

Taking tea with the 'Pink Lady'

By Robin Oakley

When you are boiling a kettle over a charcoal fire in a slit trench at a military training camp you don't expect the Prime Minister of Britain and a brace of Presidents to drop in for tea.

But it happened yesterday when Mrs Thatcher was being shown the training facilities at Border Camp in the Nyanga Mountains in Zimbabwe.

She led the way down the sand-bagged steps into the dug-out, instructing President Mugabe and President Chissano of Mozambique "if I'm prepared to go down you can follow me." Dutifully, they risked their impeccably tailored suits to clamber down after her. And the Mozambiquan squaddies coped magnificently when tea was demanded by the strange lady in the pink suit. Mrs Thatcher remarked upon the

tomato ketchup bottle decorating the table. It was the soldiers' favourite, said Mr Mugabe. Maybe, said Mr Chissano, but it might have been wiser to conceal it. Otherwise their guest would think the troops spoilt.

Indeed, said Mr Mugabe. "We might lose our aid." But by then the two Presidents could afford to joke. Their respective aid budgets had been increased by £10 million apiece with pledges from their Lady Bountiful guests.

Though all was amiable, not to say convivial, Mrs Thatcher is finding it hard adjusting to the more discursive, less conclusive style of discussions favoured by African leaders. Mr Mugabe brought a team of 11 to their morning talks and spent half-an-hour just on the welcome formalities.