

Rag-tag Mozambican Army gets boost from British trainers

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Each morning at a small village in Zimbabwe's eastern highlands, two men lie belly down in the dust. One man lectures the other in Portuguese on how to fire a Soviet-made AK-47 assault rifle.

The instructor is Peter Koch de Gooreynd, a young British Army captain and one of 12 British military advisors who are trying to rub some shine onto the badly tarnished Army of Mozambique at this military compound called "border camp," about 25 miles from Mozambique.

They have only 12 weeks to train a company of 115 men. Actually, they have about half that, given the time lost in Portuguese-to-English translation: Captain Koch de Gooreynd is the team's sole Portuguese speaker.

The Mozambicans, between 16 and 27 years of age, are the first conscripts to be trained by the British Military Advisory and Training Team (BMATT) as an integrated Army company. The 300 student troops who have come here since the program began in February 1986 were junior officers.

"Border camp" has become a symbol of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's increasingly close relationship with the Soviet-backed Mozambican government of President Joaquim Chissano.

BMATT was formed in 1980 to train the Army of newly independent Zimbabwe.

Today, British officers run a staff college and, at a nearby camp, instruct Zimbabwean Army troops, some of whom are likely to fight in Mozambique as part of Zimbabwe's 6,000- to 10,000-strong force there.

Last year, Britain began training Mozambican soldiers as part of the strongest military commitment yet by a Western power to the war against the South African-backed Mozambique National Resistance (Renamo) movement.

SUE DORFMAN



Mozambican soldier: Will 12 weeks of British training help?

Progress comes slowly. During their recent fourth shooting practice, quite a few trainees were still sending up puffs of dust as the tiny missiles sailed one or two feet over their intended targets 100 meters away.

"We are talking about very basic training," said the grey-haired director of training, Maj. Chris Fitzgerald. "Ironically, these guys will return to Mozam-

bique considered specialists, after just 12 weeks."

Some of the new recruits were drafted peacefully, others forcibly by the ruling Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo). Many of them have little or no education.

"These soldiers come from villages, cities, all over Mozambique, and it is hard for them," said Capt. Raul João Mutemue, a 23-year-old platoon commander from the northern Mozambican province of Nampula. "The climate and the food are different, and some of them are not sure why they are here. But soon they understand."

Proponents of the Mozambican training policy argue that Britain must help to rebuild and defend Mozambique's major railways to help the country's five British Commonwealth neighbors - Malawi, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe - reduce their dependence on South Africa's trade routes.

"Support for Mozambique's defence and transport routes is London's answer to South African destabilization in the region," said one British official.

Yet some analysts dismiss the training program as a low-cost political ploy to deflect criticism, such as that aired at the recent Commonwealth summit in Vancouver, of Mrs. Thatcher's staunch opposition to economic sanctions against South Africa, in which Britain has heavy investments.

Other sources, including several Zimbabwean and foreign military officers, believe the program is far too small to have much impact on a Frelimo Army that has failed to make the transition from a network of scattered guerrilla units into a professional, capable armed force.

Widespread incompetence, food and equipment shortages, and a passive fighting philosophy prompted President Chissano to revamp his Army's command structure in mid-June, naming a new chief of staff and new commanders in nine out of 10 provinces.

The British advisors say they are under no illusion that "border camp" can alter the course of Mozambique's war from the seemingly endless deadlock it has been at since 1976.

"The goal is long-term: to rebuild the Army so that when peace comes to Mozambique, the country will have a profes-

sional fighting force," said a British officer in Harare, Zimbabwe's capital. "Without massive outside intervention, neither side will defeat the other."

The British instructors do everything they ask of their men, be it firing the AK-47's, the standard issue for Mozambican troops, or scaling the 12-foot red brick wall at the obstacle course. And at meal time, the thatched-roof canteen serves everyone Zimbabwean-style "sadza" -

mealie (corn) meal porridge - with a little meat.

What student and teacher cannot share is the return trip to Mozambique, where the war between the Frelimo government and the Renamo rebels cuts relentlessly across the countryside.

"Sometimes I feel sorry for these chaps," said Maj. Chris Fitzgerald, the director of training. "When

they board the trucks for home, they're singing, very gung-ho. But then I think of what is awaiting them."

Waiting in Mozambique is the war, which has forced more than 1 million people to flee their homes and left an estimated four million dependent on food handouts from international relief groups.

Several recruits here said they had joined the Army because Renamo had attacked relatives. Others said they had been forced to enlist.

"If the bandits [Renamo] had some political goals, that would be one thing," said Capt. Mutemue. "But they attack too many civilians, kill too many people. We have to stop that."

As Koch de Gooreynd barked out orders to a 38-man platoon that was marching along the firing range, the camp commander, Lt. Col. Patrick Lewis, said, "You could say that we are just scratching the surface, but at least we are doing something to help the Mozambican Army."

