

SA still backing MNR says top US researcher

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SOUTH AFRICA was still airlifting supplies to MNR bandits late last year and the regime's assertions that it has stopped supplies are false, according to a report prepared by an American academic.

While secrecy over supplies and other South African links with the bandits was intensified after the Nkomati Accord of March 1984, these links continued. Supplies definitely continued to flow by land, sea and air. At one stage a battalion of black South African troops were operating with the bandits in Mozambique.

Dr William Minter, visiting researcher for the African Studies Programme at Georgetown University in Washington DC, has just compiled a report on the MNR based on in-depth and private interviews with captured or amnestied bandits.

A copy of the report, submitted first to the Ford Foundation and the Swedish International Development Authority, was given to The Herald by the United States Information Service.

Dr Minter ended his report with the words: "Some observers now argue that South African assertions of non-support for Renamo should be believed because no recent 'smoking gun' evidence has been uncovered. The author's interviews and Mozambique eyewitness reports, together with South Africa's well-documented past record of deception, make it hard to accept such an argument as credible."

Dr Minter, who is fluent in Portuguese, interviewed 32

ex-participants of the MNR in November and December last year in north, central and south Mozambique. All but one of the interviews was done with no other person within earshot. In the single exception a translator, an aid worker with the Norwegian Development Agency, was present. Interviews averaged 45 minutes but some took twice as long.

Those interviewed distinguished between what they had seen themselves or been told, and what they had heard from others.

From the interviews, Dr Minter was able to conclude that there was "a coherent pattern of supply of arms, ammunition and medicines". These supplies came from across the border by land, carried by porters, or were dropped by parachute, or were landed by DC3 and DC4 aircraft or came over beaches from ships.

One interviewee, who spent from early 1984 to mid last year at a base in Maputo province, said South African helicopters visited the base about once every two months while he was there.

Colopes Sitoi, an amnestied bandit extensively questioned by Mozambican journalists, said bases in Gaza from August 1987 to November last year, when he left the MNR, received supplies by porters from Maputo province. Another bandit told him that there were three parachute drops in February last year.

Corridor

South of the Beira Corridor between 1979 and 1982 planes would land every three months, another interviewee said; he was then transferred as a commander to Mavonde, north of the corridor, and said he received supplies by parachute drop once a year until last year. Only in 1987 did no supplies arrive. Each shipment would last a year.

Another interviewee in Zambezia and across the river in Sofala between December 1985 and February 1987 said carriers went twice to an airstrip during this time and twice to the beach north of Quelimane to collect ship-borne supplies said to be from South Africa.

Planes landed at Alfazema in Zambezia in April 1987 and April last year, according to another. This pattern of annual supplies was common to many although some received supplies more often.

In most cases only elite forces, and others who had a need to know, were actually present when planes landed. But several of those Dr Minter spoke to, had seen DC3 Dakotas and a similar four-

engined aircraft, a DC4.

Documents captured at the Casa Banana base in Gorongosa provided more detailed information of supplies before and immediately after the Nkomati Accord. Such information included a 26-tonne supply dropped from August 1 1984 and 14 deliveries between May and July that year. Also detailed are the difficulties the South Africans had using their air force transports after Nkomati and the need for the bandits to make airstrips for civilian aircraft.

Dr Minter said the general pattern that emerged from his private interviews and available documentary evidence suggested that Mozambican eyewitness accounts occasionally appearing in the Mozambican Press were more significant than many had previously thought.

He lists bandit leader Dhlakama's bodyguards telling a radio journalist in June last year that supply planes to Gorongosa brought uniforms as well as arms and

took out precious hardwoods and ivory.

Others told of supply flights in October and November last year; one as late as November 12 which came out in a news agency story just as Dr Minter was finishing his report.

Dr Minter noted that the Mozambican coastline of 2 500 km was equivalent to the coast from east Texas to Atlantic Florida and the area of Mozambique to the six south-eastern American states. A considerable number of small planes and ships escaped capture by US drug enforcement agencies in this area. "It is likely that a smaller number of deliveries could elude the poorly equipped Mozambican authorities."

Structure

The MNR was not, according to those who spoke to Dr Minter, a loose collection of warlords and roving bands as often thought. There was a clear hierarchical structure with good command, control and communications.

The basic operational unit is a company with 100 to 150 men. Two or three of

these are grouped into a battalion and a provincial base may have two or more battalions.

Headquarters for the bandits was in South Africa until December 1983 when it was moved into Mozambique and split into north, central and southern sections. During the South African basing period the day to day command was in the hands of Lt Johan Hunter, an aide to Colonel Charles van Niekerk.

In preparation for Nkomati six MNR communications "officers" remained in South Africa to handle communications between the South Africans and the new headquarters at Gorongosa. Two were trained in ultra-secret communication, according to the Gorongosa captured documents.

Efficient radio communications seemed critical for the bandits' capacity to organise attacks over rural Mozambique. One bandit "officer" said he was responsible for 21 radios in a single sector. The Gorongosa-South Africa link was an advanced frequency hopping system which neither Mozambique nor Zimbabwe could moni-

tor, Harare sources told Dr Minter.

These links were still functioning in October last year, according to Chivaca Joao, who accepted the amnesty in November last year.

Boers

The presence of South African troops or advisers with the bandits was episodic rather than constant, according to the interviewed. Most had heard of "Boer" presence but few had actually seen them.

A captured member of the South African special forces, of Angolan origin — he was forced to join as a teenager in a Namibian camp — said that between 1982 and 1984, when he was transferred to another unit, the standard pattern was a group of five sent for two or three months.

The commander and doctor would be Afrikaners and there would be three Africans, one of Angolan origin, one of Mozambican and one of Zimbabwean.

Malawians

One interviewee who was in a Zambezia base in 1985-1986 said there were black Malawian and South African as well as white South African instructors. Separate sections of the base were allocated to the whites, to the black South Africans, to the Malawians and to the bandits themselves. He also said there was a black South African battalion with a commander called Kinyama.

Scattered interviews by Radio Mozambique indicate the continuing presence of at least small numbers of South African advisers.

Such reports mentioned South Africans in Mozambique at various bases right up to mid-November, when the latest of those who was interviewed left the bandits. A displaced peasant told Dr Minter that 10 blacks at a Zambezia base in December spoke only English among themselves and he was sure they were not Mozambicans.