

EDDIE KOCH meets the mercenary sent to persuade Renamo to stop the sabotage

WHO is this man? An emissary of peace able to go into the heart of Mozambique and pacify parts of that war-wracked country or a ruthless soldier of fortune who helped turn Renamo into one of the world's most brutal rebel armies?

Meet Garth Barrett, 48. He is the envoy sent by Eskom on a mission to Renamo's headquarters in Gorongosa last month to urge rebel leader Afonso Dhlakama to put an end to sabotage attacks on the power lines that connect the hydro-electric dam at Cahorra Bassa to South Africa.

But take a look at his curriculum vitae: member of Britain's elite Special Air Services; hero of the abortive war for white supremacy in Rhodesia; warrior for special forces in the South African military; specialist in the art of knife-throwing; commander of some of Pretoria's covert raids into Mozambique; supporter of Hitler's SS; architect of a mercenary plan to invade the Seychelles; anti-communist crusader for the CIA and SADF to support Renamo and armed dissidents in Zimbabwe; and an assassin who plotted to kill President Robert Mugabe.

Is this the stuff of which pacifists are made? The question is at the heart of a growing controversy over Eskom's decision to use Barrett as go-between with Renamo.

The SAS soldier is a frank man. He admits that he did all of the above except for the plan to kill Mugabe, which he vigorously denies...and that the knife is his favoured instrument of th.

Barrett argues with conviction that it is precisely these attributes which made him the one person capable of persuading Dhlakama to stop waging war around the pylons that are so vital to the success of the Cahorra Bassa hydro-electric scheme.

"I'll admit that I am no lover of Mugabe or Machel or Chissano. I am an anti-communist but people as a whole, especially in Africa, are oriented towards capitalism," he told *The Weekly Mail*.

"The PJC (a joint committee representing all the parties involved in running Cahorra Bassa) needed someone who had credibility with Renamo to liaise and negotiate with Dhlakama. That is why we have been able to agree that the powerlines won't be blown up and even that Renamo will provide protection for maintenance teams that operate in their territory."

Barrett says he is deeply committed to ensuring the future of the Cahorra Bassa scheme and even has an environmental motive for this. "This part of Africa has to develop economically and the only way to do this is to bring cheap power to every person. Studies have shown that when all the Mozambican refugees go back home, for example, five- to 10-million trees will be destroyed for firewood."

He adds that his negotiations with Renamo for the PJC have been okayed by the Mozambican government, which is represented on the committee. "In fact EDM, the Mozambican electrici-

A soldier of peace?



Meet Eskom's peace envoy Garth Barrett, who is also an ex-SAS soldier, a warrior for SA's special forces and an expert at knife-throwing

ty company, has asked me to try and set up a similar deal to protect the pylons that run from Komatipoort to Maputo."

Not everyone is convinced. "South Africa has eased back, although not ended, its supply and military command assistance to Renamo," says the latest edition of the London-based journal *Southscan*. "Barrett is well-placed to do it and Eskom officials are privately concerned that they might unintentionally be helping him to do so — to their own detriment."

The report followed a *Weekly Mail* article last month which noted that Barrett had accompanied a troupe of Eskom officials, SABC reporters and foreign correspondents to Renamo headquarters at Gorongosa in Mozambique and arranged for supplies of expensive radio equipment as well as a new uniform to be delivered to Dhlakama.

Did Barrett ever conduct covert raids into Mozambique? "Yes, as commander of the SADF's Sixth Reconnaissance Commando I led the invasion into Matola in 1981." One of his men, killed in that raid was wearing a helmet bearing the emblem of a swastika. "Well you know how soldiers are. They're always plastering themselves with tattoos and regalia of that kind."

Did he lobby the South African military to continue covert support for Renamo after the 1984 Nkomati Accord and Zimbabwean dissidents led by Ndabaningi Sithole? Yes, he had dealings with the right-wing International Freedom Foundation, the Heritage Foundation and conservative senator Jesse Helms in this regard but declines to give details.

Did he draw up a plan to invade the Seychelles? "I won't deny that I was involved in the Seychelles. Some former colleagues of mine were captured during Mike Hoare's mercenary invasion and I drew up a plan to get them out."

Asked about the countless atrocities committed by Renamo, including those in which villagers are forced to eat the body parts of their dead relatives, Barrett says he is "deeply saddened" by the acts of barbarity that blacks are committing against blacks in Africa. "But we cannot be naive about the way war is conducted on this continent."

Barrett has met Inkatha leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi "about four or five times". He respects Buthelezi as a leader in the same mould as Dhlakama and Sithole and believes that Zulus will never be able to live peacefully with other black tribes in South Africa. But he says he has never worked for Inkatha or kwaZulu.

One night while he was visiting his friend, Dhlakama, at Gorongosa last month, Barrett took part in a dinner table chat. The topic was the German SS.

"A friend of mine was in the SS, and the Russians put him in a labour camp for five years after the war. Five years just for being a soldier. They treated him terribly. He didn't deserve that."

When it was pointed out that the SS had committed terrible atrocities on the Russian front, he replied: "But not all SS. This was the Waffen SS. He was just a soldier."

Barrett confirmed reports that his company, Minerva, formed after he left the SADF, earned

vast amounts for designing explosion suppressing bags known as "Barrett's Bomb Bags". These were used widely as security devices in local buildings as a precaution against Umkhonto weSizwe attacks in the 1980s.

Eskom, currently engaged in high-level talks with the governments of Mozambique and Zimbabwe to create a common power grid for the whole of southern Africa, says it was not aware of Barrett's political leanings or past activities when he was employed to contact Dhlakama.

But the electricity supply commission denies reports that it is embarrassed by its contact with him or that its delicate talks with the governments of Mozambique and Zimbabwe are jeopardised by it.

"Neither Eskom nor the Permanent Joint Committee on Cahorra Bassa (PJC — which represents Pretoria, Lisbon, Maputo, Eskom and EDM) has any knowledge of Mr Barrett's political leanings or his past activities, except that he was a member of the erstwhile Rhodesian Defence Force," said Eskom PR consultant Johan du Plessis.

"His services are being used solely to maintain contact between the PJC and Renamo. Since this contact is being maintained with the full knowledge of the Mozambican government, which has representation on the PJC, the credibility of the PJC cannot be affected by allegations concerning Mr Barrett."

Eskom also denied sending radio equipment to Renamo along with Barrett, but said discussion was under way for the PJC to supply communications technology to the rebels. "A direct communication link with Renamo would be invaluable at present and in the future during reconstruction work on the power lines," said Du Plessis.

● The SABC has objected to *The Weekly Mail's* report about the trip in which a team of its journalists accompanied Barrett to Renamo headquarters in Gorongosa.

PC Kritzinger, editor-in-chief of television news, said the SABC "categorically denied" that the corporation was involved in an effort to "brush up Renamo's image". He also rejected suggestions that the SABC team had helped deliver expensive gifts to Dhlakama.

SABC reporter Johan Kruger denied a report that he had promised Dhlakama that he would muster support amongst white South Africans for the rebel's cause.

Chris McGreal, a foreign correspondent who reported on the trip for *The Weekly Mail*, replied: "Kruger was a representative of the SABC and made it clear through the quotes in the story that he intended to present a favourable picture of Renamo. In working closely with Eskom, he was part of a delegation that delivered the gifts."

He added that Kruger's promise to Dhlakama was made in front of about a dozen witnesses at a dinner table. "He made so many promises to so many people that even the evangelists on the trip stopped taking him seriously."