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My father told us Why:  
 7Cos the AN C wants our  
 land.They re terrorists7  
 - MARZANNE ESTERHUYSE, AGED ELEVEN  
 There was a tlme when  
 border tarmers drove across  
 the Limpopo every Sunda for  
 tag In another country. Lo  
 lon5'r. In Its place: a state 0!  
 -.( near-slege  
 IT is breakfast time at Overvlakte, the  
 northernmost farm in South Africa.  
 At the head or the table, Willie  
 Esterhuyse says a prayer. His wife,  
 Elene. and their children bow their  
 head: and clasp their hands in a  
 moment of quiet thanks. While they  
 eat dye ever- present handgun and the  
 Bible'L- the two items which allow the  
 family, to live In relative peace - are  
 closest hand.  
 Thi; front yard of the. farm runs  
 down to a' dirt track, hemmed in by  
 two metres of fencing and topped with  
 thickeoils of barbed wire. Just beyond  
 lies th sandy, parched Limpopo --  
 the Zimbabwe border and one of the  
 condpts for insurgents coming back  
 to lay nes on the farmers' lancl  
 In past six months, the Dongola 7  
 area as been transformed. The  
 community that has been led by  
 attraqtive government incentives to  
 farm this isolated. thomy sembland  
 has been bound together by fear md  
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 guerrillas.  
 Armed by the SA Defence Force  
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 farmer: and their wives living dong  
 this iumon of the Limpopo have one  
 simpl aim: to keep their land free of  
 insurputs no matter what the cost.  
 "We have to follow every tpoor  
 now,-;because it could be the ANC,"  
 says Esterhuyse. hUntil three years  
 ago, ire crossed the border all the  
 time.- We used to drive :cross the  
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 before last December, when 1  
 land placed on a nearby farm  
 (0- . 7 .' -- six members of: funny,  
 for a life of partial seige.  
 Since July last year, regional army  
 officers have regttlarly travelled the  
 55km to the border farms, to train the  
 women to shoot. The; farmers,  
 connected by radio to each other and

to military headquarters, have formed a civil defense commando.

But the December blast, less than 8km from the Esterhuysen's gate, shook the conservative frontier communities. The first blast was followed by a series of landmine attacks: on South Africa's border farms.

"I didn't sleep for three nights after the attack last December," says Elene Esterhuysen. "We expected an attack on the house. What really worries me are all the new weapons, like mortars. They could march on the Zimbabwe side of the river. And shoot into our house."

For the Esterhuysens, who are ardent government supporters, the issue which has sparked nationwide rebellion by blacks for nearly two years is not the struggle for political power. It is the land. In the six short years since they moved here, the family has carved out their cotton and wheat fields, hectare by hectare, from the bush.

In that time, they have taken off a total of two weekends.

Some rain, but little drops to the water from (16615 under the Limpopo's sands is a complex and tenuous affair.

"We've put our lives into this, our sweat. Everything. We'll never give it up," says Elene Esterhuysen.

Instead, she is resigned to the possibility that one day she will have to fight for their survival. "I teach my children to load the magazines. So if we are attacked, they can help us load the ammunition, while my husband and I shoot. They must feel they are part of the whole thing."

Since the December attack, Marunne and her eight-year-old brother. Piet have ridden half-way to school in a motorised personnel vehicle, joining other farm children in a large military truck on the main road to travel the rest of the way. At their school in the border town of Messim, "The army come to show us what landmines and grenades look like," says Marunne. "So if we see them on the farm, we know they are dangerous and we won't pick them up. They teach us at school what to do if the ANC attacks. We have to fall down and pretend we're dead."

The situation is more than in the distant school lessons for those who live here. On July 10, police and suspected ANC guerrillas fought an armed battle on a farm in the district next to Dongolga in which 4 summarily killed the CDA's.

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shootouts on the borders.

But for many would-be farmers like Willie Esterhuyse, accepting such risks has meant their only chance to buy land.

"I always wanted a farm," he says

Then, While working in a cotton research station in a nearby town, "I heard the government was offering a good deal for farmers to move here. I bought the land for R130 000, and got to work.

"It's unbelievable how different this area is now. I think the government really needs us here for security." Indeed, the border farmers, with their political loyalty to President PW Botha's administration and their protection of the land, form one of the most efficient para-military forces available to the government.

"We're ready- for anything," says Esterhuyse. "If there's direct fighting, we'll sort them out chop-ehop; that's for sure."

Aside from being able to call on the help of his own family, Esterhuyse claims to have learned a crucial lesson from the, white Rhodesians, who found themselves dangerously isolated by hostile farmworkers, and easy targets for guerrillas, in the blacks'- battle for independence before 1980.

"The way I protect my labourers," he says, "they'll never protect the ANC. They ask me, 'Who are these people who put down the landmines? We must kill them.'" And, says Esterhuyse, "if the local people don't help and support them, they'll never win."

Besides, he says, the farmworkers need only look across the river to discover what freedom means. It means hunger," he says.

Last Sunday, 10 Zimbabweans crossed the border as illegal immigrants, looking for work on the South African side. We handed them over to the police, to be sent back. But they always return," says Esterhuyse. So sure are the local farmers of their workers' trust that they plan to arm them in the near future. We'll select very carefully who we give arms to," says Esterhuyse. "But (it's) have to be part of the whole security thing."

Still, his own farmworkers live in a pitiful compound of mud huts and small brick houses, and their pay offers only bare subsistence, although it is average for the district. Women earn R150 a day shifting the irrigation pipes. The highest-paid man on the farm earns R2509 month.

And yet for now, Esterhuyse, - who says the government should have moved faster with its reforms, "appears to have the loyalty of his

workforce. 'They are just an scared of the ANC as we are," he says. "The good thing about landmines is that they can kill anybody. Not just white people."

In the opinion of many political observers, the Esterhuyses and their neighbours are buying time, hoping for a solution. but facing a deteriorating security situation. The government has begun surveying the border track to tar it. making landmine attacks on it impossible. Last month theyy offered to give the Dongola farmers mine-proof vehicles in which to travel around their farms. And the women have been supplied by the SADF with Israeli-made Uzi rifles.

But despite the increasing danger of attacks on its land, the community lives with a quiet confidence. The children play under the giant moshatu trees, and ride in their father's open pickup truck along the border fence.

"There Ire lots of dangers here." says 11-year-old Mananne, "but we know the Lord is with us."