

Escape from Modderbee

Unfinished Trial - 1990

A True Story by an ex-MK soldier

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Rodney 'Baduza' Toka

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Dedicated to:

My commander, Odirile Meshack Maponya his wife Mpho Megale,
and
all the comrades that were members of the Moses Mabhida unit

My parents, Philemon and Maria Toka

My wife, Ingrid and my children, Temoso, Mantwa and Tebatso

My siblings, Andrew, Florence, Lesley and Mathlodi

“Let no amnesia strike at fire hour

There shall be those who shall storm the castles

And those who shall write about the events” — Unknown

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Rodney “Baduza” Toka

Foreword

Let the guerillas and guerilla commanders write their story. Let them write stories about their moments of sadness at the death of a comrade, killed by the enemy bombardment or malaria. Or the longing for a loved one across the border in South Africa; let them write about the mirth that made buffaloes wonder at the laughter tearing the silence of the forest or the loneliness that cannot be described by words, as on occasion it led to suicide.

No second person will ever understand or believe the heroism of these men and women without having to step into their boots. One had to be “there” to know, understand and appreciate the experience. And “I” was “there”.

Words cannot describe the brutality of apartheid, yet the same words attempt to describe the heroism of its victims and those who set themselves the goal to conquer it.

This is a story that is also a history of a country at war with itself. A biography of a schizophrenic country.

This country hated itself so much that it evolved apartheid. This country so loved itself that it gave birth to the resistance movement that evolved into the Liberation Movements.

This book tells the story of the violent dynamics of the politics, the socio-economic conditions and the psyche of a dual society, that produced General Smuts, the pretender, Dr HF Verwoerd, the villain, and Dr NR Mandela. This book comes at the right time when many still do not know, understand nor respect the price others had to pay for the 1994 democratic elections and for the white community to discover all-of-a-sudden how massive crime was after 1994.

Ph.D. Moloto
June 2002

Preface

This book is a tribute to all the legendary guerrillas, their commanders and commissars. It is a fitting tribute to the armed men and women, whose heroic effort ensured that a nation realised its cherished dream, a dream of a free democratic, non-racial and non-sexist South Africa.

This is the story about the Moses Mabhida unit, one of the most celebrated combat units of Umkhonto we Sizwe and its Commander, Mainstay Chibuku. At the height of the armed conflict of the mid-80s, the MK military headquarters in Lusaka assigned this unit a mission and the instruction was simple and direct:

“Recruit, train, arm, and lead our people into battle”.

Comrade Toka’s brilliant, vivid and refreshing narrative captures important moments in the history of this unit. He reveals how in the face of trying and hazardous conditions in the underground, in prison and in exile, the unit prepared and executed its mission; how members struggled to grasp the theory of revolution, the strategy and tactics of the liberation movement, the military and combat work in the process of mastering the skills and art of revolutionary warfare.

The unit successfully opened reconnaissance routes from Botswana for ferrying both personnel and material, prepared dead letter boxes, trained and armed new units, ie. Sigcwelegcwele, Dabulamanzi, Maqedindaba, Mavumengwana, Madinoga and Hintsa.

Thus, after the Kabwe Conference in 1986, when Comrade OR Tambo, the Commander-in-Chief of MK finally issued his command to “advance, attack and give the enemy no quarter”,

Preface

and the Moses Mabhida unit was equal to the challenge.

The unit responded in the most appropriate and dramatic fashion. They engaged the enemy personnel and installations in more than twenty encounters, attacks in Pretoria and West Rand areas.

Through the limpet mine warfare, as captured in multiplicity of operations, they unleashed a campaign of “Revolutionary Terror” right in the belly of the “beast” — with a crippling and devastating effect.

It was during the course of conducting these operations, on April 15, 1988 at the Sterland Shopping Complex (in Pretoria) that a prematurely triggered mine exploded in the face of Comrade Odirile Meshack Maponya, killing him instantly. He died with his ZCC badge on him. The tragic and untimely death deprived Umkhonto we Sizwe and the Moses Mabhida unit one of its heroic commanders.

Comrade Mainstay Chibuku, as he was fondly known by his comrades, was a shining example of modesty; during training and in actual battle, he displayed unblinking courage and bravery that bordered on recklessness; he was selfless, dedicated and totally committed to his mission. Here was a commander who led by example.

In a typical fascist fashion the mortally wounded enemy responded with ferocious onslaught in a vain attempt to arrest the rising tide of the revolution. Members of the units were killed, others were arrested, tortured and sent to prison. Among the prominent commanders who were killed during this period was Stanza Bopape.

Despite the vicious attacks, members of the units outside and inside prison, demonstrated remarkable resilience and tenacity as they resisted and fought back in the true spirit and example of their great commander.

May the spirit and example of the Moses Mabhida unit inspire and strengthen our youth and all our people as we

reconstruct and rebuild our country and continent for a better life for all.

Fight Mabhida, Fight!
Amandla

JB Masilela (Che)
June 2002

Chapter One

The Dangerous Nine

It was early morning. I had just finished reading an article in the *Cosmopolitan Magazine* when I suddenly heard the rattle of keys on my cell door. I looked up and saw the beaming face of Sergeant Duran. He was a good man and practically all the inmates liked him.

I was surprised to see him, for it was a Saturday morning and on weekends, we were only allowed to go for our daily exercising at 10h00.

“You have a visit,” he said.

For a second or so, I lay motionless as I tried to figure out who could be visiting me so early in the morning. Then I stood up and followed Duran.

The Pretoria Security Prison was built to house mainly political prisoners. Dennis Goldberg, one of the Rivonia Trialists, had been housed there for more than twenty years. It was also from this prison that Steven Lee¹ and his comrades had escaped in 1989 to rejoin Umkhonto we Sizwe.

Since their escape, security had been intensified and escape in any other prisoner’s mind remained a wishful thought. All the doors, except the cell doors, were electronically operated and circuit televisions monitored all movements. I followed Duran into the medical room which was not far from the prison’s main entrance. To my surprise, I found my visitor to be a beautiful blonde, sitting motionless at the table, apparently waiting to see me.

1. Steven Lee was a member of MK who was arrested in 1979 together with Timothy Jenkins and Alexander Moubarris for their MK activities

The Dangerous Nine

“Mr Rodney Toka,” she said and extended her hand.

“How are you, Maam?” I said, as I took the hand.

“Greetings from Priscilla Jana’s office,” she said.

“Thank you,” I replied.

“Mr Toka, before we start, I think it would be proper for me to convey some sad news to you.”

“What sad news?” I asked apprehensively, looking into her eyes.

“Your girlfriend was finally traced to a house in Batswana Section.”

“Thelma?” I asked.

She nodded her head.

“We had an interview with her and we are convinced that she is the person you are looking for.” She paused and looked at me.

I knew that whatever she was going to say was bad news.

“We did not find your child.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

She hesitated and then, with lips trembling, blurted out the grim news.

“Your son passed away seventeen days after birth.”

I was dumb-struck. I closed my eyes. It was a nightmare, I told myself. It wasn’t happening. But it was for real. Collecting myself, I asked, “How did he die?”

“We do not know the circumstances of his death.”

I stood up and went towards the closed door. I punched it several times and shouted, “Duran! Duran!”

Within seconds, the door opened and Duran was there, asking, “Is anything wrong, Rodney?”

“Take me to my cell,” I said and this time, I led the way. I blamed myself for having being arrested.

It was about 10h30 and my fellow inmates were outside exercising. Some of them were sitting in groups, playing games - chess, scrabble, billiards.

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I went straight to my cell and lay on my back. I started to think about how I met Thelma and how crazy we were about one another. She fell pregnant and while she was in her second month, the police had arrested me. I knew she loved me and we had hopes of marrying some day. I kept that hope alive despite my imprisonment. The child to be born meant a great deal to me. He would be our future. We would relive in him. Now my son was gone. What did I have left to live for? Thelma had deserted me. While I was in prison, my family had reported to me that she had left the house where we had lived together and moved to Batswana Section. I had asked my attorneys to trace her.

I was thinking of these things when I was disturbed by a noise in my cell and found my inmates staring at me. These fellow inmates were part of the eleven comrades that I was arrested with, eight of which were part of the group that later escaped from Modderbee prison, and became popularly known as the The Dangerous Nine.

“Anything wrong?” Peter Maluleka² asked.

“It’s my son,” I said, “He died seventeen days after birth.”

They tried to console me, but I remained inconsolable. They stayed with me as long as they could and reluctantly returned to their cells and I found myself alone.

2. Peter Maluleka is the Chairperson of the Executive Committee of the Greater Pretoria Metropolitan Council and Chairperson of the ANC Pretoria region

Chapter Two

My Family

I was born on April 17, 1963, to Philemon and Maria Toka (neé Moeletsi), in a township called Mamelodi, Pretoria, but my family later relocated to Garankuwa. I was a late talker, forming words only at the age of six. This is really of no significance but a point of interest. I had two brothers and three sisters, and I am the youngest son in my family. My sister Hilda is the last born; she was born in 1966.

My parents were a happy couple. I never witnessed a brawl between them. My father (Daddy as we called him) was a soft-spoken person who could not hurt an ant, let alone a fly. He was a teetotaler and a non-smoker. He was an ardent reader of the daily newspapers, especially the Rand Daily Mail and the Sunday Times. He monitored the news hourly and this helped him enrich his vocabulary and to have a good command of English. One of his favourite programmes was “Consider your Verdict”. He never missed that programme. He was a good story teller and he kept us entranced as he told us about the good days and bad days with equal gusto.

The bad days were the days spent in Alexandra Township, when tsotsis forced a mixture of paraffin and potatoes into his mouth. The good days were the days when he worked for De-Lux Dry Cleaners and had the honour of pressing King George’s suit during his visit to South Africa.

Those who know my father referred to him as a gentleman of all times. Daddy worked for the dry cleaning firm earning less than fifty rands a week, up to the time he was pensioned

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off. The one good thing we enjoyed from our father's employment was that we could have our trousers cleaned free of charge. We were therefore always presentable at school. At one stage my elder brother, Lesley, was celebrated as the neatest boy at school.

Our mother Maria Toka, known to us as Eti, was the direct opposite of our father. She was a strong woman with the calibre of a leader. She took initiatives and stuck to her decisions. She worked as a domestic in a number of white-owned houses and the wage she earned and her housekeeping skills kept us supplied with our basic needs and a few luxuries. Eti was a no-nonsense type of a mother. She instilled discipline in all of us and made us respect all elderly persons as our parents. We were among the first people in Garankuwa to install electricity in our house entirely due to her management. She followed two dictums — “Children are there to be seen and not to be heard” and “*Staan vir jou manskap*”. (Stand for your rights).

One day she sent me to our neighbour to ask for some salt she desperately needed. I did as my mother requested. The old woman gave me the salt and a message for my mother. She was tired, she said, of people who asked for cheap things like salt.

I relayed the message to my mother. My mother was busy at the time, attending to her pots on the stove. I put the salt on the table in the kitchen and I was headed for the dining room when I was stopped in my stride by her call. She wanted me to get close to her. Suspecting nothing, I went close to her and the next thing, I found myself on the ground wailing and begging for mercy. She beat me good and solid and when she had enough of beating me, she ordered me to wipe my tears. She then gave me my lesson: never to repeat such messages for they spoil good relationships between neighbours. Elderly people, she said, joked with one another. She reminded me to be respectful to older people and close my ears to whatever

bad things they said about each other.

I was not the only one in the family who went through such a beating — every child in the family was soundly punished when he or she went wrong according to my mother's precepts.

Our mother's discipline sent us to school and kept us there until we completed our matric. That discipline has made us responsible and independent people today.

Out of the Afrikaans maxim of "*Staan vir jou manskaap*", my mother managed to instill pride in us. She conquered that fear that was within us and prepared us for the future. She was the kind of mother who always protected her young from the cruelties of life and who never slept until the last child was in the safety of our home.

I go to School — and the Police come too

I began my schooling in 1970. I was then seven years old and one year in the talking business. I was admitted in Ikageng Primary School where I completed my standard two in 1973.

In 1974, I went to Kgaugelo Higher Primary School where I completed my standard five in 1976. Both schools are situated in Garankuwa Township, about fifty kilometers from Pretoria.

During the uprisings in 1976, I was only thirteen years old and could not understand what was happening. The only popular words at the time was "black" and "power", which were mixed together to form "Black Power". Schools were burnt and government vehicles were set ablaze by riotous students. Having been born in a religious family, I thought the world was coming to an end.

It was during one of those days as we were listening to the news on the radio that my father commented, "Our kids are dying like flies". I could see the grief in his eyes.

I started asking about what was happening, and got some answers. I understood that the fight was against the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction at schools. The police were all over the place, patrolling in their caspirs and they were

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sometimes seen chasing students who shouted at them as they passed by. Student leaders were leaving the country and going into exile to escape from being arrested and killed in detention. Amongst them were those we regarded as our giants — Bachana Mokwena, Thele Moema, Saki Moema, Don Letsholo, Israel Sesoko and Miles.

Bachana Mokwena: Died in an “accident” between Pretoria and Johannesburg in 1992

Thele Moema: Previously, a manager at National Intelligence Agency, and now advisor to the premier of Gauteng.

Saki Moema: Died in detention, allegedly killed by Askaris after he refused to join the enemy.

Don Letsholo: Now a Colonel in the South African National Defence Force.

Israel Sesoko: Whereabouts unknown.

Miles: Whereabouts unknown.

They escaped and Garankuwa suffered a political lull for a decade.

Chapter Three

Black Power

In 1977, I was enrolled at the Modiri High School where I started Form One (grade eight). It was quite a pleasant experience and I was geared for the challenges that lay ahead. I was full of expectations about the wonderful things that couldn't happen in my life. I had envied my brother in his long trousers and had wondered what it would be like in grade eight. I spent the first day at this high school, running up and down from one classroom to the other with a group of new students. It was a day of confusion.

We went through a sort of orientation programme to familiarise us new students with the school. At the end of the day, we were all admitted and then taken to our respective classes. Life in Modiri High School was not bad, but that life changed. Every Friday afternoon, we assembled in the school hall and debated topics that ranged from politics to science. A favourite topic was, *“Problems of the world shall never be solved by parliamentary speeches but by blood and iron”*.

We had two, two-person teams, the proposing and opposing. These debating sessions roused my political awareness as nothing else did. I kept getting warning signals not to get involved in politics, which, I was told, was a dirty game.

It was during my first year at high school that the mighty Stephen Bantu Biko was killed in Pretoria prison. Commemorations were held all over the country.

In Modiri, we were told by our student leaders to wear black clothes to honour the death of the great son of Africa. Many of

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the students came in black and at about 14h00 that day, we assembled at the school sports ground to hold the commemoration. We addressed each other as “black brother” or “black sister”. We felt a solidarity as we pledged ourselves to one another.

We had been an hour in assembly when we heard police sirens coming from Zone Four, which is a stones throw from Zone Two, the site of Modiri High. Within minutes we saw police vans descending from the hillock and heading towards us. There were all in all about twenty-one vans, coming, as I guessed, from both De Wildt and Brits police stations.

Confusion reigned on the sports ground, as students began fleeing for their lives. Our student leaders urged us not to run away, our demonstration was peaceful, they said, and we should make a stand. We knew the character of the South African police. We would be baton-charged and arrested. We ran for our dear lives. Some students were beaten up and our leaders were arrested. I was scared and angry; I could feel hatred flowing in my blood vessels.

The following day, a school boycott was organised and we demanded the release of our leaders. Some of the organisers of the boycott went into hiding and led the struggle covertly. The campaign developed into “Azikhwela” (boycott of the government buses) and our parents were told not to go to work.

The boycott was a success and later that week our leaders were released. I was greatly impressed by the power of our coordinated action. The Black Consciousness Movement was gaining popularity and if you were not called black brother or black sister, then there was definitely something wrong with you.

The years that followed were not as politically active. We gathered on June 16 each year to commemorate the Soweto uprisings, and on September 12, to commemorate Biko’s Day. On March 21, we assembled to commemorate the Sharpeville

Black Power

Massacre. These were the days that united us and maintained our spirit of resistance.

The political situation at Modiri High School charged me with hatred for whites to the extent that I became derailed.

In 1979, while in Form Three (grade ten), I joined a group of pickpockets. Every Friday, during lunch, we left our school for the city centre in Pretoria. We reached the centre at 14h30 and plied our business, pickpocketing white men up to 17h00. We looked out for soft targets. Our best business was between Church and Van der Walt Streets. We ran between these streets and they provided us with our best returns. Our gang was admired by the other pupils: the most beautiful girls fell in love with us. We were the envy of the school and were regarded as the upcoming Mafioso.

In 1980, I transferred to Ribane Laka High School. Ribane Laka is situated in Mamelodi East and is named after two doctors, Ribane and Laka, for their standing in the community. I was in Form Four (grade eleven) then and had one more year left to complete my schooling.

I joined another pickpocketing gang at this school. My new gang did not discriminate between black and white. We pickpocketed everyone. Our leader was a very slim, very intelligent young man called, "Mathousand". We pickpocketed, shoplifted and bag-snatched. The supermarkets were very lucrative targets. We stole whatever came our way. We stole from chocolates to shavers and we disposed of our goods in the trains. They called us the Blue Jersey Boys, since we wore our school jerseys. We made lots of money. Over weekends, we went to a certain shebeen called Junior Spot in Zone Two, Garankuwa, and drank our money away. The shebeen was frequented by teenagers, hence the name "Junior". We were very popular at the shebeen.

We operated for five months, then during the sixth, suspicions were aroused and we were barred from the super-

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markets. We then moved on to other supermarkets and took a chance at Checkers in Church Street, opposite Poynton Building in Pretoria. One Saturday, I had concealed eight shavers on my body. I did not realise I was being monitored. I was just about to leave the shop when a heavy punch struck me on my cheeks. I became confused – another punch followed. I was taken to the manager's office. She instructed the heavily-built security guard to take me to the kitchen and telephone the police. I was taken to the kitchen and handcuffed to a chair. While the guard went to telephone the police, I was joined by two ladies, one of whom told me that when the security guard returned, he would beat me mercilessly so that by the time the police arrived, I would be lying in a pool of blood. I shivered with fear and decided that was not for me. I asked for a piece of wet soap and to my surprise, one of the ladies complied.

I was left alone, waiting for the guard. I smeared the soap with my free hand onto my cuffed hand and after a painful struggle, slipped off the handcuff. I dashed out of the kitchen, up the stairs and found myself inside the shop. I stopped running so as not to arouse suspicion and adopted a brisk gait. I walked out of the shop and then ran for my dear life. I stopped about five kilometers later in Marabastad. It was around 14h00 when I took the train to Garankuwa.

I looked out for my colleagues and found them missing. Later that day, I learnt that they were all arrested. I was scared to sleep at home and spent the night at Junior Spot shebeen. The rest of the gang members were all released on Monday, after being lashed on their buttocks.

The arrest and detention in prison made us feel that we were now real men and could face any demanding situation. We saw ourselves as the Young Lucky Lucianos and the Vito Genoveses of our times.

At the end of that year, all the gang members failed grade eleven and had to repeat it in 1981. That bothered us for we

had persevered at school despite our pickpocketing. We felt that there was a conspiracy against us. The school management gathered to discuss what disciplinary measures would suit us best. We never knew what they decided.

A week later, I found my name billeted on the notice board as one of the participants in the forthcoming school debate. This was a popular event and the school hall would be filled to capacity. One would think it was an honour being chosen as a participant, but it was a form of discipline, especially designed to keep erring pupils on track. Students were reluctant to speak. Many were shy and many had language problems. The debates were conducted in English. Those who absconded, faced corporal punishment or hard labour, weeding the grass on the school ground.

I was shocked to see my name. I weighed my options and decided to participate. My friends advised me otherwise. They suggested I stay at home for the rest of the week and pretend to be sick. I listened, but followed my own instincts. I was a theatre performer at the time and had taken part in a few productions, one of them being, *Love in Deathpot*, directed by Paul Monama. I was not shy on stage. I sought assistance from Errol Matloa, who was a Unisa student at the time to help me with the debate, "*Detente policy is the only solution to South Africa's problems*". I was opposing it.

My friends were surprised when they saw me at school and realised that I had not taken their advice. They tried, even at that stage, to persuade me to keep away and said that I was being foolhardy. I, however, would not change my mind for all their pressure. Errol Matloa had prepared my presentation. I was to deal with the topic in terms of historical, social, political, economical and religious arguments against detente. I memorised my speech and was excited on the day of the debate. I could feel victory in my heart and was convinced I would win the debate for my team. That Friday, my group

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decided to give me their full support and sacrificed their trip to town.

The school bell rang at 14h00 and the students assembled in the hall. I did not possess a school blazer so I borrowed one from a lady friend, Maria Ntladi.

The chairperson opened the session, the adjudicator, the time-keeper and the speakers took their respective places. The debate started. I was the third speaker. I had not completed my speech, when the audience rose in standing ovation. There were shouts of “Fatso! Fatso! Fatso!” as I was popularly called, from all parts of the hall.

When the audience settled down, I continued my speech and when I had completed, there was resounding clapping. I could not believe what was happening and I wished my parents had been there to witness it. The applause went on and on. I was assessed the second best speaker of the day and placed on the school team, chosen to challenge Modjadji Training College in the Northern Transvaal. At that debate, I was declared the best speaker. I began to be referred to as a flower of the school by my elders. I was the envy of other students. I suddenly became aware of my own hidden talents and withdrew from wasting these on criminal activities and became a good student.

I passed my grade eleven in 1981 and completed my matric in 1982.

Chapter Four

Worker And Trade Unionist

In 1983, after failing to enroll either at the University of the North or at Unisa, I got a job at Venturi Motors as a petrol attendant. I was bored with my job and felt that it was getting me nowhere. It was stultifying my dreams about my future. I did not see myself there as a “petrol joggie” as they called me. I worked in the garage for two months and my mother got me another job at Louis Pasteur Building in Pretoria. I was employed by Dr Du Buisson and Fourie as an assistant in a microbiology laboratory. I liked the job very much and it took me closer to my ambitions of becoming a doctor. But there were problems — there were no safety measures in place to safeguard workers, the salary was too low, there was racial discrimination, the white workers were privileged.

I became active in trade union politics and started rallying the workers on the bad working conditions and demanded salary increases. We embarked on a two hour work stoppage and brought the entire Louis Pasteur building to a halt. I held discussions with management and the conditions were improved. I was twenty years old then and I gained recognition from both young and old in the building.

I took part in a play, *Ziyajika*, with Tsheko Ngalo and Mohula Sebati. The play was about trade union movements in South Africa and the popularity the unions were gaining. It was performed in February 1983 at the Wits Theatre and it was video recorded. It became part of the Wits History Workshop and was performed alongside Malcolm Purkey’s, *Gandhi in*

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South Africa.

1983 was an eventful year in the life of South Africa. It helped shape my politics. There was the formation of the United Democratic Front. Students all over the country were up in arms demanding Student Representative Councils (SRCs), Fosatu and Cusa were discussing a possible merger which would result in Cosatu; the Million Signature Campaign was initiated against Piet Koornhof's Bills for the formation of a tricameral parliament which saw the inclusion of coloureds and Indians and possibly Africans, through the fourth chamber, in the all-white South African government. Nearer home, it was the year in which two of my friends Thabo Rammutla and Andries Mokoka left the country to join the ANC and Umkhonto we Sizwe.

I initiated a number of strikes at Louis Pasteur Building and for my efforts, I was fired in 1984. I was returned my pension fund payments and was advised never to set foot in that building ever again.

I join the Youth Movement

In May 1984, I met Jake Poo and he invited me to his home which was nearby mine in Zone Two. Jake informed me that 1985 had been declared International Youth Year. We decided to launch a youth offensive against the Mangope regime in Boputhatswana. We recruited people to form an ad-hoc committee. Amongst those that joined us was Jonas Rakau and Steve Monama, both from Zone Two. We learnt of the formation of a similar committee in Zone Five, led by Thabo Ndlovu and Michael Moema. We decided to combine our efforts and our fourteen member committee became the backbone of the Garankuwa Youth Organisation (GAYO), which was launched in September 1984 under the chairpersonship of Pat Ramorei at the Roman Catholic Church Hall in Zone One. We adopted the ANC colours, black, green

and gold, and our motto was, “Let us Unite in Action”, taking up Oliver Tambo’s call in a 1982 speech.

The launching of the youth organisation marked the revival of politics in our township that had suffered a political setback for more than five years. I was elected an organiser and as such, a member of the executive committee. In the same year, the Pretoria International Youth Year Committee was formed. I was elected publicity secretary and was assisted by Oupa Masuku, who wrote our statements. Oupa, together with Mpho Lekgoro, Kgaugelo Lekgoro and Thabo Ndlovu helped to shape our policies. Jonas Rakau was elected treasurer of this committee.

The motto of the Pretoria International Youth Committee was, “Youth Action for Total Liberation”, and it was in keeping with the times. The mood was right, the apartheid regime was crippling us; the youth was no longer saying freedom in our lifetime, the slogan changed to “Freedom in our Youth”.

Chapter Five

The ANC And Umkhonto

The year 1985 saw Oliver Tambo, President of the ANC, declare the year as the “Year of the Cadre” in his January statement. In one of its declarations, the ANC demanded that the country should be rendered ungovernable. The people were to form rudimentary organs of People’s Power and this was done. There were street committees and people’s courts and instant justice in the form of corporal punishment. All the parks in the townships were closed to the police. Policemen living in the townships were forced to seek accommodation elsewhere. We formed small underground units known only to their commanders. There was the graffiti squad that scribbled graffiti all over the place, another squad specialised in setting up barricades. Others still watched out for informers and monitored the movements of the police.

I was part of the graffiti unit, together with Jonas Rakau and Josias Mahlatsi. We spray-painted all the schools and railway stations with messages such as, “Viva Mandela”, “Viva Tambo” and “Long Live the Freedom Charter”.

I helped Richard Nkabinde, Oupa Appies, Meshack Rapeo and Jonas Rakau to erect barricades at four o’clock in the morning at the Garankuwa in support of COSATU and the Mass Democratic Movement. There was a seventy percent support in our township. Those who arrived to catch the five o’clock buses returned home when they heard that barricades had been placed everywhere. Our township was now in the

limelight and the cruelty of the Boputhatswana police made us more vigilant.

It was around March of the same year that Thabo Ndlovu recruited me to join the Ramogodu, Umkhonto we Sizwe unit which operated near our place. He introduced me to one member of this unit who made me write a short biography of myself.

I was then given a task to recruit two other members so as to form a cell of three people (the standard size of a MK unit). I recruited Jonas Rrakau and Josias Mahlatsi. Their biographies were collected by Stanza Bopape who was at that time a member of another cell. We were promised training and arms to engage the enemy. We waited endlessly for these things.

In May of that year, we read about an exchange of fire between the police and members of MK in Ramogodu. One policeman was killed in the shootout and the MK guerrillas made their getaway in a hijacked car.

It was then that we realised that our potential commanders were in our midst and not in Tembisa in the East Rand as our main contact had led us to believe. He had countered our impatience at not receiving supplies to get on with the job with such flimsy excuses that the train had not come, was late or hadn't arrived at all.

It was three months after this event that we saw our commander, Thabo Ndlovu. He was furthering his education in Europe at that time. So in fact, he was not available to command us. "So what were we doing? Wasting our time?" we asked ourselves. In the meanwhile, Jonas Rakau was nagging me to leave the country and join the ANC. I was most reluctant to do so and kept postponing my decision.

The situation in the country was in the meanwhile worsening. It was becoming increasingly clear that the South African government was losing its grip on the African people. According to Moses Mabhida, the situation had reached a state

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of equilibrium: the power of the government equalled the power of the masses. The State terrorised its enemy, the people: the “people” terrorised those identified as sellouts. Necklaces and burning tyres were the order of the day.

In Garankuwa, we formed the petrol bomb unit. Five litres of petrol concealed at my house, was discovered by my family and I was given a stern dressing down for two hours at a family meeting. I was exposed and had to come to terms with Jonas Rakau’s idea of leaving the country.

I leave to join MK

On the evening of October 16, 1985, we decided to leave and the next day Jonas Rrakau and I went to Brits, to a village called Bethany and met a shopowner, Setshego. An ANC contact who had helped Rammutla and Mokoka when they had left the country in 1983. Setshego directed us on our escape route and gave us the name of our contact in Botswana.

On October 18, 1985, the day Benjamin Moloise was hanged, we left the country. We reached Botswana the same day. The fact that we were in a free country made us euphoric. We were more committed than ever to liberate our Motherland.

Chapter Six

Crossing Into Botswana

We entered Botswana through the Ramatlabama border post. A few meters from the Botswana border post, there was a petrol station where many people waited for transport to Lobatse. There was a group of people already at the bus stop and we decided to join them. It was not long before the bus arrived. We boarded the bus and to our surprise, found that, unlike the system used in South Africa where the bus driver collected the fare, people just boarded the bus and occupied the seats and a conductor collected the fares.

One important aspect is that when one goes into exile, one tends to be impressed by small things that are different from one's own country. This system of payment really impressed me. The bus travelled for about fifty kilometers and reached Lobatse. To our surprise, Lobatse was different from what we had heard. There were shacks and clear signs of unemployment and hunger. Botswana was not the small haven that was projected to us by our comrades inside South Africa. We later realised that Third World problems of destabilisation on the borders of South Africa were created as a result of the policies of the white minority government of South Africa.

We waited for an hour at Lobatse for the bus to Gaborone. The journey to Gaborone took two hours and we reached it at dusk. Our destination was Tlokweng Village, but there was no bus to take us there. There were three passengers heading in

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that direction, Jonas and I and one other person. We negotiated with a taxi driver who quoted us 5 pula (R7.50). We had no option but to accept. The distance from the station to the village was covered in nearly twenty minutes.

We began looking for an old man, Twins, a family friend of Jonas. Our story, if we were questioned, would be that we were just visiting him and would be returning home on Monday morning. We spotted a bar called Triple D while still in the taxi. We stopped at this bar and Jonas hopped out to ask for directions to Twins' house. Fortunately for us, Twins was known in the area. A man directed the taxi driver to Twins' house and by 21h30, we were knocking at Twins' door. A middle-aged woman opened the door and let us in. She informed us that Twins was not in but welcomed us and began preparing food for us.

Twins arrived at about 23h00, after we had our supper. He was very happy to see Jonas. We went to bed in the early hours of Saturday morning. When we awoke, Mrs Twins served us a hearty breakfast. We really felt at home.

We spent the day visiting Gaborone in Twins' Toyota Stallion van. He told us about the good old days of Mmamosadi nyana (the queen). He also told us about great statesmen like Sir Seretse Khama. He even told us about the might of the Botswana Defence Force. Twins really loved his country.

Late in the afternoon Twins took us to the Oasis Motel next to Mphahlatsane Motel for a few drinks. The two motels are not far from the Botswana and South African border post of Shuping Stad. While we drank, Mr Twins continued to entertain us with his narratives.

We were just about to leave when he started telling us about South African refugees based in Botswana. He cited a few places and among them, he talked of the Dukwe Settlement. We asked him to tell us more on that subject, but he became

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cautious. He did tell us, however, that the refugees were living in better conditions than the people of Botswana and that the government of Botswana was contributing generously to their welfare. This information comforted us. We were also cautious in our questioning and careful not to raise any suspicions about our true purpose for being in Botswana. We left the Oasis at about 20h00 and went to the Triple D where we met some girls who accommodated us for that night.

I do not know what Mr Twins told his wife about us, but when we visited her the following morning, she was even more hospitable than before and even washed our dirty clothes. Jonas was the same size as Mr Twins and fitted into his trousers while his own pair was being washed. I was too fat for a loan from Mr Twins and so just had my shirt washed.

We told Mr and Mrs Twins that we would be leaving them on Monday, October 21, 1985. Sunday was thus, according to them, our last day. Sunday was not such a busy day and we went to bed early. Mrs Twins gave us a Rotary watch to be repaired in South Africa. She had taken it to several places in Botswana but to no avail. We were not returning to South Africa, but we could not tell her that, so we took the watch and up to this day, I cannot remember what happened to it.

At about 8h00 on Monday morning, we left the Twins' house for Gaborone. Setshego had instructed us to report to Thami of the ANC, who was a teacher at the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). We arrived at the YWCA at 8h30 and met Thami. We told him we wanted to join the ANC. He advised us to spend some time in the Gaborone Mall and meet him after lunch. We did so and returned at about 14h00. He then told us that he had not been able to find Koppie, the Chief representative of the ANC in Botswana and advised that we should report to the Botswana Special Branch. We were shocked and scared to follow his advice, but he insisted that that was the procedure. We realised that we had no option but

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to go to the police. We went to the Central Police Station in Gaborone and inquired about the offices of the Special Branch.

We were directed to the first floor where we reported our circumstances to the police and they interrogated us and took statements from us. After several hours, in the late afternoon, we were locked up with four local criminals who kept banging the cell door for almost half the night. One of these prisoners knew the procedure for new recruits to MK and reassured us that the police cell was the way to Lusaka and detailed the next steps of our journey. His explanation relieved us of our feelings of betrayal. We were released the following morning at about 8h00.

A police officer took us to the offices that worked hand in glove with the Botswana Council of Refugees (BCR). It was late in the afternoon when we were taken to the offices of the BCR where we were given train tickets to Francistown and 22 pula (R33) each for provisions. We met South Africans at the BCR who were also heading for the Dukwe Settlement. Our spirits were buoyed. We began singing freedom songs and praised our leaders. The revolutionary spirit was upon us, and we were delirious with joy. We saw the torture, frustration and great courage reflected on each others singing faces. We could also see the determination to fight and vanquish the mighty apartheid regime.

At about 18h30, we were all assembled by the BCR officials and led to the Gaborone Station. The train arrived at 19h00 and we left for Francistown. The Botswana Special Branch members were all over the station masquerading as passengers.

The train had a diesel engine. We travelled the whole night and reached Francistown only the following day at 7h00 in the morning. We were met by the Francistown BCR officials at the station and were led to the Francistown Police Station where we boarded a truck to Dukwe Settlement.

We reached the settlement at midday and made our first

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contact with the African National Congress.

Chapter Seven

Dukwe Settlement

The Dukwe Settlement is situated in the outskirts of Botswana on the way to the Gazungula border post. It was established to cater for refugees from all over Africa. There was only one access and exit point to the Settlement which was guarded by the Botswana Police Force. It was packed when we arrived there, mostly with refugees from Joshua Nkomo's Zipra Movement who had fled Zimbabwe as a result of the reign of terror of the Fifth Brigade. Other refugees were Namibians who did not align themselves with Swapo.

The South Africans were affiliated to the PAC and the Black Consciousness Movement, as well as from the African National Congress. All three political organisations had their respective representatives at the Settlement. Some PAC members had been there a long time and were living with their families. They had proper houses and were allowed free access in and out of the settlement.

The ANC refugees lived in tents, and it was clear that they were there in transit to Lusaka. The procedure was to make our stay as short as possible. The normal duration being seven days. The longest, not more than fourteen, which would be as a result of administrative delays by the Botswana Department of Home Affairs. New travel documents had to be prepared for a swift and smooth movement of cadres to Lusaka.

Our chief representative was Oupa Mokou, popularly known as Chamza, who regularly lectured us on dialectical materialism. He, at times, brought us home delicacies that we

Dukwe Settlement

missed, such as mango achar. He made us feel at home while preparing us for our forward journey. His favourite phrase was, “Never celebrate with booze”, to warn us against the practice among some groups who made their last night a night of booze and freedom songs. There was no special beer in Dukwe. The only two common drinks were Chibuku and Tototo, pronounced, “tho, tho, tho”. It is also known as Bambara Gin. In South Africa, it is popularly known as Mampuru. It is a strong African gin guaranteed to put the consumer on his knees. The stuff was not expensive, costing 3 pula (R 4.50) for a 750 millilitre bottle. It was this stuff that kept us going in Dukwe. We drank the stuff because there was nothing else to drink. The stuff was not healthy because it was never inspected. It moved straight from the brewer to the consumer.

This “tho, tho, tho” was a bone of contention between us and the chief representative who felt that we resorted to it because we were frustrated by being in exile. He made it a point to always assure us of the just cause of our revolution. He made us aware that our people in South Africa looked upon us as their heroes and that our mothers, brothers and sisters would be disappointed to learn of our drunkenness.

We would promise not to drink again, but as regularly as we promised, we returned to “tho, tho, tho”.

One good thing we did at Dukwe was that we formed a football team and challenged other refugees, thereby cementing bonds with them.

I missed my mother at Dukwe; I missed her tongue-lashing and I realised how much I loved her.

My group was amongst the unfortunate ones in that we stayed for fourteen days at Dukwe due to new travelling arrangements. We were the first group to travel by train to Zambia via Zimbabwe. All groups before us had the opportunity of flying to Lusaka where they were picked up by the Umbokodo (ANC security wing).

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We boarded the train at Francistown. It went via Plumtree to Bulawayo where it stopped for about an hour or so before leaving for Harare. We were escorted by a member of Umkhonto we Sizwe, Siphon Mofokeng. He had all our passports with him. The procedure here reminded me of the excursions we went on in lower primary school; our teacher kept all our tickets with her. History was repeating itself, only now, I was an adult — it was an Umkhonto we Sizwe cadre who was orchestrating my behaviour, telling me when to eat, when to buy, what to buy and when to disembark from the train. We left Francistown at about 19h00 and travelled for the whole night. We arrived in Harare at around midday.

In Harare, we were welcomed by the Zimbabwean ANC chief representative. We were taken to the station where we boarded a bus and travelled to the Chirundu border post. It was about 20h00. The connecting bus did not arrive so we had to sleep outside the border at an adjacent filling station. Siphon was very angry and could not understand why the bus had not arrived. The bus only arrived the following morning at around 10h00. We then entered Zambia and travelled to a transit place in a township called Charleston in Lusaka.

Chapter Eight

In Transit at Charleston

In Charleston, we were accommodated in two big houses which served as a transit camp and were given the choice of going to school or joining the army.

The houses were manned by members of the Umbokodo who served us and searched us. I had never been searched like that in my life before. It was humiliating but we accepted it as necessary and in the interest of the genuine revolutionaries. We did not all join the ANC with the same purpose. Some were sent by the enemy to corrupt and poison members of the organisation and some had been sent to ferment confusion in the ranks of the ANC and MK. All this was explained to us by the chief representative of the ANC in Lusaka, Ntate Mashigo. We were then made to write full biographies of ourselves.

This was for security reasons. The biographies were used to check our credibility. We would be called at any time for questioning to test our integrity and consistency. Those suspected as enemy agents would be encouraged to confess in a humane and friendly way; those who persisted as agents would find themselves in Quatro, the ANC prison in Angola.

It was at Charleston that I was given the name Dumezweni Baduza, which I was to use for my entire life in exile. My friend Jonas Rrakau became known as Jackson Masemola. We were instructed to get used to our names and never forget them. I objected to my name. I said I was a Tswana with no knowledge of Zulu. I said I would not mind being given a Tswana, Pedi or Sotho name. Gab, the man who gave me the

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name, explained to me what a pseudonym meant and pointed out the honour bestowed upon me, for I was named after an African giant, Dr K. Baduza, known for his opposition to imperialism. I accepted the name happily after that and become so attached to it that I wanted it incorporated in my identity document.

Our days in Charleston were not bad despite the fact that we did very little and were not allowed out of the yard. We sat around in the big houses the whole day, playing table tennis and recalling our families and our lives back home. At night we sang freedom songs and danced our popular revolutionary toyi-toyi. Our commanders demonstrated military crawls like the lizard and the leopard. They gave us encouraging reports about Angola and raised our expectations. They instilled in us a fighting spirit and strengthened our commitment to liberate our country. The result was that we couldn't wait to become soldiers of Umkhonto we Sizwe.

We spent almost three weeks in Charleston and were then flown to Angola. Most of us had never ever dreamt that we would fly and so the experience was quite thrilling. That experience alone, incredible as it was, doubled our commitment to the ANC and the people of South Africa. We flew for an hour and fifty five minutes when the hostess announced that we were about to land in Luanda, the capital of Angola. Luanda was regarded by the revolutionaries as the "revolutionary trench of Southern Africa". It housed Zipra, Swapo and Umkhonto we Sizwe and allowed us to move around freely with our AK47s. It gave us land to use as our training camps.

For all these concessions to the liberation forces in Southern Africa, Angola became an arch target of the South African government's destabilising strategy.

Chapter Nine

Becoming an MK Cadre

We were met at Luanda Airport by members of the famous Umbokodo and taken to the Vienna transit camp about twenty kilometers from the Luanda city centre. The transit camp was a complex of military tents and porter camps. It was situated in the same area where the battle between the Cubans and the South African army had taken place in 1975 when the Boers had made a full force bid to arrest Angola's independence. Neto who was then the president of Angola, had called in the Cubans to defend the Angolan Socialist Revolution. By the time the Cubans arrived in their katusha's and Grad Ps, the Boers had been closer to capturing Luanda.

The Cubans, known as internationalists among members of MK, launched heavy strikes against the South African forces. They shelled the area with rockets from both the katusha's Stalin Organ and Grad Ps, thereby forcing the apartheid army to retreat. This was the mother of all battles and our commanders detailed the Cuban strategists to inspire us. The searching and testing procedures began all over again. We again wrote our biographies and the chief recording officer (vetting officer) at the camp called us one by one into his office to cross-examine us on our biographies.

Once the security screening was completed, we were formally welcomed as members of Umkhonto we Sizwe by the regional commissar who at that time was Comrade Che O' Gara (Previously, Secretary of Defence in the South African National Defence Force). The Commissar, was a great orator

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who made us jump in jubilation, shouting “War! War!War!” He was a custodian of the Bambatha Revolution and shouted slogans to the effect, “Long Live Sigcwelegcwele! Long Live Maqedindaba! Long Live Makana!”

He respected all those heroes of the Battle of Blood River, the Battle of Isandlwana and all other battles waged by our heroic grandfathers. He told us about these battles as if he was there. He narrated the way Sigcwelegcwele entered the British camp and conducted reconnaissance. He told us how Maqedindaba killed the commander of the British army, thus demoralising it and causing its disarray and ultimate defeat by the black army. His welcoming speech was very inspiring and continues to inspire me to this day.

The following morning, all we talked about was this impressive commissar. Life in exile was becoming interesting.

Every morning, we were taken out for thirty minutes of sport. Among the instructors who gave us our morning exercises was a guy called Oscar Polelo. This comrade was very fit and exercising was the major part of his life. He was amongst a group of forty comrades who had just returned from a special course in the German Democratic Republic. He was used by the command staff to reduce the up and down movements of the new recruits.

He introduced an exercise package he termed “locking exercises”: the exercises varied from sit-ups to frog-jumps. They were very strenuous and left us so strained that for two days we just retired into our tents.

We had our breakfast at about 9h00. The bread was baked at the camp. After breakfast, we attended classes in political studies. I became interested in the dictatorship of the proletariat, which I found quite interesting. I became engrossed in the concept of a classless society and the idea of workers owning the means of production. I became transformed from a capitalist-orientated person to a socialist-orientated one.

Becoming An MK Cadre

The classes would finish at 13h00. We would then go for lunch which was prepared by our kitchen staff who were elected very carefully due to the “Black September” incident in which the entire MK camp was poisoned.

The food in the camp was palatable and delicious. We had among our kitchen staff, cooks that could be recommended to the best hotels in the country.

At 15h00, we would be called to formation where we would be divided into groups for camp duties. One group would wash the pots, another would clean the pigsties which were in the charge of a man named Mosquito, another group went into the bush to cut logs from the trees for cooking. The last group was made up of invalids, recovering from malaria; they swept the ground.

It was here in Vienna that we were introduced to the guard system. We had to guard the camp at night against such reactionary forces as Unita. We changed guards every two hours, starting at 20h00 and ending at 8h00. The most strenuous duty was between 2h00 to 4h00. This time was referred to as “Break my Heart” because it was the period when the enemy could be expected to strike, thinking its quarry asleep. It was also the time when the wild animals set out on the prowl to stalk their prey. We were warned never to sleep at our posts, especially during these hours.

We learnt at Vienna how to respond to different alarm systems, from ground attacks to avion. The latter was used to signal the detection of a plane. We had to run to the air shelters for cover when we heard that signal.

We remained in Vienna for about two months and were then taken to other camps. Jonas and I parted company. He was sent to the Kakulama camp in the eastern part of Angola. I was sent to Quibaxe camp in the north. The camp was popularly known as the “coffee plantation” as it was situated in the coffee plantations of Angola. Coffee fell from the trees and oil oozed

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from the ground and the comrades who sat on the ground had their trousers soiled.

Chapter Ten

In Training

When we arrived in Ouibaxe, we found that it had in fact been closed down by some MK members and was no longer used for training purposes. The camp had a full administrative staff, headed by Sidney Mpilo, who was the camp commander, but only a few MK members. We were then, according to them, the first group of crusants (new recruits) to arrive there for training.

Ouibaxe never had the necessary infrastructure for an MK camp. We had to build that infrastructure. We began by erecting our tents. We then dug the trenches and air shelters. It took us about three full months to develop the camp into a fully fledged military camp. After the hard work, we waited for another three weeks for our instructors to arrive from Europe.

It was around May 1986 that our training started. We had good military instructors, Arnold and Themba. Arnold was remarkable, in that he maintained a high morale and was happy all the time. He would be on duty for 72 hours and was capable of going on afterwards with more work. He started each day as if it was utterly new and not a continuation of the day before. He was among those brave commanders of Umkhonto we Sizwe who waged fierce battles against the Unita forces. He was shot in the legs while defending a group of crusants coming from Luanda and bound for the north. Even after he was shot, he continued fighting until the Unita forces retreated.

One good instructor from Zola in Johannesburg was Comrade Vickie, popularly known as Commander “Morning”.

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He was amongst those brave fighters who died in the Unita skirmishes in what was dubbed the “Battle of the Northern Front”.

Ouibaxe was good in that the camp commander and his staff kept us so busy daily that very few of us had time for home sickness.

We were taught how to manufacture black shoe polish that would compare with the best polishes in the world. The polish was manufactured through an interesting process which involved the burning of car tyres. The black ash would then be mixed with soap tablets, preferably bars of Sunlight soap. Thereafter, diesel was mixed in to make the compound softer. The end product was so good that our boots shone all the time. This experience and others made us more dedicated to the revolution.

Other duties at Ouibaxe included going to the bush at 15h00 to collect firewood which we used for our cooking. We did our own cooking. We were also required to guard the camp at night in two hour shifts. The duties began at 18h00 and ended at 8h00. During the day, only the main posts were guarded. We fondly referred to the 2h00 to 4h00 night shift as “Break my Heart” shift, since it was at these times when we could be attacked by the enemy.

One comrade who always attacked those who believed in God claiming that there was no God, was on the “Break my Heart” shift at a post 500 meters outside the camp. The idea of waiting for two hours in a wild bush frequented by hyenas so terrified him that he called out to God in Xhosa, “Ay Thixo!”, to everybody’s surprise.

It was at this camp that I popularised myself as one of the best playwrights in the ranks of Umkhonto we Sizwe. I wrote my first play, “Think about the Future”, which won huge accolades at the camp. I staged the play twice — once for the camp and once for the members of the National Executive

In Training

Committee (NEC) who visited the camp. The play was mainly based on life in the townships and had a cast of thirty men. I was the producer, director and played the lead role because there was no one there with acting experience and I knew that a weak actor could destroy even a good script as good actors could improve one. The majority of those who acted in my production had never been in a theatre before. I gave them minor roles to play. I had no difficulty in attracting “actors” for only the “Drama Department” was allowed to rehearse during working hours, from 15h00 to 17h30. Many comrades found drama to be a good excuse to shirk work.

I did other plays at the camp and *Woza Albert* was one of them. I did that play with Comrade Mpiyakhe. Staging those plays kept me safe from home sickness.

It was around September 1986 that I decided to do advertisements and let my actors do the hard stuff — the plays. The adverts were mainly based on the promotion of socialist products and the slamming of capitalist ones. One advert that made my name sound in all MK camps was an advert on a Soviet tin called *Slava*.

These activities gave me an excuse for missing physical training and tactic-physico which was a mixture of physical and tactical training, which were conducted during the latter part of the day. Immediately after the order was barked for recruits to don their tracksuits, I would go to my tent and fetch my scripts, and inform the instructor that the camp commander, David Ngozana and his commissar, Walter Motaung (Tsietsi Tolo) had ordered me to write a play on tribalism in preparation for the next visit of the leadership to the camp. The instructor would be very upset with me and I was dubbed *Moloi*, meaning unfit. My involvement in theatre also privileged me to eat anything at anytime. My simple explanation was that I was munching whatever I was munching in preparation for my plays.

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During October 1986, a special operatives group visited our camp. Included in this group was Gordon Webster who was sprung out of hospital in Pietermaritzburg by Robert McBride, where he was under police guard. I was interviewed by this group and they recommended that I infiltrate South Africa to fight the enemy. They also decided to send a unit to the Pango Camp in the northern part of Angola for intensive training in engineering. I would be together with Fabian Mbumbulo and Isaac Maria-Maria. Maria-Maria never made it to South Africa: he died while defusing a Unita landmine.

In Pango, I continued writing plays and advertisements. I was made a section commander, but I did not hold the position for long. It was taken away from me following an incident where I unwittingly criticised the Officer on Duty (OD) within his earshot. I had been called to my section by the officer who reprimanded me for my failure to discipline my section and get the base in order. I was ordered to clean my base myself as commander and warned that he would return in two hours and expected to see the base spick and span.

I remarked that there were sick comrades in one tent and that the OD was ill-disciplined if he could not get the entire command to clean the base, not realising the OD was within earshot. He called me to book and ordered a corrective punishment. I had to run and crawl for two hours with a knapsack full of soil slung on my back. During formation that night, I was demoted as commander of my section. I was punished again a week later, together with Fabian, and ordered to feed the pigs for seven days.

Chris Hani visited the camp during this time and I was amongst those he interviewed. I complained to him about the treatment I was receiving. He did not react. He left the same day without taking anyone of us with him. I was depressed and felt defeated. The following morning, at 5h00, I was asked to report to the guardhouse in my civilian clothes. I knew then that

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my prayers had finally been answered and I was leaving Pango for home. It was about 6h30 that the truck left the camp for Luanda. I left my comrades in Angola, and with my AK47, left for South Africa, the battle cry, “War! War! War!” ringing in my head.

Chapter Eleven

Commissioned to Infiltrate South Africa

In Luanda, I was accommodated in a flat in Angop Building which belonged to the Angolan Press Agency. I was taken to the MK stores the following day to be given civilian clothes. I was given three pairs of trousers and a suit. I was also provided with formal shirts, T-shirts and about two pairs of shoes.

On the third day in Luanda, I was given an air ticket to Lusaka. It was approximately twelve months since I had been at that airport. The plane arrived at about 14h00. I was met by Comrade Keith Mokoape and taken to Mutendere Township which was mushrooming with MK guerrillas preparing to return home. I was accommodated in a house belonging to SACTU in 'C' Section and was welcomed by the comrades. We had to cater for ourselves in this house — clean, cook and work in the garden. I sold my Soviet suit to an old man for K450 (R150).

Life was fun at Mutendere and a great relief from the camps. On my first night, we went to a tavern called Mazimoyo and enjoyed ourselves drinking and laughing. Zambian ladies joined us and I took one of them to bed with me. It was a great relief after twelve months of celibacy. I needed that experience. I needed the fun and laughter of Mutendere. I think the whole atmosphere at Mutendere was necessary for our re-integration into civilian life and our preparation for guerilla action at home.

I had a wonderful audience in the comrades at the SACTU House. They wanted to know how I had come to join MK. I

recounted how the guerrillas had come to our area and recruited Jonas Rakau and I, how these guerrillas had been attacked and how they had valiantly fought the police, won the fight and retreated into exile. The comrades were quite excited about my narration and I had to repeat it several times.

I did not know then that someone, apart from the young comrades, was listening to me. Late one afternoon, as I was preparing to leave for my base, I was called by one of our commanders. I did not know this person, except that he was an ardent Christian who went to church every Sunday. He was, as far as I know, the only MK guerilla that was a committed Christian. I waited for him and as he came up, he surprised me by calling out, "Are you Fats?"

I was stunned and utterly surprised that anybody in these parts would know me by that name.

"I was commanding that unit you talked about. I did not know you by sight. I only knew you through your biography which was given to me by Lassie," he went on. I was thrilled. "What's your name?" I asked.

"Mainstay Chibuku," he said.

I laughed. "Are you also going home?"

"No."

"Why?" I persisted.

"I am declared a hot potato in the country and I am also a prohibited immigrant in Botswana," he laughed sarcastically as he rambled on.

I was happy that I had at last found my commander, a man I could always go to for assistance.

"Where is Qabane?" I asked, referring to Lassie.

"He is in Swaziland."

We talked for a long time before we parted. I went to my base happy and excited, like a small boy going to school for the first time.

The following morning, Chris Hani, who was the chief-of-

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staff, came to see me with Keith Mokwape. He briefed me on my mission in South Africa and asked me if I wanted somebody to work with me. I did and suggested that Jonas Rrakau and Mainstay Chibuku work with me. Keith Mokwape shook his head in disagreement as I mentioned Mainstay's name.

"But the comrade is highly wanted in South Africa," he said.

"I know, but I want him. It is through his experience that this mission will succeed," I said. I heard Comrade Chris Hani sigh with relief.

They instructed me to speak to Mainstay and left. I talked to Mainstay and he said he had no problems. He was tired with "rear", as exile was termed, and wanted to go home.

Chapter Twelve

Readiness to Infiltrate South Africa

Two weeks later, Jackson Masemola (Jonas) and Thuso Mojapelo came to Mutendere. We formed the Moses Mabhida Unit, initiated by Chris Hanu and Keith Mokwape. Our mission was, “recruit, train, arm and lead our people into battle.”

Mainstay was appointed the commander of the unit, Jackson Masemola the chief-of-staff, Thuso the communications officer and I the commissar. Pretoria was chosen as the operational area. We wanted to show the enemy that no place on earth was immune to military operations, especially bombs.

It was 1987 and the ANC declared that the war should be taken to the white areas. We were determined to implement this order by the end of February 1987. We infiltrated into Botswana over the Zambezi River by boat. We were met at the Botswana border fence at 2h00 by comrades operating in Botswana and transported to Gaborone, to Mogoditshane Village, where we were booked into the mogotel, known popularly as the Blue Note. This village was known for harbouring MK cadres and subject to attack by the SADF. One comrade was killed in a skirmish in 1986.

The mogotel, which was also frequented by members of the Botswana Special Branch, was not a safe place for a combat unit. Experience had shown that many cadres arrested in Botswana were apprehended at this Motel. A good alibi was one way of assuring our survival at this place. We had to plan a watertight alibi to save us from being returned to Lusaka. Our story was that we were students from Lesotho registered at the

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Botswana polytechnic and that we were stranded for lack of accommodation. While that story worked, it put us under great stress, for every morning, we had to pretend that we were leaving for the polytechnic. We would spend the entire day walking around the Gaborone Mall and hide when we saw members of the special branch.

The other flaw in our story was that we did not even know where the polytechnic was. We only knew that it was on the way to Tlokweng, but where exactly, we did not know. As could be expected, a bunch of students living in a motel roused the suspicion of the locals. We were already four weeks in this motel and the million dollar question was, "Who was funding your stay?" We were feeling the heat and went to see our commanders, Naledi Molefe and Steve Sebata. We suggested we infiltrate into South Africa and the only advice we got was, "use your initiative". They made it quite clear that the ball was in our court. They did, however, advise that we should get ourselves girlfriends living in Botswana and live with them.

They referred to the women of Botswana as sympathisers of our revolution. Three days later, Jackson found himself accommodation in Gaborone with the former Miss Francistown and a week later, Mainstay was living in old Naledi with a lady called Tiny. Thuso discovered the location of his relatives in Botswana and went to live with his aunt in Kanye. I relocated myself in Mogoditshane with a girl called Motshidisi.

Life in Botswana was good and refreshing and once more we enjoyed civilian life. Our girlfriends protected us and kept us safe from the hands of the Botswana Special Branch. Tshidi collected the number plates of the special branch vehicles and gave them to me. She also listened to the local grapevine news and informed us in good time.

We lived the lives of the Batswanas. We went to the rivers to fetch water and to the forests to fetch wood. We drank chibuku when they drank it. We were very disciplined and

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soon we were allowed into the discos free of charge. We were popular with the locals. They respected us and enjoyed our company. In Comrade Naledi Molefe's words, we colonised Botswana. We had been in Botswana for over a month when the four of us, Mainstay, Jackson, Thuso and I were summoned to a meeting at the Red House in Broadhurst by Naledi Molefe and Comrade Dan of the Botswana command. Comrade Dan was popularly known as Buffalo Soldier on account of having been attacked by a buffalo while infiltrating an MK unit into Zimbabwe. He was hospitalised in Zimbabwe.

Also present at the meeting was Comrade Lennox, sent by headquarters in Lusaka. We expressed our eagerness to infiltrate South Africa and were told we would soon do so.

Our unit, however, was reduced to two. Jackson was ordered to join the Dead Letter Box (DLB) unit in Botswana and since Thuso had relatives in Botswana, he was ordered to join the Botswana operations. That left just Mainstay and I for Pretoria.

We maintained our positions as commander and commissar. We spent another two weeks loitering in Botswana and were paid two hundred pulas a month for our survival. Sometimes the comrades would be in hiding and couldn't reach us to give us our stipends. On July 1, 1987, we received instructions to prepare ourselves for infiltration into South Africa on July 2, 1987. We were issued with South African clothes and given R800 each.

Comrades Naledi and Sebata drilled us in communication. We worked out the codes we would use. A telegram reading "Form boys and girls choir" would mean that both of us were retreating to Botswana. "Form boys choir" or "Form girls choir" would mean that only one of us was retreating. "Mapule gave birth to twins" would signal a double bomb blast, while "Mapule gave birth" would signal just one blast. We were also given a five number post box for all our letters which turned

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out to be a dangerous liability.

Poor Motshidisi was shocked to learn that I was going home to fight for my country. She wept uncontrollably, not because she was scared that I was going to die, but because she was going to miss me. She had been given enough time to prepare for the parting. I made it clear to her that being a soldier, I had to be ready for any emergency. Such emergent and spontaneous decisions carried their risks and were almost due to sheer good luck when they resulted in success. We had as many successes as failures. The same could be said of our enemies. Motshidisi cried uncontrollably. It encouraged me to wage a fierce battle against the apartheid regime.

Naledi and Sebata took us to a place called Mmanawana in the southern part of Botswana and left us in a mud hut, a stones throw away from the border fence dividing the former Boputhatswana and Botswana, to await our crossover. The house belonged to an old man who, together with his family, helped to infiltrate MK guerrillas. They had been assisting the MK for the last five years in this dangerous mission. In return, the ANC saw to all their material needs and paid for their children's education. However, a turncoat guerilla could seal their fate at any moment.

Chapter Thirteen

Crossing Into Bophuthatswana

We slept with the family in their mud hut. At 5h00, the old man's fifteen year old barefooted son, who knew the area well, escorted us to the border fence where we could enter South Africa. We climbed over the fence into Boputhatswana. The young boy led us a further one hundred meters until we reached a bus stop which was on the way from Makgobistad to Mafikeng. A bus belonging to Boputhatswana Transport Holdings arrived exactly at 6h00. We boarded the bus to Mafikeng, the boy still in our company. The boy then took us to the Johannesburg taxi rank in Mafikeng. His mission accomplished, the boy returned home. For us, it marked the beginning of a perilous task.

On reaching Park Station in Johannesburg, we boarded another taxi to Pretoria. Another taxi ride from Pretoria took us to Ga-Rankuwa.

My heart raced as I stepped into my hometown. I had to be most adroit about not revealing myself. I longed to see my mother and talk to my father. I had to suppress these feelings. We were tired and slept in a bush familiar to me. It was next to the Ga-Rankuwa Hotel School, between Zone One and Zone Two.

My home was only about 200 meters away and standing in the bush, I could see my young sisters playing on the road. It filled my heart with delight, which was not without its pain, since I couldn't reveal myself to them and touch them.

We crept out of the bush, made our way to the Medical Uni-

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versity of South Africa (Medunsa). Bearing in mind the support enjoyed by the UDF at that institution, we hoped to get help there. Our plan with the Botswana command structure was that we would locate a spot where our arsenal would be delivered to us.

The first person we met at Medunsa was one of my former comrades, Machipisane, whom we called Chips. He wasn't excited to see me. He saw danger and gave me a serious tongue lashing and warned that in coming to Medunsa, we were in breach of security and that it should not be repeated. Nonetheless he assisted us when we briefed him on our mission. He located an empty room where the arsenal could be delivered and arranged accommodation for us close to that room.

We were at Medunsa on two occasions and on one of those, Mainstay managed to sneak out to the Ga-Rankuwa Post Office in Zone One from where he attempted to send our first telegram to Botswana informing them of our safe arrival in Pretoria. The message read, "Hilda bought a car!" The clerk, however, declined to send off the telegram, insisting that the box number was wrong since Botswana had four numbers and he had given her five numbers. Mainstay did not argue with her and returned without sending the telegram.

We wondered why we had been given a five number box and concluded that somebody, somewhere wanted to sacrifice us, but who? We had no clues. My commander, Mainstay, was brave and intelligent and he immediately ceased all communication with Botswana.

We then travelled by taxi from Ga-Rankuwa to Pretoria and in Pretoria boarded another taxi to Mamelodi. We alighted at the Tsako Thabo School in Khalambazo, and I led the way to my aunt Safira who lived in White City which was close to Khalambazo. Much to my surprise, my aunt welcomed us and later gave us a room at the back of her house. She occupied a

typical four-roomed house with tapped water and electricity. She had built a few shacks around her house for extra space.

My aunt's daughters, Lizzie and Gertrude, were excited about us and took us in their charge. They were aware of our mission and in complete sympathy, they pointed out most of the enemy agents in the area and took us to the hair salon to have our hair permed so that we would look like Mamelodians.

They protected us from girls they thought would be a security risk, they made us change our shoes because they said they were out of fashion in the circles in which we would be moving. Those two beautiful girls took us to the discos and taught us all the songs that were popular and I fell in love with one of the songs, Anita Baker's "No more tears". Lizzie and Gertrude, above all, gave my aunt the courage to harbour us in her house. Mainstay enjoyed their company intensely. He accompanied them to town and took a walk in the township.

My cousin, Felix offered us his room and we lived there for part of our sojourn there. He also served as our eyes and ears and warned us against people who could turn us in.

We left Aunt Safira after a month. Mainstay went to live with a girlfriend, Mpho Helen Megale, whom he later married in Tsakane. I went to Section D1 and lived with another cousin, Mmapule.

A week after I had moved to Section D1, Mainstay decided that I should go to Botswana to arrange proper communication and canvass more money.

I successfully returned to Botswana, met the command structure and discussed the problem about the five number post box. They insisted that it was five and they had used it successfully before. I then decided to use Tshidi's box number for all our communication and they agreed to check the box daily for our messages. That was the number we used until our arrest.

I was given R 1 500 to purchase a Peugeot 305 to transport

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arms. I infiltrated back into South Africa through the Pitshane Moloto border fence, this time, being helped by Peter Rramonyetsa, who also helped MK to infiltrate cadres.

I reached Pretoria and briefed Mainstay about my arrangements. We asked a friend, Dichutu, from Vuka in Kagiso to purchase the car. There was no car at the price we could afford. We communicated this to Botswana through another friend, Fetsang, also from Vuka, who acted as our courier. We were instructed by the command structure in Botswana to use our initiative, which we interpreted to mean, steal a car.

Chapter Fourteen

Roadblock Arrest

We had by now, recruited nine comrades who were eagerly waiting to be trained, armed and led into battle. Our first manoeuvre was to steal a car and commissioned Joseph Tiger Nkosi, of Mamelodi East, to do so. Within days, Tiger presented us with Pretty, a man from Soweto. We met with him and discussed the procedure. Pretty promised to deliver a Toyota Cressida in two days. We had to pay him R 500. The changing of the engine and chassis numbers and the painting of the car would be our responsibility.

We decided on the Cressida since Tiger had a similar car that he had written-off. He had the documentation for the car and that would make our operation very easy. We would simply use the documentation of the old car on the new one. Two days later, Pretty delivered an almost brand new grey Cressida. We paid Pretty his R 500 and Tiger offered to take the car to KwaNdebele to have the engine and chassis numbers changed, the car resprayed and fitted with KwaNdebele number plates. This exercise would set us back by R 540 which we paid in advance. A few weeks later, we were told that the car was discovered by the police while parked at a shebeen in Dennilton.

Mainstay was very angry and he instructed Tiger to tell “those lousy criminals”, as he referred to them, to steal another Cressida and carry out all the alterations as was agreed upon.

Tiger went to KwaNdebele to deliver the commander’s message. He arranged with the KwaNdebele contacts for

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another car and the funding thereof. Three days later, Tiger personally went to steal another Cressida somewhere in KwaNdebele. Though it was not new, it was in a fairly good condition. The car had the registration number KNB 1067 and cost only R 160. We used this car for our work. Mainstay and I were very happy. We communicated to Botswana that we would be arriving with Tiger to collect weapons.

I left for Botswana two days later, on November 18, 1987 with Tiger and another brave comrade, Conrad “Brown Sugar” Lekumbi. Brown Sugar was wanted by the security branch, who had a reward on his head. He was part of the command structure of a unit that was operating in Mamelodi before our arrival. The security police apprehended this unit. Brown Sugar had escaped the dragnet. We were ordered by the Umkhonto we Sizwe leadership to locate him and spring him out of the country to safety.

It was around 15h00 when we started out and arrived in Mafikeng at about 18h30. We decided to find a place to sleep as it was unsafe to jump the fence at night. We were given accommodation by Jomo, a footballer at Montshiwa. I cannot remember what excuse we gave this good Samaritan. We left the following morning at about 6h30.

I was then the only person who knew the area well and I decided that we should take the Makgobistad route. Our plan was for Tiger to drop Brown Sugar and me at the Mmanawane bus stop from where we would jump the fence into Botswana. Tiger would then return to the Ramatlabama border post where he would use his South African passport to cross into Botswana. Our meeting point in Botswana was the Cumberland Hotel in Lobatse.

We were just about five kilometers from Mmanawane when we came across an army roadblock. We decided to turn back, but we were already seen by soldiers who were stationed about two kilometers away from the main roadblock. We had no

Roadblock Arrest

alternative but to go through the roadblock. Our KNB registration number was sufficient to rouse the attention of the army and we were ordered out of the car.

We were immediately separated from one another and interrogated individually. They failed to get any incriminating information from us, so they called the Boputhatswana Intelligence Service who operated from their offices in Khupe.

Boputhatswana Intelligence instructed them to drive us to a bush on the road to Rramatlabama, about four kilometers from the Boputhatswana Intelligence headquarters. Our car was driven by a soldier. We were interrogated in this bush and our identity documents taken from us to be shown to MK turncoats turncoats operating in the area. We were taken in cars belonging to the intelligence service to the Mafikeng Railway Station parking bay where we were paraded before former MK cadres who were hidden in a Toyota microbus parked across the road.

We were then taken to the Mafikeng Police Station where we spent two days without any interrogation.

On Saturday, November 21, 1987, the Boputhatswana CID division began investigating the car. The case was handled by a police officer called Sticks, who charged us for “possession of stolen property”. He applied a certain chemical to the bodywork of the car which exposed the silver-grey paintwork. He applied the test on several parts of the car and was convinced that there were two cars there, the yellow one belonging to Joseph Tiger Nkosi and a silver-grey one belonging to someone else. Comrade Paul Sefularo, on his way to Botswana, was also arrested on that day and brought to the Mafikeng Police Station.

Paul knew me very well and he was surprised to see me in the cells. I explained to him exactly what had happened and the possibility of being granted bail. I even told him the name I used because of the fake Boputhatswana identity document that

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was found in my possession. The document, with my name depicted as Samuel Mosala, was given to me while in exile. During my brief interrogation, my identity document was confiscated but returned to me later. This really made us believe that Moses Mabhida was with us.

Paul promised to do something about our bail upon his release. He was released the following day, on a Sunday. We made our first appearance in the regional court in Mmabatho on November 23, 1987. The State did not challenge our application for bail, set down at R 600 each. We were then moved to the Mafikeng local prison where we spent twelve days before being released on bail. Paul had kept his promise and arranged our bail thereby saving us from the Boputhatswana Intelligence Services who would have detected our real identities when our fingerprints were sent from Pretoria.

Chapter Fifteen

Out On Bail – Suspicion By Comrades

We went directly to Pretoria after our release and I reported to Mainstay. He told me I would have to go to Botswana to explain myself. I was in Botswana a week later. I was now a suspect among my own comrades and the MK command structure in Botswana began my interrogation. Mainstay arrived in Botswana four days after my arrival. My interrogation continued for another week. It was only after Che O’Gara telephoned Paul Sefularo and confirmed he had bailed me out that I was in the clear. I thanked Che for saving me from my own comrades.

I was once again a trusted member of MK and we began to discuss with the command structure about infiltrating arms into South Africa. We were told to wait in Botswana for further instructions from Lusaka. Lusaka sent us a map of a DLB located in South Africa with a courier. We were given operational funds and we once again returned to South Africa in ZCC uniforms through Ramotswa. Our plan was to head for Mochaneng in Zeerust. The border area was muddy due to heavy rainfall. Our Zionist boots were covered in mud and this slowed down our pace. It took us approximately five hours from the fence to reach Mochaneng village.

While in Mochaneng, we inquired about transport transport to Zeerust and found that there was none. We then decided to walk to a neighbouring village of Rietpan. On our way to Rietpan we met an old man who wanted to know who we were and what we were doing in that area. We told him that we were

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returning from a prayer session in Rramotswa. I left Mainstay to do the talking since he was a member of the Zionist Christian Church. I, in the meanwhile, hummed a Zionist song that I heard as a child, as they danced in the traditional Zionist way with a finger pointing to the sky.

The old man left; we had allayed his suspicions, or so we thought and continued on our journey. Ten minutes later, we saw the old man returning. He just sped past us, moving in the same direction as us. We said nothing to each other but the danger warning was there. We ran through the bush towards Rietpan. It was not long before we heard police sirens in the direction of Mochaneng.

We were, by this time, already in Rietpan. Mainstay had a lady friend in Rietpan and we went to see her. He told the lady what had happened and she immediately set out to arrange transport for us. She returned with a combi and we offered the driver R200 to take us to Zeerust. He was most co-operative and used a less popular route. We boarded a taxi to Johannesburg from Zeerust.

On the way to Johannesburg, we encountered a roadblock at Swartruggens. All passengers were ordered to disembark from the vehicle. One black policeman came towards Mainstay and I and ordered us back into the combi. The other passengers were given a thorough body search. The doors of the vehicle were locked and the driver was ordered to unlock them using his key. The driver was also questioned and searched. Satisfied, we were allowed to leave. We sighed with relief. The roadblock was not directed at us.

Mainstay persuaded the driver to drop us off at Kagiso Two in Krugersdorp and so we arrived in Vuka as Kagiso Two was called. We spent the evening and night at Mainstay's brothers house. The entire family had gathered for a Zionist prayer session. Seeing me in a Zionist uniform, they assumed I was a church member. I had to spend the entire evening praying and

Out On Bail – Suspicion By Comrades

drinking tea and coffee. We left Vuka on Monday morning and arrived in Pretoria.

Chapter Sixteen

Cleared By The ANC

Two days later, Mainstay decided to fetch our DLB, which, according to the map, was in a place called Wagendrift, just a stones throw from Hammanskraal. We travelled by taxi to Hammanskraal and alighted on the freeway to Pietersburg, on the road to Rust de Winter. We studied the map. The DLB was not far from the freeway, about two-and-a-half kilometers away in the bush. We followed the directions on the map. We countered and recounted our steps.

It took us about thirty minutes and we stood right on top of the DLB. We dug the soil with our hands. It was soft. We felt the plastic bags that contained our arsenal and satisfied that we had located our DLB, we made our way to Mamelodi. We did not want to take the same route. We travelled on Moloto Road to Umhlanga in KwaNdebele. It took us seven hours to get to the road. I wore out my moccasin shoes in the process. Their sole cracked in the middle.

According to the map and the distance travelled, we could only assume that we had moved from Hammanskraal to KwaNdebele. We had hoped to get lifts on the way. It was only at 22h00 that we managed to get a lift to Mamelodi. Mainstay, on seeing how tired I was, ordered me to rest.

Mainstay managed to get hold of Tshepo and Squich, both from Attridgeville, at about 16h00 the next day. They organised transport and at around 19h00, went to pick up the arsenal from the DLB. They dropped the arms at Squich's house in Attridgeville. Mainstay left Squich and Tshepo

guarding the arms and came to collect me in Mamelodi.

At midnight, we began distributing the arms to the comrades we had recruited. The first batch of arms was delivered to Ernest Ramadite in Atteridgeville. Ernest was a commissar of a unit that we dubbed Dabulamanzi. He was a brilliant politician. Through him, we managed to recruit Francis, the bravest commander of our internal units and George and Liffy, who became selfless guerrillas of Umkhonto we Sizwe.

Other arms were distributed to units in Mamelodi and Kagiso. Mainstay saw to it that the distribution was completed in two days so that training could begin.

We were now in control of seven units which included Dabulamanzi: the other units were Macethindaba, based in Mamelodi and led by Reuben Khotsa, with Reginald Lefty Legodi as his deputy and James Ndo Khasi as chief-of-staff; Machingwana, led by Peter Maluleka; Seqweleqwele, a reconnaissance unit comprising of four staunch members of the Zionist Church, led by Mainstay's younger brother, Itumeleng; Madinoqa, a unit of two brothers, Siphon and Vusi based in Kagiso; Hintsu, a unit of two led by Joseph Tiger Nkosi and Bernard Mokgonyane and the last unit was based in Kagiso and was led by Naphtali, with Chi as his deputy.

Tshepo and Squich became part of the command structure and was responsible for the logistics of the Moses Mabhida unit. They could organise transport and accommodation in a wink of an eye. We kept them aloof from the other units, the existence of which was known only to Mainstay and I. The Mabhida unit was now poised for a full scale war against the regime.

Chapter Seventeen

MK In Pretoria

Now that the arms were distributed, we began the training of the units. Mainstay decided to divide the units into three: the AK47 squad, the grenade squad, and the limpet mine squad. Each unit was thereby trained for a specific task.

Seqweleqwele in Kagiso was the reconnaissance unit whose main task was to be familiar with the route from Johannesburg to the border of Mochaneng and to carry out any emergency transportation of members who had to be taken out of the country. It was also their duty to gather information about enemy manoeuvres in the border area.

Seqweleqwele was turned into a full combat unit after Mainstay recruited Fetsang as our courier. We also recruited Billy, a shepherd from Mochaneng to reconnoiter the border. The arrangement with him was purely financial. We paid him between R 50 and R 100 per trip.

Billy was assisted by a man from Dinokaneng whose name I no longer remember. He was a one-eyed fellow and conducted reconnaissance between Zeerust and Mochaneng. He linked with Billy. The training was completed by March 1988 and the units awaited signals to attack.

The training involved the use of firearms, physical training, tactics and politics. In politics, we concentrated mainly on the strategy and tactics of the ANC, the Freedom Charter and the MK Manifesto.

We were not the terrorists as some people perceived us to be, but matured people fighting an unjust system. Dabulamanzi

MK in Pretoria

was trained in a bush in one of Boputhatswana's villages in the use of AK47s and makarov pistols. It was at a shooting range where one shot with live ammunition. In March 1988, sporadic attacks were reported in the areas of Pretoria. Kagiso joined later and our MK voice was heard both in Pretoria and Krugersdorp.

We were all in all responsible for nineteen successful military operations and the escape from Modderbee prison was the twentieth operation. Amongst the operations we carried out, one was Ngoma Bosuku (Night Song), where three MK operatives, clad in brown overalls, raided a shebeen in Atteridgeville, ten kilometers from Pretoria. In this operation, three policemen died and several civilians were caught in the crossfire. One policeman who was in the toilet at the time of the attack, jumped a wall fence and ran for his dear life to the Atteridgeville police station.

During the shooting, there was confusion and the operatives joined the masses who were running helter-skelter and retreated from the scene. One operative suffered injuries as he was shot in the hand. About twelve more shots were fired in the air to signal the war that was mounting against the enemy.

The other major attack in Atteridgeville was a bomb blast that rocked the Atteridgeville Municipal office. The operative that carried out the operation was given a crash course in the handling of limpet mines by both myself and Mainstay at about 10h00 and on the same day at 16h00, he carried out the bombing of the municipal building.

Other bomb blasts in Atteridgeville included an attack on the Atteridgeville Railway Station where a bomb went off in a standby train. This blast was to support the stayaway that was organised by Cosatu. It was important that we always reminded the people that MK was present to defend them against the enemy.

The attacks in Pretoria Central stemmed from a directive

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from the then president of the ANC, Comrade Oliver Tambo, to take the war to the white suburbs. In keeping with this order, we were responsible for the Sterland attack in which Mainstay died a premature death.

We also carried out an operation at the Lion Bridge where a civilian car and several shops were destroyed.

Our next operation was blasts at Vermeulen and Proes Streets in the city centre. Both blasts occurred at lunchtime. The one at Vermeulen Street went off near the Wimpy Bar injuring four people and damaging several businesses, one of them being the South African Airways building. The Proes Street blast damaged a civilian car, under which the bomb was planted.

This attack was historically important since the regime was celebrating forty years of apartheid rule on this day. Thabo Mbeki was meeting Wynand Malan, Van Zyl Slabbert and others in Paris in their bid to commence talks between the regime and the ANC. After the lunchtime blast, a communique was sent to Paris and the meeting was extended for one hour to discuss the ANC's shift from hard targets to soft targets.

The attacks in Mamelodi included grenade attacks at the houses of policemen. Four houses were damaged and in one attack, unfortunately, a one year old baby was killed. It was one of those operations carried out due to poor reconnaissance. The baby was not the target and his death still pains us. No rightful thinking man can go out of his way killing toddlers, but there are always casualties in a war. The enemy too has killed babies like Trocius Ndlovu and Mitah Ngobeni.

The grenade attacks in Mamelodi were so terrifying that many policemen there had their windows barricaded with chicken mesh. Such ugly structures was a sign of war and it was clear that the enemy was beginning to feel our presence.

In Kagiso, there were also attacks on enemy agents' houses. One man who was purported to be an informer had his house

attacked twice in one week. The house was first attacked on a Tuesday night. The police came to inspect the damages on Wednesday and left. The unit gave me a full briefing after the attack. It was before Mainstay's death. I reported to my commander and he was unhappy about the attack and ordered the house be attacked again and this was done on Thursday. This time round the police refused to carry out an inspection in loco. Butcher, as the informer was called, was seen on Friday loading his remaining furniture on a truck and relocating to an unknown destination.

Other attacks in the West Rand included a bomb blast at Luiperdsvlei Railway Station where we wanted to derail a railway line. This was in support of a stayaway organised by our international organisations. Our operative who went to place the bomb also wanted the explosion to ignite the Shell petrol storage tanks situated across the station. Reaching the station he found the Shell depot tightly guarded but since he was at war, he was eager to carry out the operation against the odds. On his way to the railway line, he passed a few gamblers who were squatting in a circle and playing dice.

After placing the bomb, he considered warning the gamblers, but decided against it. The bomb detonated after thirty minutes; the gamblers ran helter-skelter, very dusty, very confused, cursing the whites, whom they believed were responsible for the blast. "These whites want to kill us!" they lamented. The same operative was responsible for two other bomb blasts at police stations, one at Kagiso and the other at Witpoortjie.

We kept journalist busy with daily scoops. The police were all over in both places, blaming their informers for the blows the regime was encountering.

One thing that people must appreciate is that there are deaths in war, civilians caught in the crossfire lose their lives. The man behind the trigger and the man planting a bomb are

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forced by circumstances beyond their control to act in the manner they do. They are not killers. Circumstances turn cultured men to uncultured action. What would a reasonable man do to solve a dispute when negotiations are not permitted. War is war, and as Mainstay said, “those who are prepared to die will live and those who want to live will die.”

Those men and women who died in the raids by the SADF in Matola, Maseru and Gaborone were victims of such circumstances and of the total onslaught declared by President PW Botha and his generals. For those caught in our attacks, I say, “It was not personal but it was in the course of the liberation of the black masses of our country. Blacks also died in this war because they, by donning the uniform of their enemies, they aligned themselves with the forces of darkness.

Chapter Eighteen

We Blast The White Laager

In April the police were beginning to have leads on us. On the morning of April 15, 1988, I went to see Mainstay at the Zozo house he was renting in Tsakane section in Mamelodi east. We planned to direct our attacks in the centre of Pretoria. We felt that the time was ripe to shift the focus of MK attacks from the townships into the white suburbs. The enemy had to be hit where it hurt most. It was during this time in our struggle that the ANC was advocating that the war should be taken into the white suburbs.

It was around 13h00 that I retreated to my base in Phumla Mxashi next to Eerste Fabriek Station. I had moved from Mapule's place in D1 section and was staying at the time with Aunt Safira's youngest son, Mmolawa, who was very fond of Mainstay and I and we were welcome in his house at any time. He was highly impressed with our operations and saw us as professionals. One ungodly night, he was invited for a drink by a policeman friend. He extended the invitation to me and to his surprise, I accepted.

There were ten policemen at the party. I never panicked nor was I uneasy. They accepted me as their good buddy who should always be invited to their parties. Another important fact was that Mainstay was living with Helen Mpho Mehale, whom he later married. Mpho was the daughter of the highly respected members of the Zion Christian Church, Waitin and Annie Mehale, of Kagiso II in Krugersdorp.

As the story goes, Mainstay was in standard one when

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Mpho was born. Mainstay was so enthralled by this baby that he promised the parents he would marry the girl when they grew up. He watched over her as she grew up and when Mpho started Sub A, Mainstay made it his duty to take her to school every day. He continued this ritual until Mpho attended higher primary school.

Mainstay, in the interim, went into exile. Even when in exile, he continued to communicate with Mpho whom he called Mavis. While we were operating inside South Africa, Mainstay decided to tie the knot. Their love was love at its best.

On the day we planned our move on the Sterland Complex in Pretoria, Mpho was out on a school trip to the Rand Easter Show. At about 17h00, we gathered at Mainstay's base in Tsakane. We armed our mini limpets and left for the Sterland Complex at about 18h30. By 18h50, we were already in town. We reached Sterland close on to 19h00. Our aim was to place the limpet mine at 19h00 with a lead plate of thirty minutes so that it would detonate at 19h30 when the cinema audience would leave.

Mainstay was busy trying to remove the pin when we saw one of the parking attendants approach in our direction. Mainstay ordered me to intercept him. I did so and engaged him in a discussion a few meters away from Mainstay.

I was still talking to the attendant when a loud explosion disrupted the silence. People who were sitting outside Sterland ran towards the scene, shouting, "It's a bomb! It's a bomb!" I had a plastic bag in my hand which contained another limpet mine. As people came running towards the scene and shattered glass from an adjacent building sprayed the ground, I panicked and dropped the plastic bag containing the mine into a dustbin near me.

The attendant I was talking to ran away immediately. I had no option but to move out of the area. I went to a taxi rank near the Holiday Inn and after a five minute wait, I boarded a taxi to

Mamelodi.

Suddenly, the eerie silence in the area was shattered by sirens heading in the direction of the blast. At this point there was only one question in my mind. “What had happened?”. The taxi waited for five minutes before taking off.

Mainstay was nowhere to be found. Being a soldier and drilled in military engineering, the only conclusion I could draw was that the mine had been triggered off prematurely, a thought I did not want to entertain.

I reached Mainstay’s base and looked for Mpho. She had not returned from the Rand Show. After about a twenty minute wait, Peter Maluleka arrived. I reported the events to him. We were still talking when Mpho arrived. Peter felt that we should not tell her anything that evening, that we should first confirm what had happened.

I could not sleep at Mmolawa’s house and decided to visit Tiger and brief him on the events. I stayed with him that night. Tiger and I awoke early that Saturday morning. The morning newspapers carried a story of a bomb blast at Lions Bridge, which was a stones throw away from the Sterland Complex. The Sterland blast was also reported and a man wearing a Zionist badge was reported dead.

My heart stopped beating. Mainstay was dead. I felt helpless and defenceless. That man who cautioned me, who scolded me when I blundered, that brave and intelligent man who made our security a priority — that man was no more.

For the first time I felt that the enemy was closing in on us and the thought drained my courage. I went to see Mpho. I left Mamelodi Gardens and travelled to Tsakane. I thought of giving Mpho money to travel to her home in Vuka until I confirmed the report about Mainstay. I did not want to tell her about the newspaper stories. I feared that she would break down uncontrollably and alert the ignorant house owner and the neighbours. I asked her to go to her parents in Vuka and

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promised her that I would follow her. She didn't waste time and followed my advice.

I left her and went to a shop called Segwagwa where I telephoned Francis, the commander of Dabulamanzi to meet me in Mamelodi. Francis was briefed about the loss we suffered. After our meeting, I left for Vuka to be with Mpho. I travelled by taxi to Johannesburg, by train to Krugersdorp and from Luuipardsvlei boarded a taxi to Vuka. I went directly to Mpho. I realised at the door that I was late. Mpho already knew.

I stood at the door in fear and my heart began beating wildly when I heard the sounds of grief from that house. I had been hallucinating all the time about breaking the news to Mpho.

Silas, the brother of Mpho, confronted me at the door with a copy of the newspaper, Rapport. On the front page was a full picture of Mainstay's mutilated body, the face was clear, there was no mistaking it. I broke down and cried. I told the Mehale family what had happened and cautioned them not to speak about it to anyone who was not in our circle.

I was just about to leave the place when Mpho called me. I turned and went towards her.

"Bomber!", she called out.

I looked at her and didn't know what she meant. Mainstay had asked Mpho on several occasions to transport grenades from Mamelodi to Krugersdorp and she had complied willingly. She had carried out each mission successfully. She had shown greater courage than many men who would lose their courage by simply analysing the potential risks.

"We will discuss it fully when I come back from Botswana," I said and left her parent's home. I went to Mainstay's home and told his parents what had happened. I then went to see the Seqweleqwele unit and informed the comrades there of the tragedy. All the units responded to Mainstay's death as the signal for a full scale war.

Chapter Nineteen

Umkhonto Hits The Apartheid Belly

On April 18, 1988, I set out for Botswana to report the death of Commander Mainstay Maponya. The Seqweleqwele unit transported me to Zeerust where I was picked up by a guy from Dinokaneng. He left me in Mochaneng where I was taken to the fence by Billy. It was a Monday afternoon and at about 16h50, I was safely in Botswana. I got into a bus on the Rramotswa-Gaborone road and reached my base in Mogoditshane at about 19h00. My girlfriend was happy to see me and could not stop smiling. I decided not to tell her about Mainstay before I had told the commanders.

The following day, I met the Botswana command structure which was at the time under the command of “Che O’Gara”, January Masilela, now Secretary of Defence. I asked about the former commander, Naledi and was told that he had been killed in a SADF raid, together with three Botswana nationals, all of them women who had supported the South African liberation struggle.

As the story goes, the four were shot and their bodies set alight by the enemy forces. I recalled Mainstay and I reading a report in the Star newspaper. The name mentioned was Solomon Molefe and we could not figure out who that was. Mainstay had bridled with anger and when that anger had subsided, he had come up with a brilliant strategy, “Attack in order to defend! The enemy,” he said, “should be kept on its toes and never allowed to relax. The towns must resound with bombs.”

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I remembered how at one stage, I had proposed that we hit the sewer pipes running through Pretoria's city centre just to have the capital of South Africa smelling badly for at least a week. This was an idea we laughed about. Pretoria should, for the first time in its history, smell so badly that the whites would want to flee from it in panic. The Botswana command structure asked me to await instructions from military head quarters in Lusaka after hearing my report. It took a week for Lusaka to respond. I was called again to a meeting by the regional command structure.

Two comrades, Liverpool and Hector were sent to help me in my mission. They were booked in at the Gaborone Hotel where I met them. Liverpool was a military engineering specialist who had trained in Havana in Cuba. He was adept in all aspects of military engineering. He could manufacture his own explosives using all sorts of materials — garden manure, oxide, etc. He was just the kind of man we needed to terrorise those who held on to our country by force.

Hector was an intelligence officer who had trained in the USSR. He screened our recruits and studied enemy manoeuvres. The survival of the Mabhida unit and its sub units depended on his skills. Hector suffered from malaria and this affected his performance. He was a young comrade who, given enough time, could have made a good chief of security.

Our brief remained unchanged and as before, was to train, arm and lead our people into battle. I was appointed commander of the Mabhida unit and dubbed General Baduza by Comrade Che O'Gara.

Liverpool, who was at the time 41 years old, became my commissar. We were given about R14 000 as operational funds. I briefed Hector and Liverpool on the situation inside the country; I warned them then about the battalions of fully armed soldiers who marched up and down the streets of our

townships, practicing the WHAM (Winning Hearts And Minds) strategy to win our hearts and minds. I advised them to greet the soldiers and humour them and not fear them, since they were like dying horses, making their last kicks. It was around late April that we infiltrated into the country. We headed for Mamelodi. I contacted Tiger and he accommodated Hector and Liverpool at his house. While there, Hector became ill and was taken to the doctor who diagnosed malaria. Tiger explained that Hector came from one of the villages in KwaNdebele and that he contracted the illness there. Hector recovered from the illness after three days.

I then took them on inspection trips in Pretoria and Kagiso. We learnt of the death of Silas, Mpho's brother. He was killed by the enemy who had tracked him down after identifying Mainstay through his his finger prints and thereafter tracing his contacts.

They singled out Silas and on April 18, the day I left for Botswana, a man called Sam was instructed by his handlers to stab him in public. Sam carried out the attack at a shopping complex in the presence of a number of people. Silas was rushed to the hospital. He was placed in intensive care where he died. Our local unit, Seqweleqwele, retaliated and attacked Sam's house in Lewisham with grenades. One person was injured and that attack led to our arrest. The Security Branch bugged Megale's phone.

When Liverpool, Hector and I had infiltrated into the country from Botswana, we were given maps of two DLBs, one in Middleburg and one in Lenasia. We decided to retrieve the DLB in Middleburg and I went with Liverpool, Tiger and Bernard Mokgonyane, in the latter's car to do so. We retrieved the DLB, concealed not far from the road. Benny (Bernard) later joined Tiger's unit and the two operated together. We distributed the arms to our units in Pretoria and later went to Kagiso to retrieve the remaining arms.

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Two months went by and Liverpool and Hector were encouraged by the almost daily reports of operations by our units operating between Pretoria and Kagiso. I had in the meanwhile, fallen in love with a Transkeian girl called Thelma. I had met her at Siphon Mchingana's house in Vuka. The girl really loved me and had fallen pregnant.

Four limpet mines were left after we had distributed all the arms. I telephoned Mpho from Fetsang's house, which was also in Kagiso, to arrange with her to hide these in her brother's shack. Her brother, George had no problem with this. I communicated in code, saying I wanted to bring my nephews to spend a night at her place. The enemy acted on this message and raided Mpho's house early the following morning and found the limpets. They arrested everyone in the house. This was on June 10, 1988.

The raid also led to the arrest of Stanza Bopape and Bheki Nkosi. Stanza was later killed by the Security Branch who covered up his death by spreading lies that he had escaped while being cuffed. The story was not believed by anyone.

We were alerted on June 10 by a young man who knew our base. I had to see to it that all units were put on guard before making my getaway to Pretoria later in the day.

Naphtali and Chi, both from Kagiso, took me to Pretoria from where I travelled to Mamelodi. The enemy had trailed me and caught me on June 13, literally with my pants down, in bed with a lady called Mpuni, the sister of Fetsang. There were about eighteen enemy policemen who raided my Aunt Safira's shack in Kagiso.

We are trapped

I later learnt that amongst the group that took me to Mamelodi was an informer who had tipped the enemy about my whereabouts. We had made many mistakes, we had grown careless and became cocksure because of our successes; people

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were not thoroughly screened; I should never have taken Mpuni to my base and let down my guard; celebrating with booze and having a good time. Such weaknesses and others resulted in the successful crackdown of one of the most powerful structures of Umkhonto we Sizwe ever to operate in Pretoria, the belly of apartheid. By June 15, 1988, thirteen members of the Mabhida unit were arrested in Pretoria, six others were arrested in Kagiso. On June 16, most of us were placed under the notorious Section 29 of the Internal Security Act 74 of 1982. We were kept incommunicado.

Our greatest blunder was to attack Sam's house. The operation was anticipated by the enemy to verify their killing of Silas Mehale, whom they thought had contact with MK, especially the late Mainstay Chibuku (Meshack Maponya). The enemy used Sam to kill Silas during the day where everybody could witness the event. Seqweleqwele, (the Unit), hearing of Silas' killing, immediately took revenge, attacking Sam's house with a F1 hand grenade, as the enemy had anticipated. We had walked into a trap. The police had kept a twenty-four hour surveillance on the Megales. We were arrested!

ANC policy was that as an MK soldier, you fought so that you could fight tomorrow. To ensure this, every operation had to be planned properly with an amount of professionalism.

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Pictures of Rodney Toka and some of his comrades, taken after their arrest in 1988.



Rodney 'Baduza' Toka



Peter Maluleke



Ernest Thoboki Ramadite



James Ndo Kgasi

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Francis Pitsi pointed out at an identification parade at the Pretoria Central police



George Mathe (second from right)

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Ernest Ramadite (second from left) at an identification parade at Pretoria Central police station.



A Renault hit by a mini limpet mine at Proes Street, Pretoria, planted by a member of Dabulamanzi unit (1988)

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A train hit by a limpet mine at Attridgeville station, in support of a stayaway called by Cosatu.



Attridgeville Municipality office after it was hit by a superlimpet mine, planted by one of Mabhida units in 1988.

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Rodney's father, Philemon Toka



Rodney's mother, Maria Toka

Chapter Twenty

Life in Bronkhorstspuit Prison

The police separated us we were placed in different police stations. I was placed in Bronkhorstspuit, about forty-five kilometers from Pretoria, on the way to Witbank in the Eastern Transvaal. I was the first MK guerilla to be jailed at that police station and the policemen there did not have any experience in handling the so-called terrorists. They were so nervous that two of them would point the pistol at me when the other one brought food into my cell, making it difficult for me to make the slightest move.

I lodged a complaint with the inspector of detainees and that barbaric practise was stopped. I developed a positive relation with Sergeant Olivier who was then appointed to bring me food and we became very good friends. Sergeant Olivier confided his own hatred of the security branch. Members of the security branch, he said, were arrogant and behaved as if they controlled everybody's lives and could do what they wished with them. He said they saw themselves as the anointed few and treated other police officers as their juniors irrespective of rank.

Sergeant Olivier was stopped from bringing me food after he brought his wife and son to visit me. My contact with him had changed his views about "terrorists". It also dented his faith in the National Party. To avoid such indoctrination of warders by prisoners, the authorities changed my attendants every second day and no one was allowed to serve me for three consecutive days.

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Life in Bronkhorstspruit eased and even became pleasurable after I met my faceless lover, a fellow prisoner. One painful night, I heard a voice call my cell number, "Number Three! Number Three!" the voice urged. I did not know what to do. There were strict rules about communication between prisoners. After a few seconds, I heard a knocking on my wall. I responded by knocking back. "Phone!" the voice instructed. I was confused. What phone was he talking about? The voice, sensing my confusion, instructed me to stand on top of the toilet bowl and communicate through the grill above the toilet. I did so and the voice became clearer.

"Number One, exchange Number Three," the voice instructed and then I heard presumably Number Three, a lady's voice. The lady wanted to know why I was locked alone in my cell when other people were sharing.

I told her that I had committed a series of armed robberies and that I was thus treated as a habitual criminal. We were still talking when I suddenly heard a cough behind my cell. I froze in fear. Voice Number One sensed the danger and cut off the conversation.

An hour or so later, the lady called me again. This time she instructed me in the use of what she dubbed the phone phansi (the underground phone). She asked me to flush the toilet and push the water out of the bowl using my hand. I did so and informed her when the bowl was empty. She did the same with the water in her bowl. Then I heard her voice very clearly emanating from the toilet bowl. Our secret telephone line had been established. We conversed daily, discussing all sorts of things, and particularly about life outside. We became long distance lovers. We gave each other pleasure and relieved each other's tensions. We promised to marry each other on our release. She was an excellent lover whom I still need to meet.

One day as I was being interrogated in my cell, the telephone rang. I did not flush the toilet and therefore the line

was open. “Number Three, Number Three!” the voice became insistent. I felt a cold sweat down my spine. I faked a running tummy and rushed towards the toilet and flushed it. It took me some minutes to recover my composure.

We communicated on this line until Mama, as she was called, was sentenced to two years imprisonment for housebreaking and theft. She was my faceless lover who consoled me when there was no one there to do so. It was that kind of love that Shakespeare would say was unshaken.

The day of her sentence was a bad day for her. She cried uncontrollably in fear of the unknown. There was no one to comfort her apart from myself. Justice had taken its toll. It was after Mama left that the Security Branch recruited a prisoner to be their informer. He was imprisoned in a cell adjacent to mine to dupe me into becoming his friend. The man did the dirty work for a pittance — some cigarettes and chicken intestines bought from one of the restaurants in Bronkhorstspuit. He was briefed to keep me busy all night while the Security Branch took notes of what I confided to him. He would be booked out during the day on the pretext that he was going to Court.

One day he was going to court and I decided to write a letter to my brother informing him to tell other family members about my arrest and my incarceration in Bronkhorstspuit. He undertook to give the letter to one of his family members to post on to my family.

I later learnt that he gave that letter to the Security Branch, who arrested my brother and detained him for three days during which they questioned him on my activities and on issues of which he had no knowledge of. My brother was never one of my MK contacts, and had no knowledge of our activities. My letter to him was simply to make my family aware of my whereabouts.

Timothy, the informer, was later sentenced to six years imprisonment. His bosses and co-conspirators, the Security

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Branch, could not help him get a lower sentence.

Chapter Twenty One

The Main Charge - Terrorism

On December 28, 1988, the twelve of us made our first appearance in the Pretoria Magistrate's Court. The court was surrounded by policemen, some of them being deployed on top of the court building. These were snipers from the notorious Internal Stability Unit. I was the first accused. Godfrey Liverpool Makobe was the second, Francis Pitse, the commander of Dabulamanzi, the third, and the fourth, one of our most brilliant comrades, Ernest Ramadite. The charge sheet ended with Accused Number Twelve, James Ndo Kgasi.

There were twenty-eight charges in the first indictment, the main charge being high treason. As the trial proceeded, the charges rose to fifty-one, with high treason being removed from the charge sheet to depoliticise the trial. Terrorism was then made the main charge. The indictment was read to us and we were never asked to plead to the charges. Attorneys representing us came to court and the case was remanded to January 11, 1989, pending the decision of the Supreme Court for a full trial. We were then remanded in custody and taken in a procession of some ten cars to Pretoria Central prison, popularly known as "New Lock Prison" because it was newly-built.

I have never in my life seen such a fast convoy. This convoy impressed upon us the seriousness of our position. We were isolated in single cells, reserved mainly for prisoners serving dietary punishment. Our imprisonment in that section brought the administration of justice into disrepute.

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We used to give prisoners who were serving dietary punishment, popularly known as kulukutu, food and that helped popularise us in this prison.

On December 28, Tiger, Accused Number Nine, canvassed our views on escaping. We supported the idea, but impressed that it needed secrecy and thorough planning to succeed.

We therefore started studying the prison environment and the behaviour of the prison warders. We had to know their strong and weak points. A weak point was that the warders were poorly paid.

There were two warders deployed to our section. We targeted one of them whom I shall refer to as Warder Van Wyk. Three of us, Tiger, Francis and I discussed our strategy on January 6th. We decided that Francis should handle Van Wyk. He did. The latter wanted a remuneration of R50 000 for such a job. We made contact with our MK combatants, Tshepo and Squich, inside the country and sent them to Botswana to discuss the possibility of raising R50 000.

The problem we encountered with the leadership was that many warders used that scheme to enrich themselves without fulfilling their promises. The leadership therefore proposed that Van Wyk should first take us out and the money would then be given to him, once we reached the getaway car that would be parked near the prison. We didn't think Van Wyk would accept that and he didn't. Instead, he leaked our escape plan to the Security Branch. His veracity was confirmed when, during a search, a message was discovered in a visitor's shoe. We were accordingly sent to Pretoria Security Prison which was very heavily secured.

It was in this prison that I received the devastating news about my baby who died seventeen days after birth. Priscilla Jana was our consulting attorney and out of our group of twelve, she represented six of us while the other six were

represented by both Sam Motshega's and Krish Naidoo's offices. The latter sent us a very dedicated attorney, Dick Coopersammy. Dick spent a whole week with the comrades and he was not there only as a lawyer, but also as a parent.

He helped them with everything they needed and was always there in time of need.

Priscilla Jana represented us from the beginning of the trial until we decided to drop her in favour of Cheadle Thompson and Haysom. The reasons for changing her office were political. Priscilla Jana was known for her strong opposition to apartheid and its judicial system. She had gained a reputation as an outstanding lawyer who defended those who waged their fight against the regime. This, we reasoned prejudiced the white judges against her and in turn, we would be prejudiced. With the possibility of four death sentences hanging over our heads, we felt we couldn't take chances and engage attorneys that the judges could identify with.

While represented by Jana, I thought of using her contacts in the townships to help trace Thelma for me. I was concerned about her because at the time of my arrest, she was two months pregnant.

Jana found Thelma, and Catherine Crowley, the blonde American attorney employed by her, brought me the sad news. Catherine was tasked to liaise with us on minor legal issues and other problems at least thrice a week. She was a good-hearted lady who shared our sufferings and frustrations. Seeing my reaction after receiving the sad news, she broke down crying with me. It was after this episode that I wrote my first manuscript, "Rest in Peace, Daddy loved you!"

Chapter Twenty Two

Inyanga To Help Us Escape

Pretoria Security Prison is the same complex as the Pretoria Local and Maximum Prisons. The maximum security prison housed condemned and long term prisoners. The security here was tighter than at the other two prisons. The Security Prison housed political prisoners and detainees. Dennis Goldberg, a member of the Rivonia Trial which had included, amongst others, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, was imprisoned there. The prison appeared in the news when Steven Lee Alexandra Moumbaris and Timothy Jenkins escaped from it. Security was tightened after their escape. We despaired. Our movement around the prison were monitored through closed circuit cameras. The cameras gave the prison authorities such a clear view that even an insect could not escape unnoticed.

We met two comrades, Musa and Bajabaja, who had operated in the East Rand under MK commander, Comrade Blush (an Angolan term for biscuits), in this prison. We also met one member of the special operations division of MK who was arrested after his uncle informed on him. They gave us a good reception and introduced us to the prison warders in our section.

We were placed in single cells furnished with a wall wardrobe, a study desk, a chair, a bed and a toilet. It was a three star hotel setup that made one forget that one was in one of the enemy's death camps. It was in this prison that I wrote my thriller, "Why Liz?" We were only three weeks in this prison when we decided to embark on a hunger strike, in

Inyanga To Help Us Escape

protest against being served somos: we wanted it replaced with fish. Somos used to make us fart day in and day out, and emitted a stench that caused us sleepless nights. It took us fourteen days to convince the prison authorities that somos was not fit for human consumption and should be replaced with fish.

Musa and Bajabaja were going to court on a daily basis until they were found guilty and sentenced to eight and four years respectively.

While in this prison, we managed to communicate with Damien De Lange and his friend known to us as King. The two were arrested together with Susan Westcott at Broederstroom with a Sam-7 rocket launcher. Donovan (Damien) was fluent in Zulu and we would communicate all night through with the warders screaming at us to stop communicating with each other.

Life was not bad at Pretoria Central. We had more time with visitors, unlike the thirty minutes allowed in the local prison. Here we were allowed forty-five minutes. Nonetheless, we grew restless in prison and six of us, Tiger, Ruben, Lefty, James, Benny and I met and decided to employ the services of the best inyanga I knew in Kagiso called Zitha. We asked our parents to do so. They met and appointed our courier Fetsang to arrange an appointment with Zitha. Fetsang discouraged them in their bid to get Zitha and instead recommended a young “doctor” whose name I did not know.

This “doctor” told our parents that we wouldn’t spend two years in jail unless he lost his life. He also told them that one day as the warders tried opening our cell doors, the prison key would break as a sign of the inyanga’s power.

Our parents were pleased and excited with his revelations and brought us the good news during visiting time.

One morning as Constable Hek was busy opening the cell doors, a cell key broke. This left us surprised and confused and

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we wondered whether to believe it or not. The problem was that we had grown up in a situation where Marxist teachings were the order of the day. His teaching was materialism and made it quite impossible to understand the powers of magic. But there it was, just as the young inyanga had said. There, right in front of our eyes, was the sign he had predicted. One of the toughest keys had broken. We were pleased and excited and talked about it the whole day.

The other six of our trialists were Christians and did not believe in the powers of inyangas.

The State applied to have us transferred from Pretoria Security to Modderbee Prison. It argued that it was too expensive to ferry us from Pretoria to Delmas on a daily basis to our trial. Our defence objected and their objection failed.

We were then transferred to Modderbee Prison and remained there up to the end of our trial.

Chapter Twenty Three

The Prison “Community”

Modderbee is situated about twenty kilometers on the outskirts of Benoni. The prison is regarded as the second largest prison in South Africa, the largest being Barberton Prison. Modderbee was notorious for its cruelties. Prisoners who went to Modderbee either died in prison or had their prison sentences extended because of offences committed in prison due to the stringent rules. The prison was run by a few Boer families, the Vosloos being the most powerful. They were so powerful that anyone challenging their authority did that at his own peril. It was not only difficult for the prisoners to survive without joining a prison gang, but even warders transferred from other prisons did not survive if they did not submit to the Vosloos. They found themselves fired mysteriously.

We were placed in Cell H23 which is situated in the hospital block. It was the last cell in the block. We were placed there because the authorities believed we would be under stricter surveillance since there were fewer prisoners in that block.

The prisoners were divided into groups — the Big Fives, the 27s, 28s, 26s, the Air Force and so on. The Big Five was the biggest group with seventy-five percent of the prisoners being its members. Their duty was to report prisoners suspected of offenses such as possession of dangerous weapons, dagga, or escape plots to the authorities.

The 28s, popularly known as Gazi-Gazi (Zulu word for blood), were a ruthless bunch and did not hesitate to murder warders or other prisoners. They conducted Kangaroo Courts

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and passed outrageous sentences. There was no review or appeal in their courts.

The 26s spent the whole day planning a good lie to induce money out of others. They are prison knockers and they are good in their field.

The Air Force, as their name suggests, spent their time in prison planning escapes. They went home for weekends and holidays. If any of their members were caught for sodomy, they would assist him to escape from prison.

We made a study of all these groups but it was difficult to know exactly where each prisoner belonged. Prisoners look alike in their green uniforms. They also think alike. Whether a 28 or a 26, at the end of the day, they are all involved in robbing fellow prisoners.

The Big Fives were clearly an enemy creation and it was the one that Alex warned us about. Alex was a prisoner serving a six year sentence. He was the prison's logistic man. His work was to issue clean blankets, sheets, pillow cases and pyjamas to the prisoners in the hospital section. He was a cute gentleman who, on seeing us, briefed us on the prison situation. He was a victim of the authorities and subjected to assaults. Our arrival at Modderbee remedied this situation. We defended him and owing to our intervention, the beatings stopped.

With Alex in the same cell was Raymond, a coloured man from Lenasia in Johannesburg. He served the authorities tea. He knew the times they drank tea. His knowledge of the tea business prompted us once again to plan our escape.

Alex and Raymond told us what they knew about the Big Five and what they told us was confusing and incomprehensible. It only confirmed that prison life was no child's play.

We were put on our guard when clearly a trap was set for one of the prisoners, a Mozambiquan called Mfundisi. Mfundisi, serving ten years imprisonment for an armed robbery

he had committed in Johannesburg, was appointed to serve us food. We befriended him and he did us many favours. He smuggled in the daily newspapers for us, saved us from having to eat somos by arranging it so that extra fish was cooked and stealing half the supply for us.

The Big Five discovered Mfundisi's relationship with us and conspired with the prison authorities to trap him. One fateful day, a prisoner gave him a packet of Best Blend (BB) tobacco to pass on to Mapetla, a prisoner in another section. He was stopped en-route by a warder and searched. A poke of dagga was found inside the BB packet. Mfundisi was put on trial by the prison's kangaroo court and sentenced to thirty days kulukutu (dietary punishment in a single cell). He, however, overcame his punishment through the help of a medical certificate stating that he was diabetic. Mfundisi was a really good priest who came to our cell with his bible and prayed for us. One wondered why he had resorted to armed robbery which exposed one to murder. Mfundisi remained a lone walker in prison; he did not join any of the groups. He was a "oneone", that is someone who is not a member of any group. Alex and Raymond were also one-ones.

Being non-aligned in prison was a sign of bravery and such prisoners are treated with respect by other inmates. Members of groups would be required to commit atrocities on other inmates or on members of the authorities, to prove their loyalty. Junior members of the 28s would be challenged to commit murders.

One prisoner, Dibathu told us about how the Gazi-Gazi group had murdered another prisoner who had swallowed a ten rand note. The group forced him to drink a lot of soap water in the hope that he would pass out the money quicker. When this did not work, they cut open his stomach to get the money. Eight members of the Gazi-Gazi were later charged with murder. They admitted to the charge when questioned. They all threw their prison cards on the floor, indicating responsibility.

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We were told about awaiting trial prisoners whose expensive clothes were exchanged for a piece of chicken; the many shocking human rights violations which brought in lawyers. We realised that the situation at Modderbee was not conducive to escaping. To make it so, we would have to make many friends. We had to turn the Big Fives against their masters and have the 28s on our side. This meant holding meetings with the bosses of the different gangs and getting them to agree to a truce. If there was a truce, we reasoned, then the Big Five wouldn't spy on us.

Chapter Twenty Four

Analysing Prison Warders

The prison authorities had deployed fourteen warders to the hospital section to look after us. They were headed by Major Schlebusch and his deputy, Captain Hayes. During weekends, seven of these warders would be off duty. The warders would split into two divisions, the one under the Major and the other under his Deputy and they would take turns to watch over us. The group under the Major was particularly sinister, being made up of diehard apartheid supporters who would not hesitate to kill to protect their racism. They had nothing but contempt for prisoners and saw them as a people without any rights. They made Modderbee a hellhole in which they operated their satanic tyranny. Included in this group was a black adjutant. We decided to recruit him to assist us in our escape plan.

Our main hope lay in Captain Hayes' group who were darlings. They saw the prison as a rehabilitation centre to re-educate the prisoners for reintegration into society. They were the mothers and fathers of the prisoners. Captain Hayes was a middleaged woman who was soft on prisoners and enjoyed helping them with their problems. The prisoners really liked her style of work. Our hope for escape centered on her and my task was to befriend her. Captain Hayes' second-in-charge was Adjutant van Niekerk who was later dubbed Malamulela by our group. When the 16h30 siren blew to signal the end of the prison day shift and the beginning of the night shift, he would shout "Woza Malamulela" (Come Life Saviour). This

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habit indicated his weakness and his inefficiency. It was our belief at the time that there were those amongst the enemy who only did their jobs to fend for their families.

There were weaknesses also in other members of Captain Hayes' group and we exploited these. There was only one man, a black constable known to us as Sindane, who appeared to be out of reach to us. He was a young man from Daveyton who conducted his duties zealously, harassing and assaulting prisoners. He overdid his security duties and out of his own volition, checked the windows to ensure that they had not been tampered with. He would search our beds and toilets for hidden weapons and contraband. He was, as a result, a favourite of the head of prison.

The head of prison was himself not such a bad guy. He allowed us a television and video machine in our cell. We could watch football games and listen to the news. He was very fluent in Xhosa and made us suspicious of him, for it was our experience that most whites who knew black languages were the worst racists, since most of them were members of farming (Boer) families who treated their black servants as inferior people. Tiger and Francis had given me the task of analysing the personalities of the individual members of the prison authorities.

I had made a thorough analysis of all the warders deployed to our section. It was a piece of art and I sent it to Lusaka for the leadership of MK to read and approve. The document was three pages long. I started with Major Schlebusch and his group, followed by Captain Heyes and her group.

It is always advisable as Moses Kotane once said, to know your enemy as you know yourself. You must have the full knowledge of the enemy's strong and weak points and to obtain an accurate picture, you cannot tolerate any bias. It was a character analysis that helped us carry out a bloodless escape.

Chapter Twenty Five

Seducing Prison Staff

Around August 1989, we instructed Francis to work on the black adjutant in Major Schlebusch's group. He started discussions with him and it was not long before he had him in his pocket. The adjutant agreed to help us escape with an amount of R 50 000.

We then recruited Bossie (Andrew Phala) and Trot Magwaza to work on the adjutant outside prison. Bossie was a former Robben Islander who recruited Trot, a former gangster, into Umkhonto we Sizwe. The two were extremely brave and resourceful. They actually managed to take rounds in the prison without being detected and thereby knew the prison inside out. They briefed us on the state of the prison during visiting hours.

The two started paying regular visits to the black adjutant at his home in Daveyton. However, after three months of patient work, our hopes were dashed when we found that the man was becoming increasingly scared and the number of men he undertook to help escape dwindled daily. The one week he said he could assist four of us to escape, the following week, the number dropped to two, and then only one. We then decided to cut him from our plan, but to keep him close to us, bearing in mind what had happened at Pretoria Local Prison.

We took precautions to ensure that he did not suspect any

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change in our attitudes. Francis continued to be his confidant and we continued to nurse his ego and tell him how important he was to our revolution. During Christmas of 1989, we bought him a card which we all signed.

In the meanwhile, Tiger forced us to take stock of our situation. The ploy we were using, he told us, was not working. If we continued with the strategy, we had chosen, we would be trapped in delays, trapped within our grey walls and before we knew it, the judge would sentence us to be hanged. We had to change course and take the initiative firmly in hand. It was a very difficult decision but we had no other option.

Francis was dealing with our mission outside prison and it was he who informed Bossy and Trot about our change of plan. Bossy and Trot travelled all the way to Swaziland and Mozambique to inform Commander Freddy (now Mathews Phosa) of our plan. The leadership was very sceptical and it took quite some time to win their approval and not before we had sent them detailed reports on how we would execute our plan, and how we would avoid casualties.

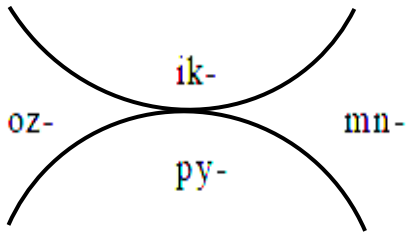
We supplied them with alternate plans and methods of escapes. It was these plans that convinced the leadership of our competence. All our communication was written in *Pig Pen* writing. We gave the key to Bossy and Trot and they channeled it to Mozambique where it was sent to Lusaka.

Figure 1 and 2 depict the example of the key that we sent to Lusaka, and coded messages would interpreted using such key.

Figure 1:









xj-	ac-	de-
fg-	bl-	rq-
st-	uw-	hv-

Figure 2:



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The alphabets on *figure 1* are interpreted as follows:


x	
j	
a	
c	
f	
g	
b	
l	

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The alphabets on *figure 2* are interpreted as follows:

o 

z 

i 

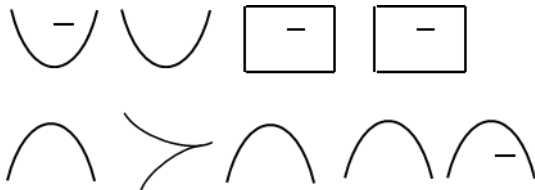
k 

p 

y 

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An example of a message that would be relayed would be as follows:



When decoded, the above message would read: “Kill Poppy”. These messages were decoded in Lusaka by Nceba Mjo (the late Commissioner Leonard Radu of the South African Police Services). We owe the success of our escape to this code. We were very confident that no one, but no one, could decipher our writing without a key.

The leadership was impressed with us, and they all waited to see the blow the enemy would suffer due to our well-planned operation. We were in control of the plan, success would be ours.

Chapter Twenty Six

The Trial Within A Trial

The trial within a trial was in full swing. The Prosecution which was led by both Prinsloo and Louisa van der Walt, was fighting its way to have the confessions admitted as evidence. Few of our comrades were called onto the witness stand to be grilled by the prosecution team, firmly entrenched in supporting the Government. The prosecution team was about the strongest in the State. They had prosecuted in a number of well-known trials. In the Messina trial, the two members of MK were given eleven death sentences each. They had also led the State in the Delmas One Trial which included among others, Terror Lekota and Popo Molefe. The other trial which made them unpopular within our circles was the Delmas Two Trial which saw the incarceration of Ting-Ting Masango, Neo Potsane and other comrades.

Before our trial could begin, the Defence asked for the recusal of Prinsloo and Van der Walt because of their obvious bias towards the Government. We knew that it was a futile exercise: our defence warned that our arguments would fall on deaf ears, such being the justice system in South Africa and that we would have to deal with the deadly team.

The first Accused to be placed in the witness box was Accused Number 4, Mr Ernest Ramadite. He was in a bad physical state due to the torture he had suffered under Section 29 of Act 74 of 1982, which gave the police wide powers to experiment all sorts of atrocities on suspects.

Ernest was not fit to stand trial. The Prosecution had a fierce

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battle to prove to the judge that the man was fit to stand trial, that his condition was not due to the torture by police officers and that he had given his confession freely and voluntarily. Others called to the witness stand were Comrades George Mathe and Bernard Mokgonyane. Both gave the prosecution such a tough time that the court had to adjourn repeatedly to give the Prosecution time to confer. In the meanwhile, we requested our defence to ask the court to allow us visits during the lunch breaks. This was granted.

These visits were better than those at Modderbee. We were not cut off from our visitors by glass; there was only a grill between us and we were even allowed to touch and kiss our loved ones. This gave the necessary opportunity to discuss our escape plan with Bossy and Trot. Security was fairly relaxed. Our people were in court to support us; they brought us food and the food was not always searched. This gave us the opportunity to smuggle in a Makarov pistol.

It took Bossy and Trot some time to have the pistol brought to us. They had to test the effectiveness of the metal detectors at the visitors entrance first. They hid the pistols on their person and found that the detectors did not pick them up. They were convinced that the detectors were defective. Comrade Squich was instructed to wrap the pistol in plastic and place it in a pot of cooked porridge. Comrade Squich gave the porridge to Comrade Eric in Atteridgeville to give to us during visiting time. Eric knew the consequences if caught, but he was undaunted.

He brought us the freedom porridge. It was placed with our other food in the awaiting trial court cell, from where we later took it to our prison. It was normal procedure to search our food in prison, but as luck would have it, no search was conducted on that day and our food reached our cell untouched. We hid the pistol under the bath in the bathroom and there it remained until the day of our escape.

The Trial Within A Trial

Though we had carefully analysed profiles on the prison warders and we had a weapon, we were still not ready for the final hurdle. The road to freedom is never easy, and one needs commitment, hard work and dedication to succeed.

Chapter Twenty Seven

Sizing Up The Enemy

Our next task was to determine the strength of the arsenals of our enemy. This task was allocated to Alex and Raymond. To our surprise, they reported that the warders within the prison yard were unarmed and only those who were on the posts were armed.

We also had to know how many doors there were between us and freedom. We also decided to discover the armaments carried by the sentries by arranging for each of us to be sent to hospitals. Every two days or so, one of us would be taken to either a clinic or a hospital outside prison. The prison authorities were very co-operative and members of the police stability unit would escort us.

We exchanged our reports and learnt that we had to pass not only two sentry posts, but five doors through the hospital section which could be opened up by one key called “Die Meester”. This was the key we had to identify. All the information that Alex and Raymond gave us was that it was different from the other keys. That left us in the dark. As luck would have it, we were talking to warder Sindani and we managed to get a good look at his keys. We immediately identified the master key by its multiple corners.

Peter Maluleka and I were the last two to go to hospital. We both suffered from piles. He was taken to Pretoria and I was taken to Delmour Private Clinic to be operated on. The clinic was somewhere in Germiston. It was a five star clinic and I had the opportunity of selecting my own food everyday. I was

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bound to the bed with both hands and legs in chains. I was very uncomfortable, but my escort, a police sergeant wanted me that way. I complained to the doctor and he managed to convince the Security Branch to allow the escort to untie my hands and my one leg.

I was discharged from Delmour and taken back to prison after two weeks. It was a wonderful two weeks, five star service and real human beings for company, people with feelings and not with one mission in mind, to have one nailed for one's commitment to the liberation of one's people. It was two weeks of beautiful women and not those ugly female warders who, due to the type of work they did, had become evil like their male counterparts.

Chapter Twenty Eight

The Maternal Instinct - Captain Hayes

I think we all agree that women are endowed with that special maternal quality. I am not saying this because of what our mothers discussed in Beijing and elsewhere. It is a natural fact that inherent in every woman is that element of loving and caring. This element goes beyond colour bar. This is the element I discovered after Francis and Tiger gave me the task of befriending Captain Hayes who was Major Schlebusch's second in charge.

I met Captain Hayes through Alex and with the wink of an eye, I was invited to her office for a little chat over a cup of tea. She asked me about the ANC and the leadership thereof. I gave her a free lecture on the movement and its policies. I saw to it that she understood us not as terrorists but as human beings who had been forced by their circumstances to do what they did. Our meeting was so fruitful that she started to invite me regularly to her office.

She would make it a point that tea was served during our discussions and I was served in the same cups she used. She saw us as human beings and the treatment we received from her team was different from the way the other warders treated us.

She conceded to our request to have our cell lights switched off around midnight to allow those who were studying, ample time to do so. She also arranged that the person switching off the lights would give due warning so that we could put our

things in order and make our beds. I really developed a good friendship with Captain Hayes.

When Sisulu and the others were released, she helped us to get permission from the head of the prison to hold a “prayer for peace” meeting in our cell on condition that no political speeches were made. We had a line-up of speakers and we used Mfundisi as our priest. We had photos of Sisulu, Mhlaba, Motswaledi, Kathrada and Gwala in our cells, and recited poems in their praise. Over a hundred prisoners attended our mini rally. We had expected to find things missing at the end of it, but to our surprise, all our belongings were intact. The prisoners were conscientised and unity was forged. The prison authorities began losing their grip and the prisoners began to see us as their leaders. They reported those who committed sodomy to us. We politicised such prisoners. They would ululate when exercising and insult the warders guarding us.

Thanks to Captain Hayes, without whom Modderbee could have been a living hell and we could have become the victims of a deadly dying horse, the apartheid regime and its surrogates, the asakaris.

Chapter Twenty Nine

Date For Our Escape

The prison, like any administrative body, follows a set routine. The prison routine was set twenty years before and it persists to this day at Modderbee. It was normal practice for the prison roll-call to be conducted during the middle of every month. The roll-call would happen during weekends. Just about the entire prison staff would be assembled in the Mapetla section as it was easy to count the vast multitude there. We knew that from our staff of seven warders, four would be on roll-call duty. We decided that the most opportune time for our escape would be during a roll-call.

In December 1989, we set our escape date for the weekend of February 17, 1990. Captain Hayes's group would be on duty. It would be the date of our acquittal from the treason trial and our salvation from hell. Alex and Raymond helped us in choosing these dates but we did not reveal even to them, the date of our escape. At that point we were taking no chances. Our lives and the lives of our families were at stake.

We did not wish to have unnecessary casualties. We also decided not to inform Lusaka and our internal MK units led by Bossy and Trot. Our prison motto was, "See you in February and not July!" as the Jazz Masters sang.

Two of us decided to get drunk on Christmas Eve and simultaneously test the corruptibility of the officials to apartheid. We gave Alex money and he got us a white warder who, for a commission of only R8, smuggled a bottle of brandy for me and a bottle of Old Brown Sherry for Bernard, into our

Date For Our Escape

cell. Our comrades did not like us fooling around like that and Bennie and I got a serious tongue lashing for putting the whole project at risk, but we were happy to go to sleep drunk after two years. Alex had given us a lesson on how to break the bottles to pieces so that they could not be identified as liquor bottles. The prison authorities would mistake them for medicine bottles issued by the hospital staff.

In the morning of December 25, we moved the labels from the bottles. We wrapped paper around the bottles with a wet towel and smashed the bottles on the floors causing minimal sound. We unwrapped the towel and the bottles were shattered to tiny pieces. You could take them to forensic laboratories and not even a single laboratory would prove that the bottles were actually brandy bottles. Alex arranged for the cell dustbin to be emptied. Thanks to Alex and the unknown warder for a lovely Christmas.

Chapter Thirty

De Klerk's Announcement – Any Point In Escaping?

The festive season was over and the courthouse was still in recess. Our attorneys restarted their consultations with us from around January 4 in preparation for the end of the trial within a trial and the beginning of the main trial.

Inside the prison, we had exhausted all our preparations and were now keeping a close watch over the prison routine for signs of any changes that might require adjustments on our part.

We had delegated Bossy and Trot to go to Maputo and obtain funds for the hire of two cars from Avis. They had returned not only with funds for the car hire, but also general operational funds to deal with any emergencies arising from the plan going out of hand. We also had to ensure we were not cash strapped to ferry ourselves to Botswana.

Alex had been given the task of reporting on all the cars and drivers used by prison warders. We needed a good car that would take us to Daveyton where our getaway cars would be waiting for us. He gave us a comprehensive report on the entire prison fleet, and we chose a beige Nissan Skyline which belonged to Adjutant Van Niekerk, a man in his prime, who we calculated would, on that account, keep his vehicle in good condition and with a full tank of petrol.

On the eve of our escape, we made a final check on all the details and assured ourselves that the plan was watertight.

De Klerk's Announcement – Any Point In Escaping?

Bossy and Trot, who reported on the situation outside regularly, had a kombi in readiness to ferry all of us in one load. Comrade Squich, who had proven his support for our escape bid, was selected to drive the combi. Peter Mokaba had made arrangements with internal MK units for ammunition. A few hand grenades and pistols were distributed to our comrades outside to provide a good backup.

The plan complete, we waited for the signal to start moving. We were tense and excited; we wanted to show our enemy and the world that one didn't need tanks and mirages to win a war, that what one needed was commitment and a good plan and we had these to defeat the might of the South African regime.

A few historical events took place just prior to our planned escape date. On February 2, 1990, FW de Klerk made his mammoth speech and bowled us over as he announced the unbanning of the ANC and the release of Nelson Mandela. The Boers were actually calling our leadership to the negotiating table. We could hardly believe what was happening; but it was happening.

Nelson Mandela was released on February 11 and the eyes of the world were on FW de Klerk and his government as it began the process of change. But at the same time, our leaders from prison, including Mandela, were calling for the continuation of the armed struggle. These events brought division amongst us. One group was saying that with the release of Mandela, the armed struggle was won and would be replaced by negotiations that would start soon. I was of that opinion. We believed that all political prisoners and detainees would be released, the exiles would return home safely. With Mandela free, our lives were saved and the hangman would be out of work.

The other group continued to treat the enemy with scepticism and argued that an enemy that had defied the entire world could not be trusted. Our group took a second look at the

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South African government and concurred that indeed it could not be trusted and our escape plan should stay in place. In any case, to change things now would cause dangerous complications — the pistol would have to be smuggled out of prison and everything would have to be returned to normality.

After a long and bitter discussion, we finally agreed to pull our job as planned.

Chapter Thirty One

The Countdown

On Saturday, February 17, we were up early and in our tracksuits, ready for the cell doors to open. Adjutant Van Niekerk opened our Cell H23 Hospital Section at 9h00 as was the rule. We filed out to begin our last full day in prison. We began it with the usual exercise, only this time we kept telling ourselves that they were in preparation for our long journey to Lusaka.

The medical headquarters in Lusaka had been informed that we would make our escape bid on February 18, 1990, either between 9h00 and 11h00 or between 13h00 and 15h00, both during visiting hours, to alleviate suspicion at the arrival of our combi. The plan was that Squich and Eric would drive the combi in the parking lot and park it in the bay close to the main gate, the gateway to our freedom. The prison roll call was scheduled for February 18; four members of Captain Hayes' group would take the roll call that morning. We would thus have only three warders to deal with. All those involved in the plan, including Comrade Chris Hani, had their fingers crossed. No one was expecting casualties and we did not need any.

Lefty and George Mathe went to the Hospital Section to ask for more bandages. Bossy and Trot had been entrusted by the MK with our lives. They were busy on the outside, running up and down with their last minute preparations.

It was at about 17h00 when we finished exercising and returned to our cell. I went to Van Niekerk and requested that our cell door be opened at 8h00 the following morning instead

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of the usual 9h00. We needed at least an hour to monitor who was entering or leaving the medical centre and to plan our invasion of the centre thereafter. He referred me to Captain Hayes who acceded to my request without any difficulty. We could not sleep that night. We sat around discussing our plan and went through the deployment of our manpower meticulously. Communists believe in the meticulous division of labour and when such division is properly allocated, success is sure to follow. Peter Maluleka was furthering his studies and to facilitate that, he was imprisoned in a single cell below our floor. We decided to exclude him from the plan; the case against him was not that strong. We calculated that he would be released on our escape from prison.

Liverpool and Bernard declined to join us, with a similar scenario in mind with regard to themselves. We decided that we would all go into the medical section, that once we were all in, George would close the entrance door. Tiger would then hold Adjutant Van Niekerk with a pistol, Ruben, a body builder, would deal with the warder who had the master key. He would incapacitate the man temporarily and take the keys. James was the slowest comrade amongst all of us and we therefore gave him the task of disconnecting the telephone lines.

Lefty and Johannes Maleka were tasked to help George to bind our captives as fast as they could. The rest of us were allocated other necessary tasks. Tiger was appointed to help Ruben undress the warder with the master key and change into his uniform so that he could collect the beige Skyline and park it in front of the medical section. Tiger had to drive the car because he was the only available driver. We went over these manoeuvres repeatedly until we were certain we knew them. We retired to sleep long after midnight. Sleep came to few of us as we placed our fate in the hands of the day that would dawn.

Chapter Thirty Two

Crunch Time

We were up early in the morning of the 18th and began bathing at around six. By 8h00, Adjutant Van Niekerk's footsteps were heard hurrying towards our cells. He was humming a song and I guessed he was very happy. In my heart, I felt sorry for him and reckoned that in the next hour he would be humming a very different tune. He reached our cell door and opened it and hurried back to the medical section to prepare medicines for the sick prisoners.

By 8h20, we were in the exercising ground waiting for 9h00. At 8h45, we saw a very strong and healthy white warder go into the medical section. Lefty followed him and returned to report that the man was sitting, relaxed in a chair, talking with Van Niekerk. He was not in our plan. We decided to give him time to complete his chit chat and leave at his will. The warder with the master key was young, about twenty six years of age and he was busy playing draught with Lolo, a prisoner.

It was 9h10 when the strong, healthy warder left the hospital to join his counterparts at the roll call. We immediately occupied the medical section. Francis kept Lindani busy outside the section and was therefore the last one to join us in the operational area. Warder Lindani was left outside playing checkers with the prisoners. I am sure that that cost him his job that day.

Once Francis was safely with us, George closed the door. Tiger was already in action and Van Niekerk screamed at the sight of the Makarov.

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Ruben held the young warder in his grip and he (the white warder) yielded his keys. Earnest took the keys and opened all the doors, including the last one. The young warder was undressed and Tiger put on his uniform. James was busy disconnecting all the telephones. Van Niekerk was weeping and pleading for his wallet to be returned and his life spared. We assured them that we would not take their lives. The young man was very cooperative.

We were just about to leave when Captain Hayes appeared from one of the secret rooms carrying drips. The secret rooms were not in our plans; we did not know of their existence. Seeing Van Niekerk flat on his stomach and the young warder in his jockey bound like a captured bird, she lost her grip on the drips and they fell on the floor.

“Op jou maag!” Ruben shouted at her. She met my eyes and held them. There was the anguish of betrayal. I assured her that her life was perfectly safe and she would not be harmed. Ruben forced her to lie flat on her stomach. She cooperated and did as told. Something cut her nose and there was slight bleeding. Francis took out a handkerchief and wiped the blood. Reuben tied both her hands and mouth with a bandage. She requested that we make the bandage a bit loose so that she could breathe properly. We did that.

I soothed her as a friend and assured her that all we desired was our freedom and we would not hurt anybody. “We are not terrorists” I explained, “but a people fighting an unjust system”. She nodded her head in understanding.

We then placed Adjutant Van Niekerk’s wallet in a position where he could see it. Tiger had by now already parked the Skyline at the entrance. We walked slowly to the car and entered it in a matter of fact way, all nine of us. Our instructions to ourselves were firm. No one would run to the car for fear of drawing the attention of the sentries. We were neatly dressed and were depending on being taken for “proef

bewaarders”, that is, prison warders who came to work in their own clothes and did not wear uniforms. We were all safely in the Skyline with Tiger behind the wheel as planned. He was cautioned to drive very slowly. We did not, under any circumstances want to hear screeching tyres and we did not want any unnecessary casualties.

We drove over the prison humps and reached the last gate which blocked our path to freedom. The warder manning the gate approached the vehicle. Francis immediately jumped out and pointed the gun at him. He opened the gate very fast. Francis got into the car and it was then that Tiger screeched the tyres. Squich and Eric were not at the gate as planned and we panicked. The Nissan Skyline petrol gauge was showing empty and it would not have taken us far. At the intersection, where signposts directed one to Benoni and Daveyton, we met Bossy and Trot in a blue Ford Sapphire. They were on their way to the prison to check on Squich and Eric. We signalled them to follow us.

We learnt later that Squich and Eric had mechanical problems with their combi therefore they could not make it on time. They arrived at the prison after our escape and could see by the activity at the prison that we had escaped successfully.

We drove into Daveyton township and abandoned the Skyline near the shopping complex. Bossy was holding a F1 hand grenade in his hands, ready to blow any enemy vehicle that might try to forestall us. Four of us jumped into the blue Sapphire while the other five went with Bossy to the taxi rank to hire a combi. The Sapphire sped away in the direction of Northern Province via Witbank. As we approached the Delmas highway, we saw prison warders combing the bush surrounding Modderbee prison with dogs. The prison siren was bellowing all over the place. The search for the “dangerous nine” was on.

We made our way to Bronkhorstspruit which is just before

ESCAPE FROM MODDERBEE

Witbank. Trot was given a speeding ticket by a traffic officer. We arrived in Ga-Maritshane at around 2h00 and were taken to the Lutheran Conference Centre. Bossy arrived with the others an hour later. All eight of us were now at the Centre. Only Ruben was missing in action. He got lost in the confusion at Jan Furse Hospital when the rest of the guys who came with Bossy in the combi from Daveyton decided to move in pairs so as not to attract attention. Ruben then went back to Mamelodi, to his girlfriend's house, where he was located the next day, February 19, 1990, by Bossy and Trot.

Squich and Eric also joined us the following day after they retreated to Attridgeville to look for a pistol and hand grenades for our protection at the Centre. We had to be armed because we anticipated that the enemy would kill us once they found us.

Our escape was a success and we spent the whole day congratulating each other. The escape was important for it established the Pretoria regime had lost control. It was important because it infused hope into parents whose children were on death row for their attacks on the regime.

After the Pretoria bombings in 1983, the enemy ensured that security was so heightened in the city centre that it was believed that even a bird could not land unnoticed. The enemy, knowing that its days were numbered, went all out to ensure that we were not left unpunished. They removed treason as the main charge and replaced it with terrorism and murder. The entire trial was depoliticised and made to look as though we were a bunch of criminals without political ambitions.

Our victorious escape also meant that we were able to rejoin MK in exile and continue the ongoing war with the enemy. It was a relief from the stress of living a life of a prisoner where you are told what to do and what not to do. Further, our escape was a huge blow to the prosecution who secured death sentences in the Messina and the two Delmas trials.

To the security branch members at Compol Building in

Pretoria, our escape meant sleepless nights as they promised their masters through one Colonel Eugene Opperman that we would be brought to court within a week to face our charges. It is my suspicion that if the enemy found us, there would never have been a chance of us returning to court. They would kill us and claim that they were returning fire to protect themselves. We therefore vowed never to be found. To the revolutionary forces led by the ANC, the escape was seen as a continuation of the struggle by MK prisoners, who, according to Tom Sebina, the then spokesperson of the ANC, “sees their incarceration as another terrain of the struggle.”

We had completed our work. Our contribution to the Freedom Struggle was to impress on the Pretoria regime that it may have monopolised all the military hardware it could, using our taxes, the wealth we created to oppress and suppress us, but we in the ANC also had our international network, our sympathisers and supporters, but above all, our determination to destroy apartheid, our great commitment, our awesome spirit of self-sacrifice, our innate African intelligence and when we put all these together, we put together an awesome courage that overcame all odds.

Chapter Thirty Three

Disguised In Ga-Maritshane

Bossy and Trot had arranged with the pastor of the Lutheran Church in Ga-Maritshane to book the Conference Centre for two weeks for a conference of the Education Crisis Committee. The Church had agreed and for the two weeks we pretended to be members of the ECC. We carried our books with us everyday in the morning and held our fake discussions.

Early on Monday morning, Tiger, Francis, George and I went to the priest's house, about 200 meters from where we were housed to watch the television programme, Good Morning South Africa.

We heard the announcement that the police were looking for nine members of Umkhonto we Sizwe who had escaped from the prison in Benoni. Our photos were flashed on the screen, one by one, with a picture of an AK47 and the words "armed and dangerous" inscribed below our names. The public was warned not to confront the suspects but to report them to the nearest police station. The pastor was sitting with us in his lounge. We did not give the slightest sign of recognition. I guessed he recognised us for he left for Pietersburg almost immediately and returned laden with all the newspapers.

We decided to keep our mouths shut and depended on him. We later learnt from some comrades that the pastor was the brother of the slain Communist leader in the Northern Province, Peter Nchabeleng.

The story of our escape was a scoop, making headlines in practically all the dailies. *The Citizen* headlined "Nine Terror

Trial Men Escape” and went on to report how three prison warders were overpowered by the escapees who made their getaway in a beige Skyline belonging to a prison warder. The charges we faced were detailed — terrorism, murder and treason — and as in the case of the television broadcast, the community was warned not to confront the escapees as they were armed and dangerous.

The *Sowetan* had a small article on its front page entitled, “Dangerous Nine on the Run”. *The Star* was among the first to publish our photographs on its second page. Instead of Johannes Maleka’s picture, they published Peter Maluleka’s picture. Peter was still in prison and I thought how angry he would be to see his photograph in the press.

Bossy and Trot told us that in celebration of our escape, beer was being sold cheaply in Atteridgeville and that the station hawkers had joined in the price war. The people in the township, rejoicing in our victorious escape, dubbed us the “Untouchables”.

Those who attended our trial that Monday could not believe their eyes when they saw only three accused, Liverpool, Peter and Bernard. They were astounded when told of an escape which saw the freedom of nine ANC members. This was the largest number of ANC members ever to escape from an apartheid prison.

There were those who did not believe the story and one of them was my father who, when I telephoned him from Lusaka, told me he had thought that the enemy was once more trying its dirty tricks, that they had killed us and were faking the escape.

The Prosecution was hit below the belt and applied to the court to have the trial postponed until the culprits were brought to book. The Judge gave them the postponement based on Section 60 and 61 of the Criminal Procedure Act 51 of 1977.

The trial would resume with the three trialists if the Prosecution failed to produce us. Tiger’s mother was inter-

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rogated by the Security Branch on our escape. When she failed to give them any information, she was assaulted and nearly suffocated by the notorious Security Branch.

We, in the meanwhile, were in Maritshane masquerading as members of the ECC and not on our way to Botswana as the enemy thought. The police cordoned off the East Rand for almost the whole week on the possibility that we were hiding somewhere. Captain Eugene Opperman kept assuring the public that the police would return the culprits to jail where they belonged. He continued to refer to us as “extremely dangerous”.

Chapter Thirty Four

Crossing The Border

We had been two weeks at Maritshane when it was considered safe for us to make our bid to skip over the border. Bossy and Trot had been making trips to Swaziland on an almost daily basis to ensure our safety.

An old man living near the border between South Africa and Swaziland was contracted to help us jump the fence into Swaziland. The first group of five left on the first day while the second group followed on the second day. The old man was an inyanga and we pretended to be sick people who suffered a very dangerous disease which needed a special witchdoctor to heal. This was the story Tiger and I also gave to a lady inyanga who sheltered us for the night at her house while Trot and Bossie reconnoitered the Kangwane-Swaziland route. We told her that the inyanga we were going to see in Swaziland had appeared independently to both of us in our dreams.

It took us two full days to reach him. He was a shepherd and knew the terrain very well.

We spent the entire day at the old man's house and it was at around 2h00 that he took the first group safely across the border. At about 4h00, he took the second group of five across. We were now ten, since Eric Maboja, the man who had smuggled the pistol, had decided to join us.

We were picked up by Umkhonto units operating in Swaziland and distributed in different homes. I was allocated to Dr Thobyane at the University of Swaziland.

One of the MK cadres, Sox, who was then the commander

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of MK in Swaziland, informed us that the movement wanted us out of Swaziland as soon as possible. Swazi police were collaborating with the Boers and some of our comrades had been abducted or shot by the Boers in Swaziland itself. The little Kingdom was not a good place to be in.

After a week or so, the first group was smuggled into Mozambique to a place called Nomahashe. I was in the last group. We followed two days later; we were taken to the border of Nomahashe to be met by a group from Mozambique. There was a breakdown in communication and we found ourselves stranded in this dangerous place for three days. As soldiers of Umkhonto, we were expected to find our way out of this situation. We persuaded a Swazi citizen to hide us in his house. We were in a state of panic that someone, possibly a mole in the ANC, was trying to sabotage us and for how much?

To our great relief, a unit of Mozambiquan comrades came to pick us up on the third night. We were helped through the border fence. We reached the base in Nomahashe at about 3h00. The same morning at 8h00, we were ferried to Maputo where we were accommodated at the house of the chief representative of the ANC. We stayed there for four days when we were when we were taken to Hotel Ruvuma where we spent another eight days or so.

Ruvuma Hotel was a Frelimo Party hotel and it housed senior officials of the Mozambiquan Intelligence Services. It seemed that the officers knew about us. They monitored our movements. A few meters from the hotel was the intercontinental, a place where we could relax and enjoy ourselves. We bought beers and mixed with the locals. For the first time since our escape, we had the feeling that we were out of the lions den, albeit temporarily.

One of the few leaders who visited us at Ruvuma Hotel was Comrade Matthew Phosa who was then the Commander of MK in Mozambique. This was the man who, together with Bossy,

Crossing The Border

Trot and Chris Hani, had co-ordinated our smooth escape from prison. He briefed us on the situation in Maputo and gave us the message from our leadership in Lusaka. We were welcomed into the ranks of MK and praised for our heroic actions inside the Republic of South Africa. The leadership, we were told, were eagerly awaiting our arrival in Lusaka. But he also brought me very bad news. he told me of the incarceration of my Botswana girlfriend, Tshidi Joy Banda, by the Mbokotho. I was shocked by the story of Tshidi's arrest and I was eager to reach Lusaka to hear the full details. It was alleged that she had been working for the enemy and was party to my arrest and those of my fellow comrades.

A few days later, we were on a flight to Lusaka, the revolutionary base of Africa.

Chapter Thirty Five

Arriving In Lusaka

We were met at Lusaka Airport by Comrade Keith Mokwape who was then heading the Military Intelligence of Umkhonto. We were taken to a place in Helen Kaunda where we were placed with Comrade Castro, a member of Military Intelligence and once an editor of Dawn which was a journal of Umkhonto we Sizwe.

The following day, at Castro's house, we were visited by the highest delegation of MK led by the present South African Minister of Defence, Joe Modise, Comrade Chris Hani, Commissar Max, Checkers Manchek, who was once the commander of MK in Zimbabwe, the Chief of Communications, Sis Jacqueline, now a retired Major General in the South African National Defence Force and Comrade Rachid, who was then the commander of Special Operations.

Commander Joe Modise welcomed us on behalf of the President of the ANC, Comrade Oliver Tambo and other members of the NEC. We narrated the stories of our arrest and of our escape. They listened, glued to their chairs, as if listening to Hans Christian Anderson narrating an American movie.

They were all impressed with the account of our escape. Commander Modise then told us that the leadership of the ANC looked upon us as heroes of the struggle.

It was at this meeting that Comrade Keith Mokoape was given the task of arranging a press briefing to announce our safe arrival in Lusaka. The briefing was held on April 2, 1990

Arriving In Lusaka

in Lusaka. We were all collected at about 8h00 and transported to the office of the chief representative in Lusaka. By 9h00, members of the press were seated and waiting for the prison escapees to occupy their chairs. All the Zambian newspapers were there, and among the foreign correspondents, there was French Television and the BBC. Africa Confidential was also represented. We were led into the gathering by the then spokesperson of the ANC, Comrade Tom Sebina.

We narrated the story of our escape to the press and answered their questions. The Zambian Times closed its report with the observation that as the South African masses went to church, we were leaving the prison. The press gave our story the publicity it deserved. We saw it ourselves on Zambian television. We were described as selfless, that instead of caring for our individual families, we had cared for all South Africans whose lives were outraged daily by the ruthless South African regime. We enjoyed the respect of the community and its leaders and were treated with high esteem by our comrades who saw in us fearless members of Umkhonto we Sizwe. Mabhida had always been with us.

Chapter Thirty Six

Home At Last

I later moved from Castro's house to stay with Bachana Mokwena and his wife Mariam. They were a wonderful couple and they did all they could to reintegrate me into civilian life. The house was visited by some of our leaders like TT Nkobi, Thele Moema and Zakes Tolo.

The leadership of Mbokodo (the ANC Intelligence) came to see me at the Mokwena's and informed me about Tshidi. I was not impressed with their account of Tshidi's arrest. They gave me an undertaking that they would review the matter. They were as good as their word. Tshidi was released in 1991 and I was called by a member of Mbokodo to pick her up at a certain house in Chilenje South, very near to the home of the Mokwenas. Tshidi had been captured by the Boers after my arrest in Botswana. The Boers had used a certain man staying in Kagiso II, Vuka, in Krugersdorp to visit Tshidi's house regularly. The Boers used him to tell Tshidi of my arrest. They knew she loved me and would be very eager to see me. She suspected the guy and refused to accompany him to South Africa. She reported the person to MK Military Intelligence in Botswana and the guy was captured. In Lusaka, he confessed his involvement in a plot to arrest all members of our MK Unit in Pretoria and Krugersdorp. He was a mole in our units and we had trusted him. It was this blind trust that had betrayed all of us.

Home At Last

After the guy had failed to lure Tshidi to South Africa, the enemy introduced a Mozambiquan into the picture. On the day he arrived at Tshidi's house in Mogoditshane, he arranged with his masters to send in a team for an abduction mission. The same night, Tshidi was abducted and delivered to Pretoria. As a citizen of Botswana, she was kept in one of the hotels in Pretoria where she was interrogated and recruited to work with the enemy. She was instructed to point out ANC houses in Botswana for bombardment by enemy soldiers.

Reaching Botswana, she reported to the MK military intelligence. The services recommended that she go to Lusaka for her safety. It was decided in Lusaka to lock her up. Her confession led to the clean-up operation in Botswana where some senior members were arrested. Thus the reason the movement chose Swaziland for our escape route instead of Botswana.

Tshidi and I lived together as husband and wife until 1993 when she decided to elope and get engaged to a Botswana national who promised her heaven and earth.

It was only in 1994, on November 4, that the South African government decided to grant us amnesty and allowed us to return to the country.

We arrived home as heroes of the revolution, the last group to arrive into the motherland. Things were different, the ANC was in government and our comrades were now ministers and MECs. We came home to a new environment of peace which promised to cause no more tears.

Our mothers, sisters, brothers, neighbours, comrades, compatriots and the people of South Africa were happy to integrate us into the new system. Our integration later became a mixture of happiness and sorrow as we had to face a new struggle — a struggle to resettle ourselves and our families. A struggle to be employed in a country we dearly loved, a country to which we had given our youth in an endeavour to

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liberate it from those who had taken it away from us in force.

Epilogue

The enemy refused to clear us of the charges and we had to wait in Lusaka until South Africa's first non-racial and democratic elections had taken place. The enemy, through its trade mission in Lusaka gave us passports which we used to cast our votes during the April 26-27, 1994 elections.

We waited in Lusaka up to June 31, when we convened a meeting with Awolo and George Naicker, the ANC's financial administrators in Lusaka. At that meeting, we forced the administrators to purchase us air tickets to Johannesburg. We decided that initially, four of us would return to South Africa, after which the remaining group would follow. The first four to return were Joseph Nkosi, Reginald Lefty Legodi, Ruben Khotsa and myself. We boarded a plane at Lusaka Airport on July 4, to Jan Smuts Airport in Johannesburg. After a two hour flight, we arrived at Jan Smuts. We were scared that we would be arrested, but to our surprise that did not happen. Instead we were met by family members at the airport and taken to our homes. I could not stay long at my house since I believed that those still committed to apartheid would hunt us down. The ANC headquarters asked us to contact Penuell Maduna should we run into problems.

That night I slept over at my sister's house. After three days, I moved to Mafikeng where I hid in Frans "Star" Vilakazi's house. I stayed with Star, then appointed Member of Executive Council of Transport and Aviation in the North West Province, for two weeks and it was through his help that I secured a job

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in the VIP Protection Unit.

Whilst I was very grateful for Star Vilakazi's assistance, my stay in the VIP Protection Unit was however, frustrating since I was expected to protect the very same that people who had benefitted from the past regime, and had worked against the revolution. They were chosen on the basis of their standing in the community and are today claiming to be more ANC than the tried and tested cadres of the movement.

My comrades Joseph Tiger Nkosi and Reginald Legodi joined the army. We were eventually granted amnesty on November 4, 1994 by the ANC despite the National Party's objections. They maintained that the ANC could not clear itself.

Francis Pitsi, George Mathe, Johannes Maleka and James Ndo Kgasi returned to South Africa around December 1994 and all joined the army. They were given ranks far below their worth despite their selfless sacrifices. Alas, our army was put together by compromises and concessions made to the architects of apartheid. We paid the price. The ANC leaned backwards to accommodate the enemy and reconcile with it.

The ANC has been fortunate to be led by visionary leaders, but in order to lead the government into democracy, they compromised a leadership whose activities and policies were determined purely by principles they had formerly considered non-negotiable, like the formation of the government of national unity. The overwhelming majority of junior cadres, like ourselves, questioned the government of national unity but the ANC cadreship was highly disciplined and tenaciously adhered to the direction indicated by the leadership.

Fresh from the bush, I could not, like most other cadres, entertain the idea of making peace with the enemy let alone sharing power with the very same architects of apartheid and other stooges.

I found myself in the invidious position of being employed

Epilogue

in the VIP Protection Unit with the task of protecting those I regarded as enemy collaborators — the people who directly or indirectly contributed to the death of so many comrades and the intolerable suffering of millions of our people. It was a torturous position, in sharp contrast with my hitherto life in which it was very much clear who my enemies and those of the revolution are; the boundary lines between my enemies and my comrades was clear. Reconciliation can be torturous. In the spirit of reconciliation, the ANC accommodated all and sundry who purported to be ANC aligned.

I joined the South African Police Services in 1995 as captain, and I continued to serve in the SAPS until I reached the rank of a Major-General.

Further, I completed the B.Iuris and an LLB degree at the University of North West.

In May 2011, I left the SAPS and joined Transnet SOC Ltd as the Head of Security. I remain loyal to the ANC.

The Struggle Continues

Viva Nelson Mandela

Viva ANC!

The Citizen, 19 February 1990



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9 TERROR TRIAL Warder's car found MEN ESCAPE

By Cobus Oosthuizen
and Sapa

NINE men charged with terrorism, murder and attempted murder escaped from the Modderbee prison, near Benoni, yesterday.

The men, who were to appear in the Delmas Circuit Court today, over-

powered prison warders and escaped in a beige Nissan Skyline, belonging to one of the warders.

Witwatersrand police liaison officer, Captain Eugene Opperman, said last night the car had been recovered outside Daveyton, but the prisoners were still at large.

One of the suspects

took the uniform of one of the warders and this might be used by the escapees to commit other crimes.

The nine accused, are Mr Alfred Kgasi (25), Mr Ernest Ramadite (24), Mr Francis Pitse (24), Mr Johannes Maleka (25), Mr Joseph Nkosi (29), Mr Reginald Legodi (22), Mr

Thapelo Khotsa (23), Mr Moeketsi Toka (25) and Mr George Mathe (21).

They are standing trial on charges of terrorism, seven alternative counts of murder, six counts of attempted murder, and 11 counts of damage to property.

TO PAGE 2

The Citizen, Monday, 19 February 1990

Nine escape

FROM PAGE 1

Capt Opperman said the men were armed and "extremely dangerous", and he warned the public not to confront any of them.

Anybody with information should contact the nearest police station or the Security Branch of the South African Police, he said.

He could not give any details of the escape "for security reasons".

The nine suspects were part of a group of 12 alleged ANC members, who were initially charged with high treason, murder and attempted murder after a spate of bombings and shootings in Pretoria in 1988.

They were also members of the Mamelodi Civic Association, Mamelodi Youth Congress, Saulsville/Atteridgeville Youth Organisation and Ga-Rankuwa Youth Organisation.

When the court case began in the Delmas Supreme Court on August 1 last year, the State alleged that the accused murdered three Atteridgeville police constables, Bernard Mope, Nelson Phenyane and Andrew Mphahlele on March 18, 1988.

They were also accused of the murder of a 12-month-old baby, Patience Kulele, in a handgrenade attack on the house of a Mamelodi policeman, on May 10, 1988.

It was alleged that they were also responsible for a bomb attack on the

Sterland Cinema complex in Pretoria, as well as a limpet mine explosion at a Juicy Lucy outlet on May 25, 1988, in which five people were injured.

Other charges included the alleged attempted murders of Ms Mathilda Venter, Ms Elke Hansen, Ms Anna Prinsloo and Ms Susana Kruger of Pretoria and Ms Rose-Mary Muzwayine and Ms Annanus Nkoana of Atteridgeville.

When the treason charges against the 12 accused were dropped last year, legal experts said it could have been intended to have the effect of de-politicising the trial.

The three accused who were not with the nine who escaped yesterday are Mr Peter Maluleka (34), Mr Bernard Mokgonyana (26) and Mr Godfrey Velaphi Molube (41).

No democracy in Nepal

KATHMANDU. — King Birendra issued a tough defence of Nepal's partyless political system yesterday, ahead of the launch of a campaign for multiparty democracy his government has vowed to crush.

Nepal's absolute monarch showed no signs of bending to the protests of parties banned for 30 years, now banded together in the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy, which was due to launch its campaign with demonstrations yesterday.

ESCAPE FROM MODDERBEE

The Citizen, Wednesday, 4 April 1990

Escaped ANC men arrive in Zambia

LUSAKA. — Nine African National Congress members who escaped from prison on February 18 have turned up at their movement's headquarters in Zambia.

ANC officials showed the group briefly to journalists yesterday on their arrival.

Rodney Toka (27), spokesman for the group, said he and the others, all members of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the ANC's military wing, were helped to escape from Modderbee prison, 35 km east of Johannesburg, by an underground MK unit which gave them a gun.

The Star, Monday, 19 February 1990



Joseph Nkosi.



Reginald Legodi.



Reuben Khotza.



Alfred Kgasi.



Francis Pitsi.



Mokoatsi Toka.



Ernest Ramadite.

By Craig Kotze

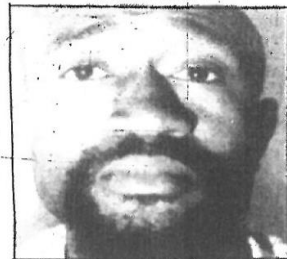
A massive police dragnet was cast over the Reef for nine prisoners, charged with terrorism and high treason, who broke out of the Modderbee Prison near Benoni after overpowering warders yesterday.

The nine were to have appeared in the Delmas Circuit Court today, said Witwatersrand police spokesman Captain Eugene Opperman.

The prisoners are armed and at least one of them has a prison warden's uniform.

Captain Opperman said the suspects attacked warders at about 10 am and overpowered them.

The suspects are: Mr Alfred



Pieter Maluleka.



George Mathe.

9 prisoners overpower warders

Kgasi (24), Mr Ernest Ramadite (24), Mr Francis Pitsi (25), Mr Pieter Maleka (35), Mr Joseph Nkosi (25), Mr Reginald Legodi (23), Mr Mokoatsi Toka (32) and Mr George Mathe (26), Mr Reuben Khotza (23).

They are regarded as extremely dangerous.

The warden's car in which the nine escaped has been reco-

vered just outside Daveyton on the East Rand.

Police immediately launched an intensive search and road-blocks were set up. Vehicle patrols were also sent out, Captain Opperman said.

He said it was feared that the uniform taken from a warden could be used to commit other crimes.

Captain Opperman declined to give further details on the escape.

He warned that the men were to be considered extremely dangerous and that the public should not apprehend them.

Anyone with information is asked to contact their nearest police station.

Email your comments

Email your comments to:

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You can also send your comments to:

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