

BIRTH OF ARMED STRUGGLE IN MOZAMBIQUE

Recently the people of Mozambique celebrated the fifth anniversary of their hard-won independence, and the fifteenth anniversary of the start of their armed struggle.

The following is an account by Joaquim Chipande, the present Minister of Defence, of their first battle. Chipande led that first assault in FRELIMO's battle against Portuguese colonialism in Mozambique.

"After FRELIMO was formed, I was sent to Algeria to get some military training. In June, 1964, I got orders directly from President Eduardo Mondlane to start military action. Eduardo Mondlane's instructions were very precise: 'You were sent by the people. You are a son of the people. You should now return to the people to start armed struggle'. It was a period of great persecution. The PIDE was very active and even though I quickly got close to our frontier, it took me and my group of about 30, two months to actually cross the border.

"People were demobilised and demoralised because of the great wave of repression which had followed the Mueda massacre, including the bloody suppression of strikes. Eduardo Mondlane had instructed us to 'clearly define who is the enemy'. Arms are to be used against whom? Against the Portuguese army, police, and the whole administrative machinery which oppresses and massacres our people. On the other hand, all civilians, whoever they are, are part of the people. 'You will protect them, whatever their race or religion. Civilians are not our enemies - they must be protected. Advance, and we will tell you when to start the war. Create suitable conditions'. Once we crossed the frontier, we advanced. I was told to go to Cabo Delgado.

"We continued to advance, dropping off small groups to organise support, so we could attack on as many fronts as possible. It was up to me, as head of the group, to choose the first target. The Portuguese controlled all the highways so it was quite difficult to continue advancing. We marched by night, mainly barefoot through the forest so as not to leave any traces.

"However, for all our care, by the time we got to Maconia - about one hundred kilometres southeast of Mueda - the Portuguese got wind of our presence. Their vigilance was stepped up and there were arrests in the areas through which we had passed. I sent word back that it was difficult to advance farther and asked for permission to attack where we were, so as to mark the date of launching of armed struggle as soon as possible. A messenger arrived on September 15 (1964) with the word to attack on September 25.

"We held a meeting of group commanders on the 20th to work out plans and tactics. It was agreed that as this was to be the historic signal for launching people's war, the very first attack must be made in co-operation with the local people. All clandestine PRELIMO workers in the area were contacted and we explained that on the night of September 24, bridges should be destroyed and roads blocked by felling trees or digging ditches across them.

"My group of twelve was to attack Chai, a small administrative centre about forty kilometres northwest from where we were at Maconia.

"We marched the whole night of the 23rd and slept in the forest, without anything to eat. The same on the night of the 24th. We were in position at 3 a.m. on the 25th. But how to attack? The Portuguese had defence units, sentries. We didn't even know how many or how they were disposed. I gave orders to call off the attack for that night and withdraw. Some of our people objected strongly. I said: 'We've had nothing to eat or drink for three days. We'll withdraw and rest up'. Others objected: 'After coming so far, we can't stop now'. My reply was: 'We don't know the real situation. Perhaps we will kill civilians by mistake'. So we marched back fifteen kilometres and rested alongside a small lake. There at least we had water, also dense forest for protection.

"We decided to send a scout into Chai early next morning. He was in civilian clothes, a valid identity card in his pocket, and bandages around one leg - pretending he had to enter the hospital. We had given him money to buy some peanuts and manioc for us.

"He got into the administrative courtyard and was able to contact some prisoners. They told him where the police were stationed and how many, and where the sentinels were posted. He came back and drew a map of the situation. We worked out a plan, ate some manioc and peanuts, and set out immediately after sundown.

"We surrounded the building and advanced to within fifteen to twenty metres of the positions guarding the barracks. At exactly 9 a.m. one of our men tried to grab a sentry from behind, but there was a pillar in between and he just couldn't get his hands right around him. There was a scuffle and I ordered that the sentry be shot. He was killed and that was the first shot in our armed struggle. There was a sharp gun battle and the Portuguese started hurling grenades from inside the post.

"We withdrew without losses. The armed struggle had started. The next day many people fled to join us in the forest, including one of those who were in the post when we attacked. He said we had killed the head of the post and five others and that there was tremendous panic. He immediately asked to join our unit and was accepted".

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"... IN MOZAMBICAN HISTORY, THE FIGHT FOR A REVOLUTIONARY POLITICAL LINE HAS BEEN INTRINSICALLY BOUND UP WITH THE FIGHT FOR UNITY.

THE STRUGGLE TO DEFEND AND CONSOLIDATE UNITY, THE DRIVING FORCE OF THE LIBERATION STRUGGLE, DEMANDED PERMANENT VIGILANCE AND ACTION TO NEUTRALISE AND ELIMINATE THE MANOEUVRES OF THE ENEMY AND OF NATIONAL OPPORTUNIST AND REACTIONARY FORCES. THIS SAME STRUGGLE REQUIRED A CONSTANT FIGHT TO CLARIFY AND DEVELOP FRELIMO'S POLITICAL LINE, ESPECIALLY AS REGARDS THE DEFINITION OF WHO IS THE ENEMY AND THE NATURE, METHODS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE FIGHT".

- PRESIDENT SAMORA MACHEL -