

Mozambique troops ^{no. 8} get SAS training ^{17/10/86}

A British military training mission, including former SAS commandos, is in Mozambique to aid resistance to South African-backed rebels. The Britons are involved with the tacit approval of their own government.

The SAS men were recruited by Defence Systems Ltd (DSL), a London-based military security organisation. They will teach anti-guerrilla tactics to an elite battalion of Mozambique troops; there is no suggestion that the Britons will be going into action against the rebels.

DSL is run by a former SAS officer, Alistair Morrison. It has had wide experience of Africa, including security work for De Beers diamond corporation. It sent a team to Uganda last year to train the pilots of helicopter gunships, but the contract was ended suddenly when Museveni's guerrilla army seized power.

The first role for the British-trained force in Mozambique will be to defend the railway line from the port of Nacala to the Malawian border (see page 2). A British arms company, Hall and Watts, has sold equipment worth £1.6m to the Mozambique government to equip the 600-strong battalion. According to *Jane's Defence Weekly* the equipment includes the latest Enfield L85A1 rifles and ample ammunition.

Also involved in setting up the SAS training mission has been Major Graham Wilson, last commander of the Rhodesian SAS, before its disbandment by the Mugabe government. Wilson was the most highly decorated officer in Ian Smith's Rhodesian army; he is well acquainted with the Mozambique terrain - having served in many covert Rhodesian operations there during the civil war in the UDI years.

Protection of the strategic Nacala-Malawi railway is receiving top priority on account of the \$80m international role in its rehabilitation. This month Canada gave a further \$21m to the project. The EEC is lending \$23m and France \$22m. The SAS-trained battalion is expected to begin its duties early in 1987.

Another British military training company, Falconstar, was absorbed into DSL this year. It also had had African experience, in creating the Ugandan Special Force (disbanded after Obote's downfall).

The role of the former SAS men in Mozambique is being treated as highly confidential by the British government. But if the mission proves successful it will be a notable political coup, in a country which has until now relied upon Eastern Bloc defence aid. It is recognised that the task is critically-timed, given recent successes by the MNR rebels.

It is not known whether South Africa has been told about the new British initiative in Mozambique. Military circles in Pretoria, who have played a large part in destabilising the government of President Samora Machel, may well see it as provocative.

It is certain, however, that the Zimbabwe authorities have been kept in the picture. Major Wilson, still in Harare, has direct access to Emmerson Munangagwa, the minister responsible for security and the intelligence services.