

The freedom fighters of the Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO) substantially increased the scope and intensity of their guerrilla warfare against the Communist FRELIMO government of Mozambique and its Zimbabwean and Tanzanian allies during the last two months of 1988. Except for a three-day Christmas truce, military operations at various points in the elongated country of Mozambique were almost continuous during this period. The total number of RENAMO soldiers is now estimated at 25,000, under the leadership of Afonso Dhlakama.



Afonso Dhlakama

On November 26 the city of Gurue in the central province of Zambezia was taken by RENAMO forces. Gurue was heavily defended, and contains the principal warehouse for exporting tea in the country. The military installations in Gurue were heavily damaged and seven Soviet T-54 tanks were destroyed. Over 100 of the defenders were killed, including 23 Tanzanians as well as government troops, and 34 were captured. Large quantities of munitions were secured along with nine 95-millimeter cannon and 13 anti-aircraft guns.

Tanzanian troops, from the country bordering Mozambique to the north, have operated in support of the Communist government of that country for the past two years. About 900 were withdrawn at the end of 1988, and RENAMO claims to have inflicted 1,519 casualties on the Tanzanians since their arrival. RENAMO also reports much hostility and conflict between the Tanzanian soldiers and the native population.

In Sofala province immediately south of Zambezia, RENAMO had occupied the important town of Inhaminga just south of the Zambezi River on November 16. On December 2 three battalions of Zimbabwean and Mozambican Communist government troops were sent to try to retake Inhaminga. The battalions were ambushed with the loss of 40 of their men killed and much war material. Seven men were captured in the ambush including Major Raul Singutai, who had received military training in the Soviet Union and commanded the Fourth Battalion of the Fifth Brigade in Sofala.

On the following day, December 3, RENAMO soldiers took the city of Buzi, also in Sofala province, defeating the Second Battalion of the government's Fifth brigade. Three Soviet T-55 tanks were destroyed and large quantities of munitions captured along with five cannon. RENAMO held Buzi, like Inhaminga, for a period of weeks.

On December 11, in the southern province of Gaza, the main headquarters of the military command for the province in the city of Chibuto fell to RENAMO, along with the entire

city. Military installations and the electrical generating plant for the city were destroyed. Fifty-seven of the defenders were killed including the commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Oscar Joaquim Macamo. Seven Soviet T-53 tanks and 25 military vehicles were destroyed. Unusually large quantities of military supplies were destroyed. Unusually large quantities of military supplies were captured and put into immediate use by RENAMO for their own forces. Among the captured supplies were seven tons of munitions for light weapons, nine tons of mortar shells, 197 bazookas, 374 anti-personnel mines, four 120-millimeter mortars, 1,376 uniforms, and 1,009 pairs of boots. In view of the long-time and severe shortage of clothing for the RENAMO freedom fighters, the uniforms and boots were almost as welcome as the munitions.



In addition to these major military operations, on December 19 RENAMO once again cut off the electric power to the capital of Maputo (for the fourth time in two months) and also to Mozambique's second city of Beira. Interfering with the electric power supply to these two cities—the keys to all that remains of the Communist control of Mozambique, corresponding to Kabul and Kandahar in Afghanistan—has been a vital part of RENAMO strategy for the past five years. Since 1983, RENAMO has destroyed more than 1,200 pylons carrying electric power lines from South Africa into Mozambique—674 of them in the year 1988 alone. These figures come from Ian McCrea, spokesman for the Electricity Supply Commission of South Africa, and provide an ironic commentary on the constant practice of the U.S. media in referring to RENAMO as "South Africa-backed." If South Africa is backing RENAMO, their electrical companies are certainly paying heavily for it.

On December 15, at a press conference in Washington, Dr. Luis Serapiao, official representative of RENAMO in the United States, released an official announcement from RENAMO that the Communist FRELIMO government in Mozambique had finally contacted RENAMO to request negotiations on ending the war. Dhlakama had responded "that RENAMO is prepared to sit down at the conference table with FRELIMO aimed at discussing the possibility of achieving peace in Mozambique." But he also emphasized "that RENAMO will never sit down at the conference table to discuss the so-called amnesty by FRELIMO."