

New evidence links mystery base to Renamo

NEW evidence emerged this week that Portuguese businessmen and elements of the South African Defence Force violated South Africa's joint security accord with Mozambique by backing Renamo rebels.

A national serviceman confirmed *Weekly Mail* reports that a mysterious military location near Phalaborwa was used as a launching pad for clandestine missions into Mozambique.

The former soldier, who served in the base during 1986, said it was a camp for an elite SADF unit of black soldiers from Angola and Zimbabwe.

"These guys made regular trips into Angola and Mozambique and when they came back they would brag about how they were going to buy nice cars with the money they were paid," the serviceman said.

This month the *Weekly Mail* reported that helicopters were used some 18 months ago to ferry wounded Renamo insurgents from a base that had come under heavy attack by Mozambican armed forces to a clinic near Phalaborwa for treatment.

The national serviceman confirmed that there was a clinic at Skietog which can receive patients by helicopter. There are no other hospitals in the Phalaborwa area capable of providing such a service.

The SADF's Directorate for Public Relations responded to requests for details about Skietog and the role that it played in the military by saying:

"The Defence Force does not in any way support nor provide base facilities to Renamo. Furthermore, the Joint Security Commission between South Africa and Mozambique was established precisely to investigate all allegations of this nature."

The serviceman said that the base was in fact the headquarters of the Fifth Reconnaissance Commando set up to incorporate black Selous Scouts from Zimbabwe, members of FNLA fighters from Angola and other surrogate forces of the SADF.

"Although we knew it as a Recce camp we were told to always refer to it only as Skietog. Security was always very tight."

The *Weekly Mail* has also found that Frama Intertrading, a company that supplied Unita as a front for the SADF until at least 1986, was also deeply involved in the war against Mozambique.

The company, owned by a former Mozambican called Arlindo Maia, had an old Dakota based at the civilian airfield at Wonderboom which was used to make regular deliveries to Renamo bases in Mozambique.

Sources close to the company say that Maia owned another company called General Trading Company (Gentra) which ordered supplies for Renamo.

Testimony from Renamo deserter Constantino Reis claims that that the top leadership of the rebel organisation were heavily involved with senior SADF officers in the smuggling of illegal ivory from Mozambique

An ex-soldier tells of cross-border missions from the mystery base near Phalaborwa uncovered by the *Weekly Mail* a fortnight ago. EDDIE KOCH reports

during the early 1980s.

"There were really huge quantities. The ivory came in planes returning from Mozambique after taking men or materials there," said Reis shortly after defecting from Renamo in 1985.

The illicit trade was run by Orlando Cristina, assassinated in mysterious circumstances at a Renamo base 30km north of Pretoria in 1983, and Evo Fernandes, another senior Renamo official who was murdered near Lisbon in 1988.

On March 31 1988, Sergeant Robert van der Merwe, a policeman convicted of killing a drug dealer on the Reef, told the supreme court under oath that while he was stationed at the Oshoek border post on the Swazi frontier he had been taken to Nelspruit, where he met Commandant John Vorster.

Vorster introduced him to a man "who he said was responsible for liaison between a certain organisation — which I understood to be Renamo — and the South African government ... As far as we could gather, he was responsible for supplying the Mozambican resistance movement with whatever they needed."

On March 14 1988, Paul Oliveira, another senior Renamo defector, told a press conference in Maputo that there was, at that time, still a Renamo base near Pretoria.

He named Brigadier Cornelius van Niekerk and a Brigadier van Tonder as SADF officers responsible for liaising with Renamo. SADF headquarters did not reply to queries about what work Van Niekerk was now doing for the military.

An SADF representative repeated the statement that the military was not involved in supporting Renamo. "In fact the contrary is true," he said. "The Defence Force has supplied non-lethal equipment to the forces of Mozambique to assist them in supporting the Cahora Bassa scheme."

The magazine *Mozambiquefile* recently said in an editorial that there had not been any news of demotion or change in post for Van Niekerk, "the South African's chief liaison officer with the MNR".

"Until such changes are made it will be difficult to take seriously the repeated South African government claims that destabilisation is over and no more support is flowing to the MNR."

At a mass rally in Nelspruit on Sunday, African National Congress Deputy President Nelson Mandela called on State President FW de Klerk to establish a commission of inquiry into claims that Renamo was still being supported from inside South Africa.