

had happened.

HEAVY BLOWS

This was a bitter time for all of us. Our movement was taking heavy blows. The dark decade of the 1960s was upon us. Our main function was to survive and regroup. The capture of our leaders at Rivonia, with Denis amongst them (so that was where he had been!), led to more and more detentions, and soon I was amongst them, being questioned on a whole range of things, including the camp at Mamre. Fortunately, we had managed to get many comrades out, which was not all that easy, Cape Town being far from any border. One of them we were especially sorry to see go. His name was Martin, and although he seemed a bit soft for the city, having spent most of his life in educational institutions in the Transkei, he had been virtually the only ANC intellectual in what we called 'the locations', the other intellectuals being mainly with the PAC.

I remember going to fetch Martin one night to take him to a safe hideout, the police were after him. A car in which he was travelling had been found to contain ANC pamphlets, and this required real courage on my part, since the dogs in the location set up such a howl, and there was no way of convincing them that this white man marching along nervously was a comrade who believed in the Freedom Charter.

Twenty and more years later, at the ANC National Consultative Conference in Kabwe, a comrade comes up to me, stares in my face, looks again, and asks if I am comrade Albie Sachs. I stare back at him, there is something familiar about him, but I can't really recognise him. "Remember me?" he asks "from the camp in Mamre..." And another comrade, and another, all were in the first detachments of MK, and saw action in Zimbabwe before being imprisoned for a dozen years by Smith's forces. Now they and I are together again, all of us still struggling, active and alive, parts of this indestructible thing called the ANC, hugging each other in celebration of our survival and of our confidence in the future. And there up on the platform, is the soft, solitary intellectual, only now he is not called Martin any more, he is known as Chris.

* The Chris (Martin) referred to is the Army Commissar of MK.

DYNAMITE THIEVES

Ronnie Kasrils

"You're not doing enough!" the burly figure of our commander, Joe Modise, snapped at us.

We were meeting him secretly in a sugar cane field near Durban. The year was 1962. He was down from Johannesburg, shortly after the arrest of our Commander-in-Chief, Nelson Mandela, and he was addressing Curnick Ndlovu, Billy Nair, myself and other members of the Natal Regional Command of Umkhonto we Sizwe.

We had opened our combat account on December 16th 1961, with home-made bomb attacks on government targets and were busy building our network. After comrade Mandela's arrest in July, 1962 we had recorded our protest with petrol bomb attacks on goods trains and regime offices. But to be honest we had not been active enough.

In the Transvaal there had been some spectacular actions with dynamite smuggled out of the mines. One of our number proffered the excuse: "If only we had dynamite like you comrades on the Reef, comrade Joe." Modise cut in: "We're getting small quantities from sympathetic mine workers. You've got quarries here in Natal", he growled, "get your own supplies and get on with it!"

With that the meeting was over and we felt both sheepish and determined to prove we could deliver the goods. We ordered comrades to be on the lookout for sources of dynamite. Word soon came in of a road construction camp outside Pine-town, near Marianhill, that was using dynamite. Curnick Ndlovu, our regional commander, ordered me to reconnoiter the place. I drove out with a fellow MK cadre, Eleanor Anderson (later my wife) to locate the place. We packed a picnic lunch and after some searching found the site.

A road was being blasted out of the hills. There was a hive of activity with vehicles and workers busy on the mammoth task. Unperturbed we set-out our picnic quite close to a formidable barbed-wire enclosure with a pair of red-boxed magazines.

It was a challenging sight and we imagined the desirable sticks of dynamite stored inside. No

one paid this peculiar white couple much attention. We placidly munched our sandwiches and sipped our cokes even though, what with the dust and commotion and distant booming of dynamite blasting in the hills, the once rustic scene now scarcely qualified as your ideal picnic spot.

I knitted my brows, puzzling how we would need to cut our way through the tough-looking fencing. Eleanor was much more practical than I. Her solution was simplicity itself. "If only we could get over to that padlocked gate and check the manufacture and number of the lock we wouldn't even need wire-cutters" she observed.

In answer to my puzzled expression she explained: "Once you can get the number of any lock it's possible to buy the self-same one and with it the key. All the makes are on sale in the hardware shops and that padlock looks a common type to me" she confidently concluded.

The suggestion seemed worthwhile exploring and taking advantage of a lull in the activity in our vicinity I sauntered over to the gate in question. To my surprise I immediately noticed the brand name and serial number engraved on the padlock, yet another example of the better observation qualities possessed by the so-called fairer sex (at least over this male anyway)! we finished our picnic and departed.

During the next week we checked-out the various hardware stores in Durban. Eleanor returned from one such excursion to Henwoods in West Street. "Here you are" she coolly announced, handing me a copy of the padlock and key I had seen at Marianhill.

One night a week later Billy, Eric Mtshali, Mannie Isaacs who was our driver, and I assembled for the raid. Additional reconnaissance had established that a solitary guard always went drinking between 8 and 10 pm.

We arrived at our destination leaving Mannie parked by some bushes. He had no idea about the true nature of the mission and thought we were attending yet another clandestine meeting in the bush. We approached the object of our interest with bated

breath. I clutched Eleanor's key in my sweaty palm still doubting whether it had the power to open the gate. Billy and Eric had large wire-cutters in case the key failed us. We carried crow-bars to force open the magazines - burglar-style! I had a pistol in my belt but fortunately the watchman was relaxing, as expected, at a local shebeen.

DESPERADOS

We skulked up to the gate and quite a band of desperados we must have looked. I fiddled with the padlock and engaged the key. It fitted easily enough. One turn and the lock clicked open. What a gratifying sound that was. We were in!

We went quickly to work as though we were professional safe crackers. Sparks cut the night air as we jemmied the magazine doors open. We began emptying the contents. Box upon box of explosives piled up. We had not anticipated that there would be such a quantity and realised we should have come with a truck. We sweated heavily from the labour and excitement as we carried box after box over to Mannie's station wagon. He was perplexed at the sight of all the boxes and Billy told him we were collecting propaganda material. There were so many boxes we tossed what we could not take away into a nearby stream.

"Get moving!" Billy shouted and Mannie drove off in a cloud of dust. Eric and I lay on the boxes of dynamite in the rear of the vehicle as we careered along a bumpy, gravel road. The idea had been to take our haul to Eleanor's flat in central Durban but we had not expected such a large booty. We needed somewhere more remote. "Head for George Naicker's place". Billy commanded and after forty minutes of the adrenalin racing through our veins and the vehicle speeding through the night we reached our destination on the outskirts of town.

George was as cool as an English cucumber. On his instructions the goodies were stashed in the store-room of a school opposite his home. It was school holidays and he had access to the store-room key.

Next morning the Durban newspapers carried the sensational headlines: "HALF-A-TON OF DYNAMITE STOLEN NEAR PINETOWN!" as Mannie Isaacs drove to work he glimpsed the news posters carrying that headline and in a daze drove

through a red traffic signal and collided with another car.

We knew next to nothing about using dynamite let alone storing it. I was dispatched to the Durban library to consult books on mining and explosives. To my horror I read the safety regulations: "Never drive in excess of 15 m.p.h. when transporting dynamite" was one rule; "It is forbidden to strike a match or make sparks where dynamite is stored" was another; "Dynamite must be stored under cool, well ventilated conditions" was yet one more chilling rule.

What alarmed me far more than the recollection of the



Ronnie Kasrils

violent way we had cracked-open the magazines and our rapid get-a-way was the horrific thought of our explosives sweating miserably in the small, stuffy store-room of the school. Now I realised why the magazines had ventilation slats and other such design features.

We soon installed an electric fan in the storeroom and proceeded to construct caches around the outskirts of Durban. Thoughts were already turned to our next round of MK action.

"DESERT RAT"

For that we required expert advice. Jack Hodgson, "the desert rat" who had taught us how to manufacture our first chemically based bombs was sent from Johannesburg to give us expert tuition. He was not only a war veteran having served against the fascists in the North African campaign, hence his nickname, but he was also an ex-miner and knew as much about dynamite as Alfred Nobel himself. We could not have asked for a better qualified, more cheerful and inspiring instructor. At that stage our policy was not to endanger

human life but Jack never ceased to tell us that "the best sight in the world was dead fascists cops in the gutter". He was simply delighted with our success and warmly congratulated us for our initiative and daring.

Joe Modise was a happy man too. He dispatched Abdullay Jassat to us to collect supplies for the Reef and the Cape. Comrade Modise also sent detonators because although we found dynamite sticks, gelignite, cordex and safety fuses in our haul we must have dumped the all-essential detonating caps in the stream. MK now had teeth of dynamite and our sabotage campaign took-off with a vengeance. Electric pylons, railway lines and electrification masts as well as transformers were cut as though made of butter and pass offices and other administrative objects were demolished.

Next step would be combat action proper when trained cadres and weaponry would arrive from abroad. Eric Mtshali was one of the first from Durban to take the underground road north. But we underestimated the enemy's reaction. We had not mastered the art of clandestine organisation sufficiently. More particularly we trusted the ability of comrades to withstand solitary confinement and torture. Many cracked under interrogation and some rats sold-out to save their own miserable skins revealing our secrets. It was this rather than the enemy's skills of detection that led to the collapse of our underground network.

Cumick and Billy were amongst many who were arrested. They were sentenced to twenty years each but emerged from prison with no regrets and have thrown themselves back into the fray. George Naicker served 14 years and is with us in exile as cheerful and unperturbed as ever. Eleanor and Abdullhay were arrested but both made daring escapes. The three of us met up in Dar Es Salaam where I was fortunate to marry Eleanor in 1965. We also met Jack abroad and were privileged to work with him until his death in London in 1978. Mannie dropped out of things and died of natural causes in Durban. To this day I still work closely with Joe Modise in our People's Army, Umkhonto We Sizwe.

Those were thrilling, pioneering days of MK. We would not have changed them for anything in the world!