

Mozambican army, ex-Renamo forces integrate well

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By Tichaona Chifamba

CAPTAIN Joseph Chomboio is a jovial youth who has been fighting against the Mozambican government forces for 10 years. The former train driver joined Renamo in 1981.

During the peak of the war in Mozambique, Capt Chomboio was better known as Chitima, and both members of the government forces and the Zimbabwe National Army who operated in the Gorongosa area remember him very well.

"Mufana iwe wakambonetsa. (Young man, you were very troublesome)," joked a senior instructor at the Border Camp in Nyanga. Chitima looked at the instructor and laughed.

"Chief, even you were troublesome. You routed many at Casa Banana and only the likes of Chitima survived," he returned fire in fluent Shona.

"Chitima was the commander of the Companhia Ninguem Fica, and as he recalled, no one was left behind when he took his gun to go and fight the enemy. "When I took my gun and moved, everybody else did the same and no one was left behind. That is where my company (Companhia) got its name from."

Today Chitima is the senior liaison officer representing former Renamo forces at the Mozambique Training Team camp at the ZNA's Border Camp in Nyanga. His colleague from the government forces is Lieutenant Lazaro Menete. The two share the same office and have set aside past differences.

According to the MTT commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Martin, the two armies have integrated well and there are no problems of a former Renamo soldier wanting to fight a government soldier.

"Integration is no longer an issue. When they arrived they all became members of the FADM (Mozambican Army)," Lt-Col Martin told visiting journalists last week.

The chief instructor, Major Ian Buchanan, said there were no incidents involving the former enemies except one where a

government soldier sprained his ankle and was being helped around by a former Renamo soldier.

However, a source said one soldier was disciplined by the superiors after calling another a bandit.

The MTT is home to 540 FADM forces who will go back to Mozambique after completing their training course on December 20. The aim of the course, which is jointly run by the British Military Advisor Training Team and the ZNA, is to train the soldiers in basic military skills and tactics up to platoon level.

"We did not have a high-tech training module. Everything has been done at the practical level," Lt-Col Martin said.

Initially, the course was supposed to run for 16 weeks but had to be cut to 10 weeks because of the late arrival of the former Renamo soldiers. Chitima attributed the late arrival to transport problems faced by the former rebel movement.

During the course, students learned about leadership and administration, conventional warfare, counter insurgency and internal security, map reading, fieldcraft, signals and first aid, among other topics.

The course is run in Portuguese and soldiers have to be able to read and write the language in order to be trained. The programme was also aimed at officers and senior non-commissioned officers.

On completion of the course, the graduates will go back to Mozambique where they will establish three training camps at Boane, Manhica and Dondo to train six battalions each before the October elections.

The training of soldiers in Mozambique will have to be hurried so that a new army representing both parties is in place before the elections. "The training of the new army is a vital factor in

the stability of a new nation," Lt-Col Martin said.

Problems may arise, however, because of the level of literacy among some of the soldiers. A Zimbabwean soldier helping in the training said although some students could read and write, others could not and this could pose a problem when the students went back to Mozambique to train others.

The British provided 13 instructors and the ZNA provided 87. In all, there are 30 British military personnel at the MTT and 417 Zimbabweans. Most of the Zimbabweans are in the support staff and take the FADM soldiers into the bush during training. The Zimbabweans also provide additional transport and medical and signals staff.

Second in command at the training camp is Major Raphael Makaraanya, whose task is to ensure that all logistical support is in place. The Zimbabwean said everything was moving according to schedule and the students had come together as one family.

As politicians try to come up with a workable strategy in Maputo to ensure that war is a thing of the past in Mozambique, they know that their success hinges on the integration of their forces. And the forces should be non-partisan.

"Whether the government wins the elections or not is not a problem. We went to fight so that the people could have a government of their choice. If the government wins, then that is what the people want and there will be no need to fight," Chitima said.

IN the picture (top left) a member of the FADM forces takes aim during training in Nyanga.

● (Picture by Elliot Mahende of Ziana.)