

SOUTH AFRICAN MILITARY USE OF MNR BANDITS

The South African military used some of its Mozambican MNR bandits as mercenaries in the destabilisation of Angola and Zimbabwe, according to a former bandit who has surrendered to the authorities under the terms of Mozambique's amnesty law.

At the time of his surrender, Neva Benson Mazive was commander of a "special force" of bandits in the central province of Sofala. He told a correspondent of the daily paper 'Noticias' in the central city of Chimio that he joined the MNR in 1982, when he was just 12 years old. The bus in which he and his elder brother were travelling was ambushed by the MNR in Inhambane province, between Mazive's home district of Massinga and the small port of Vilanculo.

The bandits abducted the passengers and gave Mazive and his brother four months forced military training at a camp in the northern Inhambane district of Mabote. They were then sent on missions to ambush vehicles on the Massinga-Vilanculo road. Mazive told 'Noticias' that later in 1982 he and 50 other bandits were chosen for a course at Phalaborwa in the South African province of the Transvaal. He said the course was given "by three South African officers, a major, a captain and a sergeant", and that 22 of the bandits passed, learning techniques of parachuting, reconnaissance, infiltration, sabotage, and night attacks.

He said that they had also been taught English and Shona "so that we could easily infiltrate Zimbabwe". The same Phalaborwa centre, said Mazive, also included dissidents recruited by South Africa from Zimbabwe, Angola, Tanzania and Zambia.

Mazive's first missions after his course were in Angola and Namibia, taking part in Pretoria's wars against Angola and against guerrillas of the Namibian liberation movement, SWAPO. He stayed in Namibia for six months. He said he was then infiltrated into Zimbabwe together with Zimbabwean dissidents. His task here was to look for bases of the South African liberation movement, the African National Congress (ANC), whose members would then be abducted. But he said that this mission was aborted by Zimbabwean security. He returned to South Africa in 1984, where he said he trained bandits from Zimbabwe and Zambia. This, he was told, was revenge for the support these two countries gave to the Mozambican government. Later, when he was already thinking of abandoning the MNR, he was involved in training "a group of mercenaries to destabilise Tanzania".

When he returned to Mozambique he learnt of the amnesty law from the radio, but his superiors told him it was all propaganda and that those who surrendered would be killed by the authorities. "So I delayed a long time before I turned myself in," said Mazive. "After a long discussion on the matter with a Mozambican soldier abducted by the bandits, I decided the time had come." With a group of 20 others, he fled from the bandit camp in Sofala and surrendered. Mazive has now offered to place his knowledge at the disposal of the authorities "to contribute to the liquidation of banditry".