

Parade AUG. 88

Convoys keep roads open

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JUST as the Rhodesians used convoys during the war here, so too does Mozambique in its post-liberation conflict.

One convoy which travels particularly dangerous ground leaves twice a day from Marracuene, about 30 km from Maputo.

We watched one going and waited for one to arrive.

The incoming convoy had about 400 vehicles, from buses to elderly, incredibly fragile looking trucks, to a man with his child on the back of a motorbike.

Some of the vehicles which clattered to a halt at the end of the 100 km run from Gaza looked too battered to withstand anything but a shove to the car breaker's yard.

The morning we were there about 100 lightly-armed Frelimo soldiers travelled with the convoy, on board the vehicles they were protecting.

A vulnerable, slow-moving, ill-protected target.

No one, unless they bribe the soldiers, is allowed to travel the route unescorted, *Parade* was told by a civil servant.

The convoys take people and rations to Gaza, until recently one of the least war-devastated provinces, and come back with some farm produce, and truckload after truckload of wood, to be sold at what was described as "exorbitant prices" in Maputo.

This particular convoy has been in operation for only five

months.

One that has been going longer is the convoy from Beira to Tete, which takes a staggering three weeks, every six, from departure to destination.

It is attacked frequently by the bandits and among the assorted cargo being ferried north is fuel. Tete, dependant solely on Beira as a source of supply, often has dry petrol pumps.

Driving to South Africa is out these days and journeys to Swaziland via Namahacha is hazardous.

The pot-holed, pock-marked roads of Mozambique are dangerous, and by attacking and therefore cutting communication links, the bandits have dealt a costly blow to the government.