

BUSH BAR:

A South African Solution for Jungle Busting

by First Lieutenant Adam Geibel



TOP VIEW: Hollow blade is angled to push brush aside.

The South African National Defense Force's most recent armor combat experience was in Angola during 1987-88. There, they engaged Cuban T55s with Oliphants (Centurions re-engined and armed with a 105mm L7 cannon, similar to the Israeli upgrade package) and usually came out victorious. But the difficulties of moving through the jungle made an indelible impression on the veterans.

In addition to limiting mobility, the densely-packed trees played havoc on the Oliphant's fenders and side skirts, as well as knocking stowage and even troops off the upper hull. Even smaller trees were a nuisance, since a shaken branch might drop a snake onto the tank.

The South Africans' answer was the Bush Bar — a sort of Cullin Hedgerow Cutter for the jungle. In Vietnam, the U.S. Army had fitted bulldozer blades edges to the front of M48s to achieve the same effect. However,

the Bush Bar lacks the sharp cutting edge of the U.S. version. Apparently, the sharp edge can get caught biting into trees, and it takes a lot less effort to bowl that much wood out of the way than slice it off a few feet from the ground. The Bush Bar also has a more pronounced 'V' shape, the better to push trees to the side. The total weight is one ton and the bar can be fitted in 15 minutes.

The mounting points are similar to those used for the Soviet BTU bulldozer blade and, like the Soviet BDD 'horse shoe' armor, the Bush Bar is hollow and can be filled with sand or water to increase its mass. In a pinch, the Bush Bar's reservoir could provide an emergency source of drinking water.

References

South Africa's Border War, 1966-1989, Willem Steenkamp, Ashanti Publishing Ltd., Gibraltar, 1989.

"South African Oliphant, Pt 2," Helmoed Romer Heitman, *Museum Ordnance Magazine*, Sep. 94, p. 17.



FRONT VIEW: Blade mounted on front slope shows anchoring points