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Raid by 500 South Africans Into Southern Angola Continues

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JOHANNESBURG, Sept. 18 — South African military officials said today that a raid into southern Angola that began two days ago was continuing, and that nearly 500 soldiers had been deployed to track down a battalion of Namibian insurgents.

The raid, backed by the air force, was characterized by the authorities as a pre-emptive strike against guerrillas of the South-West Africa People's Organization, which South Africa said was planning attacks in the South African-administered territory, also known as Namibia.

Spokesmen for the South African Defense Force said here that its soldiers were trying to eliminate a battalion of anywhere from 400 to 800 insurgents, and had destroyed an arms cache near the South African border on Tuesday.

The South African Air Force engaged in intensive reconnaissance flights to assist the ground troops and attacked a guerrilla command post, according to the Defense Force. Further details of the attack were unavailable. The officials also did not offer information about progress in the military operation or losses suffered by security forces or the South-West Africa People's Organization, which is known by its initials as Swapo.

The Defense Force, which has provided scant information about the raid, said on Monday that the operation followed months of intelligence-gathering in areas where the insurgents operated. It said in a statement today that its troops were split into 12 teams of about 40 men each. It said more details about the attack were not yet available "because of the nature and limited extent of the operation." The Army Chief of Staff, Lieut. Gen. Ian Gleason, said on the day the raid was announced that the operation should be completed within a week.

The raid has met with international condemnation. In an apparent response to this criticism, the Defense Force said in its statement that the raid was a "follow-up operation" that came after "at least three attempts by Swapo to infiltrate South-West Africa in large numbers." Western governments have deplored the action.

South Africa has been the target of worldwide criticism for earlier raids in Angola and Botswana. It administers South-West Africa in defiance of United Nations resolutions and a ruling by the

International Court of Justice and has been engaged in an 18-year conflict with the insurgents. It installed an interim Government in South-West Africa about three months ago, an act that critics called a cover for continued South African dominance.

The statement said that the first infiltration attempt was last January, involving about 200 insurgents. Most of the guerrillas were "destroyed," the statement said, but a "small number" escaped across the border into Angola. Two similar unsuccessful attempts had been made since security forces were withdrawn from Angola in April, according to the authorities, who said that the insurgents had killed 35 people and abducted 115 others this year.

"In actions resulting from these attempts, a total of 72 terrorists were shot dead and large quantities of weapons and ammunition destroyed," the statement said.

The Defense Force said that, despite setbacks, the rebels had become more aggressive and increasingly attacked civilians. In addition, officials said, there was closer cooperation between the guerrillas and Angolan forces. Gen. Constand Viljoen, head of the South African Defense Force, said on Monday that the Angolan forces had been told of the current military operation and asked not to interfere. A similar arrangement was reportedly made when the Defense Force made a raid into Angola last June.