

New SADF chief's cross-border sorties

By ELSABE WESSELS WM. 3-5/8/90

THE new chief of the South African Defence Force, Lieutenant-General Kat Liebenberg, was responsible for a spate of strikes into neighbouring countries that killed scores of innocent civilians and severely dented South Africa's international image.

Liebenberg, named as new head of the SADF last week, will take office on November 1.

In May 1986 Liebenberg took personal responsibility for a triple strike into Harare, Gaborone and Lusaka that left at least six people dead and 13 injured. He explained: "It is our right and duty to protect our people against this type of terror and we will carry out our duty diligently."

The Eminent Persons Group (EPG), on a visit to promote reform in South Africa at the time, cut short their tour as a result of this raid. A few weeks later the EPG published a highly critical report that fuelled that sanctions campaign against South Africa.

A *Weekly Mail* investigation this week revealed that Liebenberg had a particular penchant for cross-border raids.

The controversial general earned his first sensitive appointment in Namibia in 1977 as commanding officer of Military Area Two in Ovamboland.

Said Liebenberg of his position: "It was a sought after command because it was the sector most involved in counter-insurgency operations."

In 1980 he was promoted to Director of Operations at Army Headquarters and in 1982 to General Officer commanding Special Forces, which includes irregular forces such as reconnaissance commandoes and the precursors to the Civil Co-operation Bureau.

Military experts believe that the special forces would have been responsible for strikes into neighbouring countries.

Research shows a remarkable escalation of cross border attacks into SA's neighbouring countries during Liebenberg's office.

● On morning of January 30, 1981 SADF troops struck into Maputo by attacking three houses in Matola, 15 km from the centre of Maputo. More than 16 people, the majority civilians, were wounded.

● The following year, in a pre-dawn raid on 9 December, 1982 South African soldiers, firing machineguns and hurling grenades took control of Lesotho's capital, Maseru. Among the 37 killed were five women and two children.

● On 23 May 1983, 64 people died and 40 were injured when SA warplanes raided Maputo, striking at five alleged ANC bases. Among those dead were two children and two women (one eight months pregnant).

● On 16 October 1983, the army launched its third attack into Maputo. Five people were wounded in the raid, described as a pre-emptive strike on an ANC planning office.

● In May 1985, the Cabinda raid at the Malango Oil Complex in northern Angola led to the capture of reconnaissance Captain Wynand du Toit 1985 and left two of the elite recce team dead.

● On 13 June 1985, SADF units attacked several houses in suburban Gaborone killing at least 15 people, including a Dutch