

Teacher freed by Mozambique rebels

The Star 28/5/82

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The Star's Africa
News Service

MUTARE — At the
end of British ecologist
John Burlison's six-
month Mozambican or-

deal was marmalade
and toast. It was what
he longed for most as
he was marched
through the bush by
his heavily armed kid-
nappers.

After he was cap-
tured on that fateful
December 17 in the Go-
rongosa National Park
by a unit of the rebel
National Resistance
Movement of Mozam-

bique, Mr Burlison's
thoughts were domi-
nated by a numbing
fear for his life.

He had lived six years
in Mozambique and
knew the MNR's repu-
tation for ruthlessness.

"This is it," he
thought as 50 of the
rebels marched him
out of Chitengo wild-
life training centre

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other side.

Mozambican rebels free British teacher

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where he was the academic director.

They had taken the camp without firing a shot. The local militia had offered no resistance, the bearded wildlife expert told me here.

He had just been released by the Zimbabwean authorities who had held Mr Burlison for "documentation" and questioning after the rebels freed him and sent him across the border.

His initial fear of being killed by the rebels gradually subsided as they assured him of his imminent release. They were consistently polite to him throughout the six months. All, even the commanders, called him "Senhor John."

CHILEAN TEACHER

Once when a drunken rebel slapped Mr Burlison a commander immediately disciplined the man. It didn't happen again.

Captured with Mr Burlison were a 32-year-old Chilean mathematics teacher, Mr Moises Carrill, and 50 Mozambicans.

The rebels released the older men and the women and children among the Mozambicans, and marched the rest with Mr Burlison and Mr Carrill into the Gorongosa Mountains.

There a base camp was set up for the estimated 500-strong MNR unit which had just moved into the Gorongosa area.

In February Mr Burlison was told he was to be released, but not Mr Carrill. The rebels promised he would be released later. That was the last time Mr Burlison saw Mr Carrill.

A heavily armed group escorted Mr Burlison to the camp of another unit in northern Manica province, a three-week march away.

Mr Burlison estimated the total strength of the two units, the only two he had seen at about 1 000 men. →

but found no trace of this connection.

From the main northern camp Mr Burlison had been marched another six days to what he was told was the Zimbabwe border and the intended place of his release.

But they were unable to cross the flood-swollen Gairesi River which runs along the border so retreated to a nearby "sub-base camp."

When they still could not cross after waiting for about four weeks they returned to the base camp, shattering Mr Burlison's hopes, but on May 8 they set out again and this time crossed the river.

On Monday this week Mr Burlison's escort shook hands with him and pointed him in the right direction.

It turned out to be a remote spot in north-eastern Zimbabwe about 80 km north of Inyanga. The Zimbabwe police, alerted by local tribesmen, picked Mr Burlison up and drove him to Mutare, formerly Umtali, and some long-awaited toast and marmalade.

Mr Burlison said his captors had set no conditions for his release, other than to ask to tell the truth about how he was treated and what he had seen.

He said he had been well treated by the rebels and that although his sadza-base diet had been monotonous it had been "perfectly adequate and wholesome."

← He knew the MNR was reported to be backed by the South African Government.