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Unrepentant Sparg  
gets 25 years for  
ANC commitment

# The making of a traitor

**IF** it means my life, I'm quite prepared. In fact I'd be proud to be counted among those who fought and died for this country and its people.

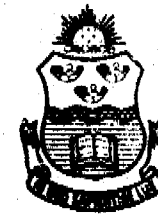
**Sarah Sussens**  
THE first white woman to be convicted of being an ANC fighter held the Rand Supreme Court captive this week as she spoke of her development from an ordinary white South African to a committed revolutionary.  
Sparg came from a conventional middle-class home. In her

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words, she lived the type of life that most white children live in this country and she did not have any particular interest in politics.

"It didn't seem abnormal at the time that I was growing up, that most of the people in this country, that is black South Africans, featured mainly as servants," she said.

It was only when she went to Rhodes University that for the first time she met blacks as equals and not as servants.

Thus began a political involvement that would lead to her becoming a member of the elite unit of the military wing of the ANC and to plant, singlehandedly, limpet mines at three police stations.

Her commitment is complete. In a letter to her parents, she said: "You see, there really is no going back for me. Neither can I stand still. We can only really move forward now.

"If it means my life, I'm quite prepared. In fact I'd be proud to be counted among those who fought and died for this country and people."

Throughout the two-and-half-day trial, Sparg showed little emotion, remaining composed and confident.

At the start of each day's hearing, she would turn to greet her family and friends and her face would light up with pleasure.

When Mr Justice P J van der Walt sentenced her to an effective 25 years in jail on Thursday, the court let out a collective gasp but Marion did not flinch.

Dressed in the ANC colours of black, green and yellow, she turned to her family with a wide, slightly quizzical smile.

Then she embraced family and friends. She lost her composure briefly when a close friend wept.

Said a friend afterwards: "She has finished crying."

Mr Justice Van der Walt, in passing sentence, said there was little likelihood of Sparg being rehabilitated. She was a dedicated member of Unkhonto we Sizwe and because there was little likelihood of rehabilitation, the element

of retribution had to be emphasised.

She had been indifferent to the loss of life and injury and the outrage of the community had to be reflected in the sentence.

He described her as a mature, intelligent young woman.

A striking feature during Sparg's trial was her courage and refusal to back down.

Sparg said although she did not regret joining the ANC or her actions she did regret the suffering she had put her family through.

Said her mother, Mrs E A Sparg: "You may not believe in what she did, but you have to admire her for her courage in standing up for what she believes in."

Sparg's attorney, Mr Norman Manoim, said her purpose in giving evidence was not to mitigate what she had done.

"It was more important to her that she was understood than to receive a lesser sentence," he said.

"Ultimately she was prepared to face the music and not try to detract from what she had done or why she had done it and in doing so, she showed remarkable courage and integrity," he said.

Sparg, giving evidence in court, made it clear that she believed that if whites wanted a nonracial society, they had to be prepared to make the same sacrifices as blacks. South Africa was at war and she regarded herself as a soldier fighting for her cause.

Sparg, whose real political involvement began after the death of black consciousness leader Steve Biko in 1977, told the court she had chosen police stations as targets because they were manned by people who had proved themselves to be particularly brutal in their defence of apartheid. She had chosen John Vorster Square as a symbol of apartheid.

On a lighter note, she added: "I

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still am today slightly amazed and I think appalled at the lack of accuracy that was in existence or non-existence at the police stations, particularly John Vorster Square."

Sparg, a former Sunday Times journalist, committed her first act of political violence in 1961 when she joined fellow journalists, Arnold Geyer and Danmian De Lange, in a petrol bomb attack on three PFP offices.

Rumours circulated widely this week that Geyer had influenced Sparg, but close friends said he did not play a vital role in her political development.

In court, Sparg said she and Geyer both had fled to Botswana.

"I indicated to Geyer that I had contacted the ANC and held discussions with them and I accepted their viewpoints, and he didn't accept that position," she said.

"In that case, I told him that I was going to break off any further contact with him. Since then I have never heard of or seen Arnold Geyer."

They chose the PFP as a target because they had refused to boycott Republic Day celebrations.

In court, Sparg said she regretted choosing the PFP as a target and she had been immature and emotional at that stage.

"I would today still stand by some of the criticisms I made of the PFP, but I certainly do not believe that I was correct in choosing them as a target for violence."

Shortly after the PFP bombings she fled the country, crossing the Botswana border on foot.

She met ANC members and it was at this stage that she considered herself formally recruited into the ANC.

Sparg went to Angola for three months' military training, before being assigned to the editorial staff of Voice of Women, the official journal of the ANC's women's section.

It was after the SADF's raid in

Lesotho, in which 30 South Africans and 19 Lesotho citizens were killed, that Sparg felt she had to join the operative ranks of Umkhonto we Sizwe.

Sparg said some of the ANC leaders tried to dissuade her, but she felt she had no choice.

Sparg was then assigned to Special Operations and returned to Angola for a refresher course.

She then returned to South Africa where she scouted certain targets for attack.

Giving evidence, a close friend, Allison Gillwald, described Sparg as very intelligent person, with a remarkable sensitivity.

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