

MK Special Operations Unit Project

Interviews

Guy Malamba

20 December 2025

eThekwini

Comrade Guy, let's start with your personal details. Date of birth, where you were born and so on.

My full name is Guy Lukhanyo Malamba. I was born on 22 August 1960 in Port Alfred in the Eastern Cape.

How did you become politically aware? Was there any influence from your parents or siblings or your cousins or school friends?

Okay, I first became politically aware when I was still a student, doing JC (Junior Certificate), Grade 8. There were political activities in KwaMashu, Lamontville, Umlazi and other areas in Durban. In Umlazi there were people like George Sithole. He passed away.

I think they were in the ANC underground and arranged for people to go out of the country to join the movement. There was a guy, Thami Ngcobo – he was a very quiet person, you could not even think of him being a member of underground structures. He was a neighbour and was very close to us as youngsters around V section of Umlazi. There were new Zulu government administration offices in Umlazi but we were against this. We didn't want the KwaZulu Bantustan in our township and there was a protest going on. So, we became aware that there were these political activities taking place.

Secondly, there were people from some other schools – and one of my neighbours ran away from school with others to go out of the country. So, we started to question how come they left us behind. Only to find that this Thami Ngcobo knew exactly the arrangements made for the first group that left. I left after that when I was wanted by the Special Branch because of our political activities.

They raided my home but I was not there during the time and my friends were taken by the Special Branch. They were questioned why were they not in school. They were detained for about two days and the Special Branch questioned them about me. They told the police that the best place to find me was at school because I never stopped going to school.

I saw the Special Branch speaking with the principal and I realised that they are now here to pick me up – and that was my last day at school. I just decided to run away to join Thami Ngcobo.

Where was Thami Ngcobo?

He was around the location here but he was deeply underground. He had a lot of contacts. He told me who I must contact to leave the country and how must I leave. He gave me Andrew Mashaba's contact details in Soweto. Before I left, I met with George Sithole and a guy known as Jabu. They were already experienced and advised me that I should be careful of 1, 2, 3 and when I get there what should I do, and I complied. I took a train from Durban to Johannesburg. It was in April 1980.

In Johannesburg they put me in a house to stay until others were ready for us to be taken across the border. I stayed there with some of my neighbours from Umlazi whom I found were also wanting to leave the country.

You were born in Port Alfred, so when did you come to Umlazi?

Durban, I came in 1962 when I was two years old. My father got employment this side and my mother was working at King Edward as a nurse.

Did you always stay in Umlazi?

Yes. If I had to run away from Umlazi because of political problems, I went to my uncle's in Lamontville and stayed there.

How did you get the money to go from Durban to Joburg by train?

My mother had to pay my school fees. I demanded it from her because I was very desperate to leave the country. When she gave it to me, I used that. I also went to Peter Ngwenya who was working with IBM in Durban and I lied to him that I have a problem (laughter), that I am sent from home to buy some things in town but the money is short so I needed some more money. I can't remember how much he gave. I was with Peter's younger brother, Mthokozisi, the one that passed away in Tanzania in a car accident.

So, you went with Peter's brother?

Yes, the one younger than Peter. The one elder than Peter – he left the country before us. We found him in Dukwe, the refugee camp in Botswana, stuck between the PAC (Pan Africanist Congress) and the ANC conflicts there. They first met with the PAC guys who misled them. They were very reluctant to come with us when we left Dukwe. We were transported to Tanzania, where we met all the ANC leadership. Before we went to Dukwe we stayed at one of the veteran comrade's house while they were preparing passports for us to proceed to Zambia. We stayed there as refugees.

How did you get from Soweto into Botswana?

We stayed in that house in Soweto for a few months. Andrew Mashaba was in charge of the whole operation. They used to bring us money to buy whatever we needed, food and all that. We didn't know the real names of the others in the house, but we felt like we were part of a family. We were not briefed properly, about where we were going to and what was going to happen. Then suddenly comrades came to take us. They said, 'You must be ready with your things'. We don't know the driver of the car that then took us. We don't know where we are going. He took us close to the border fence in the Ramotswa area.

So, we passed the border and fortunately on that side we were also welcomed, so we fell into the right hands of the ANC guys there. They just took us to one of the underground houses to stay. They gave us political reading material – *Sechaba*, News Briefings and many other things. We thought we knew politics, only to find that people outside were more political than us. We had to learn from them. We stayed there and they kept giving us books to read and we read and read until they took us to a place – I think it was a Botswana government building – where we were fingerprinted to check whether we were criminals and for them to process passports for us. This was done after we were taken to the Dukwe refugee camp.

Now when your mother gave you the school fees and you disappeared, how did she find out that you had left the country?

When she found out, we were still in Johannesburg in the underground house. Griffiths Mxenge went to assure our parents and told them that, 'No, the boys are safe and they're in good hands'.

In Dukwe we were being prepared for where we're going to go now. Some wanted to go to school, some wanted to go to MK. Our aim was to reach MK camps and get trained there. We then flew to Lusaka and were taken to a place where we met all the leadership, including comrade Moses Mabhida and many commissars. They seemed to think we were too young and should go to school. They asked us about the political situation in South Africa. We expressed ourselves politically to them and what we realised is that they knew more than what we knew.

To me, it looked like some of them were from underground inside the country and they had come out; this was like a transit house. I used to look very young and comrade Moses Mabhida asked me if I know the bullet flight of a pistol and the difference between a pistol and an AK because it is what brought us there. I said I wanted AKs to go and fight wars to liberate the country. That's what motivated me to come out of the country. We were tired of seeing this oppression and all the things by the police. They asked me all these mathematical questions since I wanted to go to the army but I looked like I was supposed to be going to school (laughter). That is how I landed at SOMAFCO (Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College). The leaders said I must go there if I want to understand all these calculations that they were asking me

about. After I go to school, I can go to the army. I couldn't disagree. I couldn't say no. Whatever came, it came, you understand.

We then went to Dar es Salaam to a place where we found many others. Some were waiting for scholarships, some were waiting to go to the camps in Angola, others were working with logistics there, others were assisting to process everybody's documents. We were told we are on our own now and we had to make individual decisions as we were not there with our families. I took my own decision to join MK. I signed everything. We were then transported to SOMAFCO in Mazimbu.

At school, they looked at our biographies to see when we left school. And we were given aptitude tests to see what grade or standard you must go to. I was put in Standard 8. We stayed in the dormitories. And whilst studying we now got used to school, playing soccer and other games and we competed with SWAPO (South West African People's Organisation) and other liberation organisations. But after a while I just told them that it's a mistake that I am in school here. I told them my intention was not to be in school, I wanted to fight back in South Africa and at the school here I saw people were serious about studying. Some were sent to Europe, GDR (East Germany) and other places to go to further their studies. They said, 'Go to the GDR,' and I said no, I organised Mthokozisi to go and tell the principal there that it's a serious mistake that we are there, our aim is to be in the army. They wanted us to have careers while there but we were very serious and we were like protesting this thing of being in school.

They said, 'No problem, there's transport going to Dar es Salaam,' so once it's here, we must take our things and go. Now in Dar es Salaam we were not taken to the very same house where we were in before but to an underground house of MK.

Mthokozisi's legend name was Muzi Mtimande. Mine was Peter Radebe.

We were staying where the other MK combatants were. It was close to one of the leadership's quarters, somewhere around where I met the famous Andrew Masondo. He was the MK Commissar. He was on Robben Island and he was a mathematics professor. He had a lot of information from inside the country and of how we came out. They took our records from those who took down our biographies and they tried to check whether we were apartheid agents. We stayed at that house for about six months. I don't know how but I took over the cooking (laughter). We flew to Angola around October 1982. In the military camps we started our basic training. We were very happy and excited that finally we were in an MK camp.

Which camp were you in?

We were in Caculama in the province of Malanje. It was so nice, and everything went according to plan. Then we were called in to an interview. There were Russian officers there and they had to determine if we could qualify to go to Moscow because of the cold winter weather there and if our health was good enough to go there, and to do the training and they wanted to know what I knew about the military in South Africa.

The only place I was well versed with was the Louis Botha airport in Durban where the pilots and the military were training. They used to fly over our houses there. So I was very familiar with them because sometimes we went to the airport to see these planes. We saw everything that they were doing. It was not a difficult thing to gain access there because we came as visitors. Then I was informed that I qualified for the artillery unit that will focus on military airplanes.



Guy Malamba,
recently

So, Louis Botha airport wasn't just a civilian airport? It was also used by the military?

Yes, a part of it.

What happens after you were chosen for the artillery unit that would focus on military planes?

In 1983 we were taken to Russia and trained in really sophisticated weapons – these surface to air missiles. We were taught to operate a radar system surface to air missile. Those weapons automatically target any plane. It was a privilege to be selected to be trained in these weapons, like the Strella 32M, a heat-tracking missile. It involved many calculations but the formula was very simple to guide the weapon and how you aim it. What was most important was the weapon did the calculations itself. We trained there for about nine months and after that we were taken to Kashito in Angola.

Where in the Soviet Union did you get your training?

In Odessa in Ukraine. It was still under the Soviet Union then. I was there with Lux Marumo and Titi (Abraham Lentsoane).

When you came back to Kashito, what happens?

Kashito was a secret camp because once you are there, you are on your way to South Africa, you're being prepared with combat skills, tactics and political-military skills. You do MCW (Military Combat Work) which prepares you how to be amongst the people without being detected. You also are refreshing your weapons' skills. The Russians came and they took us to Luanda. There are places there where they could fly an airplane. They took us to see airplanes flying and would give us practice on how to aim. We only aimed, we didn't fire because obviously this thing locks into the target. Once the target is locked it tells you when you pull the trigger. You have to elevate the weapon 35 degrees. The front of the airplane is tilted so that the speed of the jet and the speed of the missile meet. Although maybe the jet is in front a little of the missile, the speed of the missile will hit the engine of the plane.

So, we were being refreshed there.

We were prepared to get civilian attire. We were taken to one of the stores. You select your clothes. They also gave us new IDs with a new name. Mine was Gladman Nxumalo.

Who was with you in that unit?

It was Lux and Titi. In Zambia we stayed in a house with Special Ops members. Gordon Webster was there. Valdez (Xolile Sam) too. Then we were taken to the southern part of Copperbelt in Zambia. We were made to cross the Zambezi River at night with the crocodiles all over. Hey, it was dangerous! Anyway, we entered Zimbabwe, we walked a few kilometers before jumping over to Botswana again and there, somebody was waiting for us in a car and drove us to Gaborone. We went to a house where there was (Ernest) Pule and others. They were escorting comrades who jumped the borders into South Africa.

When we in South Africa we were taken to Zeerust where we could take another car driven by another man again early in the morning – around two o'clock – and went to Johannesburg.

Titi and Lux were originally from Soweto. Bear in mind they still had people that they trusted as contacts and these people were going to sort out the accommodation. We stayed one night in Moroka and they decided we have to leave because they were not sure of the surroundings.

So that is when I said no, let us go to Dube in Pimville. I went to the House of Peter's uncle. I had stayed there before I left the country. We used to visit this uncle even when I was staying at the other house in Soweto because he had this different understanding of politics more than anybody else in the family. Now we're back from exile and going back to Peter's uncle's house. I took Titi and Lux with me. There they phoned Peter that I had come there. Peter didn't know Titi and Lux. He came there rushing. He was based in Joburg now. Peter used to travel a lot.

He was still working with IBM. Peter asked me where did we come from and I told him the truth. I needed a place where we could stay, a very private place. So, he also was very desperate to ask where were we going. I said can you take us to Pretoria somewhere? So, he took us to Dr Zwane who had a surgery in Ga-Rankuwa. The doctor knew a man who was called 'German', he owned rooms for people who want to have sex, so they went there to speak to him and he gave us three rooms. They told him that 'No, these are our guys and they'll be going back to Durban soon'. I used the same ID as Gladman Nxumalo. There we stayed because now I used to go to conduct some reconnaissance mission to see what our approach is going to be like. Our targets were Waterkloof and Swartkop where the military planes were. We went to Winterveldt, which is a rural area behind Voortrekkerhoogte where all their airplanes are parked.

There was a time when Peter was coming down to Durban again, and we said once we carry out the operation in Pretoria we must move very fast to Durban because the Boers would become aware of our targets. I came down to Durban to check the

strategic positions at Louis Botha airport, from where we could launch a missile to hit a military plane.

I came back to Pretoria with Peter to prepare the operation. We sent Peter to Botswana to go and collect some money. We never sent him to collect weapons. Peter stayed in a hotel. It was full of the National Intelligence Service (NIS) of the Boers. Some of them, they look like farmers and hunters. But they collect information and they look for anything around because they know that MK guys are there.

There was a lady in Botswana who was a spy and she targeted Peter. Peter went to see Oupa and Chris and they gave him a vehicle full of firearms and other equipment and some of the things were loaded in the spare wheel. When Peter came into the country, he drove to his relative in Dube, and just then the police came all over the site and arrested him. That Botswana lady leaked out the information to the South African Police way back in Botswana.

Then a message came through to the doctor in Garankuwa where we stayed that Peter had been arrested in Soweto. The lady who gave the doctor the message was Peter's girlfriend. When we heard about the arrest, we decided let's move quickly. We were staying in different places. The doctor went to Lux to tell him that something is wrong. Lux came with the doctor to pick me up. We went to where Titi was staying. I said no, we don't trust anything, let the doctor remain now. We have to walk on our own. I said Lux, you must wait somewhere, I will walk straight to the house where Titi was staying. I said to Lux hold my pistol, and left to alert Titi about the arrest. I just took cash with me. We had a system of knocking three times on the door otherwise the comrade in the house doesn't open. It was in the morning when I went there, not realising that Titi had been taken by the soldiers and the police the previous night.

The lady where Titi was hiding thought he had lots of money, so when she tried to check the bag looking for money, she saw the weapons there and she phoned the police and they arrested him. When I came there, the soldiers were already in the house and others were deployed outside in the bushes.

There was a nurse who stayed opposite that house. She saw what happened the previous night when Titi was arrested and she tried to alert me that I must not go into that house but I didn't understand that. I saw there were other guys just sitting in front of the house next door so it looked normal. This house had the old system to lock the door. When you enter you have to pull a bar and if you lock it, you put something like an iron inside and then it's locked. So, when I knocked three times somebody said to me, 'I'm coming'. There was this noise like a helicopter and when I opened the door, hey, there were soldiers inside, both Black and White pointing at me with rifles. When the soldiers looked at me, they saw a young boy, and they said 'Ja, who are you?'.

I told them and they said, 'Do you have an ID?'. I showed them my ID. They looked at my ID and they gave it back to me, and they said, 'What do you want here?' And I said no, I came for money from my uncle, I want to take a taxi. They were arguing amongst themselves saying, 'No, this is a young boy, man, this is not the person that

we're looking for,' and they let me go. But when I approached the door, hey, these Boers came from that helicopter and they said, 'No, no, no, don't leave'. Then I had no chance because in the helicopter there was a man with fingerprints material and everything. These guys were searching me thinking maybe they will find a pistol – but they didn't see that I was carrying money and they took me to this Land Rover and took the fingerprints – and they realised that, yes man, this is a terrorist we've got here. Then they balaclaved me and flew me in the helicopter.

First, they flew me to Ga-Rankuwa police station because the police involved were both from Bophuthatswana and South Africa working jointly. The Bophuthatswana police didn't want to release me to the South Africans but the South Africans overruled them by calling (Lucas) Mangope (Leader of the Bophuthatswana Bantustan) himself. Mangope came there to hand me over to the Boers.

They put me in the cell but they took me out again to point out our hiding places. So I went to show them exactly where I was staying. Then some of them, they felt that we came as visitors. They were surprised that I was arrested because they said, 'This man is a good man and an ordinary citizen'. But others didn't agree.

They tortured me, tortured me. They took me from the police station to one of the places where they used to torture people. It is a very small room, maybe four square metres with a ring in the middle and when they put you inside this holding cell, they strip you naked and put a chain on your leg so that you can't move from corner to corner of this fridge. The people guarding there were not South Africans, it looked like they were Zimbabweans or Namibians or from somewhere else.

I was there for two days and then they took me to another place. I was worried that Peter was in there.

But how could the comrades in Botswana give him firearms without asking us permission to do this? We knew better how to manoeuvre with these things. Peter just drove through the border like a civilian, not realising that this lady had a plan with the Boers. I was taken, I think, to Stilfontein. And then later to John Vorster Square where I realised that Titi was also there. I don't know what Peter or Titi told the security police and I just claimed responsibility, telling these Boers that I gave Peter those weapons so he never did anything, and they must release him. But they said, 'No there's nothing like that'.

We couldn't hide anything. We came from exile, we came from MK, they knew that, they showed us our pictures when we were still 'wanted'. I only saw Peter and Titi, I think, after six months from the time we were arrested. Titi was required to go to court and testify to tell them that okay we were going to do this and that as part of our mission because obviously they knew. They wanted these weapons. Unfortunately, the weapons were not there, we proved that the weapons given to Peter were to be used temporarily while we were still waiting for the big machine. But they made Peter the number 1 accused, I was accused 2, Titi was accused 3. We were tried for high treason and given a 15-year sentence. We were taken to Robben Island.

Peter wasn't in the unit. You brought him in. So, why did they make Peter accused number 1? That was very strange.

Because Peter found us the places to stay and he went out to meet the comrades in Botswana and brought the weapons in. He was also an activist from a long time ago. They said, 'No, this one is too clever,' and once they looked at his IBM background, they saw Peter used to navigate systems that we didn't know about. They felt Peter was the mastermind of everything. They said, 'no, he knows a lot more than us because when we were asked questions about the weapons, we didn't know how he came into the country with them. We still don't know today why the comrades in Botswana decided that he must transport those weapons and how he got connected to the Botswana lady spy.

Can you explain a bit more about your mission. You were supposed to hit military planes going to Namibia from Waterkloof and Swartkop.

The Boers used to transport fighting materiel and personnel from South Africa to Namibia using these planes. So, a plan was devised on how to disorganise them and make them feel that the war is all over the country.

Were you going to hit a plane in Swartkop or Waterkloof?

Both.

Why didn't you do it?

The equipment didn't come into the country for us to use. And then Peter and us got arrested. We also heard that within the leadership of our organisation there were leaders who were against Special Ops.

When did you get released from Robben Island?

We were released in April 1991. Peter and I came to Durban and Abraham (Titi) went to Pretoria. Later we met and analysed the whole situation. I said no, those people outside should have planned with us what to do. I don't know maybe those weapons were going to be directed to someone else?