

Call to arms in Mozambique

From Joseph Hanton
in Chibuto, Mozambique.

Because the South African-backed Mozambique National Resistance is stepping up its activities, thousands of villagers are receiving military training so as to be able to resist them.

Training lasts 45 days. It is hard work, but at the end trainees receive rifles to help to protect their village.

Coca, Missava, a village in Chibuto district, has not been attacked, but the villagers are clearly worried. On July 11 the MNR ambushed two buses on the main road only three miles from the village, and 20 people were killed.

This was the worst of 20 MNR attacks in Chibuto district since early June. Roads have been mined, villages burned, and shops looted. In June, the MNR even lobbed a few mortar shells at the mili-

tary camp in the district town (also called Chibuto), but the shells missed.

Chibuto is in Gaza province, 130 miles north of the capital, Maputo, and just north of the Limpopo River. After a rapid spread south through sparsely populated parts of Inhambane and Gaza provinces early this year, the MNR has so far been unable to move further south through the densely populated Limpopo valley.

Mozambican sources say that South Africa has recently infiltrated hundreds of trained MNR fighters across the border 100 miles west of here, and is stepping up air and sea drops of supplies.

In response Frelimo is finally returning to the successful tactics of its guerrilla war against the Portuguese, and is organising and arming the people. The change began in March, when President Machel

appointed provincial military commanders. All were guerrilla commanders during the liberation war, but they come from the provinces they now command, which means they speak the local language and know the area.

They have high ranks, mostly major-general, and considerable autonomy. The centre of their strategy is volunteer local militia to defend villages and factories, and local combat troops to attack MNR bases.

But the effect of the change is only just being felt. Local militia and army training began in earnest only in July, but already 250 young men from the district taken into the army have finished combat training.

"We are only starting to move against the bandits, and our forces still do not cover the entire district. But we feel the activity of the armed bands

is already decreasing," said Nikolau Nhumalo, the district administrator, who is also district military commander.

He argues that what support the MNR gained when they moved into the district in March has since dwindled away. "They gained support because, when they raided a shop, they distributed some of the food. Now they can't, because all the shopkeepers have closed their shops and fled," he said.

Others in the district say that, in meetings with local people, the MNR picked on three local discontents: queues and shortages, the "villagisation" programme, and the inability of men to go to South Africa to work.

Ambitious young men still want to work in South Africa because of the high wages and the consumer goods they can buy.