

Mozambique resistance 'is well armed and fed'



From John Borrell
in Harare, Zimbabwe

The Mozambique National Resistance, which is engaged in an increasingly bitter struggle against President Machel's Frelimo Government appears to be better armed and supplied than official reports suggest.

According to Mr John Burlison, the British zoologist released this week after five months as a prisoner of the MNR, the guerrillas are well armed and fed, and can move with comparative ease over large areas of central Mozambique.

Mr Burlison, aged 28, said yesterday, that he had counted about 1,000 guerrillas at camps where he had been held pri-

Mr Burlison

soner. All were armed with Soviet-made AK-47 assault rifles, and mortars. Landmines and machine guns were in evidence. Several times the guerrillas returned to camp with weapons captured in engagements with Mozambican troops. Prisoners had also been brought back.

At the base camp where he spent most of the five months there were thatched huts and the guerrillas did not seem unduly concerned about the possibility of attacks by government forces. Food was supplied by local villagers and, although he could not establish whether they did so willingly, or under duress, Mr Burlison said the maize meal, vegetables and meat were plentiful.

"We ate three meals a day and beef or goat meat was served almost every evening."

he said. "I actually put on weight in the camps."

He said the guerrillas moved about freely during daylight, and on one occasion he was accompanied by 300 men on a march between two camps.

Discipline and organisation in the camps was good, although he was once told of prisoners being shot for trying to escape. "I heard the shots but didn't actually see anything myself."

Mr Burlison said he saw nothing to connect the guerrilla movement with South Africa or any other outside power. A few old parachutes were in evidence in one of the camps, but there were no markings on them.

The MRN is generally thought to be backed by South Africa. Documents captured recently by Mozambican troops

reinforced Maputo's claims that Pretoria is involved.

However, Mr Burlison's observations while a prisoner do not tally with the official line from Maputo that the movement has a rag-tag army, which is continually being routed by government forces.

Mr Burlison who was abducted in the Gorongosa Game Reserve, where he worked, on December 17, estimates that he was marched a total of 500 miles during his time with the guerrillas.

He said he had been well-treated and had even been provided with anti-malaria pills on a regular basis. When a sore went septic on a march he was given an injection of penicillin.

The zoologist flies back to Britain today and plans to visit his family in Stockton-on-Tees.