

Minister details rout of MNR

Herald Reporter

ONLY three Zimbabwean soldiers were injured in the combined air and ground attack by Mozambican and Zimbabwean forces on six MNR bandit bases in Mozambique's Gaza province last month.

Giving more details of the highly successful operation, which saw nearly 200 bandits killed, the Minister of Defence, Cde Enos Nkala, said Zimbabwe's only casualties were a paratrooper who fell into a tree and two men who were shot. All three were back in action the next day.

Cde Nkala said the bandits had transferred their operations to Gaza following previous successes by Zimbabwean and Mozambican forces in Sofala, Manica and Tete provinces, areas where "the situation is showing signs of stability".

"We saw quite a large movement of bandits into Gaza and the emergence of bases in that area. We observed the situation, defined the activities of the bandits in that area and followed them in, as a combined force.

"We attacked the bases and destroyed about six, one of which was bigger than Casa Banana (the MNR bandit headquarters in Gorongosa seized in earlier operations) and heavily fortified with anti-air weapons.

"When our strike force went into attack there was intense anti-air fire but we were able to neutralise it and destroy it within a few minutes.

"Our paratroopers were in place and they overran the base within a matter of hours after our air force neutralised the enemy fire."

The smaller bases were then attacked and overran, said the minister with nearly 200 bandits killed and some captured. These were still being questioned, giving valuable information as to bandit tactics and intentions. The captured bases were now occupied by Mozambican forces.

All aircraft, including helicopters, involved in the attack returned to base. A previous communique had said the attack by the Zimbabwean and Mozambican forces had taken place between March 18 and March 23.

In his exclusive interview with The Herald, Cde Nkala said that following combined operations by the two countries' forces the situation in Mozambique was improving. Besides operations in Tete, Manica, Sofala and Gaza the situation in Zambezia had "been taken care of".

Although there were incursions into the Beira Corridor the bandits had again been dealt with and when the bandits tried to transfer the war into Zimbabwe they were dealt a blow.

"The situation is no longer as bad as it was towards the end of last year."

Not wanting to go into too much detail, Cde Nkala said captured bandits had said they were trained, financed and equipped from South Africa.

There was no doubt that South Africa continued to violate the Nkomati Accord, he said.

"Let us talk about this region. Who is the enemy of the Frontline States? South Africa. Who sponsors dissidents? Who sponsors, arms, trains and equips dissidents? South Africa. All captured Renamo bandits tell us that they are trained and sponsored from South Africa."

Zimbabwean forces would continue their support of Mozambican forces in Mozambique so long as the Mozambican government, which is a target of South Africa, wanted them there.