

MiG was probably tagged from take-off

Own Correspondent

CAPE TOWN. — The MiG-17 which landed at Hoedspruit Air Base yesterday was as good as captured even before it crossed the border to South African airspace.

In fact, South African Air Force observers probably had it tagged on their radarscopes almost from the time it took off from its airfield.

SAAF radar stations constantly monitor air activity along the northern borders and cover a considerable slice of western Mozambique as well.

According to the authoritative publication "The Military Balance", the 800-man Mozambican Air Force has 36 combat aircraft — some MiG-17s and the others the more modern MiG-19s (Nato code-name "Farmer") and MiG-21s (Nato code-name "Fishbed").

It is not known, however, if all these aircraft are operational.

The captured aircraft now at Hoedspruit is not a "catch" for technical intelligence experts unless it contains some startling internal modifications. The sub-sonic MiG-17 type — code-named "Fresco" by Nato intelligence — dates its first operational service back to 1953 and was mothballed by the Russian and Warsaw Pact air forces long ago.

In age and performance it is

closely equivalent to the Canadian CL13B Sabre Mark 6 with which the SAAF was equipped before the Mirages came into service.

In its heyday, however, the MiG-17 was widely exported to at least 10 other communist and Third World countries, and was built under licence in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Red China.

In recent years it has been supplied to such Third World countries as Mozambique, Uganda — during the Idi Amin era — Somalia, Tanzania, Nigeria and Ethiopia.

Although obsolete, it is a sturdy, well-tryed aircraft that can be put to devastating use as a ground-attack fighter.

Its flying weight is 6,5 tons and maximum speed at low altitude is 1 125 km/h. It has an operational radius of 500km to 700km, and an operational ceiling of about 15 400m.

The armament of currently operational MiG-17s depend on their type.

The Fresco A and B models mount one 37mm and two 23mm machine cannon, while the Fresco-D has three 23mm machine cannon and can carry up to 500kg of rockets and bombs.

The Fresco D and E models mount no cannons, but carry four radar-controlled air-to-air rockets (Nato code-name "Al-

kali"), which have a range of 6km.

The prefix "MiG" is a contraction of the names of the two men — the designer Mikoyan and the mathematician Gurevich — who have designed many of the Red Air Force's top combat aircraft of the past 35 years, including the MiG-15 of Korean War fame — the first really modern Russian jet fighter and the immediate predecessor of the MiG-17.

**Rand Daily Mail
Johannesburg
9 July 1981**