

Zimbabwe's troops bolster
hard-pressed Maputo army

Allied force surrounds rebel camp

From Andrew Meldrum
in Harare

A combined offensive of Zimbabwean and Mozambican troops surrounded a heavily-fortified camp of the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR) rebels on the slopes of Gorongosa mountain in Mozambique's central Sofala Province yesterday.

The rebels' Gogogo camp is in the Gorongosa National Park which for several years has been the centre of the MNR activities and has been written off by the Mozambican government as an occupied area.

But following Mr Robert Mugabe's election victory in Zimbabwe in July, that country has increased the number of its troops in Mozambique to an estimated 10,000 — one-quarter the size of Zimbabwe's army.

The well-equipped Zimbabweans boosted Mozambique's often underfed and demoralised forces. Since July, many rebel bases have been destroyed, according to Zimbabwean and Mozambican reports.

The Gogogo camp is reported to be one of the few important rebel camps still holding out. It has been an MNR training camp and was known as "The Military Academy." Foreign mercenaries aiding the MNR are believed to be still in the camp, according to Mozambique's state-owned newspaper, *Noticias*, which reported that South Africans, Portuguese, British, Americans and Israelis are believed to be at these. A radio message recently monitored by the Zimbabwean-Mozambican forces reportedly called for the ur-

gent evacuation by air of some of the personnel at the besieged camp.

The allied Mozambican and Zimbabwean forces also reportedly destroyed the MNR headquarters in Gorongosa on August 28. The "Casa Banana" (Banana House) headquarters held enough arms and ammunition to keep the MNR rebels supplied for two years, according to an estimate by a Mozambican officer.

He said it included large numbers of mortar shells, rockets, grenades, machineguns, rifles, heavy artillery and anti-aircraft guns. Some 500 rebels were reportedly killed in the five-hour assault on the headquarters. The base consisted mostly of mud huts but had electricity and a telephone system, according to reports.

The supplies of ammunition, reading material from South Africa and medicine all suggest that air-drops to the rebels continued to come from South Africa, despite the Nkomati non-aggression pact of March, 1984 in which South Africa pledged to end any support to the MNR.

The headquarters were apparently used to stage attacks on the oil pipeline, road and railway lines between Zimbabwe and Mozambique's Indian Ocean port of Beira.

MNR sabotage of the economically-vital transport corridor was the main reason Zimbabwean troops were first deployed to Mozambique in 1982. Beira port and the transport routes to it will be even more crucial to landlocked Zimbabwe, as well as Zambia and Malawi, if international sanctions are applied against South Africa.