

Zweli Mkhize pays tribute to MK veteran Gordon Webster



File Picture: Zweli Mkhize has paid tribute to MK veteran Gordon Webster. Picture: African News Agency (ANA) Archives

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[BeyondWords](#)

Durban - ANC Struggle activist Dr Zweli Mkhize on Wednesday paid tribute to uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) ANC operative Gordon Webster, who in the 1980s was dramatically rescued from a Pietermaritzburg hospital after he was shot five times.

Webster died on Tuesday aged 58. He had been in hospital for more than a week after the vehicle he and his wife were travelling in collided with a stationary vehicle near Estcourt.

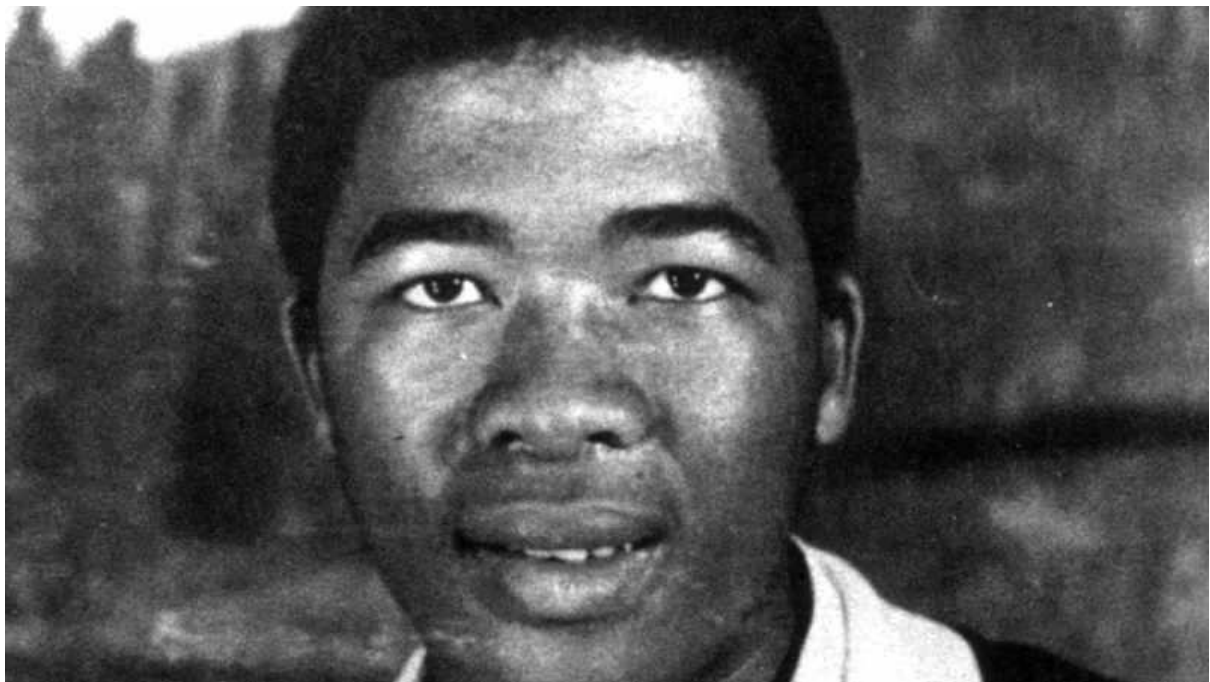
His wife passed away a few days before him.

Mkhize said Webster was among the finest freedom fighters, who had a love for people and for humanity and placed this above their own lives.

“He was prepared to face death despite all the risks and adversity. The apartheid government was heavily armed but they were prepared to face insurmountable circumstances.”

Mkhize called on young South Africans to look at the example set by Webster and others who sacrificed so much for freedom and dedicated their lives to the service of the country.

Obituary: MK veteran Gordon Webster inspired others through courage and sheer determination



File Picture: A picture of Gordon Webster from the 80s. Picture: African News Agency (ANA) Archives

Durban - Veteran ANC operative Gordon Webster, who in the '80s was dramatically rescued from a Pietermaritzburg hospital after he was shot five times, has died aged 58.

Webster had been in hospital for more than a week after the vehicle he and his wife were travelling in collided with a stationary vehicle near Estcourt.

His wife passed away a few days before him.

Greta Apelgren, who was part of Webster's unit Operation Butterfly, described him as a courageous person who was always humble and jovial despite the post-traumatic stress disorder that he suffered after being shot by the apartheid regime, tortured and imprisoned on Robben Island.

In 1986, Webster then 22, and fellow MK operative Bheki Ngubane had been shot at by police. Ngubane was killed and Webster, shot five times, was rushed to Edendale hospital.

Robert McBride, his father Derrick and others carried out a daring rescue operation and freed Webster after a shoot-out with police. Webster would eventually be taken to Wentworth in Durban before travelling in a caravan to Gaborone, Botswana where doctors eventually removed the last bullet that had been lodged next to his heart.

Apelgren said after being rescued and recovering, Webster returned to South Africa and recruited and helped train operatives.

TRIBUTE

Remembering Gordon Webster, one of our most unlikely and modest freedom fighters



Gordon Webster passed away. (Photo: Supplied) Picture was taken 2022.

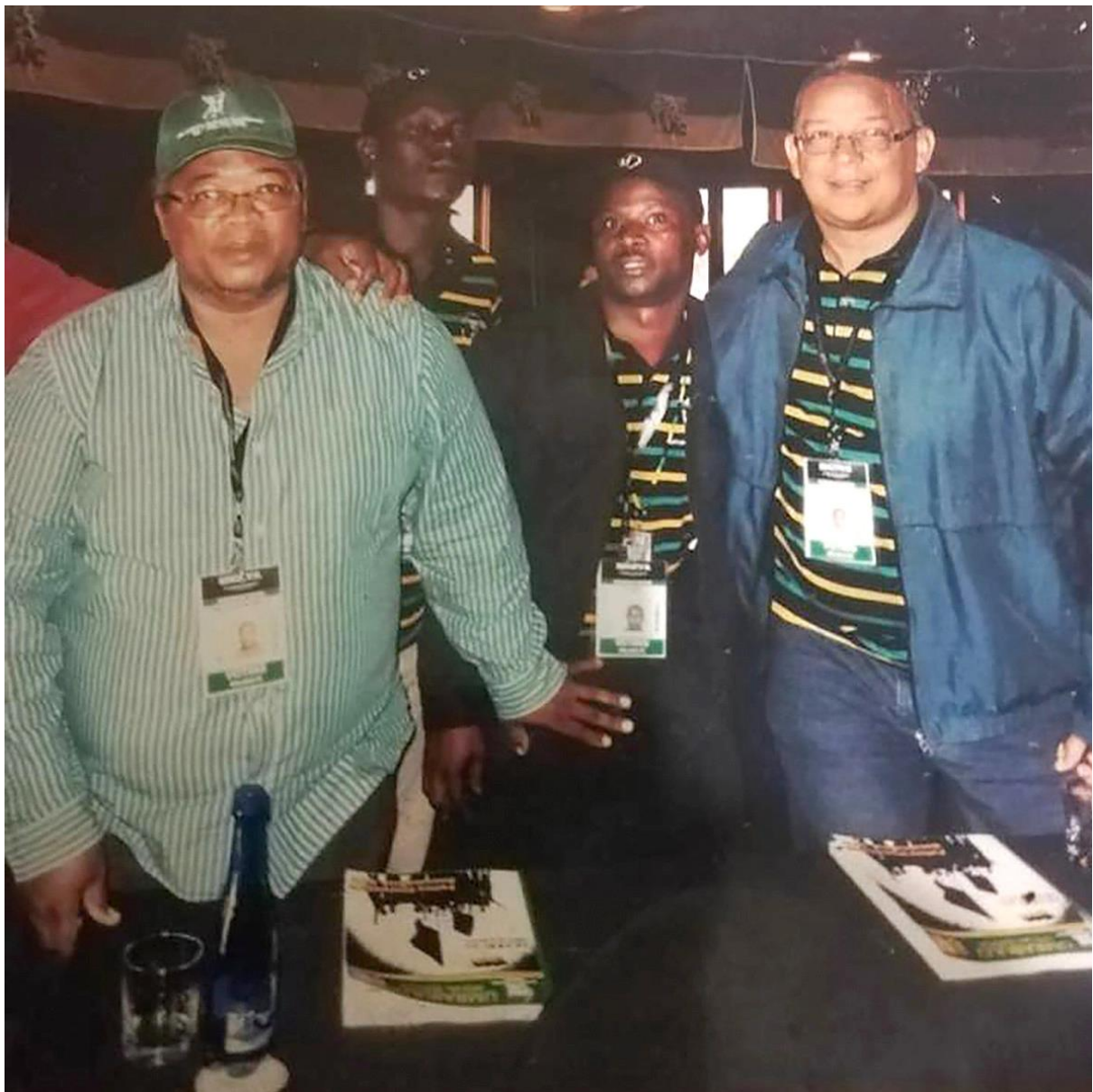


By Bryan Rostron

11 Aug 2022

Despite his innate modesty and desire for anonymity, Gordon Webster, who has died at the age of 58, was at the centre of several hugely dramatic episodes in the 1980s when he commanded an Umkhonto weSizwe unit which carried out a series of sensational propaganda bombings in the Durban area.

Sometimes those most deserving of our attention, never having sought the limelight, simply seem to slip away from us, modest and unassuming even in their final passing, just as they had always been in life. So it was with Gordon Webster, one of the most remarkable and unlikely of MK freedom fighters, who has died at the age of 58.



Gordon Webster with Robert Mc Bride, 2015/16. (Photo: Supplied)

A quiet, thoughtful and extremely gentle soul, Gordon was the most unlikely of combatants. As a young trainee teacher in Durban, barely in his twenties, he should never have had to pick up a gun in the Struggle for liberation. He was, however, all the more remarkable for having done so, and should be honoured today precisely because he took up arms without ever asking for, or expecting, anything in return for his outstanding bravery and considerable sacrifice.

Despite his innate modesty and desire for anonymity, Gordon was at the centre of several hugely dramatic episodes in the 1980s when he commanded an Umkhonto weSizwe unit which carried out a series of sensational propaganda bombings in the Durban area.

Having survived an almost fatal shootout with security police, then being freed from hospital in a famous raid by his comrade, Robert McBride, and later being sentenced to 25 years on Robben Island, two weeks ago Gordon and his wife of many years became victims of South Africa's road carnage. Anne died almost immediately and earlier this week Gordon was taken off life support.

Gordon and Anne Webster leave four adult children in their twenties and thirties.

“On his own, Gordon made such an impact,” Robert recalled this week. “As our commander, he taught us everything we knew. He was completely selfless and from the very beginning he never expected any acclaim, nor did he ever ask for anything in return later on.”

Typically, as a student teacher in Durban, Gordon simply vanished one day without telling his family in order not to compromise them. He went into exile for military training and many months later, just as surreptitiously, he suddenly reappeared in Durban – and immediately recruited his close friend Robert into the underground Struggle.

Daring plans

Gordon's tight-knit unit began a series of sensational propaganda bombings at a time when the ANC seemed almost dormant in the area. One night Gordon and his comrade, Bheki Ngubane, were stopped on a lonely road by the police. They were carrying armaments in the boot of their car.

Bheki was shot dead and Gordon was almost fatally wounded. He was kept under heavy armed guard in the Intensive Care Unit of Edendale Hospital near Pietermaritzburg. The apartheid regime made a huge fuss about capturing “a dangerous terrorist”.

Famously, Robert and his father Derrick organised a daring raid to free their wounded comrade. Dressed as doctors, with AK-47s hidden up their

sleeves, the McBrides entered the hospital at night, climbing the stairs to the ICU where Gordon lay naked and attached to several drips and tubes.



Picture was taken 1983 before Gordon Webster, left centre row and Robert Mc Bride right centre row, joined MK. (Photo: Supplied)

Following a shootout in the corridor, the McBrides ripped out all the tubes and placed Gordon on a trolley. Racing down the concrete stairs, the wounded man fell heavily several times. As they exited the hospital, nurses and patients crowded to the windows, singing encouragement as they made a fast getaway.

After several weeks recuperating in secret, Robert smuggled his friend to Botswana and despite receiving medical treatment abroad, doctors were unable to remove several bullets from Gordon's body as they were too close to the spine and heart. Later, after Robert had been sentenced to death for the 1986 bombing of beachfront pubs in Durban, Gordon desperately sought permission from the MK command in exile to return to South Africa and repay the debt to his friend, with a plan to kidnap the trial judge in return for Robert's freedom.

Eventually Chris Hani authorised this audacious plan, but Gordon was arrested almost immediately on his return. This episode is indicative of Gordon's extraordinary bravery and steadfast loyalty. He was sentenced to 25 years in prison, and it was on Robben Island in 1990 that I interviewed him in preparation for a book about his and Robert's exploits. I was struck

at the time by Gordon’s gentleness, directness and honesty in answering all questions – and, remarked on by all who knew him, his sense of humour.

After 1994, Gordon was offered a senior position in the South African National Defence Force, which he turned down. As he told me at the time: “I never want to be told by anyone ever again what to do, or take orders from anyone.”

Read

Eulogy for freedom fighter Gordon Webster



Gordon Webster. Picture: ANC Eastern Cape/Facebook

Published Aug 19, 2022

SHARE

The MEC for Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs Siboniso Duma delivered the eulogy at the Special Provincial funeral of freedom fighter Gordon Webster.

Our Programme Director, Dr Sibogiseni Dhlomo;

The children and grandchildren of Cde Gordon Webster;

The Webster and Zuma families;

MECs and MPLs from both KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape;

More on this

Executive Mayor of Alfred Nzo District Municipality, Cllr Vukile Mhlembana;

Traditional Leaders, Religious Leaders, and Councillors;

SAPS Chaplain, Rev P.L.P. Gumede

The Director-General of KZN, Dr Nonhlanhla Mkhize;

Members of uMkhonto we Sizwe Military Veterans;

Ex-political Prisoner

Leaders of various political formations

Compatriots and Fellow Mourners;

We have come to the heart of Mpondoland, in the land of King Faku, to return to the soil the mortal remains of a distinguished freedom fighter and good human being, Cde Gordon Webster.

While we are devastated, we know that to be in Mbizana we have to let history rhyme with hope because it is in this art of our land that the umbilical cords of other great stalwarts of the South African revolution were cut.

Here in the home of the historic Pondoland revolt, we have the homes of ANC President Oliver Reginald and the mother of the nation, Mama Winnie Madikizela-Mandela.

The footprints of the Khoi and the San are not only to be traced in their present-day living descendants.

They are also found in the world-renowned rock art paintings in surrounding caves and mountains.

They have defied time and immortality to tell the stories of the Eland and the hunter-gathers.

They have prevailed through centuries of attacks on our culture, heritage, and identity to stubbornly remind us that our history as a people predates 1652.

Till today, they whisper to those paying attention that ours is a story of hope and triumph against the violence and dehumanisation that came with slavery at the Cape, colonialism, and apartheid.

Claiming both KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape as his homes, Cde Gordon Webster's momentous life is a living tributary, telling us that when all is said and done, we are South Africans rooted in the nourishing and resilient African soil. While history must rhyme with hope, it is still with heavy hearts that we today have to bid farewell to an outstanding patriot and revolutionary – Cde Gordon Webster.

It is a double blow for the family, the children, and indeed our country that today we release this quiet revolutionary to his beloved wife, who transitioned to the land of our ancestors in the vehicle accident in KwaZulu-Natal that robbed our nation of these companions, parents, and comrades-in-arms.

Heart-wrenching as it is, we must release this child of our soil to the care of his departed parents, our mother, umaZuma and our father u-baba uArtie Gordon. Hamba kahle mkhonto! You have fought a good race! You have completed your journey. Beyond the grave, a warm embrace from our heroes await. Among them: our father, Derrick McBride, Ebrahim Ebrahim, Bheki Ngubane, Andrew Sibusiso Zondo, Gerald Hawkes, Portia Phila Ndwadwe and many more.

Please tell them that surviving members of the Butterfly unit, the pride of our arm struggle, will not let your sacrifices go in vain. Working with your beloved organisation, Africa's oldest and most glorious movement, the African National Congress, we will make sure that we restore the dignity of the people you so loved that you were prepared to lay your life for their freedom.

Today we dip our revolutionary banner of black, green, and gold to salute your contribution to the emancipation of our country from the yoke of apartheid colonialism, white supremacy, and racial division.

In your honour, we will leave no stone unturned to realise the vision of a National Democratic Society. As you did, we will marshal all our people behind the noble vision of a united, non-racial, non-sexist, equal and prosperous society. On behalf of the Provincial Government and the people of KwaZulu-Natal, we convey our deepest sympathies to the family, friends and relatives.

Sishaye engeqiwa ntwala! Siwumtshingo ubethwa ubani na, lihambile iqhawe lakithi! Duduzekani nilale ngenxeba mndeni nezihlobo. Akwehlanga lungehli. Uma kunjena, siphakamisela amehlo eth ku Jehova, umqali nomphelelisi wokholo lwethu. Liyasho izwi ukuthi uhlala eseduze nezinhliziyi zabadabukileyo. Siyamethemba, uzowabopha amanxeba.

To the grandchildren and children of Cde Gordon Webster: Jennifer, Brian, Samantha and Gary, please accept our heartfelt sympathies on losing your mother and father in such a tragic manner.

We hope that the fond memories you have of your beloved parents will spare you unending sorrow. A good man like your father would want to see you overcome this setback and be in charge of your life and destiny again.

Fellow mourners since the passing away of Cde Gordon Webster, we have felt the outpouring of love from many quarters and from those who knew him intimately. From all the tributes we have heard, including today, it is clear that among us lived a man filled only with the unrelenting spirit of love for humankind.

He was the very epitome of love, reminding us of Che Guevara's dictum that "the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love." It is impossible to think of a genuine revolutionary lacking this quality."

In his youth, this good man was driven by a deep love for the poor and oppressed. It explains why he chose to change his society by choosing the mother of all vocations, teaching. Teaching remains a noble calling for the selfless among us who wish to transform society by impacting the youth.

When he embarked on this journey in the eighties, it was clear that the racist regime had sought to use segregated education as a tool for subjugation, division, and cheap black labour. The eighties was the era of "the comrades," led mainly by young activists in our townships, who, like the 76-generation, decided to confront the brutality of apartheid head-on.

It was South Africa's militant and courageous youth that was the first to positively respond to OR Tambo's call of rendering South Africa ungovernable on the 8th of January 1985 resulting in Botha declaring a state of emergency.

Having grown up in a family that taught him to value human solidarity, ubuntu, and human dignity, Cde Webster grew up knowing that everybody was somebody and that apartheid was evil and against the wishes of God.

It is here in the Eastern Cape that we learn of the moving and inspiring stories of our Coloured community, which embraces Mpondo and Xhosa traditions, including the ancient tradition of ukwaluka and associated

rituals. IsiXhosa is a language spoken with much ease by different communities. Kuyathethwa apha.

Like a number of outstanding activists in the Coloured and Indian communities, Cde Webster would not allow himself to be hoodwinked by the sham and façade of PW Botha's Tricameral Parliament in the eighties.

While others embraced it and collaborated with the enemy, Cde Webster realised that this was another ploy by the evil apartheid regime to drive a wedge between the oppressed. It was clear to the young Cde Webster that this was another divide-and-rule strategy that had to be resisted. Those who have written about him attest that Botha's Tricameral Parliament must have been one of the important motivations for him to take the decision to pick up arms to fight this diabolic system that would otherwise have sought to alienate him from all his roots – be they Zulu, Mpondo, or Irish.

Cde Webster fully embraced his black experience and the alienation of his people in the land of their birth. In a colonised country that grounded and premised everything on race, he saw himself very much like our father, Walter 'Xhamela' Sisulu, who was born of an African woman at Engcobo and a white man, asserted that: *I am a black man, I am an African. I am subject to all the laws that affect my people... I never wanted to see my skin colour determine my race. I was an African in every sense of the word. No less, no more*".

It is exactly this definition and affirmation of our being that finds resonance in the poetic vision of the National Development Plan.

It says:

"Who are we?

We are Africans.

We are an African country.

We are part of our multi-national region.

We are an essential part of our continent.

Being Africans, we are acutely aware of the wider world and deeply implicated in our past and present.

That wider world carries some of our inheritance."

To assert his humanity and identity as an African and a black man who shared in the pain, struggles, and triumphs of his people, Cde Gordon Webster was willing and prepared to pay the ultimate price for freedom.

He was ready to sacrifice limb and life to free his country from national oppression and to contribute to the vision of a South Africa that belongs to all, black and white. Known for his humility and quietness, he left the country quietly to join Umkhonto we Sizwe in exile.

Like the MK at its formation, he swore allegiance to the Freedom Charter and took the oath that MK guerrillas and combatants took on December 16, 1961, where they said: *“The time comes in the life of any people when there remain two choices: to submit or fight. That time has now come in South Africa. We will not submit but will fight back with all means at our disposal in defence of our rights, our people and our freedom.”*

On his return from exile, Cde Webster recruited many youths to join the ranks of the people’s liberation army.

Cde Robert McBride, tells the story of their friendship and comradeship better than many of us.

It was Cde Webster who recruited him to Umkhonto we Sizwe and Cde McBride speak glowingly of how he looked up to him because of his discipline and the seriousness he attached to the liberation struggle.

It is probably a tragedy that many South Africans, our youth, in particular, did not hear from Cde Webster himself about how he was rescued from Edenvale Hospital in Pietermaritzburg by Cde McBride, his late father Cde Derrick McBride and others.

This is an inspiring story of how South Africans from all walks of life, including nurses and general staff at Edenvale Hospital, were significant actors in their own right in the liberation of our country.

Given his modest and selfless character, Cde Webster avoided the limelight or claimed any credit in the collective struggle in which he was but an actor.

While he was a protagonist in the theatre of Struggle, even being imprisoned on Robben Island, Cde Webster chose to remain in the background, and so, very few people knew about him or his monumental contribution to our liberation struggle.

Having been trained in security, intelligence, and combat, the brave, quiet, and courageous Cde Webster understood the enormity of the task that came with freedom in 1994.

He must have been preoccupied with the well-being and security of the state, knowing too well that the widening gap between the rich and the poor was a security threat to our new nation.

When he saw how the youth that he cherished was being consumed by crime, drugs, alcohol and other social ills, the teacher and soldier in him must have been pained.

He sure was worried that youth unemployment was a ticking time bomb that would undermine the gains of our democracy.

When he saw his comrades stealing resources meant for the poor or bringing the ANC into disrepute, he must have thought that this would be utilised by our enemies to undermine the hegemony and legitimacy of the ANC as a leader of society.

If he was concerned, he only confided in his close and trusted comrades.

He could never go out in the public and attack the organisation he so cherished.

We thank him for leading by example, for teaching us about humility and care for the poor, and for not desecrating the flag of the ANC and our country.

In him, we had a man who loved his wife and cherished his children.

He teaches us that, despite the challenges of the day, we still have a duty to rebuild the African family, which was systematically destroyed by colonialism, apartheid, and the migrant labour system.

One of his children was recently cited as saying that she believes her father was truly happy as he shunned public life and spent time with them.

Such a testimony brings tears of contentment to our eyes because we know that Cde Webster in his youth faced brute violence that was unleashed by the state.

He lost friends and comrades in the crucible of struggle. If at the end of his life, he found joy from his family, we share in their joy and thank them for gifting our nation this quiet and outstanding hero of our revolution.

Cde Webster spent his youth fighting an enemy armed to teeth and survived to contribute to peace, reconciliation, and the building of a new South Africa. It is truly tragic that his life and that of his beloved wife had to be brutally cut short in a road accident. His departure reminds us again of the fragility of life.

It is also a sharp reminder of the work we need to do as a country to end the pain of families that results from the carnage and deaths on our roads.

As we bid him farewell, let us all play our part in improving road safety. To pay forward his sacrifices, let us defeat the counterrevolution, root out corruption, and unite our people.

Cde Webster picked up arms so that there would be justice and peace for the children and women of our land. In his honour, we must eradicate the culture of violence, improve the delivery of services, and ensure that there is hope and a place under the sun for the children of the poor.

We can say he is resting in peace when we have banished hunger in our land and fully restored the dignity of the people he so loved. We can say he has a good report to give to our departed martyrs if he will tell them that the ANC is renewing itself, that it is restoring its revolutionary character, is still committed to its non-racial character, and that it is on course to restore the wealth of our country to all South Africans.

In conclusion, please allow me to dedicate an extract to this fallen warrior from a poem titled "My Life is in a Hurry", by the Brazilian poet, Mário de Andrade:

My time is too short for being preoccupied with titles.

I want the essence; my soul is in a hurry! I want to live next to humans, ...the real people.

Who knows how to laugh at their mistakes.

Who doesn't get puffed up by their own success.

Who do not consider themselves elected before their time.

Who takes responsibility for their actions. In this way, human dignity is defended

And we live in truth and honesty. The bottom line is what makes life worth living.

I want to surround myself with people who know how to touch the hearts of those whose hard strokes of life have learned to grow with the sweet touches of the soul.

Yes... I am in a hurry... to live with the intensity that only maturity can give.

My goal is to reach the end satisfied and at peace with my loved ones and my conscience.

We have two lives, and the second one begins when you realise that you only have one.

Let us pick up his spear and march forward together to a South Africa that is at peace with itself and the world. Once again, my condolences to the family.

I thank you!

Robert McBride reflects on the life of MK veteran Gordon Webster

August 11, 2022

SouthAfrica News

Durban – MK (uMkhonto we Sizwe) veteran and former chief of the metropolitan police for Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality, Robert McBride on Thursday paid tribute to fellow MK special operations operative Gordon Webster.

Webster died on Tuesday aged 58. He had been in hospital for more than a week after the vehicle he and his wife were travelling in collided with a stationary vehicle near Estcourt.

His wife passed away a few days before him.

In 1986, Webster, then 22, and fellow MK operative Bheki Ngubane had been shot at by police on Sinathing Road in Pietermaritzburg. Ngubane was killed and Webster, shot five times, was rushed to Edendale hospital in the early hours of April 27.

McBride, his father Derrick and others carried out a daring rescue operation and freed Webster after a shootout with police.

McBride said Webster taught him everything he needed to know about the ethos of MK and conducting special operations in KwaZulu-Natal.

“I live with the rules and skills that he taught me up to today and I continue to survive based on his teachings. He gave us the impetus to achieve the goals of the ANC for the good of the country. We were youngsters when we joined

MK and did not know the importance of what needed to be done,” said McBride.

He described Webster as the biggest influence on his life and said that he had infused all who served with him with the resilience, commitment and dedication needed to fight the apartheid machinery.

McBride shared how Webster would be able to get operatives to relax in the midst of a tense special operation by sharing a joke.

“He understood that there was a need to be dedicated and focused during trying times, but he also tried to set people at ease.

“He helped lead us during the most important phase of MK and the message he and others sent was that MK was there to stay,” he said.

Speaking of the hospital rescue, McBride said that the support given to them as they rescued Webster from Edendale hospital supported the adage which says: ‘A guerilla is a fish and people are the water’.

“We had plenty of water surrounding us,” said McBride.

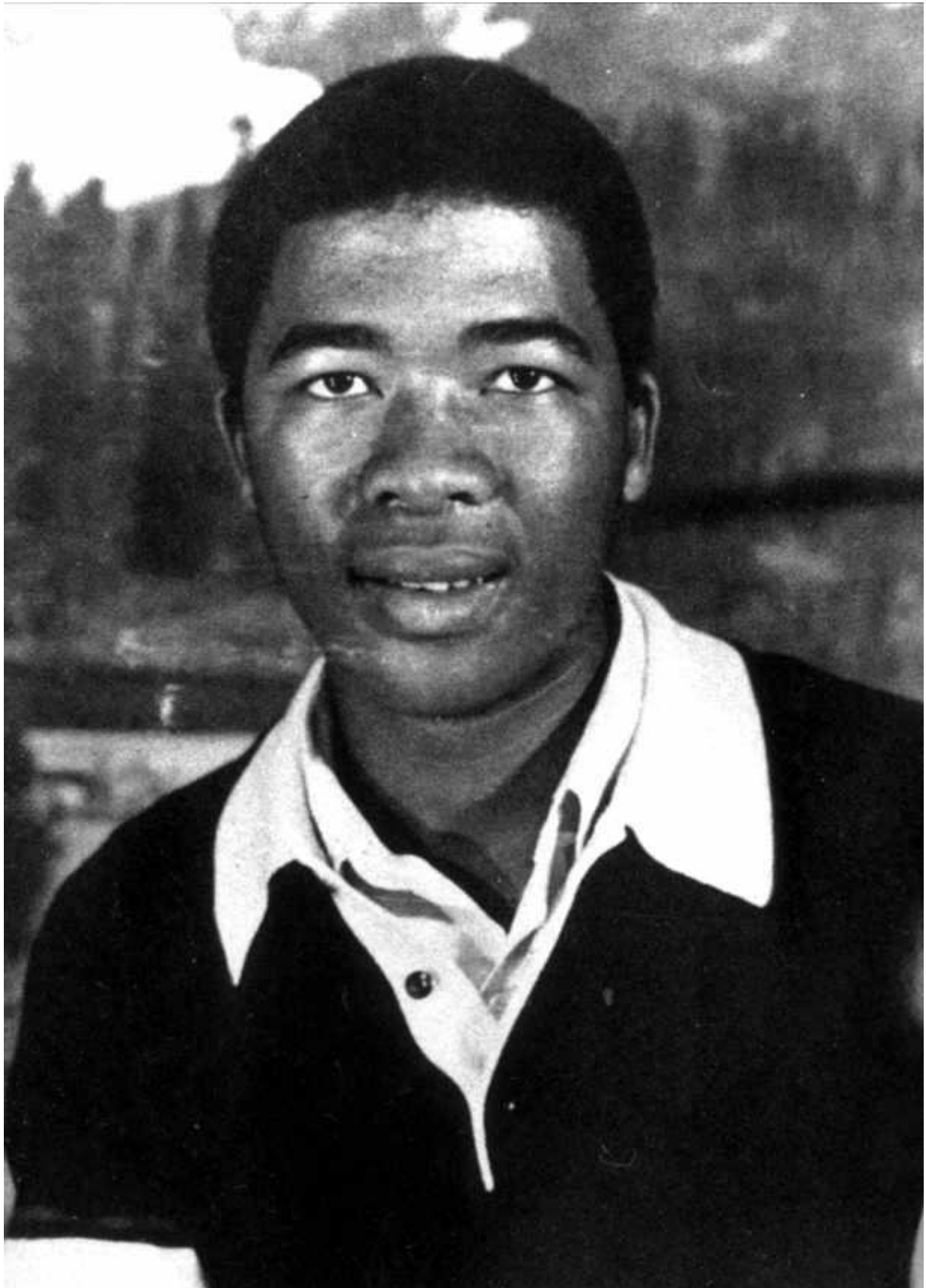
According to media reports at the time of the escape, Webster provided the hospital with an alias, Steve Mkhize, and was rushed to the theatre, where four bullets were removed. As he recovered in the ICU, the notorious apartheid security police had identified him as an MK operative.

While he recuperated a doctor later whispered a secret code word to him letting him know that fellow MK operatives knew where he was and that help was on its way.

Webster’s brother Trevor’s girlfriend, Pam Cele, a professional nurse at another hospital, then informed him of a plan to free him from the hospital.

Webster would later remark that during the escape doctors and nurses sang struggle songs and shouted ‘Viva ANC’ while he was whisked away on a hospital trolley.

Webster would eventually be taken to Wentworth in Durban before travelling in a caravan to Gaborone, Botswana where doctors eventually removed the last bullet that had been lodged next to his head



File Picture: A picture of Gordon Webster from the 80s. Picture: African News Agency (ANA) Archives

