

# Bandit base overrun on South African border

Continued South African support for the Renamo bandits was once again nakedly exposed when, on 14 May, the Mozambican armed forces stormed a bandit base at Ngungwe, just one and a half kilometres from the South African border.

This base, in a mountainous part of Magude district, about 180 kilometres north-west of Maputo, was used as a centre to distribute weaponry from South Africa to Renamo units operating in the southern three provinces of Maputo, Gaza and Inhambane.

The bandits had built a dirt road from Ngungwe to the border along which this military equipment could pass.

The base fell after heavy bombardment by the Mozambican air force and heavy artillery. At least 12 bandits were killed in the fighting.

When Mozambican journalists flew into Ngungwe a few days after its capture, Mozambican troops were visibly overjoyed, knowing that they had scored a significant victory over the bandits and their paymasters.

The Ngungwe base covered some four square kilometres in an area rich in agricultural potential. The hundreds of huts in the base were used, not

only to deposit weapons, but also as a makeshift hospital for wounded bandits.

Around the base were fields of ripening maize, cultivated by peasant families held captive by Renamo.

Throughout the base could be observed possessions looted from local people - including motorbikes (none in working order), chairs, sheets of zinc roofing, and various domestic utensils.

The bandit hospital used some of this stolen roofing and other material brought in from South Africa. When AIM reporters reached the hospital, all that was left were some bedposts, a few crutches, and a partially destroyed stretcher. "This is where the wounded bandits were treated", commented a Mozambican officer.

The hut where the bandit commander, known as "Varreira", had lived was destroyed in the artillery bombardment. Many other huts inside the camp suffered the same fate, leaving a desolate panorama.

During the assault a significant number of bandits fled from the base to take refuge inside South Africa. It is believed that this group has been reorganising itself in attempts to recapture Ngungwe.

## Renamo rejection of Mugabe "irrelevant"

Mozambican Foreign Minister Pascoal Mocumbi on 9 May dismissed as "irrelevant" a statement made from Lisbon by the Renamo bandits declaring that they do not accept Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe as one of the mediators in the Mozambican conflict.

Dr Mocumbi told reporters "What is important is that matters are moving ahead, and the mediators are working so as to reach a decision as soon as possible on the venue for dialogue between the government and Renamo".

A week later, the Mozambican embassy in Lisbon issued a denial that there was

any significance in a chance meeting between an embassy official and a Renamo representative.

A casual handshake between the embassy's press attaché, Guilherme Tamele, and Renamo finance chief, Sebastião Temporário, was blown up out of all proportion in the Portuguese media, who described it as "an official contact".

Both Temporário and Mr Tamele were attending a meeting in a Lisbon hotel organised by a Portuguese group calling itself the "Movement for Peace and Democracy in Mozambique".

At the end of the meeting, the organisation's coordinator, António Rebelo de Sousa, suggested that Mr Tamele might wish to greet "another Mozambican" participating in the event.

The "other Mozambican" turned out to be Temporário, and, naturally, pressmen present took photos of the handshake.

Mr Tamele told AIM "I shook his hand as a matter of courtesy, and simply in my capacity as someone participating in a meeting the theme of which was the future of Mozambique".

Certainly in the week following capture of the base, the bandits launched five counter-attacks, but all were quickly driven back.

Capt Lazaro Menete, who commanded the operation, denied that the Mozambican armed forces had violated the South African border in pursuit of the fleeing bandits.

He insisted that both the aerial and artillery bombardments had been directed against bandit positions inside Mozambique, thus implicitly denying

allegations made by South African Defence Minister General Magnus Malan, according to which Mozambican aircraft had violated South African airspace.

"The base is under our control, but there are still mopping-up operations going on nearby", said another officer.

The Mozambican forces believe that there will be further Renamo attempts to retake Ngungwe, and that there are probably still large quantities of arms buried in and around the base.

## Dissident visits Mozambique

An American citizen of Mozambican origin, who has played an important role in anti-Mozambican circles in the United States, returned to Mozambique for a week in May, and received VIP treatment from the Mozambican authorities.

This man, Artur Vilanculos, was one of those who attended the meeting President Joaquim Chissano held with the Mozambican community in the United States during his visit to Washington in March. Mr Chissano told that meeting "Mozambicans should feel free wherever they are. They must have the freedom to return to their country and to leave whenever they like."

Vilanculos not only accepted this invitation, but was received by President Chissano in Maputo, and on his departure was given the use of the international airport's VIP lounge, usually reserved for ministers and other senior officials.

Vilanculos was a member of Frelimo in the 1960s, but left the liberation movement in 1969, and for the following 21 years did not set foot on Mozambican soil.

He was involved with the Renamo bandits in the United States in the early 1980s, but internal struggles in the Renamo Washington office led Vilanculos to set up his own organisation, a tax-exempt foundation called "Friends of

Mozambique" of which he is the President.

Bitter rivalry between Vilanculos and the then Renamo representative Luis Serapião spilled over into bizarre accusations and counter-accusations in the letters pages of the right-wing *Washington Times* newspaper, as different American conservative groups lined up behind each of the two men. Serapião's supporters accused Vilanculos of working for the Mozambican Security Service, snasa, while the Vilanculos camp retorted that Serapião was in the pay of East German intelligence.

At an airport press conference on 9 May before returning to the United States, Vilanculos declared his "one hundred per cent support" for Mr Chissano's peace initiatives.

"I call on all of you to pray for peace and particularly for the success of the peace initiative that President Chissano has taken", he said, "and let us give prayerful thanks for the willingness of (Kenyan) President Moi and (Zimbabwean) President Mugabe to accept the role of mediators".

Asked about the Renamo announcement in Lisbon that it rejected Mr Mugabe as a mediator, Vilanculos said he found it "difficult to understand" since the bandits had earlier accepted the Zimbabwean leader.

He criticised Renamo for its murderous and destructive tactics, contrasting them with the approach taken by Frelimo's guerrilla army during the anti-colonial war.

"Frelimo never destroyed the basic infrastructures of Mozambique", said Vilanculos. "This is very different from Renamo. Unfortunately Renamo destroys things that are basic for our survival. If they kill so many people, who do they want to rule over?"

Strangely, Vilanculos denied all knowledge of Renamo's origins as a creation of the Rhodesian secret services of Ian Smith, and of its later transfer to South African Military Intelligence - despite admitting that he was recruited into Renamo by its then General Secretary, Orlando Cristina, a right-hand man of first the Rhodesians, then the South Africans. "You have more information on this than I do", he told the press conference plaintively.

Vilanculos took American citizenship in 1980, and avoided answering the question as to whether he would now apply for Mozambican citizenship, thus renouncing his American passport (dual nationality is not possible under Mozambican law).

The passport was "not important", he claimed. "My heart and spirit are Mozambican".