

# Mozambicans pressganged into Pretoria's army

**S**outh African military support for the Renamo bandits continues to this day, despite the Nkomati non-aggression accord signed between Mozambique and South Africa in 1984.

Just as before the accord, Renamo still has a base at Phalaborwa in the eastern Transvaal, and in February of this year South African police rounded up Mozambican refugees from the Gazanculo bantustan and handed them over to Renamo.

These are just some of the revelations made to AIM by Felix Isaias Ndimene and Carlitos João Maria, two Mozambicans who were kidnapped and pressganged into the South African Armed Forces (SADF). They have now broken their silence and told both AIM and the Johannesburg weekly, the *New Nation*, what they know about operations of destabilisation.

Carlitos João was a nursing auxiliary in the military hospital at Boane in southern Mozambique. In 1978 he was at Ponto da Ouro, near the border with the South African province of Natal. He asked for a lift to the town of Salamanga from a car whose driver he supposed to be Mozambican.

In fact, the car contained a group of South Africans who abducted him and took him over the border after cutting their way through the barbed wire fence.

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## Teacher pressganged after 1982 commando raid

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Felix Ndimene was a teacher in Namaacha, on the border with Swaziland, when in August 1982 he was abducted by South African commandos.

Mr Ndimene's story of his abduction is in almost complete accordance with what AIM wrote about the raid on Namaacha at the time. The commandos raided Namaacha in the early hours of the morning of 22 August 1982, murdering two Mozambicans and a Portuguese citizen. The raiders, about 40 in number, kidnapped Mr Ndimene, another teacher, Jeronimo Simbine, and a cook, Ernesto Zandamela.

The original AIM story said that the commandos were "disguised as members of the Mozambican defence and security forces". Mr Ndimene's story to the *New Nation* confirmed this: he said his kidnappers had worn uniforms of the Mozambican police.

Describing events at Mr Ndimene's house that night, AIM wrote: "everyone in the house was savagely beaten, and a search was made. Then the commandos left, taking with them Isaias Ndimene and Jeronimo Simbine, who was on holiday from Sofala province".

The Namaacha raid led to an official protest. Mozambique's then Foreign Minister (now President) Joaquim Chissano formally notified the United Nations Secretary-General, Javier Perez de Cuellar, of the raid, describing it as a grave violation of Mozambican sovereignty.

His kidnappers accused Mr Ndimene of being "an ANC operative", a charge he vehemently denied. A month of interrogation and torture followed, until the military put Mr Ndimene into the notorious SADF dirty tricks unit, the Fifth Reconnaissance Commando ("Five Recce"). He offered to join Renamo instead (on the grounds that this way he could return to Mozambique and make his escape). But his captors rejected this, and making clear that the only alternative was death, they trained him at Five Recce's base at Phalaborwa in the eastern Transvaal.

Mr Ndimene's first operations were in Angola. Thus in 1983 he was part of a South African force sent to assist the UNITA rebels, and to destabilise SWAPO bases inside Angola. This mission was a fiasco, and Mr Ndimene's group failed to make contact with either SWAPO or with the Angolan army (FAPLA).

Immediately afterwards, in July 1983, his unit was ordered to bombard civilian targets on the Cunene river in the far south of Angola. He recalled that "there were many civilians killed in that attack".

Three months later, Mr Ndimene was in Angola again, with orders to attack a base at Mulondo, which was said to house FAPLA and Cuban troops, while a second SADF unit attacked a FAPLA position at Cahama. During this incursion, his unit seized the small town of Kuiteve, and handed it over to UNITA. But in both the Mulondo and Cahama clashes, the SADF were beaten by FAPLA.

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## 75 lashes for trying to escape

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Tired of fighting in a war that had nothing to do with him, Mr Ndimene tried to run away in 1984. He was caught and given 75 lashes. His paymasters then ordered him to find a new wife, since they assumed that he wanted to escape because he had left his first wife in Mozambique.

A year later he was sent to the Caprivi Strip in northern Namibia. From a base called "Noah Camp", he was involved in further attacks against Angola. Here he was promoted to the rank of corporal and given a military number: AP5716892PD.

Returning to Phalaborwa, he was given another undercover mission. In December 1986, this time in Swaziland. His task was to kidnap a Swiss couple.

"We worked carefully and hid our MP5 silenced machine guns in a false-bottomed boot in the car and drove through the border using false passports", he recalled. The mission was entirely successful.

At the same time, a second SADF unit was abducting ANC member Ismael Ibrahim. Mr Ndimene remembered two of those involved in the Ibrahim kidnap as Daniel Zita and a man named "Jorge" who is now in a Mozambican jail.

It is possible that this man is the South African passport-holder of Angolan origin, Jorge Olimpio Nunes Alerson, who was detained by Mozambican security in 1987. He was accused of infiltrating Mozambique with the aim of murdering ANC members resident in Maputo.

Between 1987 and 1988, Mr Ndimene was based in Pretoria, and took part in raids into Soweto and Johannesburg aimed at harassing activists in the UDF (United Democratic Front). Vehicles with false number plates were used in these raids.

In the run-up to Namibia's independence elections, Mr Ndimene's unit had orders to discredit the liberation movement, SWAPO. Thus the South African authorities immediately blamed on SWAPO a bomb blast in a bank in the northern Namibian town of Oshakati, which killed several civilians. But Mr Ndimene says the bombing was carried out by a member of the SADF special forces and ordered by a commander named Diedrichs.

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"Our commanders would not hesitate to kill their own soldiers"

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In one operation, Mr Ndimene's unit was instructed to fire mortars at a base of the SADF itself, so that SWAPO could be blamed for dishonouring the ceasefire agreement.

"Our commanders would not hesitate to kill their own soldiers just so that SWAPO could be discredited", he said.

Mr Ndimene recalled that when, in 1994, the ANC, the PAC and the Communist Party were unbanned, and Nelson Mandela was released, SADF officers told him that this did not mean the war against the liberation movement would end, but that it would now be "a different type of war".

Mr Ndimene finally managed to resign from the SADF in January 1991 (by which time he had been promoted to sergeant), but continued living in Phalaborwa and maintained contacts with both members of Five Recce and of Renamo.

He told the *New Nation* that those responsible for massacres on trains and in townships in the Johannesburg area were trained in urban warfare at Phalaborwa. They learnt such techniques as entering moving vehicles, in order to make speed

getaways after attacks. They were given AK-47 assault rifles, machetes, and other sharp instruments.

Thanks to Mr Ndimene's testimony, the *New Nation* now has the names of the core group of assassins involved in the current wave of violence. They are all members of Five Recce, and none of them is a South African national. They are mercenaries, or, like Mr Ndimene, were kidnapped from Mozambique, Angola, or from as far afield as Zaire.

Mr Ndimene told AIM that "right up to today, Five Recce is one of the centres of support for Renamo. It's Five Recce that protects the Renamo base in Phalaborwa".

Carlitos João says that a Portuguese named Bento Maria is a Sergeant-Major in Five Recce, and is responsible for much of the logistical support for Renamo. "If Renamo needs something, they send a message, and Bento Maria goes to the special forces, gets whatever they want, and sends it to Renamo", he explained.

Carlitos showed AIM colour photos of members of Five Recce who are Mozambican nationals. "This is Orlando Semedo, a mulatto who used to be in the Mozambican customs police. This is Caetano Gouveia. This is Nito Maia". From other sources, AIM has learnt that there was indeed an Orlando Semedo who used to be a customs official. The other names could be false, since the SADF often gives its press-ganged recruits a new birth certificate with a new name. Thus the SADF called Mr Ndimene "Bob Dickson".

The Phalaborwa base is beside the Oliphants river, according to Mr Ndimene. "It's a training and support base", he said. "It's still there today. South Africa never implemented the Nkomati Accord".

He added that in February the police rounded up Mozambican refugees at Lukelane, in the Gazanculo bantustan, and took them to the Renamo base. Mr Ndimene said this information came from Catholic church sources working in the Gazanculo refugee camps.

"All the refugees hate Renamo", he said. "They are 100 per cent against Renamo".

How was the news of the death of Mozambican President Samora Machel, in a plane crash at Mbuzini, just inside South Africa, in October 1986, told to the members of Five Recce?

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#### SADF Special Forces involved in murder of Samora Machel

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Mr Ndimene recalled that he was on an operation inside Angola at the time. "We Mozambicans were in our tent. A Zimbabwean came and told us: your President has died. We were shocked, because in truth all the Mozambicans liked Samora a lot".

"Some days later other Zimbabweans showed up - I forget their names - and one of them said 'I was in the operation to liquidate your President'. Later I went to Durban. A friend of my brother, Engineer

John Nicholson of Coca-Cola, told me that someone called Tony Vieira was in on the operation of the phoney radio beacon". (President Samora's plane was diverted from its correct flight path by a false radio beacon transmitting on the same frequency as the Maputo airport beacon.)

Mr Ndimene had been wondering whether the President had been a victim of a plot inside the Mozambican government. "But after this information, I saw that wasn't the case", he said. "It was the Special Forces who did it. South Africa was very afraid of President Samora".

Carlitos João recalled that "after the Nkomati Accord - I can't remember if it was 85 or 86 - a delegation from the Mozambican government wanted to go and see the Phalaborwa base".

"Then all of us Mozambicans, whether in the Special Forces or in Renamo, were evacuated from there", he continued. "We were taken to the bush in the Caprivi Strip (in Namibia). We stayed there with the lions and the elephants until after the visit by our government".

Mr Ndimene believes that five Recce was involved in the Renamo attack against the border town of Ressano Garcia on 30 April this year. A group from Five Recce left Phalaborwa before the attack and returned two days afterwards, saying they had been on an operation "outside".

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### Coup plot supported from inside South Africa

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Mr Ndimene was still living in Phalaborwa in June, when the Mozambican government announced the discovery of a coup plot, and arrested several officers and civilians, including Col-Gen Sebastião Mabote, the former Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces.

He said that Renamo members were aware of the plot. "The coup had support from inside South Africa, from the Conservative Party, from the AWB (the neo-fascist "Afrikaner Resistance Movement"), and from the Phalaborwa mining company", he said.

In the Renamo base there was also talk that, even before the death of Samora Machel, Gen Mabote had been involved in supplying weapons to Renamo. (This may put a new light on the sudden decision by President Samora in 1986 to remove Mabote from his post as Chief of Staff, and send him to study in Cuba.)

Mr Ndimene recalls the political indoctrination that was part of his training. "The enemy was Anti-Christ, and Anti-Christ was the communists", he said.

He can neither forget nor forgive his physical and moral suffering at the hands of the South Africans,

and it is this that eventually led him to tell his story to the press. "I am, and I always was, against the apartheid regime", he said. "I waited for a chance to show the world that South Africa is not what people think. Even after the reforms, it's still the same South Africa".

"Inside the Special Forces we were treated differently depending on whether we were black or white", he continued. "I was always against massacres, and often I found myself obliged to say 'no, I'm sick', so as not to take part in operations. Sometimes I went in order to see, out of curiosity. But I always hoped that one day I could return to Mozambique".

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### "They want to destroy our country"

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But why do the South Africans want Mozambicans inside the SADF? Mr Ndimene had no doubt about the answer. "To destroy our country", he replied.

The question of pressganged Mozambicans had been raised by the Mozambican authorities in the past, and it now transpires that a promise made by South African Foreign Minister Roelof Botha was no more than a barefaced lie.

Former Security Minister Sérgio Vieira told the *New Nation* that he had contacted Botha shortly after the 1982 Namaacha raid. "He did not reply until we met in Maputo in March 1985, shortly after the Nkomati Non-Aggression Accord, at the level of a joint committee between our two countries", said Mr Vieira. Apartheid Defence Minister Magnus Malan was also present.

By then Mr Simbine had escaped and told the authorities that Mr Ndimene had been forced to join the SADF.

Malan, recalled Mr Vieira, denied any abduction and said that Ndimene and Simbine had joined the SADF voluntarily.

"I asked how they could afford to have foreign soldiers in their army", said Mr Vieira. "Malan responded by saying that it was not illegal in terms of South African law to have foreign soldiers in their army, and that it did not constitute any violation of the Nkomati Accord".

Mr Vieira then asked "whether they would be comfortable if we recruited South Africans into our army - and I was specifically talking about recruiting *we* members".

At this point Botha said "this would not be good for the two countries, and he undertook to denobilise all Mozambican soldiers in the SADF and send them home". Mr Vieira said.

Like so many other South African promises, this pledge was worthless, and Mr Ndimene was forced to spend another five years in the SADF.