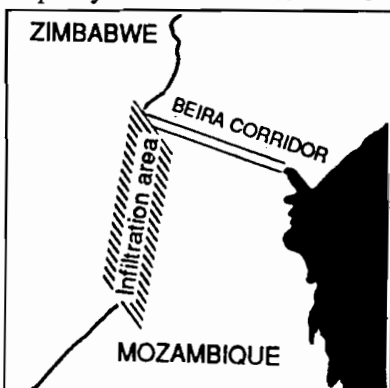


Zimbabwe tightens 'free-fire' border 25/5 AA 90

HARARE. Despite the efforts to bring peace to Mozambique, Renamo guerrillas continue with their destabilisation campaign against the Frelimo government. The Zimbabwean government is becoming increasingly uneasy about its own eastern border region.

President Mugabe is nervous at the best of times about security in the east, especially in Manicaland, from where the Zimbabwe Unity Movement of Edgar Tekere draws most of its support (despite facing constant harassment from government officials and police, Zum polled a fifth of the vote in the recent general election, and since the poll a number of Zum officials have been attacked in broad daylight).

The Ndaou area around Chipinga, in the south-eastern borders, is also the heartland of support for the exiled Ndaningi Sithole and his Zanu-Ndonga party. Both Zum and Zanu-Ndonga are frequently accused of collaboration with



Renamo, though how justifiably is uncertain.

But it is the already desperate Mozambican civilian population living in the border areas which is suffering most. The Zimbabwe army is never noted for using kid gloves, as shown by the heavy-handed approach of the troops—numbering at least 10,000—guarding the road and rail links and oil pipeline along the Beira corridor.

For some time, the army has been collaborating with its Mozambican counterpart in clearing all villagers from a strip some 15 kilometres wide along the Mozambican side of the border. The vacated villages are then put to the torch, creating a free fire zone which, it is hoped, will deter further Renamo cross-border expeditions.

Similar operations are also being mounted on the Zimbabwean side of the frontier, especially near Mount Darwin in the north and Chipinga and Chisumbanje in the south, where Zimbabwean peasant farmers and their families are rounded up into large 'protected villages'. There are clear echoes here of the tactics used in the long war between Ian Smith's Rhodesian army and the Zanu guerrillas. It is also ironical that Renamo

was created by Smith's Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO).

The Mozambicans netted along the border area in the current roundup are both workers and refugees in Zimbabwe, plus people brought by force from inside their own territory. They are taken to Zimbabwean army camps, where they undergo preliminary screening to determine which, if any, are Renamo members or sympathisers. During this process some are tortured.

After screening, some are expelled in closed army lorries, back into Frelimo-held areas of Mozambique (mainly the Beira corridor). There, many of the men are promptly conscripted into the Mozambican army. The remainder (consisting largely of women and children) are dispatched to one of four refugee camps in Zimbabwe where, over the past two years, they have been arriving in far greater numbers than have genuine refugees—those who have freely chosen to flee from Mozambique to escape the fighting.

In the camps, security is again tight, although treatment is generally good after screening. New arrivals are re-interviewed by the army, police and the CIO (retained after independence).

Since late 1988 (to the dismay of UNHCR) eight-foot barbed wire fences have been erected round each camp, with soldiers stationed at 100-metre intervals along the perimeter, to prevent night-time contact between camp inmates and Renamo infiltrators. The four camps currently hold 84,000 people, more than three times their intended capacity.