

Drivers tell of ambush horror

'I saw my leg explode'

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NELSPRUIT — Two South Africans drove their heavy truck through a gauntlet of automatic fire in a Mozambican rebel ambush, crushing one of their attackers to death as bullets hammered through their cabin into their legs.

Joe Odendaal of Johannesburg, who later lost a leg, and Hendrik Fourie of Benoni then had to endure two-and-a-half days of agony before being treated by a Soviet doctor in Maputo.

At one stage Mr Fourie got staff at a Mozambican clinic without painkillers or blood stocks to transfuse blood directly from his arm to save the life of his friend.

From their hospital beds in Nelspruit, the two 38-year-old men last night told The Star how their ordeal

started as they were driving on a deserted road in the Gaza province.

Mr Fourie, who had been driving at the time, said they were travelling along a quiet road from Nyabane to Maputo at about 3.30 pm last Thursday after having delivered equipment for the fishing industry.

He slowed down because of guinea fowl in the road.

"Seconds later I heard machinegun fire and saw three armed men ahead of us."

Shots rang through the truck, miraculously missing the South Africans.

They drove off as fast as they could, but about one kilometre later six more gunmen jumped out from the scrub and sprayed the vehicle with fire.

"Bullets poured through the cab and as I sped away we kept saying 'thank God each time a shot missed us.'"

Mr Odendaal said.

Then another man, carrying a heavier calibre machinegun, appeared from

nearby bushes and opened fire. "As I looked down I saw my right leg explode as a bullet hit it."

Shortly afterwards Mr Fourie felt a sharp jab as he was wounded in the left leg.

"As the gunmen kept firing I put my foot down and made straight for him."

"I saw him roll as the vehicle hit him and, looking in the rearview mirror, I saw him lying motionless after 11 wheels had gone over him."

Mr Fourie said. About 20 km further, the vehicle stopped as a result of radiator damage.

People from a nearby village came to their aid and took them to a military camp where Zimbabwean soldiers placed them on the back of an open truck and drove to a clinic about 40 km away. No painkillers were available and the doctors appeared to be drunk.

They were later driven to a Maputo hospital and on Sunday a chartered plane flew them to Nelspruit.