

SERRA DE
GORONGOSA
(Mozambique).

THE MNR headquarters inside Mozambique is a vast complex covering several square kilometres in the foothills of Gorongosa mountain in the central province of Sofala.

From the air the only aspect of the base visible is a landing strip used extensively in the past by South African aircraft. The rest of the base is well camouflaged by trees.

Access by land through densely wooded countryside, is extremely difficult. When Mozambican and foreign journalists visited the base, 10 days after its capture on August 28, they were flown in by a Mozam-

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hican helicopter.

Climbing up a steep and narrow path from a small and crystal-clear river, the first evidence of the base one encounters is a guard post consisting of two small huts. All entrances to "Casa Banana", as the MNR baptised their headquarters, were closely guarded.

Beyond the guard post lies the area of the "general command" itself. These are the quarters in which bandit leaders, including the MNR's "supreme commander", Afonso Dhlakama, lived. Everywhere in this part of the base photographs of Dhlakama are to be found, pasted on the walls of houses, and on the doors of stolen vehicles.

The houses here are substantially larger than the huts in the rest of the base, where the MNR rank and file slept. Dhlakama's house, the largest, is divided into two fairly substantial rooms, with an enclosed kitchen outside.

AMBUSH

Dhlakama's house and several other constructions at Casa Banana are covered with fibre-cement roofing sheets, which were captured from a lorry ambushed on the road from Beira to Inhanga in northern Sofala. The "general command" is separated from the sleeping quarters of the rest of the bandits by a wire fence,

Inside the bandits' ^{H. 10/9/85} base HQ

Nearby lies a bewildering variety of weaponry and ammunition of various origins. Captured in the assault on the base were vast quantities of mortar shells, rockets, grenades, machine guns and rifles. Some of this is still in large huts which the MNR built as warehouses.

There is also some heavy artillery, including anti-aircraft equipment. The MNR used their anti-aircraft guns against the Mozambican and Zimbabwean planes and helicopters involved in the storming of Casa Banana, but did not down any of them.

A rough Mozambican military estimate is that the quantity of military equipment captured at Casa Banana was enough to supply the bandits for two to three years.

Vehicles which the MNR had taken to Casa Banana include an almost new Toyota Land-Cruiser stolen in a raid at Inhanga, and a massive bulldozer, which the bandits had captured in an attack on Muanza, farther south, where major quarries are located. Some half-a-dozen stolen lorries are also at the base, plus a large number of motorbikes and bicycles.

Littered all over Casa Banana are sheets of duplicated propaganda material. Some of these contain crude and insulting cartoons of President Samora Machel, others boast of the MNR's supposed military might, and still others call on Mozambican soldiers to desert.

Most interesting of all this material, is a leaflet dated August 25 warning the "Marxist-Leninist forces of Zimbabwe" that

"you will all be killed and captured by our forces".

Judging by the large number of copies of this leaflet found at Casa Banana, the MNR had been unable to distribute it before the Mozambican and Zimbabwean forces attacked the base. Absurdly, the leaflet, written on one side in English, and on the other in Portuguese, calls on the Zimbabwean troops to remember their own independence war and the massacres committed by "the racist army of Ian Smith".

But what the Zimbabweans have uppermost in their minds is the fact that it was precisely the Smith regime that created the MNR in the first place, and controlled it from 1976 until 1980, when South African military intelligence took over the reins.

The base was well equipped to produce propaganda. Found at Casa Banana were at least a dozen typewriters, and three duplicators. There were also boxes of Japanese stencils and a stock of duplicating ink.

Casa Banana possessed electricity and a telephone system. Generators provided the electricity, and in one of the warehouses a large number of stolen light bulbs were found. To rig up their internal communications, the bandits had simply cut down telephone wires elsewhere in Sofala, and reinstalled them in Casa Banana.

The MNR was not short of medical supplies either. A large quantity of drugs, ointment, syringes, scales and other equipment is in Casa Banana. Some of it provided by South Africa, and some looted from

Mozambican health posts.

The material still usable will be given to the Mozambican district health authorities in Gorongosa town.

ARCHIVE

The MNR were able to destroy some material before the base was taken. Thus a large number of documents were burnt in an oven normally used for baking bread. Presumably this included the most incriminating documentation, particularly on the MNR's international links, in Dhlakama's personal archive.

The bandits also burnt down their communications centre. It was this that ensured radio contact between Casa Banana and MNR groups elsewhere in the country, and with South Africa, and perhaps bandit rear bases in other neighbouring countries.

One huge pile of ashes is all that remains of the MNR's improvised bank. This was a store of meticals (the Mozambican currency), and fragments of 100 metical and 1 000 metical notes can still be recognised. The total quantity of money

destroyed, so that it would not fall into the hands of the Mozambican authorities, must run to many millions of meticals.

There is plenty of evidence at Casa Banana of the MNR's continuing links with South Africa. For instance, copies of the paper *O Seculo de Joanesburgo*, produced by rightwing members of the Portuguese community in South Africa, were found there.

One copy of the paper journalists saw lying on the floor of one MNR warehouse was dated October 1 1984 — seven months after the signing of the Nkomati non-aggression accord between Mozambique and South Africa.

It is difficult to see how such a newspaper could have reached Casa Banana other than by air.

Hand-written communications from commanders of MNR units, dated May 1985, speak of radio contacts with "the exterior". This euphemism, used by the MNR since 1980, refers to rear bases in the Transvaal.

Everything indicates that Casa Banana was abandoned in great haste. Afonso Dhlakama made his escape northwards on a motorbike, and is believed to have found refuge in another MNR base between Gorongosa and the Zambezi. Those who saw the "supreme commander" speeding into the distance say that he was accompanied by one of his assistants.

The MNR chief was in such a hurry to get away from Casa Banana that he dropped the pair of heavy spectacles that are the most conspicuous feature in photographs of Dhlakama. These spectacles are now in the possession of the Mozambican armed forces. They will doubtless be returned to their owner when he is finally tracked down. — Ziana-AIM.