

Guerrilla Attack Begins Seesaw of Terror in Poor Village

Second in a series

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MACAUCAU, Mozambique—For this poor village in central Mozambique, the hidden war carried out by South African-backed guerrillas in Mozambique became open and direct at 1 a.m. last May 16.

Although the town was a key target of the Mozambique National Resistance and then of a counteroffensive by the Mozambican Army over an eight-month period, there is little evidence that many soldiers or guerrillas were killed. Instead, civilians, especially members of the Marxist ruling

party, seem to have been the main targets of the MNR. More than 100 residents of the town were killed by the resistance forces, according to Al

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THE HIDDEN WAR

berto Languane, administrator of the district.

The other main casualty was the economic and social development of the region. On entering the town, the insurgents burned down the rudimentary health center and maternity clinic—the only

ones for miles—in addition to stores and a nearby lumber mill, the main income producer for the area.

“The bandits killed people for being party members, for not providing them with food and for refusing to be recruited to their cause,” Languane said. Like most Mozambicans, he never mentioned by name the MNR whose attacks have spread to all but one of the country's 10 provinces. The enemy is simply referred to as *banditos*.

Both sides use the tactics of overwhelming numbers. Estimates of the number of attacking MNR troops on May 16 ranged from 100 to about

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400. After devastating much of the town they pulled out, forcing 10 pregnant women who evacuated the maternity clinic before it was gutted by fire to go with them to the lumber mill in Modeno, which they then burned.

The MNR forces then dispersed into the bush. Although the movement has created economic havoc in large parts of the country, "it has not reached the stage where it can occupy and keep a town," a western military specialist said.

The "bandits" simply hold a town for a few hours, sometimes try to win over the people by distributing food looted from stores, force men to join them and then pull out.

Four days after the attack, the Mozambican Army arrived in company strength and reclaimed the town. All but a few hundred of the estimated 20,000 inhabitants in the area had fled to the bush.

With the arrival of the Army the population started to filter back slowly, but then the numbers game came into play again. Because the MNR was raiding other villages from a "base" in the Manganze area 35 miles to the west, the Army pulled out again to improve security in other parts of embattled Gaza Province.

Back came the MNR to Macaucau in July, but with little left to loot or burn the insurgents soon pulled out.

For the next six months Macaucau was virtually a no-man's-land with neither side occupying it and most of the inhabitants dispersed to safer places.

Finally in January the Army mounted an offensive to clean the MNR out of all of Gaza. By mid-January, Philemon Massive felt Macaucau was safe enough to reopen his store, which had been looted but not burned.

A month later he was well supplied with tea, flour, dried fish and salt, but there was no sugar, cooking oil, soap, matches or cornmeal, the staple of the diet.

Getting supplies is a problem, he explained, because all his trucks have been destroyed. Even in normal times, Manjacaze, the closest major supply center, is a backbreaking 90-minute drive on rutted tracks although it is only about 35 miles away.

With the success of the Army of fensive, Gaza was deemed safe enough to take an American journalist to Macaucau. I was accompanied by a platoon of soldiers and an ancient Soviet-built T34 tank, which stirred up vast amounts of dust, giv-

ing plenty of warning of our slow approach.

The government seemingly put less value on the lives of a Soviet television crew, which went in a Land Rover without military escort and was filming an arranged songfest by the village women on our arrival.

"The Soviets are engaged in our reality," explained Mota Lopes, national director of information and my translator. "If something happens to them it is part of the Russian effort."

Part of Mozambique's military problem is due to the training their troops get from their Soviet friends, according to western diplomats and some critical Mozambicans.

Almost all the instruction at the country's army school in Nampula in

the far north is carried out by 50 to 60 Soviet officers, according to a recent western visitor.

"The training at Nampula bears no relationship to Mozambique's needs for fighting the MNR," the visitor said. "They are being trained to fight a war in northwest Europe."

Ironically, the Mozambicans had plenty of guerrilla experience in their 10-year independence war but now, a western diplomat said, they are neither a guerrilla army nor a conventional one but rather have the worst of both worlds.

"Everybody knows the Mozambican military and police are inefficient," said a well-informed Mozambican who declined to be named.

However, things are getting better, he said. "Now you don't find soldiers without shoes. They have uniform trousers—maybe not the same color as their shirts."

Like any new nation that won its independence by force, Mozambique has built up a legend about its guerrilla struggle and thus looks down on those now waging warfare against it.

"This is not guerrilla war," said Lt.

Gen. Sebastiao Mabote, Army chief of staff, in a rare interview in Maputo, the capital. "We were guerrillas. We know very well what guerrilla war is—a war of the people."

"Not this war. This war is to destroy the economic development of the country. This is a subversive war directed from the exterior," he said. Mabote charged that the South African Army headquarters in Pretoria plans all MNR military activities in Mozambique.

Although reluctant to give any details about the fighting or casualties, he said the MNR is still operating in Mozambique's central prov-

inces of Manica; Sofala, Inhambane and Zambezia. Gaza was now "clean," he said, but because the province borders on South Africa he expected more infiltration.

Although the number of guerrillas was small, it still took the Army eight months to regain firm control of Macaucau, a measure of the difficulties that the Mozambican military has in operating.

Gen. Mabote would give no figures on his own casualties, but a Eu-

ropean doctor in Gaza Province said he had treated about 200 wounded soldiers in one hospital alone over seven months. There are five hospitals in the province.

The doctor said the MNR started its Gaza offensive in March 1982, pushing south from Manica Province into the sparsely populated Chiquialaquala district.

He traced the progress of the war by the increase in the number of casualties he treated at his hospital, which he asked to remain unidentified.

"Each week there was an attack, a car blown up or a mine," or the railroad tracks sabotaged, he said. One night an Army commander died after his throat was slit.

In July 20 civilians died when a bus was shot up. The young doctor, who had only one year of surgical experience before arriving in Mozambique, said, "That night we amputated three legs."

One "quite terrible" night, he said, he worked nonstop for 13 hours treating wounded troops. There is little transportation and some wounded soldiers walked up to 50 miles to get treatment.

Those who cannot reach the hospitals simply die, said the doctor.

The Army is fighting better now, he indicated, since those injured are usually shot in front. Last year they were often shot in the back, indicating they were running from battle, he said.

As bad as it was in Gaza, he said, "If you want to see the war you should go to Inhambane Province," where European colleagues had told him the situation was far worse. Halfway between Maputo and Beira, the province is cut off by land from either major city.

There have been reports of incidents in the northern provinces of Tete, Niassa and Nampula, with insurgents infiltrating from both sides of the long, unpatrolled border with Malawi, which juts southward into Mozambique like an elongated thumb. The British Broadcasting Corp. recently reported from Malawi

that residents awoke one morning to find an MNR flag flying in their village.

Only northernmost Cabo Delgado, bordering Tanzania, is believed to be completely free of warfare.

In December some of the heaviest fighting of the war occurred in Maputo province in the south as thousands of guerrillas reportedly entered from South Africa's Kruger National Park and others pushed toward the Limpopo River in Gaza.

The Army repulsed the MNR in Maputo and then launched the Gaza offensive, somewhat turning the tide after a year of steady advances by the resistance had led some analysts to estimate that it controlled a third of the country, which is twice the size of California.

Gen. Mabote estimated that there are up to 1,000 MNR fighters in each province. More than 300 surrendered in the central provinces in January, he said.

In mid-1982 the situation had deteriorated so much that President Samora Machel cancelled a cherished, long-planned trip to Britain to reap the fruits of his key role in negotiating Zimbabwe's independence.

Instead, he announced he was taking personal charge of the war. In a gesture now emulated by lower of-

ficials, he armed himself with a revolver again as he had done during the war against the Portuguese.

Not surprisingly, many Mozambican officials trace the improvement in the war situation to that move. They acknowledge that after independent Zimbabwe replaced colonial Rhodesia in 1980, they relaxed, feeling that without Rhodesian support the threat of the MNR would disappear.

That hope seemed to be confirmed when only two districts could not be surveyed because of military activity in the 1980 census.

"We reacted too slowly," a Mozambican journalist said. "We didn't think South Africa would utilize the MNR to such an extent," by supplanting the Rhodesians and transferring the movement's leaders and troops to South Africa.

"If South Africa had not taken over the MNR it probably would have died," a western diplomat said.

Ironically, Machel's army now faces the same problem that the Portuguese did 10 years ago in fighting

him. As in any classic guerrilla struggle, the MNR does not have to win to sap the country.

With no air support and only a 20,000-man Army facing about 10,000 guerrillas spread around the country, Mozambique "has no chance of eliminating the MNR overall," the western military specialist said.

"The Army can concentrate in one area," he said, especially regions close to Maputo like Gaza, "and eliminate the guerrillas, but to what cost elsewhere?"

With the military victory in Gaza, cholera inoculation teams have recently been able to penetrate the worst hit areas to try to combat the war-related epidemic.

But fear is the main disease in this war-ravaged region. In some rural areas people do not sleep in their houses or huts but go to the bush every night.

"Everywhere the population is afraid," the European doctor said. "Always the people flee."

NEXT: An unconventional leader