

SAWING ELECTRIC PYLONS

chemicals to make timing devices. We did not use watches and modern electronic devices for timing. We merely used sulphuric and nitric acid and capsules. We were also not armed like MK is today. But we were already involved in the struggle and we knew the enemy. We were learning, and the enemy was also learning, learning from us, from the mistakes we were making. Eventually it was the passing of the ninety-day detention law and the Bruno Mtolo's that led to our capture. Many key members of the regional and district command broke under torture not only in our region but throughout the country. This led to a chain reaction and of course I was also rounded up on the 7th August 1963. They came to my working place, a restaurant where I was employed as a waiter. I had no chance of escaping, the back door was locked. The security branch led by Steenkamp who subsequently became a deputy commissioner of police detained me.

I was taken home and the place was thoroughly searched. Let me add that I had realised the dragnet was closing and although I had a passport I decided not to leave the country as I was not instructed by my command. Little did I know that the dragnet was also closing in our command which was set up at Kloof in Northern part of Durban after the Rivonia arrests and called Little Rivonia. I was heavily tortured and I realised the police had all the information which they obtained from other members of my squad and of course the traitor Bruno Mtolo. Our trial ran simultaneously with the Rivonia Trial and lasted for four months. There were 18 of us. The minimum sentence given was five years and the maximum was 20 years, given to Billy and Curnick who are out now and once again playing a prominent role in the UDF and trade unions. I got ten years and was released in 1974.

Finally the birth of MK was practically, in a very classical sense, the beginning of people's war. The very first phase of this form of struggle was initiated by the people themselves. Our organisation was inside, our base was inside and our rear was inside. Our strength was within the masses, the oppressed masses. This is how a people's army grows, this is how MK grew.

Comrade Andrew Masondo is the Director of the ANC Department of Manpower Development. A veteran of MK, he relates his role during the Sabotage Campaign.

The Sharpeville and Langa massacres in 1960 and the banning of the African National Congress created a new atmosphere amongst the people of South Africa and within the liberation movement. People began to question the concept of a non-violent struggle. There began sporadic acts of violence. Even liberal elements began to think of resorting to violence and consequently began to form an organisation committed to armed action, the African Resistance Movement (ARM).

Some members of the Congress Movement were attracted towards ARM. This was an indication of the impatience of the membership of the movement with the concept of non-violence in the midst of the brutality of the racist regime.

The idea of the movement moving away from its non-violent stance was discussed within youth circles even earlier than 1960. I remember that a group of us at Fort Hare actually formed a group to prepare for the eventuality of an armed struggle taking place.

We gave ourselves the task to gather information about military camps in the country. The group did not go far because we then lost contact as some left the country and others did not keep up the correspondence. One of the weaknesses of the group was that we were not a homogenous group ideologically. Therefore it is not surprising that the group died.

When Umkhonto we Sizwe announced itself, for me it was something I received with enthusiasm and envy because I was not a member of the founding group. I promised myself that I shall join Umkhonto we Sizwe as soon as I could find out how.

One day I discussed the whole question with Comrade Govan Mbeki. He told me that he was not very much interested in me joining Umkhonto we Sizwe because he had given me a task which he thought was as important. At that time I was working as a rural area organiser in the area from King Williams Town to Fort Beaufort.

In the Regional Rural Areas Committee I was working with people like Castro (Kati Maya), Vuyisile Mini. It was these two comrades with whom I was very close and both were active in Volunteer Corps that I expressed my desire to join Umkhonto we Sizwe and be involved in violent struggle. Though I did not know then that Mini was in the Regional Command.

It was not until October 1962 when Mini came back from the Lobatse Conference that he recruited me into Umkhonto we Sizwe. He reminded me that the two of us were in fact being indisciplined, going against the word of our Chief, Govan, who had advised against my joining Umkhonto we Sizwe. He then told me that my task was to create MK units and command them. I was not to involve myself in acts of sabotage. In spite of the oath to obey instructions of my senior commanders I once more defied another order.

I created three units in the Victoria East area and one in the Middledrift area. The Victoria East units consisted of one in Fort Hare, and two in Ntselamanzi. We used to act in all the units and acted with all of them.

I continued to do my work as an organiser in the rural areas. One of the burning questions at the time was the culling of stock and the rehabilitation scheme. The peasants were against this scheme. They were against the fencing of the land and the contouring of their fields. In Gaga one of the peasants ploughed against the contour lines and we had to go to court and fight his case.

One of our units was detailed to cut the fences and we did this consistently. The peasants were employed to build the fences and we agreed that they must build them because they had no work. In this way we organised the peasants and developed a powerful movement of peasants.

OBSTACLES

One of the obstacles we faced was lack of explosives

I could not get explosive chemicals from the university because they were guarded closely. We started to reconnoitre the pillboxes that were found in the quarries.

One day we left Alice for Debe Nek where there was a quarry and decided to go and break the pillbox to get dynamite. We sent one of our comrades in KwaNgwenya to reconnoitre the place. He gave us the information that the pillbox was the usual one made of planks. This was false because when we reached the target we found that it was steel and we could not open it. We had taken a risk and had travelled the distance for nothing. While we had no explosives we busied ourselves with cutting telephone wires. This we did every week.

We were very close with the students in Lovedale Institution because we had an ANC branch there. We kept on hearing that one of the teachers was playing a foul game against the students who were political. They kept on saying we must do something about him. I was not happy about these reports and told my two comrades, Rex Lupondwana and Relu that I am not sure if the reports were true.

One day one of the African Special Branch told me that this teacher was working for the enemy. Even then I was not convinced, until one day when I had gone to a meeting in the mountains with the peasants at night and I was passing through the town I saw the SB's car and I hid myself. To my surprise I saw this teacher with the white Special Branch.

We then decided to petrol bomb him. We prepared our bottles. It was myself, Rex and Relu. We then threw the bottles through the window. Unfortunately when Rex threw his bottle he held it with a hankie which had his name. The following day he was picked up with Relu. Relu had a good alibi. Rex was then arrested but he never squealed against us. We got him a good lawyer and he was sentenced to 5 years. This was in December 1962.

ELECTRIC PYLONS

The fact that we had no explosives was frustrating us because we wanted to blow some electric pylons. One day whilst travelling by car from East London to Alice we noted that some pylons were made of wood. This gave me an idea of



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how we should deal with the pylons. I then checked on the information about the grid and how the switches work. It became clear to me that we could saw the pylons and pull them down. I also found that if there is a cut the switches go off and that if we chose a good pylon we could affect a big area.

I then instructed one of the comrades from Ntselamanzi to reconnoitre a particular pylon I had spotted as one on a junction to a number of lines. I instructed him to check the place day and night to check on traffic.

During this period I went to Port Elizabeth to consult with the Regional Command. I used to do so periodically to give reports and get instructions. It was during these times that I made acquaintance with Wilson Kayingo and Zinakile Mkaba. My immediate contact was Koli-sile Mdwayi, who sold out later.

One day Mdwayi told me that we should go to Peter in the Red Location (New Brighton) to make arrangements to get a 303 rifle so that in the evening we could practise how to use it. We went and then in the evening we went to Peter by car driven by one comrade. We took the rifle and on the way we picked up comrade Mkaba and went to the house of the driver's brother who was away with the family. Mkaba was the instructor.

Mdwayi and I were in front of him. He showed us how to load and cock. He was demonstrating how to balance the rifle for shooting. The rifle was pointing in our direction. He then pulled the trigger thinking that there was no bullet in the chamber. The next moment we heard a

loud shot just above Mdwayi's head. It is a pity he did not hit him because if he did maybe he, Khayingo and Mini would be still alive. It was Mdwayi who sold them. We left the house quickly.

Later we sent one of our comrades to plaster the hole in the wall. He did not take the bullet out. He also painted the wall. After I had been arrested Mdwayi took the police to Peter to get the rifles, but fortunately Peter denied knowledge and when the police searched they did not get the rifles, because he had shifted them. Then Mdwayi took the police to the house and they dug the hole and found the bullet. Mdwayi said it was Peter who did that. Peter was not even there that night but he got 20 years for it.

Whilst I was in Port Elizabeth we had discussed the elimination of one of the Bantustan leaders who would be coming to Fort Hare in April 1963. In February 1963 Mdwayi was sent to bring me a pistol to do the job. He brought the pistol. Fortunately for me I was arrested in March 1963. He would have sold me out if I had done the job as he sold out the other comrades we worked with.

Middle of February 1963 I asked the comrade I had sent to reconnoitre the pylon to report as we wanted to do the job the very week. He had no report. I then told him we were no longer going to do the job. Instead I did the reconnaissance myself and decided to use the new unit I had formed at the University.

It was a unit consisting of four, and comrade Nelson Dick who came from Ntselamanzi but was not at the university. This man was my best comrade. The two of us were involved with all the units. He was brave and I trusted him.

The two comrades from the university were Vakala and Mdingi. I arranged with Nelson to prepare the tools for sawing the pylon, and he was to meet me in the evening at 20h00. I told the other comrades to come to my house at 19h00.

The comrades came at 19h00. When we were preparing to go out, we went to the gate and I then said to them that I had an uneasy feeling and therefore the job had to be dropped. We went back to the house. At 19h30 it began to rain. I then told them we had to go because

the weather was good for the job.

We then left and at 20h00 we reached the spot where I said we would meet Nelson but he was not there. So we crossed the river and went to his place. We found him and started our journey which was a mile from Fort Hare.

I had a pistol, a .22 Browning, which Nelson and I had bought, for \$5 from a friend, who said he had dug it out of his garden. It was rusted and had no part which was moving. We then oiled it for some time and ultimately we got it working. To our happiness when we took out the magazine it had six bullets.

When we reached the spot

When the friend with the shoes left he was intercepted. They took the shoes and told him not to tell me and he did likewise. The next mistake I made was not to wash the jersey I had on. We washed everything except that jersey. We left it in the bathroom.

Unfortunately I also had some documents which were incriminating. I had the Freedom Charter, Ten Point programme and the PAC basic document. I was making a comparative study. I also had Guerrilla Warfare by Che Guavara, the April Thesis by Lenin and 2 boxes of Mandela's Speech in court. I had distributed two boxes and was going to send these two boxes to East London. Before I left for the job I had said that the following day I

We were charged and three of us were sentenced. I got 12 years, Nelson 9 and Mdingi 8. Vakala was discharged. Then in 1965 I was charged again for furthering the aims of the ANC, membership of the ANC and soliciting funds for the ANC. The charge for furthering the aims of the ANC was withdrawn and I got one year for membership and 2 years for soliciting funds. The two years ran concurrently with the twelve years. I therefore served 13 years on Robben Island.

During the second trial a comrade who was part of our MK servicing unit gave evidence against me. It was a pity because he was very useful to me. He used to work at the post office and could get all parcels ad-



we started to work on the pylon. We sawed the pole, and then pushed it. When the cables broke the air was electrified and we fell. We woke up and started running. One of the cables had landed on Nelson's thigh and burnt him but because of the situation he ran with us, feeling the pain. After reaching my house we all dispersed. We had been working in the rain and we were wet and muddy.

Then my wife told me that the police were there at home. I then gave one of my friends who were occupying my servant's quarters my shoes to take to another worker friend of mine. This was a mistake because when the police left because of the darkness caused by our operation they left a policeman three houses from mine to observe.

would take this material to the places where I used to keep it. This was another mistake. I should have cleaned before I left.

The comrade who did not fulfil his task of reconnoitring did us a great deal of harm because we would have acted a week before.

The police had said I should go to the police station to sign for the documents. The following day I went. They asked me where I had been, I told them it was not their business. They then made me sign and left me. It was on a Sunday. On Monday at about 16h00 the sabotage squad led by Donald Card came to the house, searched and found the jersey with the wood chips. I was arrested. Then later my

dressed to me in my many pseudonyms. The member of our unit who did not do his work and thus caused our arrest also gave evidence.

I shall always salute the late Rex. He died on his way to Lesotho in a car accident. When I was in Umlazi he was on his way to see me when he was involved in a car accident that killed his fiancée. I dip my revolutionary cap to my comrades who went to the gallows singing, Mini, Mkaba and Kayingo.

