

MNR—JUNK COLLECTORS OUT TO LOOT

By Tommy Sithole
WHEN the MNR terrorists blew up machinery and a number of vehicles at Katiyo Tea Estate on July 25, the impression they gave was that they were carrying out their threat to take the war across the border into Zimbabwe.

That impression is false. The MNR did blow up machinery and torched a number of cars. And typical of them, they went on to terrorise families.

But the main purpose of their raid appears to have been to loot. They took shirts and biscuits, sandwiches from the club, trousers from a nearby house, sweets from a bottle and stole drinks.

Again this is typical of MNR. Two years ago when their Gorongozo bush headquarters were overrun by Zimbabwean and Mozambican forces the biggest surprise was

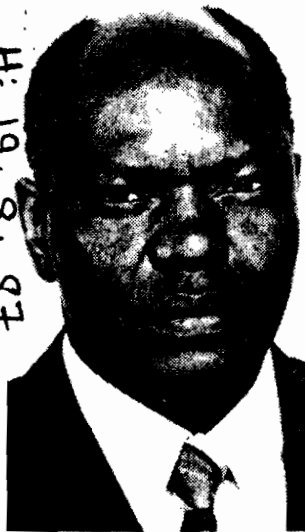
the junk found in the camp.

The mystery was solved by captured MNR terrorists who said they were under strict instructions to always bring something, anything back, to prove their success in an operation.

Thus the MNR will butcher villagers for their worthless pots and pans or cups and basins. The Gorongozo mountain-side was littered with rolls of rusty barbed wire, piles of coins, unserviceable trucks, dozens of broken bicycles and motorbikes, chairs, beds, machinery, sewing machines and many other things that any sensible bushfighter would never want near him.

But one thing is also remarkable of the MNR. They are not known for their bravery in attacking armed people. At Katiyo, the situation was the same. There were no

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Cde Didymus Mutasa

armed guards. The estate is right on the border with Mozambique, a border marked only by a river.

All this worked to the

MNR's cowardly advantage. Their intelligence must have been provided by the many workers who cross the border to pick tea at the three estates strung along the border.

There is virtually no way the authorities could control the movement of such people. Most have families spanning the border, have Zimbabwean identity cards and know both sides of the border very well.

Today the communities in the area have already shrugged off the deafening explosions of the night of the 25th and opened a new chapter in their life, their confidence having been restored by the presence of the Zimbabwe National Army units and the militia who have taken up positions in the area.

The Speaker of the House of Assembly, Cde Didymus Mutasa, who

visited the estate last weekend condemned the MNR for being used by the South African apartheid regime.

"It shows the emptiness of their mind. And you expect the MNR to govern a country. How do they ever think of running a country when they can't think for themselves?" the Speaker asked.

Cde Mutasa also spoke of the need for the local politicians to sensitise the people so that they understood and appreciated the fact that the situation was not very stable across the border.

"The militia need to be galvanised so that some of it can help the army much more than it did when the MNR attacked Katiyo," the Speaker added.

Operations at Katiyo itself have not been affected by the attack. The

estate manager, Cde Aaron Mhazo, said the attack occurred at a time when machinery was being serviced.

The little green leaf that is picked at this time has been processed for Katiyo by other estates. The damaged equipment is already being replaced and some may have to be imported from India.

Cde Mhazo could not say exactly when he expected to be back in production but said the estate would require its machinery back in full operation by November as the other estates would themselves be processing their own green leaf and would not be able to do Katiyo's.

"It is highly unlikely that we will not be back in full production by then," he said, an opinion shared by his general manager, Cde Liberty Mhlanga, in Harare.