

Pretoria-backed rebels make more raids into Zimbabwe

From Jan Raath, Harare

South African-backed Renamo (Mozambique National Resistance) guerrillas have carried out a significant diversionary offensive into south-east Zimbabwe, striking at a third new area along the country's 520-mile border with Mozambique.

No confirmation could be obtained from the Government, nor have any reports emerged in the local press of events in the desolate and remote south-east during the past week.

But a variety of sources have confirmed that on Monday last week two members of the Department of National Parks' investigative branch, who were on anti-poaching operations, were shot dead by Renamo in the Gonarezhou national park. They were named as Mr Martin Marimo and Mr Martin Sibanda.

The following Wednesday, six peasant farmers near the Chikombedzi mission, in the Matibi No 2 communal land at the southern tip of the park, were bayoneted and axed to death by Renamo. The deaths were confirmed by medical missionaries in the area.

On Friday a band of about 100 rebels were surrounded by Zimbabwean troops, who called in a jet strike for assistance.

This incident was the biggest clash that Renamo has had with Zimbabwean security forces since June 15, when the organization made its first strike into Zimbabwe, in the Rushinga district in north-west Zimbabwe.

Attacks have also been made in the Chipinge area, about 80 miles north of the northern tip of the Gonarezhou. The last reported incident was two weeks ago, when an army vehicle following a group of rebels struck a landmine.

The park, containing some of the roughest terrain in the country, with an elephant population notoriously aggressive after decades of

poaching, was closed to the public indefinitely last week.

Among recent poachers have been both Renamo rebels and Mozambican government soldiers. Sources confirm that two Mozambican soldiers in camouflage uniform were shot dead by a Zimbabwean anti-poaching unit earlier this year.

Last week's incidents occurred in the middle of an elephant "culling" programme, which ended last week with the shooting of 1,000 animals. Recent visitors describe the area as almost waterless and with no vegetation for animals to feed on.

Aid agency sources said that the village near Chikombedzi had been deserted, and there



was now a strong military and police presence in the area.

The effects of Renamo's incursions are having a profound influence along the border. In Rushinga, foreign aid workers have stopped their inoculation programmes out of fear for their safety.

The Government has announced that, in future, all Mozambican refugees — many of whom are suspected of aiding Renamo — will have to be registered and contained in refugee camps.

In the mountainous Chipinge area, white commercial farmers have formed liaison committees with security authorities, and politicians of the ruling Zanu (PF) party are constantly in the region to facilitate the restructuring of the party to ensure maximum

vigilance and rapid reporting of "strangers".

The eastern border splits families and people of the same tribal group into citizens of different countries, and crossings to and from Mozambique occur all the time. Most of them are made by Mozambican refugees fleeing their Government's own war against Renamo.

About 350 miles of the border was mined by the Rhodesian Army during Zimbabwe's liberation war, and attempts to "neutralize" it have been futile. The mines have little effect on the refugees, more than 40,000 of whom are officially reported to be in camps for "displaced" Mozambicans.

The geography of the border varies from hot, undulating, dense bushveld to mist-enveloped mountain peaks, with only a small section of it having roads or any other development. Military sources describe it as being impossible to police effectively.

The Zimbabwean security forces are believed not to have the resources for protecting the eastern border and also fighting a war against "dissidents" in the western provinces of Matabeleland, maintaining a strong presence along the South African border, and supplying personnel for an operation against Zambian rhino poachers in the Zambezi valley in the north of the country.

At the weekend Mr Robert Mugabe, the Prime Minister, presided over the passing-out parade of nearly 5,900 men of the Sixth Brigade, the second full brigade raised since independence in 1980, which brings the strength of the Army up to about 42,000.

Colonel Lionel Dyck, a former Rhodesian paratrooper and the most senior white officer in the Army, who trained the brigade, described the men as "itching for a fight like a pack of wild dogs".