painted the incident as a victory for Christianity and the West .

In October 1973 , Coey submitted an inflammatory article detailing his views on America 's foreign policy to the army magazine , *Assegai* ; the firmly anti @-@ establishment piece , " The Myth of American Anti @-@ communism " , was deemed " subversive " by the army , which blocked its publication . Coey was removed from the officer training programme soon after , officially because of his " temperament " . Though disappointed by his expulsion , and suspicious about the true reasoning behind it , Coey did not complain , writing that as an ordinary trooper he would be free to broadcast his views to the public unhindered .

Coey first saw combat action in November 1973 , in a covert external operation in Portuguese Mozambique 's north @-@ western Tete Province . He enjoyed it , comparing the experience to the American Indian Wars of the 19th century . The following month , however , he was informed by his commanding officer that he would be not be used as a paratrooper , and would not be going on patrol again , as he was , in the commander 's words , " not worth it " . Coey felt so humiliated that he considered leaving , but resolved to stay and fight on . Despite his commander 's order to remain on base , he joined a patrol into Mozambique and crossed the border on 7 January 1974 . The commanding officer flew into a rage when he discovered Coey 's insubordination two weeks later , and immediately had him brought back . Meanwhile , Coey persevered with " The Myth of American Anti @-@ communism " , and secured its publication in the conservative , nationally distributed

journal Property and Finance on 7 February 1974 . Five days later , he was barred from taking part in a parachute exercise with his unit , and on 14 February he was instructed to choose another army corps or regiment by the 18th ; the SAS no longer wanted him .

= = = Rhodesian Light Infantry = = =

Coey 's request to transfer to the Rhodesian Army Medical Corps was granted , and he was accordingly placed in a three @-@ month medical course in Bulawayo , starting in April 1974 . On its completion in July , he was promoted to corporal and posted to the Rhodesian Light Infantry ( RLI ) heliborne commando battalion , where he was installed as an instructor . He expressed pride in teaching " as we did at Quantico ? the Marine way ! " He was pleased to meet other Americans in the RLI , particularly when they were fellow US Marines . The American expatriates in the Rhodesian forces tended to try to stay together and associate with each other . They were later informally dubbed " the Crippled Eagles " by the American author Robin Moore , who moved to Salisbury in August 1976 and became their unofficial patron . Coey liked and respected his fellow soldiers , who in turn regarded him as strong , capable and brave , but there was mutual animosity concerning their respective lifestyles while off @-@ duty . " They live for pleasure mostly , " Coey wrote in his journal , " drinking and whoring . The Christian soldier is sometimes despised and ridiculed . "

Coey acquitted himself well in the eyes of his superiors following his move to the RLI , and soon after joining the unit mustered into Support Group as a specialist in tracking , mortars and armoured vehicle driving , while also working as a medic . He took part in over 60 Fireforce missions in this capacity , and became nicknamed " the Fighting Doc " because of his vehement insistence on joining such combat excursions . Although his political views had prevented him from becoming an officer , he continued to make tactical suggestions to his superiors , some of which were adopted ; for example , combat medics were introduced to RLI patrols at his suggestion , and following his example . However , other ideas of Coey 's ? such as his proposed use of psychochemical weapons and the " weapon of starvation " against Mozambicans and Zambians ? were less well received .

On recovering his journal , Coey 's family discovered that portions of it which discussed army operations in too much detail ? sometimes brief passages , but occasionally whole months at a time ? had been censored by the army , and in some cases removed entirely . Apart from an entry on 26 December 1974 , in which Coey wrote about his loneliness at Christmas and desire to get married , not a word remained after 11 November 1974 . Having become engaged to a young Rhodesian woman , Coey successfully filed for Rhodesian citizenship while on leave in June 1975 , then renewed his US passport in South Africa . " What a chuckle , " he wrote to a friend , " filling out those papers under a portrait of Henry Kissinger ! "

= = = Death = = =

On 19 July 1975 , a unit from the Rhodesian Territorial Force ( TF ) contacted a group of guerrillas near a river in the Kandeya Tribal Trust Lands , north @-@ east of Mount Darwin in the area covered by Operation Hurricane . After the Territorials killed two of the insurgents without loss , the cadres fell back and set up an ambush position underneath the roots of some overhanging trees on the riverbank . The TF patrol summoned a Fireforce made up of 7 and 10 Troops , 2 Commando , RLI from Mount Darwin , which arrived soon after . Coey , who was attached to 2 Commando at the time , accompanied 7 Troop as the patrol 's combat medic .

The Territorials and 10 Troop made a sweep of the river line , but on rounding a bend in the stream were suddenly fired upon by the hidden guerrillas . A sergeant from the TF was killed , as well as Rifleman Hennie Potgeiter of the RLI . RLI Rifleman Ken Lucas suffered a gunshot wound to the leg . The insurgents now held their fire to prevent giving their position away . Incorrectly believing from the inactivity that the cadres had fled , and thinking that the two fallen soldiers were still alive , Major Hank Meyer ordered the leader of 7 Troop , Lieutenant Joe du Plooy , to sweep around the river and send Coey out to treat the men .

Lieutenant du Plooy led his men around the bend , carefully keeping them behind cover , then sent Coey out into the open riverbed to give treatment . With his Red Cross flag clearly visible , Coey came out from cover and made for the bodies on the ground . The concealed cadres immediately opened fire and fatally shot him through the head . His lifeless body fell at du Plooy 's feet . Coey was the first American fatality of the Rhodesian Bush War . The contact in which he died eventually ended with du Plooy and two other Rhodesians being wounded and a further Rhodesian soldier , Corporal Jannie de Beer , being killed . The insurgents escaped without any further loss to their number .

= = Reactions to death , funeral and burial = =

Coey 's parents received letters of consolation from across the world , including one from Lester Maddox , the segregationist Governor of Georgia , and another from the secretary of the far @-@ right Liberty Lobby . Coey was never a member of any radical political group , but his life and death were still used as propaganda by some such movements : according to The Nation , Coey was " eulogized in the American Nazi paper " , and , on 4 July 1976 , Willis Carto of the Liberty Lobby announced a posthumous award to Coey to commemorate the bicentenary of the United States . Members of the Rhodesian public donated money to help the Coey family travel to Rhodesia to attend his funeral service . On arrival , Coey 's parents told the Salisbury Sunday Mail that they believed his death had not been in vain , as he had fallen defending " the last bastion for fighting communism that is left in the Western world " .

On 28 July 1975 , Coey received a full military funeral and was buried in the central Rhodesian town of Que Que , where he had been living . With his parents standing by , Coey 's brother , Edward , gave a eulogy that strongly stressed his family 's religious and ideological beliefs ? he said that his brother had achieved " the greatest of Christian virtues : sacrifice " .

When the family returned to Ohio , Phyllis Coey compiled her son 's journal and a selection of his letters home into a book entitled A Martyr Speaks , which she first attempted to have published in 1975 . Because of the controversial views it contained ( including Coey 's dedication of his journal " to the 100 @,@ 000 American dead of Korea and Vietnam who were betrayed by their own government " ) , the book was turned down by publishers for over a decade . Coey 's remains were reburied in Ohio in 1979 , near to his family home . A Martyr Speaks was released in 1988 , 13 years after his death , by the New Puritan Library , a religious press in North Carolina .

= = Publications = =

Coey , John Alan ( March 1988 ) . Brooks , Pat , ed . A Martyr Speaks ( First ed . ) . Fletcher , North Carolina : New Puritan Library . ISBN 978 @-@ 0 @-@ 932050 @-@ 41 @-@ 0 .