

Bomba tells SA of training by Reds

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by ADA STUIJT

THE former Mozambican pilot, Adriano Bomba, 23, provided the South African Air Force with valuable information about the quality of Russian flight training for pilots flying along the borders, an Air Force Intelligence officer said yesterday.

And his Russian-built MIG-17 fighter plane is to be returned to Mozambique because South Africa was not at war with that country and they had requested it back, said Brig H J S van der Lith, Chief of Staff of Air Force Intelligence.

The South African and Mozambican governments had negotiated to arrange the MIG's return to Maputo, he said.

The technicians dismantled the Russian jetfighter at the Air Force's 41st Squadron at Lanseria Airport, north of Randburg.

Captain Marcello Nanthumbo, head of the technicians, would not answer any questions other than those of a technical nature.

Commandant Bob Masson, an SAAF pilot, had meticulously noted down all the flight time in the plane's log-book and gave this information to the Mozambican captain.

Standing by

Air Force technicians were standing by if the Mozambicans needed help, but they did not asked for any assistance yet, said the Brigadier.

The MIG will start its journey to Maputo on Friday. Air Force vehicles will escort them to the border.

Air Force technicians made an interesting discovery.

The Russian plane, which was built in 1952, is based on English technology.

Commandant Masson said: "Just after the Second World War, Russia bought 12 English "Nene" aircraft engines, and the MIG-17's engine is a copy of it. It's lines and other technical aspects are very reminiscent of the English Swift fighter plane."

He said even though he hadn't tried it, he was convinced this plane would be able to fly at the speed of sound -- about 1 300km per hour.

Brig Van der Lith said: "Even though the plane is almost 30 years old, it is in excellent condition. The only shortcomings were its bald tyres and the jammed 37mm cannon. But the two 23mm guns were in working order."

Safe

"We took out their three guns' bullets to make the plane safe, of course, but other than that, we did not check it over too much because we already know how those guns work," he said.

"The plane was unsafe with those bald tyres, and we used our own tyres when we flew it here. The old ones were put back on before the Mozambicans arrived."

"We returned it exactly as it was flown into Hoedspruit -- except that it's considerably cleaner," he said.

"This is an excellent -- but unsophisticated -- plane, designed for many years of duty."

The Air Force allowed Lt Bomba fly in one of their Impala trainers to test his flight training -- but definitely not to test him for Air Force duty later on, Brig Van der Lith said.

He said: "The Air Force was impressed with Lieutenant Bomba's personal abilities -- he provided us with greater insight into flight training for Mozambican pilots in Russia -- but we have no intention of accepting him into the Air Force."

"He showed us that in all respects, the South African Air Force provides better training for its pilots than does Mozambique."

When asked whether he was happy with the condition of the MIG, Capt Nanthumbo said: "I will speak privately to the South African Air Force about that."

Brig Van der Lith said: "Unless the captain signs our certificate stating he was satisfied with the jet fighter's condition it won't be released."

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