

Portuguese Army chief defends policy in Mozambique

From Michael Knipe
Lourenço Marques, July 29

Allegations of irregular behaviour by Portuguese troops in the area about 15 miles south of the town of Tete first came to the ears of General Kaulza Oliveira de Arriaga, Commander-in-Chief in Mozambique, "late last year", he told me in an interview here.

The general said the rumours were investigated "immediately—maybe in January". In accordance with normal procedure, a team of officers from the Army's justice department was sent to the area from the military headquarters in Nampula.

The investigation was one of 10 made over a two and a half-year period during which Portuguese troops carried out some

10,000 operations in Mozambique. In only two of these cases were the rumours confirmed, and the allegations of a massacre at Wiriyamu was not one of them.

General de Arriaga avoided giving precise details of the circumstances involved or of the investigation. He said it would "obviously" not be made public, but it had disclosed nothing out of the ordinary. He was personally satisfied that nothing untoward had happened at Wiriyamu.

The commanding officer in Tete at the time, who was responsible for any Army operations in the area, was Colonel Amilcar Alves. He finished his commission two months ago and was now in Lisbon.

He was an excellent officer and was due to receive a military

decoration, according to the general, who clearly intended this information to be an indication of how unfounded he considered the massacre allegations to be.

These details were disclosed during a two-hour interview, which was filmed by Army officials. It was granted me by General de Arriaga on his last day as Commander-in-Chief in Mozambique. His reassignment was decided in advance of the massacre allegations by Father Adrian Hastings and is not connected with them.

The general said that of the two cases of irregular behaviour by troops which had been confirmed, one occurred in the Cabo Delgado district and involved the unnecessary deaths of two people. The other took place near Zobue, in the Tete

district, where four people were killed unnecessarily. The soldiers concerned, only a few in each case, were facing court martial proceedings.

These cases notwithstanding, Portuguese troops were the best behaved in the world, General de Arriaga maintained. Contrary to the opinion of many people in Europe, the war in Mozambique was a constructive war in which the Army did not kill people, even terrorists, if it could be avoided. The intention was to bring peaceful unity to the territory and this could not be done by massacring people.

The Hastings allegations were a small part of an enormous international anti-Portuguese campaign, the general said. He expressed his astonishment at *The Times* for accepting such "unfounded allegations", and

his shock that a former British Prime Minister (Mr Wilson) should take advantage of them to make political capital at home.

General de Arriaga explained that a central factor in the Portuguese efforts in Mozambique was the task of regrouping the population into *aldeamentos* (rural settlements). One million people were now living in such villages and in a few years the figure would be six or seven million.

The resettlement policy had been introduced belatedly in the Tete district. "It was one of our mistakes", the general admitted.

Two years ago no one in the district lived in *aldeamentos*. However, more than 200,000 now did.

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The Africans in the district were essentially peaceful by nature and Frelimo (the Mozambique Liberation Front) had needed first to use selective terrorism against tribal leaders and then more general terrorism against the local population as a whole to obtain their cooperation. This had proved relatively easy with villagers living in small scattered communities.

About 900 people, including 100 tribal leaders, had been murdered to frighten the villagers into providing support for the terrorists.

The degree to which rural Africans accepted resettlement in *aldeamentos* varied. The more sophisticated were eager to move because they were aware of the advantages, but the more primitive were sometimes reluctant at first. The category of the villagers in the area south of Tete could be placed somewhere in the middle of the two extremes.

Referring to the three stages of resettlement operations—voluntarily, then within a time limit set by the Army, usually about two months, and then by the use of a certain degree of force—the general said the fact

that force might be used did not mean that villagers would be removed violently.

The military forces deployed for the task in the area of the alleged massacres had been light infantry units. When I asked General de Arriaga why some of the abandoned villages south of Tete had been destroyed by burning while others had not, he replied that it was a local procedure and he could not give an answer.

What happened in situations where Frelimo units surrounded themselves with their own supporters from the local population? That was a vital problem, the general admitted. It could not be said that innocent people were not sometimes killed; but during the Second World War Britain had had no scruples in bombing Berlin and other large cities, causing the deaths of innocent civilians.

In this respect, the general declared, the Portuguese were fairer than Britain, in that the area was so vital that the Army was extremely careful not to hurt the local people even when they were controlled by Frelimo.

When the Army discovered a guerrilla hide-out, it usually

would warn the local population by dropping leaflets or broadcasting warnings through loudspeakers mounted in aircraft. However, the general added that he challenged any commander in the world to be so humanitarian as to sacrifice entirely the profit of an operation for the sake of the civilians in the area.

Discussing the source of Father Hastings's massacre reports, General de Arriaga pointed out that the allegations being made against the Portuguese Army were coming from perhaps 20 or 30 priests out of a total of some 500 in Mozambique, and this was not such a significant number.

When asked what he regarded as the motives of the critical priests, the general said he felt that some Burgos Fathers had convinced themselves that Frelimo would win the war and had decided not to become linked with the losing side. There was a document to this effect.

He was astonished that priests should base their position on practical rather than on moral positions. The fact was that they supported Frelimo and helped people to become terror-

ists. In that respect they were responsible for the death of many people, both terrorists and Portuguese soldiers.

In reply to my question whether the Portuguese Army sanctioned the use of torture to obtain information, General de Arriaga said it did not under any circumstances. Regarding the more macabre aspects of the allegations made by Father Hastings, the General said they caused him to wonder whether the Father's mental faculties were entirely normal.

Throughout the interview which took place at his residence, General de Arriaga, wearing a civilian suit and speaking through an Army interpreter, emphasized what he regarded as the positive aspects of the Army's role in Mozambique. This was the construction of *aldeamentos* to facilitate social progress, and the creation of an anti-communist, anti-racist populace.

Giving no hint of any hidden concern over the massacre allegations, his mood was genial and his manner relaxed. He made it clear that he personally was satisfied with the conduct of his troops and expected his word on the matter to be accepted.