

I was out of the country at time of murders: Mataveya

H 28/10/88

Herald Reporter

THE alleged MNR bandit now before the High Court entered Zimbabwe from Mozambique after the murders he is charged with had already been committed and played a passive role in the armed robberies he is further charged with, the High Court heard

yesterday.

At the opening of the defence case, John Mataveya (21) told the court how on three occasions since 1981 he crossed the Zimbabwe-Mozambique border by evasion. The last time he did so was on May 6 1987 when he crossed into Zimbabwe after spending nearly a year in Mozambique. The Ratelshock murders, where two men were shot dead, had been committed a month earlier.

Visibly shaken and speaking fluent Shona but with a very low voice (he was advised to speak louder on four occasions), Mataveya told the court the story of his life

since entering Zimbabwe for the first time in 1981.

He did odd jobs like selling vegetables in Chipinge, herding cattle at Nyakunu village and picking tea at Silvertown Tea Estate and Chimbunga Tea Estate before returning to Mozambique in early 1986, Mataveya said.

Mataveya, who has pleaded not guilty to two counts of murder, one of attempted murder, three of armed robbery and one of possession of arms of war, said he only returned to Zimbabwe on May 6 last year to look for a job.

"I went to see my cousin Simon Matido at Wendy Farm. On discussing em-

ployment prospects, he told me that there was something I could do to get money while looking for a job if I was steady," the alleged bandit said.

He said it was this "something" that turned out to be armed robbery. Simon had an AK-47 rifle. On the first occasion he robbed a bus while Mataveya was hiding in the bush. On the second he robbed a store, and again Mataveya was hiding in the bush and only helped to carry the "loot", the court heard.

After the second armed robbery Mataveya said he told Simon to "throw away the gun now that we have all the money we need". Mataveya was arrested the following day.

Police efforts to arrest Simon were called off after Mataveya had allegedly admitted to committing the alleged crimes alone.

The trial, which is before Mr Justice Ebrahim, sitting with assessors Mr Patrick Musengezi and Mr Mubvumba Nyandoro, was briefly adjourned in the morning after Mataveya had been led into the witness box with leg irons. It resumed after extra armed guards were brought in and the leg irons removed.

The State case is led by Mr Ray Goba of the Attorney-General's Office while Mr Bruno Mugabe of Mugabe, Mutezo and Partners is appearing for Mataveya.

The trial continues today.