

Renamo kills five soldiers in raid into Zimbabwe

IN THE first reported attack on Zimbabwean troops inside Zimbabwe, Mozambican rebels killed five Zimbabwean soldiers before dawn on Tuesday in an attack on a small army border encampment on a tea estate south-east of here and about 300 miles from the capital, Harare.

Several young women were said to have been injured, at least one seriously. The 50-strong unit of the Mozambique National Resistance Movement (Renamo) also looted a shop on the estate.

The raid marked the first known time that the South African-backed, right-wing Mozambican rebels have killed Zimbabwean soldiers inside Zimbabwe. Last October Renamo declared war on the Mugabe government because of its decision to support Mozambique with 7,000 troops in the 10-year-old war against the rebel movement, which was originally formed by Rhodesian intelligence agents in the early 1970's.

The Zimbabwean army reportedly killed one Renamo guerrilla and captured four others in follow-up operations around the Jersey tea estate. The small army encampment is 50 yards from the estate offices and 400 yards up a small hill from the Mozambican border, where lush tea fields melt into bush land. A day after the attack, soldiers were strengthening the camp's defences with sandbags while two helicopter gunships flew overhead.

The raid was Renamo's most dramatic foray into Zimbabwe since the rebels shot dead 11 civilians in a north-eastern Zimbabwean village in June. But

From Karl Maier
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since then it has stepped up its raids, attacking a tea plantation 100 miles north of here on 25 July, and abducting villagers along the eastern border.

The sharp rise in Renamo attacks began earlier this year soon after combined Mozambican, Tanzanian and Zimbabwean forces scored victories against the rebels in northern Mozambique.

At the same time, anti-government dissidents in Zimbabwe have stepped up attacks on villagers and white farmers in the south. John Norvall, a 53-year-old farmer, was slain yesterday morning 30 miles north of Bulawayo, the 50th white farmer to be murdered by dissidents since independence in 1980.

But for the Zimbabwe government, the most worrying Renamo attacks are in eastern Zimbabwe, where tea plantations earn millions of dollars a year in foreign exchange and provide jobs for thousands of Mozambican migrants, who get as little as a penny for each kilo of tea they pick.

The increase in Renamo attacks in the area has sparked fears among Zimbabwean officials that the rebels are slipping across the border among the migrant workers. Tea estate managers agree this is possible.

"We might have 100 Renamo people on the estate as far as I know," said one, about 50 miles north of the Jersey estate. But, he added, "if they rounded up all the Mozambicans, the economy of this region would collapse."