

4/12/87
Gdn. N.Y.

MNR MOUNTS ANOTHER BLOODY MASSACRE

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Special to the Guardian

MAPUTO—South African-backed rebels of the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR) carried out a gruesome atrocity on the main road north from Maputo on Nov. 28.

At mid-afternoon, a large group of rebels attacked a northbound convoy in the area of Maluane, 30 miles outside Maputo. By the end of the afternoon, they had massacred 71 people and wounded another 78.

When journalists visited the massacre site the next day they counted 32 burned and twisted vehicles scattered along about a half-mile of road. Among these were three passenger buses and several trucks, one of which was donated by the U.S. Agency of International Development for the private sector in Mozambican agriculture. Charred, unrecognizable bodies lay inside some of the vehicles and beside the ruined buses.

The MNR's aim was clearly to massacre as many passengers as possible and to destroy anything that they could not take with them. The military escort with the convoy put up a fight but was overwhelmed. Survivors say that two soldiers and four of the rebels died.

Despite the bravery of some individual soldiers and militiamen, it is clear that the convoy had no real protection. Also, the escorts had no radio contact with Maputo and were thus un-

able to call for air support. In short, the military still has no strategy for keeping the roads safe.

This is all the more serious because after the last massacre, at Tanninga 530 miles north of Maputo, Defense Minister Alberto Chipande promised better protection for the convoys.

In three major ambushes over the last two months, 402 people have died. About 150 vehicles that the country can ill afford to lose have been destroyed. The MNR's strategic objective is to cut the road links from Maputo to the fertile farm land of the Limpopo Valley, traditionally a major food producing area for the capital. They are near to achieving this aim, too. After such carnage, few people will be prepared to risk their lives on the road.

100 REBELS KILLED

But the military has scored successes elsewhere in Maputo province. Four MNR bases within a radius of about 50 miles from the capital were overrun in the second half of November. The most important was Matsequenha, less than two miles from the South African border.

Previous attempts to knock out this base had failed because the rebels would just retreat over the border into South Africa, only to reappear again at Matsequenha a few days later. This time the operation was well-planned, and a large contingent of Mozambican troops sealed the border first. The fighting lasted for three days and culminated in a frontal assault on Matsequenha in which 100 rebels died.

But the local MNR commanders had already pulled out and were reportedly heading north. South African planes that had overflowed the Mozambican positions had evidently kept them advised of the advance of the government forces. ■

Gdn. N.Y. 9/12/87