



Mozambicans mourn a family member killed by the MNR: U.S. media is trying to clean up

Guardian 17-8-88

MNR's ugly reputation.

## New York Times reporter's trip aids MNR bandits' dirty war

By PAUL FAUVET  
Special to the Guardian

MAPUTO—Three journalists from major U.S. publications made a clandestine visit to Mozambique in late July to interview the self-styled "supreme commander" of the South African-backed Mozambique National Resistance (MNR), Alfonso Dhlakama.

The stories, by John Battersby of the New York Times, William Claiborne of the Washington Post and Spencer Reiss of Newsweek appeared the following week. A fourth journalist, Mark Peters, took photos. The whole thing had been arranged in Washington by a far-right outfit called Freedom Inc.

The journalists' plane also carried laptop computers and sophisticated solar-powered communications equipment donated to the MNR by right-wing U.S. businesspeople. The equipment is designed to improve the communications between MNR camps, and also to allow the rebels to communicate with the out-

side world without going through South African military installations at Phalaborwa in eastern Transvaal. A transit center outside South Africa (probably in Malawi) is to be established.

This scheme will get rid of the most obvious evidence of MNR links with South Africa. One reason why the frontline states can be so definite in their accusations of continuing South African support for the MNR is that their intelligence services intercept radio communications between the rebels and their paymasters. The MNR's U.S. friends are now trying to eliminate this damning radio link.

Freedom Inc. is one of the groups that pays the MNR's U.S. bills. This year it is contributing \$15,000 for the upkeep of the MNR's Washington office.

But neither Claiborne nor Battersby bothered to enlighten their readers about the nature of Freedom Inc. and its executive director Robert MacKenzie.

In Southern Africa MacKenzie is better

known by his pseudonym, Bob MacKenna. MacKenna is a Vietnam veteran who became a mercenary in the armed forces of Ian Smith's racist regime in Rhodesia in the 1970s. MacKenna served as a captain in one of the most highly trained and murderous of Smith's elite units, the Special Air Services (SAS), which was particularly used for cross-border raids against frontline states.

The SAS was a key unit in Smith's war against Mozambique, and MacKenna helped train the first units of the MNR. MacKenna was decorated for his role in the slaughter of over 1000 Zimbabwean refugees at the Chimoio and Tembue camps in central Mozambique in 1977. He commanded the most devastating of all SAS operations against Mozambique—the destruction of the fuel tank farm at Beira port in 1979.

With the fall of the Smith regime, MacKenna moved to South Africa where he continued to work with the MNR and where he collaborated on a book, "The Elite," glorifying the SAS (and spilling the beans on its role in forming the MNR). He has also written for the mercenaries' magazine Soldier of Fortune.

None of this, however, seemed to interest Battersby or Claiborne, who even allowed MacKenzie's outfit and/or the South African regime to censor their copy, for they agreed not to mention how they reached the MNR's Mozambican hideout. They refused to say whether they flew there directly from South Africa or used a third country.

By agreeing to this omission, they effectively suppressed the real story, which is whether or not the security agreements Mozambique has signed with South Africa and Malawi (the most likely third country) are being violated.

Battersby does hint in his article that the plane flew in straight from Johannesburg. Other well-placed sources in the region believe that the journalists first tried to enter from Malawi, but that authorities there, due to an impending official visit from Mozambican President Joaquim Chissano, refused permission.

The aim of those arranging the visit was undoubtedly to try and repair the damage done to the MNR's image by a U.S. State Department report earlier this year, which detailed rebel atrocities against the civilian population.