

Evidence points to chemical attack

The likelihood of a continuing South African military role in supporting the Mozambique rebel force Renamo emerged this week with the publication of a UN report on an alleged chemical attack on troops in January this year (*SouthScan* v7/4 p29).

According to the report, largely the work of British expert Dr JP Thompson, the effects were entirely consistent with the use of a nerve agent.

Renamo is not known to control any such weapons of its own, and in the view of political observers the proximity of the battle to the highly militarised South African border, together with the importance of the Renamo base under attack, made the likelihood of their launch from South Africa greater.

The UN report, as with an earlier report by Thompson, was unable to pin down conclusively the use of a chemical weapon, while noting in detail the effects "of a CW agent" on the troops.

The Mozambican government acknowledged for the first time the scale of the engagement at the Renamo base at Ngungwe on the South African border. It said 80 of its men were listed dead or missing after the attack.

The incident took place on January 16 when four Mozambican commando companies were attacking Ngungwe, near the border town of Ressano Garcia, and one of the largest Renamo strongholds in southern Mozambique.

It is here that Renamo is seeking to preserve intact a crack force of 2,000, according to the Paris-based *Indian Ocean Newsletter*. It is seeking to exclude this unit from any deal on a future unified army.

According to the UN report, the troops were about two kilometres from the

base when they were surprised by the firing of missiles. There was a loud explosion, which produced a dense cloud of black smoke.

Prior to this, the soldiers had noted a plane overflying the Mozambican frontier "from south to north", and a white jeep moving near their positions.

"The soldiers began to feel an immense heat," says the report.

"Some troops fell to the ground, and many were completely disoriented and confused and some began to lose their sight."

The guide for the assault said a missile came from the South African side of the border.

The South African Defence Force issued a communique on February 15, claiming that it was unlikely that chemical agents had been used at Ngungwe, but that the use of chemicals could neither be excluded nor confirmed.

If the weapon was not launched from South Africa, it is unlikely Renamo itself could have acquired it from anywhere else.

- The far-right South African evangelical group Frontline Fellowship has announced that a team of three of its missionaries has just finished a trip in the Zambezi valley in Mozambique.

The government in Maputo has viewed previous evangelical missions from US right-wingers as linked to Renamo support abroad.

Frontline Fellowship describes Renamo as "the anti-communist resistance movement".

It was regarded during the Angolan war as closely tied to the SA military, when it saw its function as to take guns and bibles into Angola with the SA troops. [*Staff writers*]