

# Southern Africa News Features

a SARDC service

---

## NIGHT ATTACKS ON MAPUTO SUBURBS

by David Martin

For the residents of Maputo's outlying suburbs, nightfall brings uncertainty and fear. One such suburb is T-3, about 10 km from the city centre, which takes its name from the sound made by traditional beer dripping into a clay pot: "ton, ton, ton".

The T-3 market is workplace to some 700 vendors, who sell their wares under corrugated iron shelters, from stands made of wood and cement blocks.

Between 7 am and 3 pm, six days a week, they market peanuts, mounds of tiny, hot red peppers, and little piles of garlic cloves. The more well-to-do merchants sell cooking oil, rice, eggs and vegetables. Some goods, such as toothpaste, cigarettes, and cans of beer or soft drinks are smuggled from neighbouring Swaziland and South Africa.

The market is hot and dusty, and a handful of sellers in the open have umbrellas to protect them from the mid-day sun. But they have nothing to protect them at night when they are vulnerable to attack by the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR or Renamo).

The market is open until 6 pm each day, but three hours earlier it is deserted as the merchants, mostly women, go home to crude shelters of mud and reeds to bathe and feed their children before taking them several kilometres into the city to seek shelter before darkness falls.

At 7 pm, just after dark, on 27 February, a large group of young boys assembled at the nearby schoolyard, and then broke up into groups to loot food and goods from the consumer co-operative adjacent to the market. Half a dozen well-armed commanders may have been as old as 30 years, the average age of the rest was estimated at 15 -- some older, some younger -- according to residents of T-3.

Some carried guns, others had sticks or clubs. Some may not have had weapons. Estimates of the number varied from 70 to 300. Those who saw them assemble at the school turned and fled through the already deserted market. The remaining militiamen were badly outnumbered and two were killed.

The company of young boys broke into the consumer co-op and over 50 nearby houses, and carried away the loot into the otherwise uninhabited darkness. It was the third attack on the suburb in as many months.

One of the militiamen who died was Augusto Ernesto. His sister, Virginia, has a stand at the market. She sells little piles of red peppers or garlic cloves for 100 meticaïs (6 US cents) each. On a good day she makes one US dollar. Most days she makes 12 cents.

Virginia is a *dislocado*, a displaced person who fled from Inhambane province to the safety of Maputo. She must survive on roughly \$4 per month, and on many days she cannot afford to eat. Her round face is very sad, her eyes look faraway.

I met Virginia on my first visit to T-3 market, and I went back again three days later to try to understand more about the reality of life for the people there. They said that their main problem is security. In addition to the two militiamen killed, six civilians lost their lives at T-3 market on the night of 27 February. Two people were wounded, 86 assaulted and six abducted.

As I sat talking to some of the market vendors, seated on crude wooden stools around a rough table, a man with a child on his lap kept staring at me. Finally, he was brought to the table. His name was Reuben Mujovo, aged 42 years. For almost half his life he has worked in the South African mines, like many other men from southern Mozambique.

Two weeks after the attack on T-3, he had received a message in Johannesburg saying he must come home. His wife, Isabel, and three children aged 9, 12 and 15 had been abducted in the raid. Another, younger child had been mutilated and abandoned.

His family had fled their two-bedroom sandblock and asbestos house, but had been captured. They had been marched to the market and told to carry loot to a Renamo base called Shingangwanene.

Isabel was carrying their youngest child, Natalia, aged 6, on her back and this hindered her progress. She was ordered to put the child down, but Natalia began crying and her captors beat her. The dark scars from that beating are still evident, black marks on her smooth, brown face.

Natalia cried even more when one of the boys, little more than twice her age, took hold of her right ear and sliced it through with a knife. Then she was thrown into a pit.

When she was found the next day she was still crying, her bleeding ear hanging down the side of her head. Doctors stitched it back, but the trauma she has suffered is evident in her demeanor. Only her dark brown eyes move, suspiciously. There is none of the joy of youth in her young face.

"She is still terrified, especially when she sees people with guns," her father said as he gently pulled down the flimsy, purple headscarf to cover her mutilated ear.

Some of the suburb's residents remarked on the ease with which the attackers moved from the bush through three suburbs to attack T-3. Others questioned the whereabouts of their defence forces, unaware that regular units near the city are under orders not to carry out follow-up operations if civilian residents or captives may be harmed.

The militia, made up of volunteers from the area, are in charge of local security, and sometimes residents take the law into their own hands. A newcomer to the suburb may be captured and beaten, or handed over to the police, if people become suspicious.

Although the general location of Renamo's bush bases, such as the one at Shingangwanene, is known to local residents and the military, the bases are moved about within a wide area so they are often difficult to find.

The pattern of the attacks on T-3 has been repeated in other outlying suburbs of Maputo in recent months, beginning last year and escalating since January. More than 50 people have been killed and at least as many wounded or abducted since the beginning of this year in attacks on 10 different outlying suburban areas. Several consumer co-operatives and hundreds of homes have been looted.

As in T-3, residents described attacks by a large group of young boys, commanded by a handful of adults. The local militia put up a spirited defence although regular army units did not arrive, in most cases, until after the attackers had gone. Two of the perpetrators, captured by the militia in one suburb and presented to journalists, were aged 12 and 16.

Delfina Nhaca, a resident of one of the suburbs attacked in February, told the local news agency, AIM, of watching her brother die. Tied up and kneeling in the dirt, his head was smashed with an axe. His crime? Trying to alert other residents of the danger.

Although the peace talks that resume in Rome this month are expected to deal with military matters, including a ceasefire, the slow pace of progress to date makes it seem likely that the people of T-3 and other Maputo suburbs will have to hide for many more nights before peace returns to their lives.

The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Maputo launched an Easter appeal to Renamo last month, in which it said, "we call on you, our brothers, you who are killing us, who burn and loot our houses, who kidnap the innocent, and who oblige us to flee every night, you who create terror in our neighbourhoods, this is not the way that you will win the justice and the good that you say you are seeking, this is not the way you will achieve a more dignified life." (SARDC)

May 1992