

My flight from broken promises

Mozambican defector talks to the press

by Ray Smuts
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THE story of pilot Bomba, the disillusioned defector who fled to South Africa, can be told at last.

Ten days after hijacking his aircraft, Lt Bomba has spoken out to the Press.

Who is the man who startled South Africa when he flew into Hoedspruit air base in his MiG 17?

Adriano Fransisco Bomba's greatest ambition was to study science, but his country's leader, President Samora Machel of Mozambique, said no.

And so the young black became instead a highly trained, expensively kept fighter pilot, a cog in Mozambique's ailing defence machine — a potential killer instead of a scholar working for the betterment of his impoverished and unstable native land.

But the time came when the 23-year-old, Russian-trained pilot decided that he could no longer accept a government that had made promises but never fulfilled them.

On July 8, a day before he was due to have returned to his base at Beira, Lt Bomba clambered into the cockpit of an obsolete MiG 17 for what, ostensibly, was to be a reconnaissance flight.

Forced down

That was the last his superiors and colleagues saw of him. Instead of "hitting" a dummy target at Mahambo, as instructed, he flew northwards, low across the Mozambique countryside, and then ascended rapidly to be picked up by South Africa's radar system.

Two SAAF Mirage F1AZ fighters forced him to land at the early-warning defence base at Hoedspruit.

Yesterday, after days of debriefing, the handsome officer in his neat camouflage fatigues vowed at a Press conference that he would never return to Mozambique until Frelimo and its communist masters had been ousted.

He believes that, by furthering his education in the field of science, he would be able to assist the country from beyond its borders.

"It was a difficult decision to take, but I concluded before leaving that it would be the right one."

Expectation

Answering a barrage of questions, mostly in Portuguese through an interpreter, the pilot sketched a bleak picture of life in the one-party Marxist state.

He said that much development had taken place in Mozambique until 1974. When Frelimo took control the next year the people were filled with expectation.

But the next two years saw a distinct decline in the state of the country instead of the improvement promised by Frelimo.

"The Mozambican people's basic diet has become Machel's speeches — "because there is hardly any food".

The most stunning blow for Lt Bomba came while he was in standard nine. He and his classmates were told by President Machel that they would have to quit their studies to be absorbed into the armed forces.

"This news affected us because we wanted to study further and we started asking ourselves: 'Are we free or not?'"

He then enrolled in the Mozambique Air Force and was sent to Russia for training between 1976 and 1979.

In Russia he had access to

literature denied the ordinary Soviet subject, but he soon discovered that, while the standard of training was high, the Russians clearly regarded him and his colleagues as inferiors, adopting a paternalistic attitude towards them.

And it did not take him long to make another discovery.

"As is the case in Mozambique, those Russians who do not agree with the government line are persecuted."

Comrades

After 33 months in the Soviet Union, Lt Bomba returned to Mozambique. He was stationed first at Nakala and trained by Russian instructors, moving

later to Beira, where he received further training from Russians.

"My closest comrades and I often used to talk between ourselves about Frelimo. One of them said that if I carried on like that I might well defect to South Africa one day."

Lt Bomba said he believed the policies of the South African Government were very different from those of Mozambique. He thought he would be safe in this country.

Disclosing for the first time his escape plan, he said he had decided on the move only two days before fleeing.

It was standard procedure that pilots indicate the route along which they would fly before takeoff.

"Obviously, I could not say I was taking off from Maputo and landing at Hoedspruit."

Instead, he intimated that he intended taking off at 9.44am on July 8 and that he would "hit" (photographically) an imaginary target.

Instead, he flew northwards at low altitude and then ascended to about 7 000m in the hope of being picked up by South African radar.

Two Mirages intercepted him up over the Kruger National Park. Satisfied that he harboured no aggressive intentions, the South African pilots allowed him to land at Hoedspruit, 45 minutes after takeoff.

Lt Bomba, asked why he had opted for an aircraft instead of making use of roads, smiled and said: "I used an aircraft because it was the most efficient means of transport."

Was he surprised at being picked up so soon by the Mirages? The 2300-a-month officer smiled again, indicating that he would have thought it rather inconsiderate had he been left flying about for a long time. (As it was, he had only enough fuel left for 15 minutes' flying.)

A questioner wished to know his feelings about not seeing a solitary black South African pilot: he said that he had never seen a solitary white pilot in Mozambique.

Lt Bomba revealed that the Mozambique Air Force comprised 23 MiG 17 jets (he came away in the 24th) three MiG 15s (a fourth crashed, killing the pilot) and 21 pilots.

The Soviet Union supplied spares, bombs and ammunition and he believed that more aircraft were scheduled for deliv-

ery. To his knowledge the Russians had given only military aid to his country.

Since returning from the Soviet Union he had flown only reconnaissance flights and had never violated South African air space before his escape.

Expressing his gratitude for the cordial treatment he had received at Hoedspruit, he said he had spent Friday evening meeting South African pilots and had found this "very rewarding".

His first consideration was to further his education in a scientific sphere.

"The social problems of South Africa are not my con-

cern. I have not come here to oppose the Government. They will have to decide what my situation will be."

Some of the points he made were:

- Since South Africa's January raid on ANC homes in the Maputo suburb of Matola both military personnel and civilians have been "preparing themselves in a defensive manner" in anticipation of further attacks.

- The Mozambique Resistance Movement, believed to receive much of its support from South Africa, is a cause of concern to Frelimo, particularly in Manica and Sofala. Sup-

port for the MRM is strongest in Beira.

- Though the Mozambique Government has not admitted to supporting the ANC, it was "feeding" that organisation.

- Morale of Mozambican troops was "average". They were being trained to think of South Africa as the eventual enemy.

- Frelimo suppressed religious practice.

- He had denounced Catholicism on joining the air force but had embraced it again.

- He and "genuine" Mozambicans had never believed that South Africa posed a real threat.