

3 mail

29-12-85

Joint force captures MNR stronghold

Sunday Mail Reporter

A JOINT force of Zimbabwean and Mozambican troops on Christmas Eve overran an important MNR base in the Sofala province, killing 52 bandits and wounding many.

A Zimbabwe National Army spokesman said the base, known as Kachadea, lies in the marshlands between the Pungwe and Buzi rivers. The base is believed to have been the bandit stronghold in the area, and was used as a springboard for attacks along the highways from Inchope to Maputo and Beira.

The base, captured after a battle which lasted for two days, harboured an estimated 600 bandits and many civilians who cultivated crops for them as well as being used as porters for arms and ammunition.

Operation Njuzu, launched to capture Kachadea, was conceived by the joint forces after they had gathered intelligence from an MNR deserter trained there.

The final assault to storm Kachadea began at midday last Tuesday. When advancing on the camp the security forces came under heavy rocket and gunfire from bandit positions.

After a heavy exchange of fire, the joint troops called in helicopter gunships, which immediately neutralised enemy positions. The troops then stormed the base, the spokesman said.

The bandits abandoned quantities of arms and ammunition and also left behind civilians dressed in torn sackcloth and a number of naked children.

Several head of cattle and goats, chickens and ducks were found in the camp, although it was known

that some livestock had been driven southwards at the onset of the battle.

The livestock was believed to have been stolen by the bandits from Muda farm on the Inchope-Beira road.

The base had several huts, spaced five metres apart, surrounding a command post. Most huts were smouldering when the joint forces moved in.

The base was built in thick bush and approach was difficult other than along pathways cut by machetes.

The security forces spokesman said the civilian population living close to the camp was used for logistics by the bandits and provided them with food supplies.

The civilians also attended to wounded bandits and carried their dead during the course of the battle.