

'Homesick' defector faces 10-years in jail

Chief Reporter

THE first permanent force defector from the South African Defence Force, male nurse Lieutenant Gerald Andreas Eckert, faces up to 10 years imprisonment if convicted of desertion by a military court.

"Homesick" German-born Lt Eckert, 34, tried to slip back into South Africa at the weekend but was arrested by military police at Jan Smuts Airport on Sunday morning.

The defector who crossed to Mozambique on May 28 this year left behind a note which ended with the greeting: "Goodbye, South Africa."

After months of trying to obtain political asylum in Germany and other European countries, Lt Eckert tried to return to his adopted country. He became a South African citizen in January.

Informed sources yesterday said he had become homesick and was unaware his identity would be discovered during routine customs and

immigration checks at Jan Smuts Airport.

In a statement released yesterday, Defence Force Headquarters said: "Lieutenant Eckert will be held in custody until he has been charged with desertion in terms of the SADF's Military Discipline Code."

Military officials would not disclose any details of his arrest, but it is believed he will now face charges of high treason as he had made it clear he was not in possession of any military information when questioned by foreign correspondents in Maputo on June 3 this year.

Defence Force sources said that at this stage it would appear as if the young male nurse had not made any statement which had endangered the state.

Lt Eckert was intercepted by Mozambican forces on May 28 after he had abandoned his car at Komatiport in the Eastern Transvaal and crossed into Mozambique on foot.