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RHODESIAN paratroopers were dropped into Mozambique on Saturday as an initial step in an international plot — code-named Operation Cobra — to overthrow the Mozambique and Angolan governments, Radio Mozambique claimed yesterday.

The radio said the Rhodesian attack was at Julico, near Manel in the area where Rhodesia, South Africa and Mozambique meet on the Limpopo River north-east of the Kruger National Park.

The Rhodesian and Frelimo forces were still fighting yesterday, according to the radio.

Sapa reports from Salisbury that the Rhodesian military command refused to comment on the Mozambique claims.

The command said that Vila Salazar, the tiny Rhodesian border post in the far south-east corner of Rhodesia, was twice attacked by heavy mortar, rocket and small arms fire from Mozambique yesterday.

Rhodesian combined operations headquarters said the first attack yesterday morning lasted more than an hour. The remote hamlet was again attacked yesterday evening.

Security forces returned fire and there were no casualties in either attack although some buildings suffered minor damage.

Radio Mozambique, the official mouthpiece of the Frelimo government, claimed in March that Operation Cobra — backed by multi-national companies, the American Central Intelligence Agency and the Zaire and Rhodesian governments — would begin in September or October.

Frelimo claims airborne attack by Rhodesian troops

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The objective was to overthrow the MPLA government in Angola and the Frelimo government in Mozambique, the radio said, and to replace them with "capitalist neo-colonial powers."

Mozambique yesterday celebrated the 13th anniversary of the revolution which began against the Portuguese colonial administration on September 25, 1964.

The latest Rhodesian attack was reported to have begun last Thursday afternoon with jet aircraft bombing Frelimo positions in the Gaza Province. An armoured car column from Rhodesia also penetrated the border area, the radio claims.

The paratroopers and the armoured column are reportedly attempting a pincer movement on Frelimo forces, with the airborne troops cutting off Frelimo retreat into Mozambique from forward positions along the border.

One of the objectives, according to sources in Mozambique, is to capture

Mozambican soldiers for propaganda reasons. Already this month Frelimo has captured one alleged Rhodesian spy and five soldiers. All have been used on the radio for anti-Rhodesian propaganda purposes.

One of the five captured black Rhodesians said they had been lured into serving in the army by false propaganda. After seeing conditions in Mozambique they would be prepared to serve in the Zifa army, the military wing of the radical Nkomo - Mugabe Patriotic Front, a captured soldier said in a broadcast.

Rhodesians have exhibited bodies of men alleged to be Frelimo soldiers, but they have never captured any for propaganda purposes.

An alleged Rhodesian spy, Mr Alfonso Cotel, claimed on Radio Mozambique last week that he had been recruited in South Africa and trained in Rhodesia as part of a plot to assassinate Frelimo's top leadership including President Samora Machel.