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MK Special Operations Unit Project

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Tshwane (telephonically)

Comrade Titi, perhaps we can start with your personal details – your real name, date and place of birth, and a bit about your family background? Did your parents and siblings influence your political awareness in any way?

My name is Abraham Lentsoane. Titi Motsoeneng was my MK name. I was born in 1956 in Meadowlands. I grew up in an ordinary working class family. My father worked in a tyre factory, Dunlop, in Johannesburg. My mother worked as a chef in a restaurant.

My father had some political involvement, but since Mandela's arrest he did not want anything to do with politics. Maybe he did not want to influence me for fear that I would be arrested?

Whenever I did something, he would just say "Who do you think you are, where is Mandela?" I was not politically influenced by him, but when I was in secondary school, in form three, I was influenced by SASM (South African Students' Movement). Through SASM we also had some link with members of SASO (South African Students' Organisation).

Our political involvement was influenced more when there were university boycotts and some of the university students came back. I was mostly working with Tebello Motapanyane. But I was not aware that he had links to the ANC. We were just working as students and he was leading us in the forefront. I got instructions from him until we left the country in '76.

Why did you go into exile, why not stay in the country and continue your above ground political activities?

I went to join the ANC and the armed struggle because when we left, the mass movement had not taken root much. I left, I think, in August 1976.

Who did you leave with?

It was Jerry Matjila, Moses Molefe, whose MK name was Ernest Senemo, and Mmila Mohlahlo, whose MK name was Kenneth Kgomotso.

Who took you out of the country?

It was a teacher, Mr Tlhagwane. We hired a kombi from him. We were introduced to him by another teacher, Samuel Magano, who was commonly known as 'Brother'. We spoke to Mr Magano and he spoke to his friend Mr Tlhagwane who agreed. But by the time we were leaving, the number of people who wanted to go had increased. The kombi was full – there were about 13 or 14 of us. There was also Leslie Moatshe, whose MK name was Vusi Lerole, Africa Nkwe - that was his MK name, I'm not sure what his real name is – Alex Mashinini, commonly known as Azania, Solomon Molefe, who was the elder brother of Moses Molefe and Gigi Manyonyi, whose real name is Daniel Kotsedi.

We agreed that we were going to leave at nine in the evening. We went to Jerry Matjila's place, there were some cars circulating around there, and the boys were telling us the Special Branch were looking for Jerry. We decided there is no going back, we must leave. So, the car arrived at nine in the evening and we paid the driver. We contributed from our pockets but we also went to two tavern owners, Joe Kgasi and Matlapane. They were progressive guys and they contributed.

But both Jerry and I could not leave together with the group because there were additional people who wanted to leave. The group left on the Friday in the kombi and I and Jerry followed with public transport on the following day which was a Saturday.

We took a taxi to Martindale, then a bus to Rustenburg, where we changed into another bus that goes to Derdepoort. We crossed with our own passports. At that time, they were called travel documents. But the group that left on the Friday jumped the fence.

When we arrived in Botswana, we found that there was some confusion. The first group was not staying with the ANC, but with BCM (Black Consciousness Movement) because of the stories they were told about how the ANC didn't care about the MK comrades they recruited in the 1960s. When we got there, we were told that the people who left the border gate first were in Harry's Nengwekhulu's house. A meeting was arranged because there was some bad blood between the ANC and BCM so that Harry and then Keith Mokoape and Snuki Zikalala from the ANC will make presentations and then each person in our group would decide with which organisation he was going.

We were told the ANC's was 'going to sell us and when we leave, we must ask where we were going and then we must ask the ANC to give us return tickets but they won't agree to that. Where are the people that left the country in the '60s? They had been sold, they are fighting all over Africa,' we were told.

The group that left the border gate first were not sure what was happening now, being afraid. But we sat down, we listened. After all the presentations by BCM and ANC they said people must now make a decision. We stood up with Jerry and said we were going with Keith. And everybody followed us because they were sure that what Jerry and I were doing was the correct thing, so nobody stayed at Harry's place. We all moved to Keith's place and stayed there.

While we there, some of the people that were supposed to go with us on the Friday but did not pitch, came. One of them was Herman and the other Matthews Mabelane. Moses Molefe's brother – Solomon Molefe was staying with us with an intention of going to school. But in Botswana it didn't matter whether you are going for military training or to school, we were staying in one place. When we left Botswana he stayed behind with Herman and Matthews.

We flew to Francistown, then to Lusaka. But when we reached Lusaka there was no connecting flight, we had to wait until the following day to get a connecting flight to Dar es Salaam. That evening we slept in the central police station because it was safer than the airport. We were alone there and the door to the cell was not locked, but they were guarding it so that nobody could come in. The following day we got a flight to Dar es Salaam.

At that time, Robert Mugabe, Ndabaningi Sithole and Joshua Nkomo were going to Lancaster House in London for the Zimbabwe talks. They were in the same flight with us. We didn't know what was happening but the flight was delayed because they wanted everybody to be seated before the Zimbabwean leaders came onto the plane. We only saw them when they were coming in, they greeted everybody. I think I was sitting next to Ndabaningi Sithole.

They knew we were from South Africa because many of us used to pass through Botswana to go to Tanzania, and also they saw the type of the clothes we were wearing and heard the tone of our English – it was a little bit different from Zimbabweans.

So you knew who Ndabaningi Sithole was?

We knew more about Joshua Nkomo and Robert Mugabe because we read about them in the papers but not Sithole. I think Ndabaningi Sithole was a

reverend based inside Zimbabwe. I had less interest in the bishop because of my inclination to the armed struggle.

Our group was divided into two in Dar es Salaam. We stayed in a hotel called Zanzibar in the town, and the others in a township. I was appointed Commander of our group. I'm not sure why. Maybe because I came with the group, and the group were looking at Jerry and I as their leaders. They brought others to our hotel until we occupied almost half of it. I was left as the Commander there until when we left, around November, December of 1976 for Luanda.

We were told that there would be better security in Angola where we will be in ANC camps compared to in Tanzania where we were staying in hotels. And we could also start with some basic training. We used East African Airways, and in Luanda we were loaded into military vehicles and taken to Engineering, where we got some very basic training in some field issues, but mostly it was political training.

Christmas of '76, we were still in Luanda. They used to bring us newspapers to read, but we heard from the BBC that Matthews Mabelane had been thrown out of the window in John Vorster (Security Police headquarters in Johannesburg). We asked ourselves how was this possible? Does it mean he went home to carry out an MK operation?

In the early part of '77, we went to the Benguela camp to get proper military training. At that time there was still some fighting in the south where we were originally supposed to go. Anyway, we had normal military training: weapons firing, and all those things, it was no problem. Later in '77 we went to Nova Catengue where we did intensive training.

In Benguela, training was mostly conducted by South Africans, in Nova Catengue it was mainly conducted by Cubans. The Cubans were in charge of the military training, but South Africans were more in charge of the political training. Our political instructors were Professor Jack Simon (SACP and ANC veteran), Frances Meli (ANC veteran), ANC Khumalo, whose real name is Ronnie Kasrils, and Mark Shope (South African Congress of Trade Unions general secretary, ANC and MK veteran), who was responsible for trade unionism training.

We started an MK publication, called *Dawn*. The first copy was done in Nova Catengue. Later they moved the publication to Quibaxe in the north. I was with Ronnie Kasrils, and I wrote an article for the first issue of *Dawn* and he said, look, you are still going to go home, do you mind if this article is not printed

under the name 'Titi'? I said no problem, it can be issued under any other name.

In Nova Catengue after completing our training, we provided security for the groups that came to train after us. There were two platoons responsible for security. The trainees used to go for training during the day and come back to sleep. After three months of training the trainees were allowed to carry weapons and participate in guarding the camp.

When I left Nova Catengue I went to Quibaxe which is in the north. I went for treatment for my ears because I was close to an explosive that went off and was affected by the loud noise. From Quibaxe I went to Luanda – which was nearby – for the treatment. In Quibaxe I was a political instructor.

We then moved to open a new camp called Fazenda, north of Quibaxe. There we were training in survival. I was a Company Commissar. I was sent to Russia to do anti-air training. I think I was there for 3 to 4 months, but it was during December when it was snowing.

I returned to a new camp, Pango, to be in charge of the anti-air defences of the camp. I was what they used to call the Battery Commissar. UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) started intensifying its operations in the east and were attacking our logistical lines. So I left to go to assist in securing our own logistical lines because we had camps in Malanje.

When our trucks moved from Luanda to Malanje they were being attacked by UNITA. So we went to Cacuso and assisted FAPLA (People's Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola) to mop up operations to ensure that the area between Malanje and Luanda is reasonably safe for cars to move.

We also secured the railway line between Cacuso and Malanje because UNITA was attacking the trains, they were planting mines on the railway tracks. So, we patrolled the railway line to check that there were no mines or the track had not been bombed. At times we had to go inside the trains so that if they were attacked, we could defend the people in them. While I was at Cacuso I was the Company Commissar, but when we were doing military operations, I was the Battery Commissar protecting the convoy with a heavy machine gun. At times we used to patrol the road, going in front of the convoy to check if there are no land mines planted on the road.

When I left Cacuso I went to Viana but there were people there demanding that they be sent home to fight, commonly known as the Mkatashinga.

In Viana I worked as a chef in the kitchen. I was called to go to Zambia and then directly to Maputo. But then the Nkomati Accord was signed and everybody had to leave Mozambique. We didn't want to go back to Angola. Everybody wanted to now go forward.

So we crossed from Mozambique to Swaziland but then unfortunately we were arrested at a roadblock in Mbabane. But since we were not armed, we were just sentenced as members of the ANC. There was nothing we could do, we just accepted this. They sentenced me to 30 days or a R300 fine. I had to serve the sentence in Matsapha prison. If your fine is paid, immediately you leave court they arrest you and take you to the police station. In the police station you will just be locked in the cell, you will not have the movement that people in prison have. We opted to serve the sentences rather than have the fine paid.

On my release I was taken to the Manzini police cells, and nobody could visit us there. If any South Africans visited us, they risked being arrested. Anyway, some of the comrades were taken blindfolded for interrogation by white South Africans. Two or three of them became *askaris*. This included Ezekiel Chris More and Tebogo Kgope. The first person that they took from the cells was Barney Molokoane. They just called him during the day as if it was a normal procedure and took him out.

But once they started blindfolding him he started screaming to alert us that there's something wrong. We peeped through the window and saw white people taking him. They didn't bring him back to us. They kept on taking other comrades and not bringing them back.



A younger Abraham Lentsoane

Fortunately, soon after our release from Matsapha prison we were deported by the UN on a chartered flight to Mozambique. We were met at Maputo airport by Sue Rabkin and another comrade.

The UN gave us money while we waited at the airport for our connecting flight to Tanzania. We were taken to Dakawa. This was in 1984.

Was Barney with you?

Barney was never brought back to our cells after interrogation. He was taken to another location to avoid him giving us information about his interrogation. He came in the second group that was deported from Swaziland.

Did you find out what the South African police wanted from Barney?

Yes. They wanted Lux. But they didn't know who he was. Their challenge was that when we were arrested in Swaziland, we didn't use our usual MK names or our real names. And when the police looked at the list of people arrested they couldn't find the comrades they were specifically looking for.

Maybe they took Barney because they thought he knew the people that were trained in anti-air missiles. He said they were asking him where's Lux? He said, I don't even know a Lux. When we were in the camp in Angola doing anti-air training nobody was allowed into our base, but there was a driver who used to bring in logistics. And later on he defected. So he probably told the apartheid police about our unit. Barney was really not aware about us and he didn't say anything to the police.

Anyway, I was taken back to Zambia to prepare for coming into the country. We were delayed because some of the people who were supposed to be part of our unit were not ready, but we left anyway and they were supposed to follow.

I left with Lux and Peter Radebe, whose real name is Guy Malamba. Lux was the Commander and I was the Commissar. We crossed the Zambezi into Zimbabwe and into Botswana. We stayed in Francistown and that's where I met Pule and Tommy Masinga (Lester Dumakude).

They were responsible to facilitate our entry into South Africa. We crossed the border with them. They left us with a contact that drove us to Krugersdorp. Then we took public transport. The three of us went to Soweto and then Pretoria. We did the reconnaissance, but we didn't have our armaments. We were working with Comrade Peter Ngwenya, who was staying inside the country.

Was he part of Special Ops or MK in general?

I think he may have been part of some other structures inside the country and he was also related to Guy Malamba (MK name: Peter Radebe). He worked with us and became part of MK in general, and specifically the Special Ops unit. He was responsible for the external communication and logistics of the unit.

We didn't have AK's, explosives and other armament to conduct our mission. We only had pistols and hand grenades. So, we sent Peter Ngwenya to submit reports to Pule in Botswana and get further instructions from him and Tommy. Peter brought in weapons but he got arrested in Meadowlands.

After that, I was arrested. When the police asked me where the people who are working with me are, I said I don't know who they really are and where they are staying.

But then Guy came to see me and the police, who were waiting in the house for whoever comes to see me, also arrested him. But when Peter Ngwenya was arrested he sent a message to one of our contacts, a medical doctor, Bafana Zwane who had a practice in Ga-Rankuwa, to inform the unit that he was arrested. Before Dr Zwane could even come to me, I was arrested. But he took money to Guy and Lux to enable them to move away. And Guy came to tell me that Peter is arrested only to find that I was already arrested and he was now arrested.

Guy says that when he knocked on the door somebody said come in, and when he opened the door they were pointing rifles at him. He tried to run away and found other policemen and soldiers coming out of the neighbours' houses. The Bophuthatswana security police had called in the SADF, SAP and South African Security police to assist them.

They wanted to go where Guy was staying, so he took them to the original place that we were staying in even though we had already moved away from that place. Lux was anxious about what was happening. Why is Guy taking so long? He saw a convoy of army and police vehicles passing, going in the direction of our initial accommodation. So, he moved away immediately and became safe.

So Guy, Peter Ngwenya and I were arrested. I think it was around December 1985. Ngwenya was working for IBM. We were charged with high treason. We were sentenced in September or October '86.

How do you think Peter Ngwenya got arrested?

According to Peter, there must have been a leak on the Botswana side. When he met Pule in Botswana he was taken to another contact and he thinks this contact probably informed the Security Branch of the number plates of his car. He had agreed with the contact how they are going to meet, what codes they would use and all that. The contact came with a vehicle that had weapons in a

false compartment. This contact phoned Peter when she was around Krugersdorp. She said she wasn't comfortable driving in town.

So, Peter went to Krugersdorp to lead the contact to Johannesburg. The contact was accompanied by an unknown male. This contact followed Peter towards Johannesburg through to Roodepoort. Peter suspects that this unknown male was a security branch escort who monitored the bakkie from the border, and reported its location at every point, but mostly to ensure that the security branch do not lose track of the bakkie and its cargo. The unknown male that was with the contact was dropped off at Dobsonville hostel. Peter and the contact proceeded to Meadowlands zone 10 where Peter parked the bakkie.

Peter took the contact to a hotel in town where she had checked in. He was going to take all the weapons out of the bakkie into a big box that his uncle used for coal and wood. Peter was intending to off-load ammunition and weapons when it was dark. He was not aware that he was constantly being observed.

He returned in the evening to put all the weapons in the box, and he did not give the key of the box to his uncle. He was with another friend Vusi Mazibuko. He was called Mnambithi because he came from the town in KZN that used to be called Ladysmith. They were driving two different vehicles.

After unloading they left with Peter driving in the front. On the way from zone 10 they came across a roadblock which Peter passed without realising it. Vusi was stopped at the road block. So, when Peter sees Vusi's car stopping he thinks the guy has got a problem. He makes a U-turn and finds out that this is actually a roadblock. They searched the cars, but they couldn't find anything.

In Peter's car they saw that the spare wheel had a hole. They then took him directly to his uncle's place and because the bakkie was still parked there, they went underneath it, and found the false compartment empty. Then they asked Peter: 'Well, why is this car like this?' He said 'I don't know'.

Then they argued, and the uncle woke up because there was confusion in the yard. They asked the uncle what was inside the box. He says it's charcoal and wood. They say, could you open? Then he says but Peter, you didn't give me the key, where's the key? Peter opens the normal side that has charcoal and wood. They said no, open the other side. So, they find the AK's and the explosives. He had to admit that those are his weapons otherwise they were going to arrest his uncle because it's his house.

But later on when he was in the cell, he says the black Security Branch were asking him where is the person that brought the weapons? Where do you think the person has ended up because you dropped the person at the hotel and you didn't fetch her again before you got arrested. Then they said to Peter that is the person that made you to get arrested. The police also used the name known only by Peter and the contact from Botswana. According to Peter, the police could only have known that name through the contact

In the evidence in court it came out that the Security Branch were keeping a watch over the house in Meadowlands all the time. Peter had parked the bakkie there since he couldn't take the weapons out during the day or when his uncle was not asleep. But the police kept a watch on the bakkie all the time to make sure nobody takes the weapons out. They monitored Peter's movement from Botswana and who he met.

Peter, when arrested, was worried about incriminating evidence in his desk in the office. He sent his wife, Maki Ngwenya, to relay a message to his work colleague Sibusiso Nxasana. He requested Sibusiso to clean his desk of any incriminating evidence and destroy it. Sibusiso complied with Peter's request and cleared the desk.

To turn to something else. When do you get recruited into Special Ops?

We knew that this anti-air weapon that we were being trained on was going to be used by Special Ops. Later Rashid came to us and explained our unit was part of Special Ops. Nobody could utilise our unit because that weapon was restricted to Special Ops.

Were you told what the specific role of Special Ops was, as distinct from other units in MK?

Yes. Special Ops was supposed to conduct operations that are going to have a big impact - not a normal type of operation being done by other units. When you do an operation, everybody in MK would know that this operation is 'Special Ops'.

What was your specific mission that you were sent into the country with Lux to fulfil?

We were trained to use a heat-seeking surface to air missiles to bring down planes. That was also the headline of *The Citizen* when we first appeared in court. They wrote: 'ANC plans to bring down plane'.

Which plane in particular were you going to bring down?

There were planes taking military personnel from South Africa to Namibia. They would fly from and to Waterkloof in Pretoria, but some also left from Kimberley and Bloemfontein. We were targeting Waterkloof.

We observed initially that there were a lot of fighter planes. There was a plane that also flew families of the soldiers and children, which we were told to avoid. We had to look for a plane that flies military personnel and we tried to get close to the military base.

In Pretoria northwest around Mabopane, there was a field where the fighters used to train to fly. We were trained to choose an area from the airbase so that once we shoot the plane it must be far away from landing in the military base. We should reconnoitre it from the airbase and move back away from it because if we would shoot it at the military base it will still land even though crippled. That was our mission, to bring down a plane.

Did you actually identify the plane you were going to bring down and the date and time of the operation?

We did but somebody else had already reconnoitred the time the planes fly. We were supposed to verify the information we were given, but we couldn't do that because we got arrested.

I think the plane was a Dakota and it flew on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

The first thing was the problem of getting closer to the base as black people - but we could see the flights. We could make assumptions from our distance which were the planes carrying military personnel. It was stressed to us that under no circumstances should we touch a civilian plane. Remember the missile is heat-seeking. If it can lock on the engine of a civilian flight - Amen. So, we had to be very careful we got the right plane.

Did you get to know after 1990 that Klaas De Jonge and Hélène Passtoors might have done the initial reconnaissance?

No, I didn't know that. You are the first person to tell me.

When the police arrested you, were they aware that you were part of Special Ops?

No, only later on. I was arrested in Ga-Rankuwa in Bophuthatswana and I delayed and gave them a false name and other false information. The police in

Bophuthatswana took my finger prints to Pretoria. The police there checked them against their records and told the Bophuthatswana police what my real name is, and where I used to stay. And all hell broke loose because they realised I'm from Meadowlands, where they found the weapons and ammunition. Probably that's where the connection with Peter started arising.

Did the police themselves at any stage in the interrogation or in the court process suggest that they knew that you were part of a unit called Special Ops and that they knew what the role of Special Ops was within MK as a whole?

No. For them it was that I was MK. They didn't have a clue that I was working for Special Ops.

Did they persist with you in the interrogation about who exactly your external Commander was?

No.

You mean they didn't ask if it was Modise or Hani or Slovo or Rashid who sent you in?

No.

Don't you think it strange they didn't pursue that?

I would say if they knew they played it very low because they just asked me general questions about OR, Joe Slovo, Joe Modise and about MK generally and didn't zoom into Rashid. They may have suspected, but they did not show any interest about who sent me inside.

Did they mention any other Special Ops operative you worked with at all?

No. When they mentioned Pule, I mentioned a different name for him and the idea was, look, you know we change names all time, we may be talking about the same person but I don't know Pule.

Do you think if you had succeeded in hitting a military plane that it could have been Special Ops' and MK's most spectacular operation?

Yes, it would have been.

Of the operations carried out by Special Ops, which two or three do you think were outstanding and why?

It's the Pretoria bombing and Sasol.

Why do you think that?

You see, the one in Pretoria hit directly at the air-force personnel and it was in the centre of town where you may say the strength of the South African Defence Force is.

Was there any controversy within MK or ANC ranks about that bombing because of the number of civilians that died?

Not about the target, but there were some arguments in the camps, with some saying if there's a possibility of civilians getting injured, don't go on with an operation. Others said you don't know what had happened: when you plan and execute, there's no possibility of injury to civilians, but once you leave the bomb there, there's that possibility. Let's say, in the building you are targeting, they can decide to have a fire drill and then everybody flocks out of the building when normally there's nobody outside at that time, so people get caught directly in the explosion of a car bomb. Then many agreed that there can still be casualties even though it was unintentional, but let's try by all means to minimise them.

Do you know what actually happened there in the Pretoria bombing that led to civilian deaths?

No. I have no clue whether something went wrong there or not. We were discussing on the basis of assumptions.

Why do you think Sasol was a very good operation?

Because of the security that was created around Sasol. Sasol was supposed to be impregnable and yet we hit it. Some of the MK operations were not reported in the media. But this one they could not hide because of the explosion and the flames burned for days. It was very spectacular. It hurt them so much that they wanted immediate vengeance - and they attacked comrades in Matola.

Where were you, can you recall, when the Sasol explosion occurred?

I think I was in the Fazenda camp, north of Luanda.

And when comrades there heard about the Sasol explosion, what was their response?

They composed a song about Sasol burning fire *Nayi Sasol ivuthe mlilo*. And the song was also played on Radio Freedom. Everybody was happy and it boosted the morale of the comrades in the camp. They got an idea of what we were capable of.

Of the Special Ops leaders you encountered, do any stand out for you, and if so, why?

Let me take out JS because basically he was on the top but there were also two of those who I worked out – it's Rashid and Victor (Johannes Mnisi). Victor hailed from Mamelodi and was also involved in the attack on Voortrekker.

Victor never acted as if he had done more work than us, and he treated us with respect knowing that we were ready to lay down our lives. When he came to us in Zambia he even provided money for us. I remember going with Lux to buy shoes. Remember, we used to get clothing from abroad. When the clothing comes, you've got to wait for your turn to go and get the clothes. Sometimes you go, and there are no shoes that fit your size.

Victor gave us an allowance so that we could go to the cinema whereas other units did not get this. He said, 'Look, this money is for you. It's for operations, but in the meantime while you are here, you can go to the cinema, but I don't give you money to buy beers.' There was one film that we really liked to watch - *A Bridge Too Far*.

Rashid was bringing us groceries and he didn't have a problem when Victor also brought us groceries. We would distribute it to the neighbours. For instance, the vegetables – tomatoes, cabbages and so on. It was hot and they can go off. When Rashid used to bring them we used to also distribute it to the neighbours – and he never complained. They gave me these vegetables for you and somebody has already given these vegetables, so what do you expect me to do with that? Take them, you can give to the neighbours.

And Pule was also very good at his work and how he related to us. Pule and Tommy told us in the afternoon that we will be leaving in the evening. They gave us an option of choosing armaments - Makarovs, Scorpions, AK's, defensive or offensive hand grenades. We made our choice after consultation amongst ourselves – Lux, Guy and myself – and advice from them. They gave us funds and allowed us to count this and confirm that the amount we have is the same as what they said.

What did you think of Joe Slovo?

Joe Slovo was like OR. You see, when he comes to us, it's business, and he wants discipline. He doesn't sit normally, and discuss and play with us like Rashid does. Rashid and Victor, we took them as one of ours. But when Slovo comes he checks whether the house is clean, there were no outsiders, he didn't want us to continuously allow the locals into our house because we also had guns that we were using for our own defence that they may see.

He used to bring condoms, he used to say, 'always be careful, this AIDS kills. When you get a chance, use this thing, don't get into trouble.' JS would talk seriously to us about AIDS, about discipline, which areas to avoid. Because at times in Mozambique we used to go to the bars and he used to say certain high end ones were the places that the Special Branch likes to frequent – try to avoid them.

Do you want to say anything about Barney Molokoane?

Barney was my friend. We used to play soccer in the same team. He was very talkative and he did not mince his words. If he doesn't agree with you, it doesn't matter who you are. That was Barney. Because of all the operations that he was involved in, Barney was taken as a hero wherever he was, he was given that status.

They say he was involved in Voortrekker, he was involved in this and that, he's an operations man. I think his first operation was in '77/'78 around Bophuthatswana. When you sit and talk to him, he doesn't even worry about those things, that he was involved in so many operations. That's none of his business. But he looks at you, talks to you as comrades, and mingles with you.

How many years were you sentenced to and how long did you actually spend on Robben Island?

I was sentenced to 15 years on Robben Island in 1986. I was released in 1990 or 1991.



Abraham Lentsoane, recently

After that what happens? Where were you deployed or worked?

I worked for the ANC in Shell House, but I was supposed to be taken to KPMG by Derek Hanekom. But when Hanekom saw my CV, he referred it to Vusi Khanyile to circulate it amongst the audit firms. Vusi offered me a temporary job with the ANC while organising interviews for me with the audit firms. Later Vusi decided to offer me a permanent job in the finance department of the ANC.

Do you have a degree in commerce or finance?

I completed a B Com degree with UNISA, majoring in auditing and economics. I passed my majors when I was still on Robben Island. So, when I came out I was only just supposed to complete the articles.

I worked in the internal audit unit with Comrade (Gill) Marcus, who was trying to establish the internal audit of the ANC.

In '94 I integrated into the South African National Defence Force, and in 2005 I moved to National Treasury.

What do you make of where the country is and why?

I think it's a question of familiarity. In my opinion most of current leaders have a particular history, of being in exile or in prison or in UDF together. So, probably when discussions take place, the sentiments arise that I can't oppose this comrade because I've been with him for a long time in exile or in prison or in the UDF or wherever. We tend to take sides based on those issues.

But the ANC has made quite some progress. When I say the ANC, I'm not talking about the members, because at times we as members do not represent the policies of the ANC. Because of that, people tend to lose confidence in the ANC. And they start seeing that the closer you are to the ANC, you'll get contracts, you'll get money, all that, but if you are not close to the inner circles of the ANC, forget it.

Some people, when they come into politics, they say the others have been eating, now it's our time to eat.

If you knew then in the 1980s when you were prepared to give your life for the struggle what South Africa would be like now, would you still have done what you did?

Yes, I would, because at that time it was not so much thinking about the future, it was getting rid of what was happening then. At that time we never even thought that there'll be freedom in our lifetime because of the existing situation and strength of the SADF. We thought we will push this, so that those coming after us will continue and succeed. So, when they were about to start the negotiations, we were taken by surprise because we never expected freedom in our lifetime.

During that time you will find that within the ANC and MK there was not much preparation for the future. It was, for example, that when the youth wanted to go to school to study medicine, there was not the long-term ANC planning that we will need doctors in future or engineers and so on. When you look at us, most of our training was guerrilla warfare. Very late, people started to say they are going to concentrate on regular warfare when the talks started. Guerrilla warfare was not regular warfare – and we didn't focus on this because freedom was still far ahead of us, we thought.