

# THE LONGEST NIGHT

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Immediately after the 16th of December 1961 the Security Branch raided a number of houses throughout the country trying to find a clue as to who the saboteurs were that struck on that day. Reggie's house was one of those raided where the police found a gas pistol, some test tubes and some nitro-glycerine. As a result he was amongst those who were arrested in December 1961.

The Security Branch were convinced that Reggie was involved in the acts of sabotage that took place. But the only evidence they had was those items found at his place. Reggie appeared in court and was remanded (at that time there were no detention clauses and people had to appear in court within 72 hrs of their arrests). That meant that Reggie had to spend Christmas and New Year 1961 in custody. When Reggie appeared in court in January 1962 he was found guilty but he had a very good alibi as to why he had these items. Reggie was given a minor fine of about R50 but the S.B. were not happy at all and decided to keep a tab on his activities. The regional Command decided to suspend Reggie from the activities of MK for a short while.

## DIFFICULT PERIOD

This period was a very difficult one for all of us. We were all very young, had no experience in underground work and we were all well known (S.B. knew all of us active members of the Congress Movement) and yet at this stage we were going into the underground. We were untrained, our training was on the actual job. We were learning how to use dynamite, how to make Molotov Cocktail, pipe bombs and did a lot of reading. (At the time of my arrest the police found a book published by the Americans which dealt with guerilla warfare as espoused by Che' Guevara and Mao tse Tung, published as a counter-insurgency book but very useful to us). We were told not to carry any weapons, to be absolutely certain that we take no lives and to be very diligent.

A serious problem that we faced was the fact that we were all involved in the Transvaal Indian Youth Congress, the South African Peace Council and other organisations. We used to sell the movement's newspapers,

Spark, New Age, etc. But after the formation of MK our first allegiance was to MK which meant the other work had to suffer. Coincidentally I was elected Secretary of the Transvaal Indian Youth League at this particular time and as a result of the added MK duties my tasks as Secretary were neglected. This was noticeable because when we assembled for an appointment either myself, Shirish or Reggie would be absent. We were accused of becoming lazy and it became difficult for us to find excuses.

Once we demanded a meeting with senior Congress members because there were lots of issues that we wanted to clear up. After a long time this meeting was finally to materialise, but when we were supposed to proceed to the meeting Reggie and Shirish reminded me of some duties relating to MK. I tried to explain that as Secretary I had to be present but they convinced me and off we went and as a result I missed the meeting. My mother, my brothers and sisters all fought with me but it was difficult for me to explain. The following day at the offices the young people gave me hell. They accused me of all kinds of things and I could just not explain my way out. Reggie and Shirish each concocted some stories. Shirish said that his uncle was sick and he had to drive his father to his uncle's home. I could not make such an excuse because my mother, sisters and brothers were at the meeting.

Another difficulty we faced was transporting explosives etc. If I think of our comrades carrying the AK 47 through the

streets of TJ, how they are moving material today reminds me of an incident. I had a pistol which I had to move from my house to a place about 5-6 km away. I was very nervous and wrapped it in paper, made a nice parcel out of it, put it in a plastic packet and over it I put lots of food and other things. I carried it through the heart of TJ but every time I saw a policeman I imagined that he could see right through the plastic bag. I was on pins and needles right up to my destination. I remember another incident very well. I was sitting with Aziz and Essop Pahad in the restaurant owned by the elder Pahad when a chap came up to us and said he's got a machine-gun to sell for R100. We did not know this man and told him that we had nothing to do with it. But it worried us that here we let go a machine-gun which could be useful to MK.

## DYNAMITE

When Reggie got back into the unit a man approached him in his house and offered to sell him a box of dynamite. At that stage it was very difficult to get hold of dynamite and in every region an instruction was given to try and find dynamite. Reggie of course naturally told this man that he is not interested, but informed the unit. The region was informed and promised to investigate this man whose name is Gamat Jardien. After three months of investigation they found that Gamat Jardien stayed in Booyens, was a petty crook with tremendous knowledge in the use of dynamite. The region thought not only should we buy the dynamite from him but we also try to recruit him. Reggie talked to him and found him a very willing person and was keen to join MK. He was then recruited and introduced to me and Shirish. We had a number of political discussions with him and also pointed out frankly to him that as MK we were very naive in the use of explosives. He then promised to teach us and we later went out for experiments.

I remember one time going to a farm about 15 km north of TJ. Gamat Jardien merely took out the dynamite, stuck it onto a tree and lit it. It felled the tree. We were impressed with how he felled that tree. He then showed us how to go about it.



Then 1963 came along. Gamat Jardien had shown us a very good target near a Coloured township called Riverlee. We went over to the target and observed it and reported to the region. The region fully agreed that it should be our next target and decided that we should go on the job on the 16th April 1963. Everything was planned but for some strange reasons which I can't recall, at the last minute the region decided that we should postpone it for the next day.

Gamat came on the agreed time with his car and the dynamite and we informed him of the postponement. Gamat seemed very anxious and dissatisfied and tried to persuade us to tackle the job as planned. We explained that when the region takes a decision it is final. He then persuaded us to go and check the area and the target again. We got to the scene, everything was planned, where we'd stop, how we were going to move, etc. We then observed the target again.

After our reconnaissance, on our return as we were coming down Bree street we heard a knock in the car. We stopped and thought that could be a serious problem as we needed the car for the job the following day. I walked home while Gamat took the other two comrades home, (it was on his route) in his broken down car. The following day, the 17th April we prepared ourselves to go on the job. Shirish and I attended a meeting earlier that evening and from the meeting we went to Doornfontein. I put on jeans, a black jersey and gloves. We left home at about eleven in the evening and I remember my mother asking where I was going to that time of the night.

We went to where Reggie was working as a waiter and he immediately informed us that he was not happy with the behaviour of Gamat Jardien. We were very surprised that he could give us the assurance that the car would be fixed. And indeed as we were talking he arrived with the car fixed as promised. He told us he took the car in the early morning and told them that he wanted it before five and got it. All three of us got into the car and drove to Reggie's home. Reggie and myself got off and went into the house. Reggie gave me a rod to keep and told me with the first false move Gamat make I must hit him very hard. At that time Reggie was a very big guy, he weighed almost

200Lbs, not fat this was all muscle. We then agreed that if anything happened Reggie would be the guy to lead the attack on him. We returned to the car and moved towards Riverlea. We parked the car as planned and got out. Shirish and I went to the signal post, Gamat went to the tool shed and Reggie stood guard approximately 10-15 metres away. Suddenly there was a strange noise, a long hooter sound. We all looked up. The sound died and yet there was no car in sight. The main road was about 150 metres away from where we were and no one could see a car passing. Nevertheless we wrote it off as some passing car. We then decided to go on with the job and as I was fixing the dynamite to the signal post we noticed that Gamat had made a little fire near the tool shed. I shouted at him asking him what the hell he was doing. Reggie on the other hand became impatient and shouted at me to light the "bloody" fuse. I lit the fuse and as I lit it we heard a police whistle. Reggie shouted telling us to run for our lives. We ran, I jumped a fence of more than one metre in my attempt to get away.

We ran to where Reggie was and the three of us, noticing that Gamat Jardien was not around, searched for him but Gamat had disappeared. As we were approaching the car the whole place lit up. It was like broad day-light and the next thing we heard was "stop, put up your hands." All of us stopped simultaneously. A revolver went off and my hand was hit. I did not realise that I was shot. It was only later when I saw blood that I realised I was shot. We were surrounded by dozens of policemen wearing railway balaclavas.

It was early April and it was bitterly cold. We were asked what we were doing there that time of the night. All of us without hesitation replied we'd come with Gamat Jardien. They asked us where Gamat Jardien was and we told them that his sister lived in Riverlea and he had gone to her as we were having a problem with our car. A cop was sent to look for Gamat but came back within a minute saying there was no Gamat. At that point the explosion went off. It went off with a tremendous bang and Swanepoel shouted "Ahah Mandela se soldate".

They then got stuck into us. I was first in line and they hit me down. Reggie tried to protest asking them if they could not see

that I'd been shot. "Hey Koolie jy is harde bek ne?", with that they brought him down. They then worked on him breaking a couple of his ribs. We were bundled into cars and taken to the police station. At the police station my hand became very swollen. It felt as if the whole arm from the shoulder was collapsing on me. I pleaded for a doctor or to be taken to hospital, but they refused, telling me: "Hey you gonna die here". The policeman in charge later made a call (presumably consulting some senior) and when he came back said "Vat die koolie hospital toe". I was taken by about four policemen who literally picked me up and threw me into the pick-up van. At Coronationville Hospital the doctor, who was a very nice guy, had to tear my clothing off and then he saw the bullet sticking out just next to the shoulder blade. The bullet entered through my arm and passed on to between the shoulder blades where it got stuck. All the doctor did was to pull it out using a tweezer. He ordered that I be admitted but the cops refused. He then asked them to sign a document stating that they were taking full responsibility because as far as he was concerned I was to be hospitalised. He, I want to emphasise, was very pleasant. He gave me some pain-killers which they took away later.

When we returned to the police station Reggie and Shirish were not there. The next I heard was their screams. I heard them pleading: "Please help, leave me. I don't know anything." I realised that these chaps were being beaten up and I thought to myself: "my God I'm next." When Shirish came out of that room I couldn't recognise him. His face was battered. He couldn't even put his glasses on. Reggie could hardly walk. They put us all into separate cars and I was taken home. When we got to Doornfontein the cops just started banging the door. My two brothers, two sisters and my mother were shocked when they saw me. I was in very bad shape and my family demanded an explanation. They started their search, cutting open pillows and mattresses.

They broke the tiles of the fire place looking for arms and ammunition. On finding the book I earlier referred to they remarked "Oh so you are reading guerilla warfare." They also found



lots of letters. Mac Maharaj was staying at my place and ran a newspaper called Parade. In fact it was one of our papers. Mac was the editor and the sole journalist on. They went through all those letters which included letters to SANROC and other sporting organisations and took them away. During all this my family became very agitated and refused the cops to sit down. I was taken back to Marshall Square, locked in a cell all by myself, with no blankets and I was in terrible pain. It was the longest night in my life.

After sentence, when we were in prison we hoped that MK would continue. We sat and listened to hear of MK activities and sporadically here and there we got news of an explosion and we would jump with joy. We met comrades who had gone for training in Ethiopia. Amongst them were James Chirwa, a Malawian comrade who has just completed a sentence of 20 years, Ernest Malgas known as Jumbo, Henry Fazzie, and others. These comrades were a source of tremendous encouragement to us. We questioned them about what was happening in Africa, whether they met O.R. Tambo when they passed through Tanzania, what he said to them etc. They brought some new songs to us and we sang them.

Then there followed a long spell of lull when nothing happened but we still had confidence in our MK. We then heard of the Wankie Campaign and later some of the comrades who were involved landed on the Island. We questioned them at length about the nature of their training, what happened to them, how it was in the battlefield, etc. We kept on getting news of comrades infiltrating the country. There was the case of James April and the case of the comrades who were picked up in 1972. All this gave us a lot of encouragement.

When I was released in 1973 there were hardly any visible activities of MK. The 1976 uprising took place and shortly after there was the handgrenade incident on the border with Swaziland where two policemen were severely injured. I finally left the country in 1977 and came to Maputo where for the first time I came into direct contact with the new breed of MK. The MK of today is a completely different MK. It is an MK that is sophisticated, using the AK 47, limpet mines

and RPG 7. An MK that has proved its worth in the battlefield.

MK has become a household word in S.A. When we think our days when very few people talked of MK and today when almost every young person,

almost everyone in South Africa talks of MK, one realises the tremendous strides we have taken. MK has come a long way and it's through MK activities and the leadership of the ANC. I'm certain it won't be long before South Africa is free.

## The second stage: Attempts to get back

Joe Slovo

... From then it became clear that we were entering the second phase, which was the attempt to reconstruct the political underground and to attempt to return to the country those activists who had been trained in the art and science of people's military struggle.

Of course in one sense the two sides of these endeavours stand in contradiction with one another. On the one hand you cannot fight a people's war without the leadership of a political organisation. You need an underground, which is capable of providing both political and military leadership. On the other hand the post-Sharpeville and post-Rivonia successes of the enemy had created such a demoralisation that without the beginnings of armed activity, without a demonstration of our capacity to hit at the enemy, it was difficult to conceive of people getting together in any large measure to reconstitute the political underground.

To put it more simply; without a political underground network and internal leadership it is not possible to engage effectively in people's armed struggle and, in our situation, without the beginnings of military struggle the task of political reconstruction assumed difficult proportions. And thereafter we entered a phase in which it became necessary, however long it was going to take, to find ways of getting back into the situation and to demonstrate that we were able to hit the enemy as an important factor in helping to stimulate the process of political regeneration. So one would say from 1965/66 onwards the attention of MK and its leadership, the ANC, was devoted to attempting to get our trained political and military cadres back. This is the second phase: attempts to get back.

### WANKIE/SIPOLILO

There was the 1967/68 attempt to move through Smith's Rhodesia. Thereafter endless attempts were made to try to send cadres back to the country. These attempts literally involved land, sea and air routes. South Africa was at that stage still surrounded by a cordon sanitaire of imperialist dominated states: Angola, Mozambique, Rhodesia. So we were completely cut off from the borders. But despite enormous objective difficulties efforts were made to infiltrate personnel back into the situation through these territories, most of them (efforts) were unsuccessful.

A big project, code named 'Operation J' by our president, of landing about forty-five cadres on the coast was planned in the early seventies. We bought a boat in the Mediterranean and we managed to get a friendly party to provide a crew for it. Unfortunately the Suez Canal was closed then. This meant that the boat had to be taken to a friendly port on Africa's East coast, all the way round the continent of Africa. It in fact docked in Cape Town and Durban to refuel. But of course it was quite clean at that point.

The boat arrived safely at the port from which the operation was to be launched. We were given very generous assistance from that friendly government. At one point the boat was not on schedule and this government sent out its Airforce to check on it. They pinpointed it on its way up to the coast of Africa. That was quite a moving commitment to our struggle.

The operation was very complicated. It involved having structures inside the country ready to receive the cadres on the various landing points which had been chosen for the purpose. The landing was to take place in