

Frelimo forces learn to fight the British way

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A dozen British soldiers are trying to turn the Mozambican army into a professional force. **Karl Maier** reports from Nyanga Camp, Zimbabwe.

EACH morning at a small military camp in Zimbabwe's eastern highlands, two men lie in the dust, one lecturing the other in Portuguese on how to fire a rifle.

The instructor is Peter Koch De Gooreynd, a young British Army captain and one of 12 advisers trying to bring the Mozambican army up to scratch. They have only 12 weeks to train a company of 115 men. Half that time is lost in translation — Captain Koch De Gooreynd is the only adviser who speaks Portuguese and progress is slow.

These Mozambicans, aged between 16 and 27, are the first conscripts to be trained by the British Military Advisory and Training Team (BMATT) as an integrated company. They have little or no education and appear to have no strong opinions about the war between their government and the South African-backed Mozambique National Resistance (MNR). The dropout rate, however, is a respectable 10 per cent.

"These soldiers come from all over Mozambique, and it is hard for them," said Captain Raul João Mutemue, 23, a platoon commander. "The climate and the food are different, and some of them are not sure why they are here. They soon understand." The director of training, Major Chris Fitzgerald, of The Duke of Wellington's Regiment, said: "We are talking about very basic training. Ironically, these guys will return to Mozambique and be considered specialists, after just 12 weeks."

Britain's training of Mozambicans at the camp, about 25 miles inside Zimbabwe, has become the symbol of British military commitment in southern Africa. It has strengthened London's close relationship with the government of Joaquim Chissano in Maputo and has improved Britain's image in the region.

The BMATT team, formed when Zimbabwe gained its independence in 1980, helped integrate two guerrilla movements and the remnants of the Rhodesian army. Today, it runs the army staff college in Zimbabwe and trains Zimbabwean troops in Nyanga, some of whom are expected to serve in Mozambique with the 6,000 troops already there. Britain pays for the food, training and supplies that the Mozambican

company needs on the three-month course, thought to cost £250,000.

Proponents of the Mozambican training policy argue that Britain must help repair and defend Mozambique's main railways because they are vital to its five Commonwealth neighbours, which depend on South African trade routes. But some critics believe the programme is too small; others see it as a low-cost political ploy to deflect criticism of Mrs Thatcher's opposition to sanctions against South Africa.

The British advisers are under no illusion that the camp's training can end the deadlock in Mozambique's war. The MNR operates throughout Mozambique against a Frelimo government army that never made the transition from a guerrilla force to a regular army, and is hindered by incompetence, food and equipment shortages and a defensive fighting philosophy.

Most military experts believe Frelimo needs far more money and time to improve the army. "The goal is long term: to rebuild the army so that when peace comes to Mozambique, the country will have a professional fighting force," said a British officer in Harare, 140 miles west of here. "Without massive outside intervention, neither side will defeat the other."

"Sometimes I feel sorry for these chaps," said a British officer. "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 a million people to flee their homes and at least four million to depend on international food hand-outs. "If the bandits had some political goals, that would be one thing," said Captain Mutemue. "But they attack too many civilians, kill too many people. We have to stop that."

As Captain Koch De Gooreynd barked out orders to a platoon marching along the firing range, Captain Mutemue murmured: "The British are a generous people. Those of us who come to work here leave with dignity. It is true that not many Mozambicans receive this level of training, and our army has many problems. But we have to start somewhere."