

TWO companies of Mozambican soldiers have already been trained by British instructors and deployed against Renamo bandits and a third is on the way. Though capable, the trainees are too few and their instructors worry about their fate in the bush. Gemini News Service reports that critics say London must beef up the programme if its protestations of opposition to Renamo's backers in South Africa are to be believed

THE soldiers of Number Two Platoon, B Company, were well camouflaged while moving through the Mozambican trees, but at the edge of the wood there was open ground. They went forward cautiously, but a few seconds later were under fire.

The platoon reacted quickly with a volley of smoke grenades. A swirling blue cloud grew over the open ground. The men separated, some returning enemy fire while others cut back through the wood to storm their ambush-

In all three displays the young Mozambican soldiers acquitted themselves well. Bmatt staff stressed that their progress was all the more remarkable for the fact that similar instruction in conventional and counter-insurgency operations in Brit-

By Jeremy Harding

ers from the side.

After five minutes of uninterrupted small arms fire, it was all over. Several ambushers lay dead and others had surrendered. Then, as the smoke drifted away, the dead men stood up and a clatter of applause broke out from the small crowd of observers in the back of an open army truck.

B Company is the second integrated Mozambican company to be put through its paces at Border Camp, in eastern Zimbabwe. Instruction is provided by the British Military and Advisory Training Team (Bmatt) under an agreement by the British government to support Frelimo against the South African-backed banditry in Mozambique.

Critics of the Bmatt training, believed to cost Britain £250 000 per company (120 men), claim it is a public relations exercise by the government of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher which fails to compensate for Britain's refusal to impose sanctions against South Africa.

The scheme began in February 1986 as an officers' training programme. After completing the course, soldiers of rank from the Mozambican armed forces (FPLM) were dispersed to senior posts throughout the country's military.

Last year the scheme was modified and Bmatt began training integrated companies, hand-picked initially by Mozambique and sent to Border Camp for a period of 16 weeks. The first company to complete its training was posted near the important Limpopo railway line last December and is now being joined by B Company.

A third company has embarked on the Bmatt course and should be back in Mozambique by the middle of September.

In addition to the anti-ambush exercise, B Company's final parade involved a river crossing by a platoon with full kit and a session of target practice with AK47s, light machine-guns and anti-tank weapons.

ain lasts 28 weeks.

In only four months, strong ties of reciprocal respect and affection have developed between the Mozambican trainees and their Bmatt instructors. Brigadier John Baskerville-Clegg told B Company: "I and your training staff have been much impressed by your efforts and enthusiasm. The fact that you have achieved so much does you all great credit."

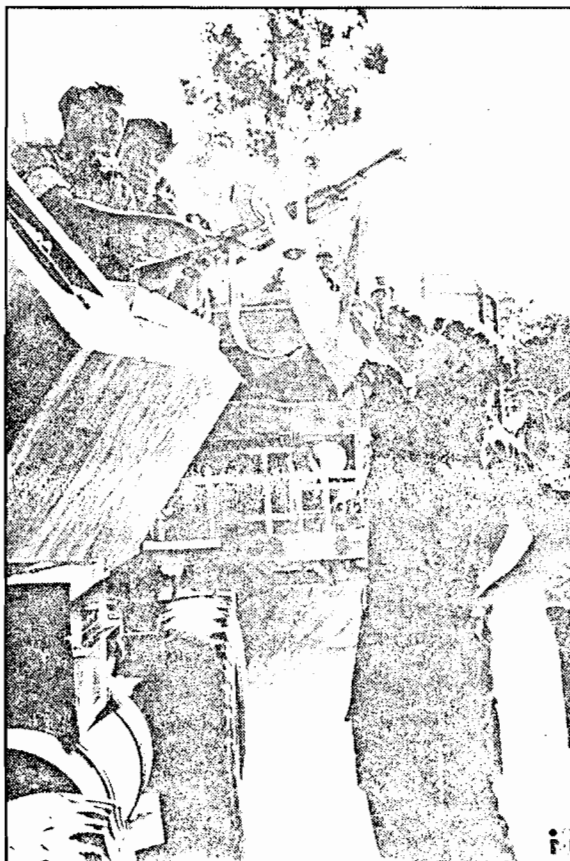
Visiting FPLM representative General Joaquim Munnhepe, in charge of the Mozambican army's training and manpower division, described B Company as "forest lions". "Our people are waiting for you," he told the trainees on their last parade at the camp.

As the truck drivers gunned their engines at the camp gate and B Company prepared to head for the Mozambican border, there were lengthy farewells between the Bmatt members and their trainees.

Said Sgt. Frank Higgins in a broad Glaswegian accent: "It's sad when they go out of that gate." Sgt. Higgins took a cold and clinical view of the task awaiting his trainees in Mozambique, where 15 000 MNR bandits have ravaged the country's infrastructure and inflicted untold violence and suffering on defenceless civilians.

While uneasy about their fare, Sgt Higgins was confident about their abilities. "In the field . . . that's where

Bmatt: could UK be buying time in Southern Africa?



LAST parade: British-trained troops leave for Mozambique.

they shine. They're soldiers of the bush and they always will be."

Bush warfare is what awaits B Company and all Bmatt trainees in Mozam-

bique. The main area of deployment appears to be in support of the Limpopo railway rehabilitation scheme, a project supported by several overseas donors.

B Company's predecessors have met with problems along the Limpopo line. They have been stationed at Ungubana, 114 km north of Maputo, for six months. During that time, say British sources, they have faced food shortages and deteriorating kit.

Lt. Col. Adrian Gilbert, the British defence attache in Maputo, says the difficulties have now been resolved and morale among the troops in Ungubana is high. Says Lt. Col. Gilbert of the British commitment in Mozambique: "Inch by inch, we are making a meaningful contribution."

But Mozambique's defence abilities need to improve by leaps and bounds to make headway against the bandits. That Britain's commitment falls well short of this is no fault of the Bmatt staff, first-class soldiers with an excellent working knowledge of the region.

It does cast doubt, however, on Britain's equivocal foreign policy position in Southern Africa, which appears to be a bid for time, money and influence in a region where competition for these key political resources leaves thousands of innocent civilians starved or victimised.

If Britain cannot bring itself to take a tougher approach with South Africa, say regional critics of the Thatcher policy, it must consider a substantial increase in military aid and training for Mozambique.