

Frelimo's bitter enemy lived, died by the gun

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Mozambican rebel leader Mr Orlando Cristina was a soldier of the shadows who played a key role in two tortured decades of his country's history.

News of his death in Pretoria at the hands of an unknown gunman was greeted with delight in Maputo yesterday and with shock by Mozambican exiles who see him as the embodiment of their dream of a Mozambique without President Samora Machel.

In a grim echo of his life of intrigue, Mr Cristina was shot on Sunday on a farm just outside Pretoria. Friends say he was shot through the neck as he lay in bed.

As secretary-general of the Mozambique National Resistance he was officially deputy to the anti-Frelimo movement's commander, Mr Alfonso Dhlakama.

However, sources close to the MNR describe him as the father of the movement, and say he masterminded most of its activities.

The former big game hunter and agent of the Portuguese secret police (PIDE) infiltrated the young Frelimo movement in Tanzania in 1962.

He was sent to Algeria for military training by a Frelimo central committee member, Leo Milas — a black American who Maputo officials now claim was a CIA agent.

On Mr Cristina's return to Mozambique PIDE had to protect him from the wrath of the Mozambican Army, which wanted to charge him with desertion.

He then became secretary and confidante to millionaire industrialist Mr Jorge Jardim, one of the most powerful figures in colonial Mozambique and a godson of the Portuguese dictator, Mr Antonio Salazar.

They worked together on the formation of the so-called "special groups" to fight Frelimo on its own ground.

Mr Cristina then played a major role in the establishment of two more elite units, the special paratroop groups and the Flechas (Arrows) — both of which were made up largely of black men. The Flechas have been blamed by Frelimo for some of the worst atrocities of the war.

Frelimo claims Mr Cristina was present during the massacre of villagers at Inhama in 1973.

After the Lisbon coup he and some of his Mozambican troops escaped to Rhodesia, where they served for a time under Selous Scouts command. Mozambican officials believe the MNR was formed then from this nucleus. The first MNR guerilla groups crossed back into Mozambique late in 1976.

Mr Cristina is thought to have been behind the anti-Frelimo radio station, known as "Radio Free Africa" or "Voice of the Hyena".

The Machel government claimed that with Zimbabwean independence Mr Cristina and his men established a base in the Transvaal.

The SA Defence Force has repeatedly denied it has helped the MNR, although late last year the United States State Department said it believed the MNR was a largely military organisation which received the bulk of its support from Pretoria.