

Guerrillas regain game park base from blundering army

Obs. 23/2/86

GODWIN MATATU ■ Chimola, Mozambique

GORONGOZA, one of the finest game parks in Africa, has become a battlefield as guerrillas of the rebel Mozambique National Resistance (MNR) struggle with the Mozambican army to reassert their control of the area.

In a dramatic turn of events, 400 heavily armed insurgents stormed their former headquarters on Gorongoza mountain and routed the 1,000 Mozambican troops defending Casa Banana camp.

It had been the headquarters of the MNR since 1980, but was taken from the rebels in August last year by 1,000 Zimbabwean paratroops who then handed it over to their Mozambican counterparts.

The recapture of Gorongoza appears to be another example of the incompetence of the Mozambican army in dealing with the rebels. According to military intelligence sources in this border town, the government troops at Casa Banana had been without supplies for more than three weeks and were heavily demoralised.

On the night of 10 February,

the rebel force moved in and the government troops fled.

The base was defended with tanks, artillery and heavy anti-aircraft guns, but the Mozambican troops did not use them to repulse the rebel attack.

The recapture of Casa Banana has dealt a heavy psychological and military blow to the Mozambican army. Major General Dai, commander of the Third Brigade here, was visibly embarrassed when asked about the incident. The governor of Manica Province was summoned to Maputo on Friday to explain how the base fell.

And yesterday, a military delegation arrived here from Beira, presumably to supervise operations at the headquarters in Chimoio.

A young Zimbabwean officer was contemptuously doubtful that the Mozambicans could retake Gorongoza. 'These people are cowards. It's only those who run to fight who survive, but those who run away from a fight will not survive.'

Members of the 10,000-strong Zimbabwean Special Task Force that has been operating here are disenchanted by the performance of the Mozambicans. 'I am tired of storming MNR bases and letting the Mozambican army hand them back to the MNR,' complained a young paratrooper.

The special task force has its headquarters at the small airport here, complete with air support, anti-aircraft guns, clinic ambulances and a rapid communications system.

Latest unconfirmed reports suggested that the attack on Casa Banana was directed by South Africans. The MNR has continued to receive covert support from the South African Defence Force despite the non-aggressive pact signed by P. W. Botha and Samora Machel at Nkomati two years ago. Sources also say that the MNR leader, Afonso Dhlakama, was flown from South Africa last week to resume command at Gorongoza.

Richard Hall writes: The

rebels claim to have killed 91 Zimbabweans while recapturing Cavallo, a military headquarters north-west of Beira.

Prime Minister Robert Mugabe faces a dilemma—whether to reinforce the crack troops he sent to help Mozambique six months ago, or to scale down the campaign. If they pull out, there will be a further slump in the morale of the Mozambique army.

According to Jorge Correia, the MNR spokesman in Lisbon, the joint force defending Cavallo left more than 300 dead when it retreated. 'We captured artillery and light anti-aircraft guns,' he said. 'Our casualties numbered 71, including wounded.'

Apart from the flare-up in the bush war, terror attacks are mounting around the capital, Maputo. Trains and road convoys have been attacked, power lines cut and anti-personnel mines laid.

One mine has wounded visitors to the Maputo beach. Until now the beach has been regarded as the last safe place where residents of the beleaguered capital could relax.