

Two MNR officers, Diogo Domingos Toni (30) and Wiriam Erton (32), who both surrendered to the authorities in order to benefit from the amnesty offered to bandits who turn themselves in, spoke to journalists at a Maputo press conference on 14 April. Both men are from the central province of Manica, and spent ten years in the bandit ranks. They said they were kidnapped in different parts of the province in 1978, and taken over the border for military training at Odzi, in what was then the rebel British colony of Southern Rhodesia.

Diogo Toni said he was promoted to the rank of commander of heavy weaponry in April 1980. Two months later Mozambican forces attacked his base, and he lost his left hand. He was hospitalised inside an MNR camp for the next eight months. In 1982, he was appointed an instructor, training other bandits in the use of mortars. His disability meant that he was not sent out on raids, but he moved from base to base in Manica and the neighbouring province of Sofala, as a middle-ranking MNR officer.

Toni said that planes flew in regularly from South Africa to resupply the bandits. The last time he personally witnessed such supplies was in April 1988 in the district of Maringue, Sofala province. The plane dropped not only weapons, but also parachuted some South Africans into the base, whom he saw discussing with his superiors. He said a plane landed elsewhere in Sofala later in the month to pick these South Africans up.

Wiriam Erton rose through the ranks of the MNR to become first a company commander, and then, in November 1984, a sector commander. For most of his time with the bandits he was operating in his home area of Mavonde, near the Zimbabwean border. At the Mavonde base there was a "special group" of saboteurs, trained in South Africa, said Erton. There were 16 of them, commanded by one Tomas Fernando, and their main tasks were to attack the railway and the pipeline from the Indian Ocean port of Beira to Zimbabwe.

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