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# Military bases and camps of the liberation movement, 1961- 1990

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## Report

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Gregory F. Houston  
Democracy, Governance, and Service Delivery  
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## Acronyms and Abbreviations

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| ANC     | African National Congress                         |
| APLA    | Azanian People's Liberation Movement              |
| CDU     | Commission Defense Unit                           |
| DRC     | Democratic Republic of Congo                      |
| FAPLA   | Peoples Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola |
| FNLA    | National Front for the Liberation of Angola       |
| FRELIMO | Mozambique Liberation Front                       |
| FRG     | Federal Republic of Germany                       |
| GDR     | German Democratic Republic                        |
| LLA     | Lesotho Liberation Army                           |
| MCW     | Military and Combat Work                          |
| MK      | UMkhonto we Sizwe                                 |
| MPLA    | Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola     |
| NP      | National Party                                    |
| OAU     | Organisation of African Unity                     |
| PAC     | Pan Africanist Congress                           |
| PDP     | People's Defence Organisation                     |
| PLO     | Palestine Liberation Organisation                 |
| RENAMO  | Mozambique National Resistance                    |
| SACP    | South African Communist Party                     |
| SADET   | South African Democracy Education Trust           |
| SADF    | South African Defence Force                       |
| SASO    | South African Students Organisation               |
| SAUF    | South African United Front                        |
| SED     | Socialist Party of Germany                        |
| SOMAFCO | Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College                  |
| SOYA    | Society of Young Africans                         |
| SWANU   | South West African National Union                 |
| SWAPO   | South West African Peoples Organisation           |
| TRC     | Truth and Reconciliation Commission               |
| TUM     | Transvaal Urban Machinery                         |
| UN      | United Nations                                    |
| UNDP    | United Nations Development Programme              |
| UNIP    | United National Independence Party                |
| UNITA   | National Union for the Total Liberation of Angola |
| ZANU    | Zimbabwe African National Union                   |
| ZAPU    | Zimbabwe African Peoples Union                    |
| ZIPRA   | Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army              |

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# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

### **Background**

Veterans of uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the military wing of the African National Congress (ANC), who are active in the Border Region of the MK Veterans Association (MKVA), came up with the idea of creating a living museum which would be a reconstruction of an uMkhonto we Sizwe training camp in Angola. Such a camp, with its modest buildings and facilities, would capture the spirit of commitment and sacrifice required of freedom fighters who had to train and survive with minimal resources far from home. They shared the concept with the MK Veterans Associations at the provincial and national levels, and received their endorsements. The project secured the support of the Amathole District Municipality, which in turn appointed the Human Science Research Council as project implementers.

The military veterans identified this project as one which would benefit both themselves and the wider public. The facility will serve a triple function of informing the general public about this aspect of South Africa's liberation struggle, providing facilities which upgrade the quality of life of a local low-income community and creating jobs for MK veterans and community members. It requires a site which includes natural forest areas, is close enough to a needy community to engage meaningfully with it and is readily accessible for tourists. The activities envisaged as part of the living museum complex are designed to make it fully sustainable in the medium term future. It was envisaged that all aspects of the living history museum would be developed from the collection of memories from former MK soldiers and the collection of memorabilia and artifacts from actual camps.

As the project unfolded, however, veterans of the military wings of the other main liberation movements, the Azanian Peoples Liberation Struggle (APLA) and the Azanian National Liberation Army (AZANLA), were drawn in. The envisaged Armed Struggle Living Museum would thus include replicated camps of these organisations as well.

However, in order to develop the concept of the museum it became necessary to draw on the memories of those who had lived in the military camps of the liberation movements to get an idea of the buildings and facilities in these camps, as well as daily routines and experiences of life in them. Part of the research carried out to meet this objective is contained in this report.

### **The focus of the research report**

After the banning of the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) of South Africa on the 8<sup>th</sup> April 1960, the two nationalist movements were forced to operate

underground. The bannings occurred in the aftermath of the PAC's anti-pass campaign and the Sharpeville Massacre on the 21<sup>st</sup> March, the country-wide strike that followed, and the declaration of a state of emergency. Thousands of activists were arrested and detained in the ensuing months. Just prior to the banning, the PAC sent Peter Molotsi and Nana Mahomo abroad to establish relationships with, and obtain support from African countries. The ANC's Deputy President, Oliver Tambo followed a few days later. Tambo's task was to solicit international support for the struggle against apartheid. The bannings and wave of mass arrests that followed forced the two nationalist movements to consider turning to armed struggle. The decision to turn to armed struggle was taken by the ANC in mid-1961, and during the following months recruitment and training preceded the launch of the ANC's military wing, UMKhonto we Sizwe, on the 16<sup>th</sup> December 1961.<sup>1</sup> For the next two years, until the arrests of the MK leadership at Lilliesleaf Farm in early 1963, MK members embarked on a wave of sabotage actions.

The Sharpeville massacre and banning of political organizations were also turning points for the PAC. In the aftermath of the banning, according to Thami ka Platjje, the PAC took a decision in 1961 to revive the Africanist Task Force, a para-military structure formed just prior to the 1960 anti-pass campaign which was to be the forerunner of the PAC's military wing, *Poqo*.<sup>2</sup> *Poqo* members were to engage in numerous violent actions, which included attacks on white civilians.

Both movements began a process of training young recruits inside the country, as well as sending a select few abroad for military training. However, the explosion in militant action during this period sparked a violent and repressive reaction on the part of the apartheid regime. Scores of young people were forced to leave the country to join those political leaders of the two revolutionary movements who had gone into exile. In response to the new conditions of exile, the two movements established military bases and camps to train and accommodate the increasing number of new recruits joining their military wings. This report focuses on one aspect of the exile history of the liberation movements that has been poorly researched: i.e., life in their military bases and camps both inside the country and in exile.

The study focuses on four broad themes. In the first, the focus is on the bases or camps used by the ANC and PAC to train their cadres inside the country immediately after the turn to armed struggle in the early 1960s. The second theme deals with the 'freedom route' taken by cadres of the liberation movement in the course of their journey into exile. Distinction is drawn between the routes taken by cadres of the different liberation movements during a particular historical period. The objective here is to outline some of the main camps of the liberation movements abroad, whether they were transit camps, military bases or camps used for the training of cadres.

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the processes leading to the ANC's decision to turn to armed struggle refer to B. Magubane et al., 'The turn to armed struggle', in South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 1, 1960-1970*, Zebra Press, Cape Town, 2004, pp. 53-145.

<sup>2</sup> T. ka PLaatjje, 'The PAC's internal underground activities, 1960-1980', in South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 2, 1970-1980*, UNISA Press, Pretoria, 2006, pp. 677-8.



The third theme of this report consists of narratives containing more details about the most significant camps of the liberation movements in exile. The focus, however, is on the military bases and camps, and excludes settlement such as those of the ANC at Dakawa and Mazimbu in Tanzania. Included here are some of the experiences of military training provided in African countries and countries in the Eastern bloc. Finally, brief descriptions are given of some of the internal bases established by cadres of the liberation movements during missions inside the country. It is necessary to begin, however, with a review of the available literature on the military bases and camps of the ANC.

## Chapter 2

### Literature review

Although there are a number of studies of the ANC in exile, and a smaller number of the exile experience of the PAC, very few studies exist of the military bases and camps of the two revolutionary movements. Unlike the major settlements of the ANC such as that at Mazimbu and Dakawa in Tanzania, the historiography of the military bases and camps of the two liberation movements consists of a limited number of brief references in studies whose focus is on other aspects of the history of the liberation struggle rather than the camps. By contrast, existing studies of the Mazimbu and Dakawa settlements provide detailed histories that cover a range of topics such as their formation, their purposes, the various structures established at these settlements, relations with citizens of the host country, as well as the stresses of exile life.<sup>1</sup>

Those camps that have been given more extensive coverage in the historiography on the ANC and PAC are the prison camps of the former. This is largely because of the media attention that emerged at the time of the unbanning of the liberation movements of human rights abuses in exile. These gave rise to four official reports on the prison camps published by the ANC itself,<sup>2</sup> as well as three reports by other organizations on the same topic,<sup>3</sup> and a host of journal articles<sup>4</sup> that arose from these publications and first-hand accounts by former prisoners and officials of these camps.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> T. Lodge, 'State of exile: The African National Congress of South Africa, 1976-1986', *Third World Quarterly*, 9(1), (Jan. 1987), pp. 11-14; S. Morrow, B. Maaba and L. Pulumani, *Education in Exile: SOMAFCO, the ANC school in Tanzania, 1978-1992*, HSRC Press, Cape Town, 2004; S. Morrow, 'Dakawa Development Centre: An African National Congress Settlement in Tanzania, 1982-1992', *African Affairs*, 97, 1998, pp. 497-521; A. Manghezi, 'Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College: Symbol of international solidarity', paper presented at the Anti-Apartheid Conference, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, 10-13 October 2004. Refer also to T. Lodge, 'The African National Congress of South Africa, 1976-1986', in G. Moss and I. Obery (eds), *South African Review 6: From 'Red Friday' to CODESA*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1992, pp. 11-12.

<sup>2</sup> 'Report on a Commission of Inquiry set up in November 1989 by the National Working Committee of the African National Congress to Investigate the Circumstances leading to the Death of Mzwakhe Ngwenya (also known as Thami Zulu or TZ)', 16 March 1990; 'Report: Commission of Inquiry into Recent Developments in the People's Republic of Angola', Lusaka, 14 March 1984 - the Stuart Commission; 'Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Complaints by Former African National Congress Prisoners and Detainees', August 1992 - the Skweyiya Commission; and 'Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Certain Allegations of Cruelty and Human Rights Abuse against ANC Prisoners and Detainees by ANC Members', Johannesburg, 20 August 1993 - the Motsuenyane Commission.

<sup>3</sup> Amnesty International, 'South Africa: Torture, Ill-Treatment and Executions in African National Congress Camps', AFR 53127/92, London, 2 December 1992; 'The Report of the Douglas Commission 1993', January 1993; and International Freedom Foundation, Johannesburg. 13. International Society for Human Rights, 'Human Rights and the African National Congress', Frankfurt, 1993.

<sup>4</sup> P. Trehwela, *Inside Quatro: Uncovering the exile history of the ANC and SWAPO*, Auckland Park, Jacana Media, 2009; P. Trehwela, 'The ANC Prison Camps: an Audit of Three Years, 1990- 1993', *Searchlight South Africa*, 3(2), (April 1993), pp. 8-30; B. Ketelo et al., 'A Miscarriage of Democracy: the ANC Security Department in the 1984 Mutiny in UMkhonto we Sizwe', *Searchlight South Africa*, 5 (July 1990), pp. 35-65; S. Ellis, 'Mbokodo: Security in ANC camps', *African Affairs*, 93 (1994), pp. 279-298.

<sup>5</sup> Ellis, 'Mbokodo', p. 279.

To a large extent, as indicated above, very brief studies of ANC and PAC bases and camps can be found in some books on the history of the liberation struggle and/or movements,<sup>6</sup> biographies of, and autobiographies written by veterans of the struggle,<sup>7</sup> and journal articles.<sup>8</sup>

Brief descriptions of training bases used by newly formed MK units inside the country in the period 1961-1963 can be found in a chapter in the first volume of *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*.<sup>9</sup> Brown Maaba's chapter in the same volume also provides information about training bases used by *Poqo* units inside the country during the same period.<sup>10</sup> Sifiso Ndlovu provides a detailed description of life in the ANC's first military camp abroad, Kongwa in Tanzania, in a chapter in the same volume.<sup>11</sup> A description of the ANC camps in Angola during the late 1970s and early 1980s is provided in a chapter written by Houston and Magubane in the second volume of *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*.<sup>12</sup>

Lincoln Ngculu's autobiography contains a number of references to ANC camps established in the late 1970s and early 1980s. These include Engineering camp, Fazenda, Novo Catengua and Quibaxe. He also provides a description of life in Novo Catengua camp in an article in *Umrabulo* that is drawn from the manuscript of this book.<sup>13</sup> Included here is a description of the camp, the daily routine and the training provided to recruits.

A number of other articles in *Umrabulo* also deal with some of the ANC camps. For instance, Senzangakhona et al. discuss the safe house in Temeke, Tanzania, used by the ANC to house refugees of the 1976 Soweto uprising before their transfer elsewhere for military training or further education. They also briefly discuss the various camps of the ANC that were established in Angola in the immediate aftermath of the uprising and subsequent years. They begin here with

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<sup>6</sup> For instance, S. Ndlovu, 'The ANC in exile', in South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 1, 1960-1970*, Zebra Press, Cape Town, 2004; G. Houston and B. Magubane, 'The ANC's armed struggle in the 1970s', in South African Democracy Education Trust (eds.), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 2, 1970-1980*, UNISA Press, Pretoria, 2006, pp. 453ff.

<sup>7</sup> L. Ngculu, *The Honour to serve: recollections of an UMKhonto soldier*, David Phillip, Claremont, 2009; L. Mphahlele, *Child of this soil: My life as a freedom fighter*, Kwela, Johannesburg, 2002.

<sup>8</sup> See for instance T. Lodge, 'State of exile', pp. 6-11. For a view of the South West African Peoples Organisation (SWAPO) camp at Kongwa refer to C.A. Williams, 'Living in exile: Daily life and international relations at SWAPO's Kongwa camp', *Kronos*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Magubane et al., 'The turn to armed struggle', pp.53-145.

<sup>10</sup> B. Maaba, 'The PAC's war against the state, 1960-1963', in South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 1, 1960-1970*, Zebra Press, Cape Town, 2004, pp.257-297.

<sup>11</sup> Ndlovu, 'The ANC in exile'.

<sup>12</sup> G. Houston and B. Magubane, 'The ANC's armed struggle in the 1970s'.

<sup>13</sup> L. Ngculu (James Makhaya), 'The honour to serve: Memories of the June 16 MK detachment', *Umrabulo*, Issue no. 13, 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter, 2001. Available at [www.anc.org.za](http://www.anc.org.za).

a discussion of the first ANC camp in Angola, Gabela camp, the Engineering camp in Luanda, Funda camp, and Novo Catengua camp.<sup>14</sup>

Bruno Mtolo, an MK cadre and state witness in the 1963-1964 Rivonia Trial that led to the conviction of Nelson Mandela and others, provides one of the earliest studies of training provided to MK units during the early 1960s in a book he published after the trial.<sup>15</sup> This is, however, a critical study of the ANC in general that arises from Mtolo's role as a state witness in the Rivonia and subsequent trials of ANC members. In 1986, a special anniversary edition of MK's magazine, *Dawn*, contained a number of articles that also dealt with training provided to MK members. In a PH. D. thesis on the ANC, Cornelius le Roux discusses the training of MK recruits internally during the early 1960s as well as externally from 1964 onwards.<sup>16</sup> Le Roux makes use of published sources such as Mtolo's book and the articles in the 1986 special edition of *Dawn*, as well as the testimonies of state witnesses in a number of trials of ANC and MK members. Similarly, Tom Lodge uses the testimony of captured MK cadres and ANC dissidents in political trials to develop a generalized version of military training and life in MK camps in the 1980s in a journal article on the ANC in exile.

Kwandi Kondlo provides one of the significant studies of the PAC camps in exile. The most detailed analysis of the PAC camps is the one he makes of the Ruvu camp in Tanzania.<sup>17</sup> The emphasis is on the issues faced in the camp such as 'health, culture, tribalism, corporal punishment as well as the general politics of the camp in order to expose the concrete basis of the internal conflicts within the PAC'. The aim is to demonstrate how 'the lack of policies, organizational procedures and inept leadership affected the lives of ordinary PAC members in the camps'.<sup>18</sup> Kondlo also briefly discusses the PAC's other camps in Lesotho, Congo, Botswana and Tanzania. Letlapa Mphahlele also includes a more sympathetic study of two PAC camps in his autobiography.<sup>19</sup>

This study article makes use of some of the sources discussed above, as well as interviews with a host of inmates of various camps, to reconstruct histories of some of the main bases and camps of the liberation movements.

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<sup>14</sup> M. Senzangakhona, E. Mabitse, U. Abrahamse and g. Molebatsi, 'UMkhonto remembered – Part Two UMkhonto we Sizwe: Within living memory', *Umrabulo*, Issue no. 14, 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter, 2002. Available at [www.anc.org.za](http://www.anc.org.za).

<sup>15</sup> Bruno Mtolo, *UMkhonto we Sizwe: The road to the left*, Durban, Drakensberg Press, 1966.

<sup>16</sup> Cornelius Johannes Brink le Roux, 'UMkhonto we Sizwe: Its role in the ANC's onslaught against white domination, 1961-1988', unpublished PH. D. thesis, University of Pretoria, 1992, 471ff.

<sup>17</sup> K. Kondlo, *'In the twilight of the Revolution': The exile history of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (South Africa), (1960-1990)*, unpublished D.Litt et Phil. thesis, University of Johannesburg, October 2003, pp. 257.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 248.

<sup>19</sup> L. Mphahlele, *'Child of this soil': My life as a freedom fighter*, Kwela, Johannesburg, 2002.

## Chapter 3

### ANC and PAC internal camps/bases, 1960-1963

The activities of the military wings of both liberation movements took place largely inside the country during the early 1960s. After the ANC took the decision to turn to armed struggle and MK was established, a recruitment campaign was followed by training at various centres in the country. In Cape Town, for instance, training was provided at a farm in Mamre, which had been hired by Denis Goldberg for this purpose. Alfred Willie, who had been recruited into MK in Cape Town, recalls that:

We had a camp here where we were taught sabotage. We were trained how to handle guns, how to communicate, and so on. We were 38 in the camp. Denis Goldberg was in charge of the whole group. I think Goldberg was one of the guys who had a military background. We were discovered after a month or so. The training was supposed to take three months. But then the training wasn't complete because we were discovered. I think it was 1962, in late December.<sup>1</sup>

Christopher Mrabalala, who was also in the group with Willie, recalls that:

People who were training us, the instructors, we had comrade Albie Sachs, the advocate, Dennis Goldberg.... We had Archie Sibeko. We had Chris Hani. We had the old man called Mountain Qumbela. Now comrade Looksmart [Ngudle] was an overall commander of the Western Cape. He was not present in the training but was co-ordinating and facilitating all that we need. Comrade Reggie September ... was also present in that group.<sup>2</sup>

In his account of the Mamre camp, Le Roux points out that a number of tents were set up on the farm 'some distance from the road, behind some large bushes'. The cadres were divided into six groups of four people each, led by a 'sergeant', and guards were deployed around the camp at night 'to warn against any possible intruders'. The three week training course included, 'among other things, lectures on politics, economics, the workings of the internal combustion engine, first-aid, the use of field telephones and judo classes'. They were given lectures on guerrilla warfare, the Cuban revolution and the writings of Che Guevara and Fidel Castro. Each morning the cadres engaged in physical exercises.<sup>3</sup>

According to Mrabalala:

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Alfred Willie, SADET Oral History Project.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Christopher Mrabalala conducted by Thozama April, 8 November 2001, Cape Town, SADET Oral History Project.

<sup>3</sup> Le Roux, 'UMkhonto we Sizwe', 477-8.

Unfortunately, what happened during the time we were training, the owner of the farm, he knew about our presence there. It was agreed to Reggie September and other top leaders, Sachs and others and Goldberg. He left the farm for holidays. He went to Johannesburg. He left his workers there. Now we don't know whether he informed his workers about us or not. We don't know that, but the leadership knew. But what we discovered during the time we were in training, the workers discovered that at the orchard next to the river, they've seen some fire, smoke. So they had to come down and they discovered that it's us. But we couldn't see them. They saw us. Then they feared or they didn't know what to do. They couldn't report to the owner first. They just called the police. So when the police came they found us there, with the leadership as I've ... comrade Chris Hani, comrade Teddie Nqapayi, Alfred Willie, comrade Sachs and Goldberg, Albie Sachs were there.... So the helicopter was there dropping soldiers and cops.<sup>4</sup>

Mrabalala adds that training was also conducted in the townships such as Retreat, Athlone and Bridgetown. It is likely that the training occurred in houses in the townships. According to Goldberg, the Western Cape resisted pressure from the national leadership to send everyone out of the country for military training.<sup>5</sup>

Some recruits in the Durban area were taken to a sugar-cane farm where they were provided with training by Jack Hodgson.<sup>6</sup> Training was also conducted on deserted parts of the Durban beachfront, as well as behind Addington hospital. Ronnie Kasrils remembers the training his MK unit underwent in the early 1960s: 'We went through various training – training by Jack Hodgson and Harold Strachan – making home-made bombing devices.'<sup>7</sup>

In Johannesburg and Pretoria training was also provided in houses in the townships. Nelson Diale, who participated in MK's sabotage campaign in the early 1960s, recalls that 'They taught us how to make a bomb from charcoal and salt and other things. This became a bomb. We were trained secretly. We had to choose a safe home. This is where we were taught.'<sup>8</sup> John Nkadimeng, who was also based in Soweto, recalls that: 'Well the training I received that time, even when I was in the MK, we were just using the home made material and ... adding charcoal and others .... put them in the pipe or in the bottle.'<sup>9</sup> Elias Motsoaledi was another leading figure

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Christopher Mrabalala. Cited in Magubane et al., pp. 101-3.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Denis Goldberg conducted by Peter Delius, 24 August 1994, London, Wits History Workshop. Cited in Magubane et al., 'The turn to armed struggle', p. 103.

<sup>6</sup> R. Kasrils, *Armed and Dangerous: From undercover struggle to freedom*, Mayibuye Books, Bellville and Jonathan Ball, Johannesburg, 1998, p. 39. Cited in Magubane et al., 'The turn to armed struggle', in South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET), (eds.), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 1, 1960-1970*, Zebra Press, Cape Town, p. 110.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Ronnie Kasrils conducted by Bernard Magubane and Gregory Houston, 22 January 2002, Pretoria, SADET Oral History Project.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Nelson Diale conducted by Siphamandla Zondi, 8 July 2001, Mohloding, Ga-Masemola, SADET Oral History Project.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with John Phala (John Nkadimeng) conducted by Peter Delius, 17 June 1993, Wits History Workshop.

in MK in the Johannesburg area. According to Ureah Maleka, Motsoaledi provided them with training in the use of dynamite stolen from the mines. ‘The dynamite,’ he adds, ‘we were hiding it behind the Mzimhlope hostel.’<sup>10</sup>

Tolly Bennun played a major role in the Eastern Cape. Govan Mbeki, who was active in the Pondoland revolt in 1960, recalls that a certain Mr Ntwana suggested at a meeting in Pondoland that “a way of hitting back, especially their local Chief, by burning manure, destroying the cattle kraal of their chief. ... He said potassium permanganate, a drop of glycerin on it will alight the kraal”. Mbeki subsequently discussed this with Bennun, who said: ‘Gov, the peasants are correct. But there is one element they have left out. It is magnesium. Mix magnesium with permanganate and then drop glycerin on that – you get a beautiful white flame’. Mbeki adds:

There was the technical committee of Jock Strachan and Joseph Jack and another young chap, Johnny from Red Location. So Tolly got this technical committee to experiment with a method of timing. You will be stupid if you lit the bomb when you were there and it blew up. You must get away from the place. All those who experimented had that instruction, place the bomb and move away. Now it took time to get that correct.<sup>11</sup>

Walter Menze recalled that a group of MK cadres he was part of was trained on a farm by a certain Mr. van Staten (probably Jock Strachan).<sup>12</sup> They were taken to the farm in a lorry by night and returned home in the morning.

I think he used to have a farm where he used to operate from. But the only thing is that we always went at night and came back at night. You could hardly identify that there was training and if we overslept we would stay in the boundaries. No one is allowed to go out until in the evening so that we could not be identified.

Menze adds:

Now a course was started, but that course was a selective course for the volunteers. Now sabotage, now we were instructed for a course of sabotage. It was very hot those days, you know; to go and cut the wires in the homes, dig some trenches and dig the wires so that the lights go off. ... The first thing that you do is you contact the people who are working there; where are the main lines? But you don’t just ask where are the main lines. You just try and search how does this thing work. After a very long time, you’ve got an idea, you verify if this is possible. So here’s the main line, you go there. Now fortunately there were some whites who are very [knowledgeable about] electricity. It was a certain

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with Ureah Maleka conducted by Sifiso Ndlovu, 12 January 2001, Soweto, SADET Oral History project.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Oom Gov Mbeki conducted by Sifiso Ndlovu, 18, November 2000, Port Elizabeth, SADET Oral History Project.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Walter Menze conducted by Pat Gibbs, 13 November 2001, New Brighton, Port Elizabeth, SADET Oral History Project.

Mr van Straten. ... He was an electrician who had all the knowledge. So people were going there, how to operate, how to do this thing.

Strachan stated in an interview that:

Jack and I were asked to invent and design explosives for MK and these devices had to be new inventions, because the rule was that they had to be such that any unschooled, untrained person could make them. I mean it was all right, I had matric physics and chemistry, things to which I had never attached too much importance, but you don't realize how educated you are, so this was our job – devices and explosives. So I said, for God's sake, why me? And they said, no well, you were a bomber pilot in the war, you see, so you must know how to make bombs. I said, but for Christ's sake, Govan, (Mbeki) we didn't make our own bombs. And they said, but you know about those things and I said, no, bombs were made in bloody factories, I don't know. So he said, anyway, you're appointed. We did a good job, actually.<sup>13</sup>

The PAC, meanwhile, had established a leadership structure under Z.B. Molete in Maseru, Lesotho, following the arrest of its leadership after the anti-pass campaign in March 1960. The PAC had established a presence in Maseru from as early as April 1960.<sup>14</sup> At a conference held in Maseru in 1961, a decision was taken that PAC members should receive basic military training. Training was provided in Maseru, coordinated by Mfanasekhaya Gqobose, a veteran of the Second World War, assisted by Templeton Ntantala.<sup>15</sup> The PAC also sent a number of youths from Cape Town for training abroad. The first group to leave in early 1961 included Philip Kgosana and four other individuals, who went to Ethiopia.<sup>16</sup>

However, the PAC had also taken a decision to prepare for a country-wide insurrection, planned for the 8<sup>th</sup> April 1963. The idea was that *Poqo* units in different parts of the country would stage their own uprising, thus forcing the government to deploy its forces over a wide area. *Poqo* cadres were instructed to stockpile whatever arms they could get hold of, and prepare for the final revolt that would bring an end to apartheid.<sup>17</sup> In Duncan Village, for instance, Vuyani Mgaza used his garage as a factory to manufacture pangas. He recalls that: 'The garage I had in Duncan Village – that's where we made the instruments to go and fight the struggle and take the struggle to the white territory'.<sup>18</sup> Training of *Poqo* units were organized at the level of groups of units. For instance, a group of units in Duncan Village led by Washington Zixesha conducted training in the bush at nearby Ezipunzana from early 1962. Another group, led by a man named Mayedwa, held its meetings and training sessions at Emasokeni. Another group in East London

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<sup>13</sup> Zoe Molver, 'Harold Strachan: Bram's bow-maker', March 200. Available at [www.literarytourism.co.za](http://www.literarytourism.co.za).

<sup>14</sup> Kondlo, *In the twilight of the Revolution*, p. 129.

<sup>15</sup> Maaba, 'The PAC's war against the state, 1960-1963', p. 286.

<sup>16</sup> Maaba, 'The PAC's war against the state, 1960-1963', p. 286.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 286-7.

<sup>18</sup> Cited in Maaba, 291.



led by Zifosonke Tshikila had gone to Lesotho for military training, as had a group from Soweto led by Ezrom Mokgakala and another from Daveyton led by Johnson Mlambo. In Port Elizabeth, *Pogo* cadres were provided ‘crash courses’ in elementary combat in the bush next to the Fort Stadium.<sup>19</sup> Herman Kekani of Mamelodi recalls that:

As far as we are concerned in Mamelodi, during that period of ‘62, ‘63, we were beginning to mobilise our cells. We used to go camping, spend the night camping, and discuss our plans during camping hours. Our camping place was right at the mountain there [in Mamelodi]. We used to go there and then spend the night there. We were singing, and discussing the plans. Amongst the plans we rejected was a *Pogo* type of taking assegais, and then fighting the whites with assegais, or whatever. We felt we needed instructions on bombs, to get the targets, which would be more effective.<sup>20</sup>

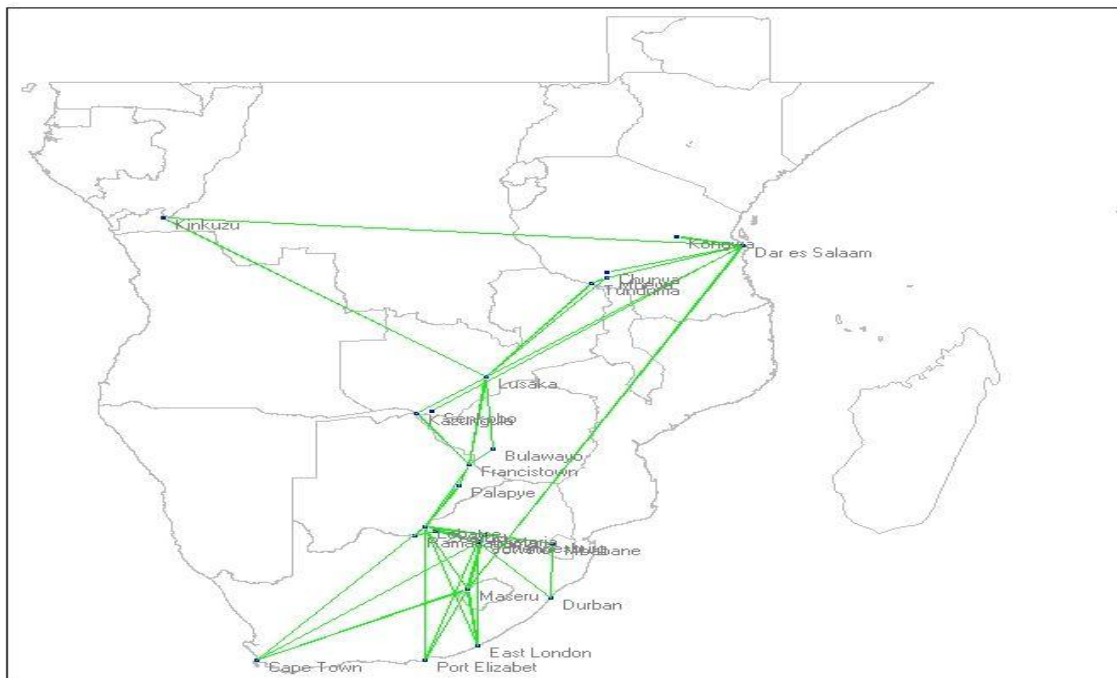
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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 291-4.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Herman Nico Kekana conducted by Sello Mathabatha, 18 June 2003, Mamelodi, SADET Oral History Project.

## Chapter 4

### Freedom routes during the 1960s



**Figure 1: Routes into exile**

Retracing the various routes taken into exile by cadres of the banned movements is the most useful way of determining the significant transit bases and camps of the ANC and PAC. This section traces the various routes taken by MK and PAC cadres in their journey into exile during the 1960s.

The most popular route into exile for MK recruits during the early 1960s was through Botswana (known as Bechuanaland at the time). Generally speaking, MK recruits travelling from different parts of the country would make their way to Johannesburg by train or bus and would converge on Soweto. Here they would be placed in safe houses until preparations had been put in place for them to be taken across the Botswana border. They would either travel by train or bus to areas along the South African side of the border, in particular Zeerust, before cadres of the movement would take them across into Botswana. The key person dealing with MK cadres in Botswana at the time was Fish Keitsing, who was responsible for the reception of cadres, housing them, and transporting or arranging their transportation by train across Botswana to Francistown and then on to Livingstone in Northern Rhodesia (Zambia). Keitsing was responsible for the ANC safe-

houses in Lobatse, while Klaas Motshidisi ran those in Palapye and Anderson Tshepe those in Francistown.<sup>1</sup>

Livingstone is a town in the south of Zambia that borders Zimbabwe near the Victoria Falls. From Livingstone cadres would be transported by train through to Tanzania, where they would be received by the ANC leadership in Dar es Salaam. A description of the journey into exile is provided in an interview with Justice Mpanza.

We left for exile through Botswana. We first went to stay in Johannesburg, in Soweto. We were picked up from there on our way to Botswana. We were staying with one colleague Dinga. He took me to Molefe's house. That is where I stayed for two weeks and then we left for Lobatse. We met Chris Hanani in Soweto and then we left with Mbatha from Johannesburg. He took us to the border. We found Joe Modise waiting for us on the other side.

When we crossed the border to Lobatse we found Modise and we did not know the whereabouts of Mbatha – the person who was transporting us. He just disappeared like that and then Modise picked us up and put us in a truck. We drove through the desert towards Kazangula. This was a very long journey and I do not remember the number of days we spent on the road because sometimes we had to push the truck through difficult terrain, including forests, etc. – it was chaotic. We killed a zebra during the first day of our journey. We ate its meat with pap. Finally we arrived at Kazangula and again we found Joe Modise waiting for us. It then became obvious to us that he was in charge. He gave money to Archie Sibeko. Archie kept the money and we did not have money. We crossed through Kazangula to the other side where we took cover. They said we must take cover. I remember the fact that I took cover next to a skeleton. I was frightened. We kept cover until late in the afternoon with Mark Shope as our leader. We were with Mark Shope throughout the journey (to Lusaka) after crossing through the border of (Southern Rhodesia).

When we arrived at the other side of Kazangula – in Northern Rhodesia – Mark Shope led the group. ... Archie Sibeko – Zola Zembe (MK name for Sibeko) – was supposed to help him. When we reached Livingstone a message had gone out that they were looking for people from South Africa. We were then met by people from UNIP (United National Independence Party led by Kenneth Kaunda) and they provided us with shelter. I do not remember the name of that township/location. We went there and they gave us tea. Then we were instructed to get ready and prepare for a journey by train. Archie Sibeko had the money. Then Mark Shope went to look for Archie as we were now divided into small groups. We were with Chris Hanani until we reached the railways station. Chris was helped by the fact that he had a baby-sitting on his lap during the train journey. We were arrested as we were going towards Lusaka. I do not remember the name of the station. It is a famous place. I have forgotten the name. They targeted those who were light in

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<sup>1</sup> N. Parsons, 'The pipeline: Botswana's reception of refugees, 1956-68', *Social Dynamics*, 34(1), (2008), p. 20.

complexion. That is how we were arrested. Chris kept still together with the baby and did not even look towards us. Ehe, Awu, Hani remained behind in the train. He was amongst the four or five members of our groups who were not arrested and were collected by members of UNIP and the ANC.

The police took us to immigration, next to the Lusaka railway station. When we arrived there we soon realised that it was tough – we were going to be arrested. I stood up and went out, pretending as if I was going to the toilet. I continued down the stairs from the 4<sup>th</sup> floor where we were kept. I went out the building through the front door. When I was downstairs I then saw a car with a flag and it belonged to Liso who was the ANC's secretary. He asked me whether I was looking for the manager. I replied and said to him do not ask me anything. Just take me away from this place. He did likewise and took me to his house. That is how I escaped arrest. It happened that Archie and the others were arrested for a very long time. This was until some comrades from the ANC and UNIP went to rescue them from the immigration building. They were supposed to go to court and then get deported to Rhodesia. [Roy] Welensky wanted us badly. I was very comfortable at Liso's house. It was like home for me. It was also during that time when arrangements were made for us to leave because it became apparent that a large group had escaped arrest. The arrangements were made for us to go to Tanganyika. The transport that was going to take us to our destination belonged to Kaunda and Nkambule. Their trucks took us up to the Tanganyika border. This is when we began to feel free. We were told that this was a free African country. Julius Nyerere was in charge as a leader. During that era Welensky was in charge in Rhodesia. It was also apparent that during that time the Boers' line of defence extended to the border of Tanganyika. We boarded buses and we were transported to Mbeya where we boarded a train to Dar es Salaam.<sup>2</sup>

Zozo Skozana also left the country in 1962.

So I left the country in 1962, firstly to Port Elizabeth where we met Moses Mkhairwa. In retrospect, it was as if the ANC was trying to paper over the revolt of the youth; the loss of the youth to Poqo. That is, they hurriedly came up with this sending of people into exile to undergo military training, purportedly to come back and overthrow the white regime. So I found myself in that vortex of events. In Jo'burg we were received by people like Elias Motsoaledi [and] Andrew Mashaba. We did not stay long although our stay there was very fruitful in that we had intensive political discussions with these people. And they were impressed by the level of understanding that we from Port Elizabeth and East London – mostly matriculants at that time – displayed. And these were our heroes, the Elias Motsoaledi's, youth leaders of the South African Communist Party and all the other parties. So we crossed into Bechuanaland. We went by train from Lobatse to Francistown. We from P.E., Uitenhage, and East London were plus-minus fifty. And then we met up with groups from other centres in Francistown. We met a group from the

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Justice 'Gizenga' Mpanza conducted by Jabulani Sithole and Bernard Magubane, 12 October 2001, Durban, SADET Oral History Project.

Western Cape that comprised Zola Skweyiya. I knew Zola Skweyiya. He was known as 'Squeeza' in the Alice area. I was known as Skof. All the Skosanas were known as Skofs. The Skweyiyas were known as Squeezas. So when we met we were two people who had known each other from student days. So we had lively debates. We found that there were people who were going to exile to further their education and those who thought that we had gone into exile to acquire military skills. Among these people I met Thabo Mbeki. We were in Botswana, and there was an election campaign actually going on in Botswana at that time. We witnessed democracy in progress there, unlike in South Africa where election campaigns are marked by intolerance. There was no bitterness or anything or whatever between the two [parties contesting the elections].

In that same November we went overland to Zambia via Khasane. We were harassed by the British when we set foot in Zambia and protected by UNIP which was fighting for independence at that time. We [were being hunted] high and low by British security forces, who were collaborating with their South African counterparts. They said that we were murderers who had committed crimes in South Africa and must be arrested and deported back to South Africa. We were captured in Northern Rhodesia, and imprisoned and subjected to lengthy interrogations and intimidation. Some of us were beaten up. We lost hope that we were going to continue with our journey up north. We discovered that we were going to be secretly deported to South Africa. We were about a hundred or something, the whole group. We were a group from the Eastern Cape, the Western Cape, Natal, and a few from the Transkei. So in the end we sat in the hands of the Black Royal Police in Northern Rhodesia, who themselves were pressurised by UNIP to hand us over to their headquarters in Lusaka. No sooner had we landed in the hands of UNIP [did] we attend a video show of the election campaign of UNIP. Kaunda was present and for the first time we came face to face with Kaunda. He was a very popular nationalist in Northern Rhodesia at that time. And early the following morning we were whisked away by bus across Northern Rhodesia to Mbeya in Tanganyika. Then we sang freedom songs, 'Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrica'. In 1962, December, we were welcomed by O.R Tambo in Dar es Salaam. And we were told that our paths [had crossed] with Nelson Mandela – he was on his way to South Africa – whilst we were entering Dar es Salaam. Then a new group came [that] had finished training in Ethiopia; Henry Fazzie and others. And they gave us our first military training, in Tanzania.<sup>3</sup>

After 1963 MK cadres travelling through Botswana were settled at what was known as the White House in Francistown, Botswana, (later replaced by a new refugee centre accommodating a maximum of 100 people), taken up to Kazangula and across the Zambezi River by the 'freedom ferry' into Zambia before being taken to Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. In Dar es Salaam, cadres were placed in either one of two camps – Luthuli House or Mandela House, depending on whether they wanted to be educated or go for military training – until such time as the first major

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Zozo Skozana conducted by Brown Maaba, 21 September 2001, KwaNobuhle, Uitenhage, SADET Oral History Project.

MK camp abroad, Kongwa, was established in Tanzania 1964.<sup>4</sup> Lawrence Phokanoka left the country in July 1963.

From Johannesburg we took a bus to Roodepoort and then another to Zeerust. The movement was well organised. There were very efficient networks to ferry people out of the country; a well-oiled machinery. When we arrived in Francistown in Botswana there were already a lot of people there. The South African government was aware that the ANC was sending people out and the then Minister of Justice, Vorster, was saying that he had sealed the borders. No more ANC recruits for military training would be able to leave the country. The movement found new routes.

They had Zeerust, which was one of the troubled areas in 1957. The ANC had established itself very firmly there. It created machineries there, making Zeerust a gateway to leave the country for people from as far as the Cape and Natal as well. For instance, a certain Nene from Natal was with us when we went out. We went through Zeerust with help from the underground machinery there on 8 July 1963. You go by bus to a certain point. They know where it is. Then you jump off. There is a way to identify the contact. You will be wearing a white handkerchief on your head. He wears his. Eventually we made contact. The main contact was Simon Senna from Zeerust. His father was the one who was arranging networks there. They used bicycles and also travelled on foot. And it was the father who eventually took us to the crossing point on the same evening we arrived.

After we made contact Senna took us to his home, where we met his father. From there they took us to some other house where we had some food. We were then taken to another house, from where we were taken to the border fence. We went along a foot path, and came to the fence. At one point it had a stepladder over it. We used this to jump over, and once we were on the other side they told us that we are not in South Africa anymore. That was the first time I was outside South Africa and I had such a strange feeling. A pass means nothing from now onwards and so on. At the top of one hill were some Boer police. There was a gate. That's what they meant when they said they had sealed the borders.

And then we got to Lobatse, where we found some comrades. The following day or two we took a train to Francistown. We stayed about 14 days in all in Botswana. The ANC had a 28-seater plane to take refugees and MK recruits from Francistown. We were five that crossed the border together. When we got to Francistown we found 23 people in the ANC house. They immediately sent a telegram to Dar es Salaam saying that there were enough people for a flight. But within the two weeks we stayed in Francistown, our number grew to 70. The house was overcrowded. There was a house nearby for the PAC. They were very few and they had a lot of space there. There was another house for

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<sup>4</sup> For more details on the route into exile refer to S. Ndlovu, 'The ANC in exile, 1960-1970', in The South African Democracy Education Trust (eds.), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 1, 1960-1970*, Zebra Press, Cape Town, 2004, pp. 411-422; N. Parsons, 'The pipeline: Botswana's reception of refugees, 1956-68', *Social Dynamics*, 34(1), (2008), pp. 17-32.

SWAPO (South West African Peoples Organisation) and SWANU (South West African National Union) refugees. In Francistown we used to have political discussions every evening with the SWAPO and SWANU people. The PAC people did not attend. The ANC people were like sardines. It was the main organisation that was bringing people out. Almost every day you find people sauntering. So, in spite of Vorster's claim that they had sealed the borders people were arriving in Francistown on a daily basis. But our 28 were taken to Dar es Salaam first.

We had spent two weeks in Botswana before flying to Dar es Salaam, where we spent 12 days. That is when I saw our leaders for the first time. I met Duma Nokwe, Moses Kotane, James Hadebe, Tennyson Makiwane and Oliver Tambo for the first time. That was now July 1963 and we are in Dar es Salaam. Because I came out on an ASA ticket, I was placed in Mandela House. Luthuli House was a huge house for MK recruits from home before they were sent all over the world for military training. Mandela House housed students who were going for academic studies. So I came on an ASA ticket.

At Dar es Salaam we were taken to the immigration offices to arrange for new passports as Tanzanian citizens. I was then taken to Mandela house as a student going out for studies because I came on an ASA ticket. On the same day I went over to Luthuli House with Martin Hani, the only person I knew in Dar es Salaam. He came to Mandela House to fetch me with a certain old man from Port Elizabeth called Jeremiah Nxapepe, whose real name seems to be Sam Majola. He came with Hani to try and recruit me for MK. In fact I no longer wanted to be a student. Even before I left I wanted to be in the revolution. Now that I had the opportunity to train and return to carry out the revolution the student thing was just not in my mind anymore.<sup>5</sup>

A less popularly used route into exile for MK cadres at the time was through Lesotho (then known as Basutoland). After independence in 1965, the new government under Chief Leabua Jonathan immediately placed restrictions on the entry of South African refugees into Lesotho, and none were permitted to enter until 1973.<sup>6</sup> The route into exile through Swaziland was the least utilized during the early 1960s. Cleophas Ndlovu took this route.<sup>7</sup>

I left the country in 1964, was immediately after Rivonia when comrades [in the] High Command of the ANC was arrested and convicted. We were subject to leave the country. Everywhere – we left the country after the arrest of the second Rivonia, comrade Mkwazi and others. ... Then a courier was sent to go and collect my belongings at home. When the day came, when I had to leave, er I thought I was going to Lesotho, but when we took a different route I was a bit puzzled. ... I only realized that we were going to Swaziland when we were taking the north coast, ... going through Zululand. “But we are going to

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Lawrence Phokanoka’, in South African Democracy Education Trust (eds), *The Road to Democracy: South Africans telling their stories, Volume 1, 1950-1970*, Mutloatse Heritage Trust, Houghton, 2008, pp. 416-7.

<sup>6</sup> Bernard Leeman, *Lesotho and the struggle for Azania, Volume 3, 1966-1984*, unpublished manuscript, 1985, 5.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Cleophas Ndlovu conducted by Wolfie Kodesh, 21 April 1993, Durban, Oral History of Exiles project, MCA 6-338, Mayibuye Centre, University of the Western Cape.

Swaziland, not Lesotho”. ... We were two, ... myself and Johannes Mkwanazi. ... We had to get over the fence. Those comrades they took us to the fence and they made us jump the fence and while we were on the other side, they gave us a ladder.

Ndlovu and Mkwanazi walked through the bush on the Swaziland side of the border at night after being told that they must walk to a place called Golela (probably Lavumisa on the Swaziland side) where they should look for a Dr. Conco. Conco drove them to Manzini, where they were linked up with an ANC structure led by Albert Dhlomo. After registering with the British authorities in Swaziland, which was still a colony, Ndlovu and Mkwanazi were provided with accommodation in a flat in Manzini. Ndlovu recalled:

We wanted to go further. We had made several attempts to go out. We even approached the United Nations (UN) to fly us over because Mozambique was still under the Portuguese. ... They had several meetings with the UN representatives and British government representatives [to get assistance to enable us to fly] over to Zambia or Tanzania. [A]ll those efforts ... failed – the refusal of South Africa to let us fly – we were told by the UN that they will bring the plane down. Even the Portuguese also were not keen to let us fly over Portuguese space. So we also tried other means – going by ... road [through] South Africa. We sent our comrade to ... make progress there. ... [W]hen these arrangements were at this final stage, we got information that the man who was acting as a contact, was trapped as a South African spy; so that had to be cancelled at the last minute when we all packed our bags ready to leave.

Ndlovu and Mkwanazi remained in Swaziland, where they became active in receiving MK and ANC members entering Swaziland. Due to their presence in Swaziland, as well as the independence of Swaziland in 1968, this route became popular in the late 1960s, especially for cadres leaving from the then Natal Province. Most young people joining MK, however, despite the different routes they took, ended up in Dar es Salaam.

The primary route into exile for members of the PAC during the early 1960s was through Lesotho. However, the first groups of PAC members who went into exile travelled further than Lesotho. According to Gasson Ndlovu:

We were sneaking out of the country. And we were jumping bail for instance. Lesotho was never our final destination. I said there were five people who left first. It was Kgosana and four others. He left for Lesotho. And they didn't stay in Lesotho long. From Lesotho, they were helped into Botswana. And from Botswana out into Tanzania, which was to become independent from British rule in 1962. It became independent in 1962 under a man called [Julius] Nyerere. So, when they got there, those five, they didn't stay long. They went over to Ethiopia, which is the country further up the continent, to the old



man called Haile Selassie. Haile Selassie gave them military training. They went straight to the military academy; all of them.<sup>8</sup>

Ndlovu was in a group that left the country for Lesotho in April 1961. In October of the same year they left for Botswana, and travelled thereafter to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in 1962. From there the group he left South Africa with was joined by others before leaving for military training in Egypt. After receiving military training this group returned to Tanzania before they were sent to the Congo.<sup>9</sup> However, Lesotho soon became the external headquarters of the PAC, and the primary route out of the country for many members of the movement. For instance, T.T. Letlaka recalls that:

It was around about 1963 or so that I had to leave the country and go into exile in Lesotho. I was then a member of the PAC. I had to travel by night. I had to avoid the eastern borders, mountainous borders of Lesotho at Quting. Now I did not speak Sesotho, although I am of Sotho origin. So, finding myself in Lesotho, at the dead of night, carrying a little suitcase, jumping over the fence. It was very interesting. I was taken there by a certain Bam; a legal practitioner in Mount Frere.<sup>10</sup>

A number of PAC cadres also went into exile through Botswana where, like their ANC and MK counterparts, they eventually ended up in the White House in Francistown. From Francistown, the first group of youths who went into exile through Botswana was transferred to a camp in Kinkuzu, Congo. In 1964 the PAC shifted its headquarters to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The increasing exodus of people from South Africa prompted the PAC to establish military camps in Tanzania, where most PAC recruits ended up in the early 1960s. Lesaone Makhanda, who left for exile in 1963, gives an account of some of the difficulties PAC members experienced when they went into exile in Botswana.

We were too many staying in a place called the White House. Botswana was very poor then. To travel from Botswana to Zambia we needed transport. SWAPO had regular transport to the north where they took their people. They would give us a ride. ... What they would do would be to say that: "We had about thirty people and we needed only ten extra." We would then give the extra ten and that is how some of our people ended up going north. When they arrived they encountered problems from [A.B.] Ngcobo and Peter Molotsi. ... Nthabo Rophotho wrote letters from Dar es Salaam telling us that they were staying in the forest. People like Ngcobo were telling these young guys: "Go back home. How did you come here? What do you want here?" We were in Botswana and that is where the flow of people was coming. It was in late 1963 and 1964. Because in 1965 we decided that we were going up to Dar es Salaam. It was not so easy to leave

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Gasson Ndlovu conducted by Brown Maaba, 26 January 2002, Cape Town, SADET Oral History Project.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Tshepo T. Letlaka conducted by Sean Morrow, 21 October 2001, East London, SADET Oral History Project.

Botswana, as we wanted to deal with the flow that was coming to Botswana. Do you know that we lost a lot of young people and we asked them to go to the ANC? We asked them to go to the ANC and they were accepted: many young people, full of energy and commitment. We could not give them answers. The leadership in Dar es Salaam was telling these young people that the struggle was inside South Africa and that they should go back.<sup>11</sup>

Zebulon Mokoena left the country in 1965.

I decided to leave the country in 1965. ... Botswana had just gotten its independence. Seretse Khama's policy was that all political people from South Africa were to pass through. Ndlovu, who was the chairman of the PAC in Alexandra, was the PAC rep in Botswana. Ndlovu asked me to go back to Alexandra to recruit more people. There came an APLA man from Dar es Salaam. His surname was Magwentshu. He said that they needed forces there. He told us that it was his mission to get more people to undergo training. From Botswana we went to Zambia and passed to Tanzania. In Tanzania there was a group of people who were going to Egypt and we were about twenty. After staying for one week in Dar es Salaam, staying in the house that was hired by the organization, we were the second group to go to Egypt for military training after the group of Enoch Zulu.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Lesaone Makhanda conducted by Thami ka Plaatjie, 8 May 2007, Walkerville, SADET Oral History Project.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Zebulon Mokoena conducted by Thami ka Plaatjie, SADET Oral History Project.

## Chapter 5

### ANC and PAC camps and training abroad in the 1960s

Wilton Mkwayi was a member of the first group of MK cadres to go for training abroad. He recalls that:

In Prague, Tennyson Makiwane approached us, telling us about the formation of UMkhonto we Sizwe. We did not know anything about this. But Makiwane told us that he had been given instructions to the effect that one of us must proceed to China for military training. Tennyson and his brother Ambrose told us that we had to split. Mabhida should continue with trade union work and I should go to China for military training.

From Czechoslovakia I left with Steven Naidoo for China. When we got there, Joe Gqabi and Patrick Mthembu joined us. Raymond Mhlaba and Andrew Mlangeni arrived together a short while later. ...

We were based in Nanking. We were not trained in conventional methods, such as how to use big guns and heavy artillery. But we were trained to use sub-machine guns. We learnt how to make hand grenades by using readily available resources, for example cow dung, in the manufacture of explosives, Molotov cocktails, etc. The Chinese told us these are indigenous methods that are easier to utilise, particularly in rural areas. According to my observation, the differences between the Chinese and the Russians were a deciding factor in sending MK cadres for military training. In the Soviet Union they were trained to use military hardware, not indigenous materials, which the Chinese taught us to use.<sup>1</sup>

Ruth Mompati, Flag Bosheilo and Alfred Koko Moqotha were the next group of Mk cadres to go for military training abroad. According to Mompati, this group went to the Soviet Union in 1962 where they underwent training for a year.

It was an Institute where we went.... We started classes immediately.... The history of the working class, it was political economy, socialist philosophy. It was philosophy and then it was sabotage. It wasn't called sabotage, but it was arms, firearms and all the things that you use; which means that we did firearms. And we were taught different armaments from outside the Soviet Union. We never used the Soviet Union arms. We were the first people who went there. We were there to be trained for sabotage. ... We were supposed to go back South Africa and to look round and see what can [be used to] make a bomb there. We were not supposed to find material from somewhere. The only thing that we found was that which made this thing blow. But the rest of the material had to be from the local vicinity. ... But we also did Topography. Go in the forest of the

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<sup>1</sup> 'Wilton Mkwayi', in South African Democracy Education Trust (eds), *The Road to Democracy: South Africans telling their stories, Volume 1, 1950-1970*, Mutloatse Heritage Trust, Houghton, 2008, pp. 268-9.

Soviet Union and you would think you are lost – with your compass you had to find your way.<sup>2</sup>

For many MK cadres, the first settlement for refugees they were to experience was the White House in Francistown, Botswana. This was a house with eight rooms used to accommodate refugees from Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. The White House was financed by the London-based Joint Committee for Relief Work in the High Commission Territories (a loose alliance kicked off by Christian Action with Amnesty International, Oxfam, the Quakers, War on Want and the United Kingdom Labour Party).<sup>3</sup> In 1968, about 44 out of approximately 500 refugees (mostly from Rhodesia) in Francistown lived at the White House.<sup>4</sup> Lawrence Phokanoka spent some time at the White House. He recalls that:

...we stayed something like 14 days in all in Botswana. The ANC was efficient. It had a 28-seater [plane] to ship away inflow of what we called refugees then. But these were MK units. When we got to Francistown we found that there were 23 people there in the camp and we were five. And then we just made a full 28. Within those two weeks we reached 70 in a very short time. And we were going and others are still coming there. And we were overcrowded. Once you are sleeping in that house, if you come late – and sometimes if you were drinking you would come late – you would find it difficult to open the door. And once you open, if you put your foot down you are stepping on a [person sleeping]. We were very many and we were overflowing in that house. [On] the other side of the house were PAC. They were very few and they had a very good space there. The other house was SWAPO and SWANU: also many. The ANC people were like sardines actually. You see, it is the main organisation that is bringing people out. You cannot be surprised. You know almost every day you find people sauntering in. ... So in spite of sealing the borders, what Vorster had said, people were arriving in Francistown on a daily basis. And from 23 in no time they are 70. ... And the plane is a 28-seater. So on the day we arrive, a telegram went to Dar es Salaam to say the plane must come. And within just over ten days it came. And we left.<sup>5</sup>

The next stage in the journey to freedom for most MK recruits was Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. Justice Mpanza recalls the brief period he stayed in Tanzania before departing for military training:

When we arrived in Dar es Salaam we were transported to the Luthuli camp. We numbered about 43 when we went there. There were other people when we arrived. Others were transferred to Mandela camp on the same day. The latter were those who

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Ruth Mompoti conducted by Sifiso Ndlovu and Bernard Magubane, 15 August 2001, Vryburg, SADET Oral History Project.

<sup>3</sup> Parsons, 'The pipeline', p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Lawrence Phokanoka conducted by Siphamandla Zondi, 1 July 2001, Ga-Mankopane, SADET Oral History Project.

went to exile for education purposes. There was already a unit that went to Morocco for military training. Others were in Algeria. We stayed there until the group from Morocco returned. It consisted of Lambert Moloi, Petrus Mthembu and Isaac Makopo. Then we began the physical exercises and they shared information with us. They told us more about military training and about becoming a soldier. This was good for us. From there, what happened is that, though we arrived in June, in August, luckily for us, we were part of the first group to leave and we went to Moscow for military training.<sup>6</sup>

Isaac Makopo was among the first group of MK cadres to undergo military training after entering Tanzania. This group went for training in Morocco in 1963, and on their return to Tanzania in the same year found that:

...more people had come from home; few hundreds of our people were there. There were two camps in Dar es Salaam when we came back from Morocco. One camp was called Luthuli and the other Mandela. Luthuli was for students, those who wanted to go for further studies, and Mandela was for military.<sup>7</sup>

Lennox Tshali, who stayed in Mandela House for a while, recalls that it was:

...not a military camp. It was just a residence. Every morning we had our timetables which were more or less military style. Every morning we were doing our exercises and so on to keep fit: all the routines more or less were military. We had no weapons. We had nothing. It was just an ordinary house.<sup>8</sup>

Makopo was in the first group of MK cadres that went for training in Morocco in 1963, and recalled that:

We landed in Casablanca, from where we were transported by land to the capital town of Morocco, Rabat, where we started our military training. Thereafter we were sent to a small *dorpie*, far from Rabat, in a very cold area surrounded by mountains. ...

In that area, things were very difficult. Food was brought by some cart drawn by mules and was always delivered cold. At times you would pick up dead flies from the food, throw them out, and continue eating because you had no alternative. Johnny Makatini visited us from the ANC office in Rabat and stayed over-night. Two or three days thereafter we were ordered to pack our things, a truck was waiting for us outside. It was in the evening. We didn't know what was happening, they did not tell us. We were driven

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Justice 'Gizenga' Mpanza conducted by Jabulani Sithole and Bernard Magubane, 12 October 2001, Durban, SADET Oral History Project.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Isaac Makopo conducted by Sifiso Ndlovu, 24 November 2000, Pretoria, SADET Oral History Project. Many of the veterans interviewed by SADET were a bit confused about which of the two houses were for those intending to pursue educational opportunities or those wanting to join the military wing of the ANC.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Lennox Tshali conducted by Nhanhla Ndebele and Moses Ralinanala, Pretoria, SADET Oral History Project.

back to Rabat, where we were taken to a far more decent and advanced military base.

We continued with marching drills, before we came now to the classroom for training in small arms, shooting, handling of weapons, small weapons such as a mortar, topography, explosives, and sabotage.

We were in Morocco for about six months.<sup>9</sup>

Alfred Willie was in the MK group that went to Algeria for military training, where he spent nine months. According to Willie

... they were still at war. You know we did not even understand the language. Nobody knew French amongst us. And it was so difficult, because we also did not understand Arabic. It was nice because this training is what we wanted knowing that it was difficult. The morale was very high, because that's when we met people from a lot of other movements; guys from Ghana were also trained in the same camp, guys from Angola and other countries were there. We were training with them. The Algerians were so rude because we did not understand their language. And this happened up until some of our guys managed to pick up French and a bit of Arabic and so on. Then they became interpreters. But they were so good in training us and we thought when we came back that: 'Ja, now we are going to face these guys' (Boers).<sup>10</sup>

Other MK cadres were trained in Egypt. Simon Senna was in the group who went there in 1964. The group was provided with a survival course at a military academy.

It was one of the toughest courses we went through. And fortunately, during that training ... we were the only people who did not suffer any casualties. We could see for miles in a desert where there were no trees, nothing, and we were moving in that heat. And we used to be fried and when you see an Egyptian dying.... We were training with colonels and other people, officers. There were also people from other countries. ... It was one of the senior courses in the military academy at the time. ... All of us survived. It was a group of 28, and we all survived.

We were trained to survive under any condition; eating snakes, all sorts of things you would come across. They trained you to eat anything; as long as it is edible, you eat it. The course took about three months. ... And then we were taken back to Dar es Salaam. We were emaciated when we returned.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> 'Isaac Makopo', in South African Democracy Education Trust (eds), *The Road to Democracy: South Africans telling their stories, Volume 1, 1950-1970*, Mutloatse Heritage Trust, Houghton, 2008, p. 208.

<sup>10</sup> 'Alfred Willie', in South African Democracy Education Trust (eds), *The Road to Democracy: South Africans telling their stories, Volume 1, 1950-1970*, Mutloatse Heritage Trust, Houghton, 2008, p. 476.

<sup>11</sup> 'Simon Senna', in South African Democracy Education Trust (eds), *The Road to Democracy: South Africans telling their stories, Volume 1, 1950-1970*, Mutloatse Heritage Trust, Houghton, 2008, pp. 428-9.

Grassen Moagi also underwent training in Egypt.

The training was very hard really, because it's a highly specialised course. We were joined by various officers from the navy, from the infantry, from artillery, from the air force. These were now Egyptian officers. So we trained with them. You are trained to survive on your own in the wild for a week maybe. We walked in the forest; we walked in the Sahara Desert; we crossed the River Nile. In the water, they tie a rope from this bank to the other bank and you cross with this rope, otherwise the current can sweep you away. Upon completion of this course, we were very dehydrated.<sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile, the ANC had succeeded in gaining the support of the Soviet Union for the provision of military training to its cadres. In October 1963, the group of MK cadres who had undergone military training in Egypt were sent to Moscow to undergo further training. 'This is where we got proper grounding,' Lennox Tshali recalled.

The emphasis in Moscow was underground work. We did what others, particularly those who were in Odessa, did not concentrate on, that is conspiracy and how to work underground. We were being prepared to go and re-organise our underground structures inside the country and then we were being taught to be completely self-sufficient in handling weapons and explosive chemicals. We were taught how to handle all sorts of guns, including 82mm mortars. ... We were given a further training course on how to deal with small guerrilla units, right up to the aggregate level, all that kind of thing.<sup>13</sup>

According to Isaac Makopo:

We were the first group to be sent to the Soviet Union, where we trained in Moscow for about a year. We were two groups being trained in Moscow, although we were not supposed to know each other. This other group arrived after us. ...

Our training was mainly in basic guerrilla warfare, concentrating on the specialised clandestine, urban guerrilla warfare, sabotage, explosives, weapons, politics, organising military and guerrilla units. That was the main thrust of our training.<sup>14</sup>

Lawrence Phokanoka was part of this group. He recalled that:

We stayed in Moscow for 11 months and 3 weeks, from August 1963 to August 1964. We were based in an old house that had a high wooden fence. We were the first South Africans to arrive in Moscow but people from many parts of the world were being trained

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<sup>12</sup> 'Grassen Moagi', in South African Democracy Education Trust (eds), *The Road to Democracy: South Africans telling their stories, Volume 1, 1950-1970*, Mutloatse Heritage Trust, Houghton, 2008, p. 294.

<sup>13</sup> 'Mongameli Johnson Tshali', in South African Democracy Education Trust (eds), *The Road to Democracy: South Africans telling their stories, Volume 1, 1950-1970*, Mutloatse Heritage Trust, Houghton, 2008, p. 468.

<sup>14</sup> 'Isaac Makopo', p. 209.

in the Soviet Union. So it was clear that this was a safe house of the Soviet security people. We were going to be trained within that yard. The fence was made of wood so people could not see from the outside. ... This 30 was going to train in unconventional warfare, including training in the manufacture of home-made explosives, training in the use of Western weapons, and so on.

We are given training in seven different areas: politics; guerrilla tactics; demolition (explosives); communications (communications among guerrilla units, including use of walky-talkies, fixing radios, and how to use a radio on a small scale); topography; weapons (pistols, rifles, machine guns, etc.); and conspiracy. Conspiracy involved training in preparation for underground work in South Africa. Conspiracy means something like the ability to keep secrets, to avoid arrest, the use of dead letter boxes, and how to operate underground such as observing the laws, obeying rules and regulations to avoid being arrested for something insignificant, and so on.

The training was scheduled to last 6 months after which we were to be flown back and thereafter infiltrate South Africa. Our role was to prepare the underground by recruiting and providing civilians inside the country with the same training we received in Moscow. We would be providing training in guerrilla tactics. This was to prepare for the infiltration of the other cadres who had trained in Odessa – the real army – in their hundreds. Our task was also to carry out reconnaissance: we would receive them and show them how to go around; we would have studied the country; we were to establish intelligence units; and train some people inside the country how to organise small guerrilla units of 5, 7 or 12. The cadres from Odessa were trained to lead battalions, regiments and divisions. Their mission was to look for recruits for big operations.<sup>15</sup>

According to Justice Mpanza, the training took place in an area of Moscow known as Ivanov.<sup>16</sup>

Isaac Maphoto was a member of the first group of MK cadres sent to Odessa in the Soviet Union for military training.

They sent me to the Soviet Union for training with a group of fifty MK cadres. Joe Modise was our Commander-in-Chief. ... The area is very far from the tropics and there are areas of the Ukraine where people have never been. We didn't see the sun from October until April, for six months it was dark and then bright for six months. After we started training at the Military Academy in Odessa, near the Black Sea, some of our boys would get drunk. ... I was also with Ronnie Kasrils in the same class; we slept in the same room. We went on training as soldiers, not as guerrillas. We all studied reconnaissance in warfare, engineering, communication, infantry, heavy artillery and so forth. In addition, Joe Modise, Moses Mabhida and one or two others trained as

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<sup>15</sup> 'Lawrence Phokanoka', in South African Democracy Education Trust (eds), *The Road to Democracy: South Africans telling their stories, Volume 1, 1950-1970*, Mutloatse Heritage Trust, Houghton, 2008, pp. 417-8.

<sup>16</sup> 'Justice Mpanza', in South African Democracy Education Trust (eds), *The Road to Democracy: South Africans telling their stories, Volume 1, 1950-1970*, Mutloatse Heritage Trust, Houghton, 2008, p. 343.



commanders.

We finished our training and came back to Tanzania in 1965. We were taken to Kongwa. We were 150 in all; two other batches came until we were 150.<sup>17</sup>

Another group was sent to Odessa in 1964. Included in this group was Amos Lengisi.

I moved from Morogoro to the Soviet Union in December. We left on 7 December 1964 for the Soviet Union, and arrived on the 3<sup>rd</sup> January. We were based in Odessa. It is in the Republic of the Ukraine along the Black Sea.

It was a bit cold because we arrived there in December, which was in winter. I think we were 72 from MK, and we were all put in the Odessa camp. I was their group leader. The following day we met with JM [Joe Modise]. Mabhida and I divided the people. Some were to go for infantry; others for the Commanders' course; the third group as engineers; and the fourth one was communication. Those who had little education were sent for infantry and we had to take one who had some education to serve as an interpreter. ...

The others then went for communication and I went for a commander's course. The Russians were training us. [We stayed there] from December until August [the next year]. Some of us were selected to go for further studies in Moscow. Fortunately I was one of those. We went to Moscow on 15 September. We were doing intelligence [training] in Moscow. The intelligence [training] lasted until February 1966. I then [returned] to Dar es Salaam, [to] Kongwa.<sup>18</sup>

After completing their military training in Egypt, the group Simon Senna was part of was sent to the Soviet Union for further training at the beginning of 1965.

We left from Kongwa to the Soviet Union. The Soviet training was humane. It was both normal military training and political training, so that you must know what you are fighting for, how to treat your enemy in a humane way. You must not kill just for the sake of killing. You must kill soldiers and policemen, not any civilians, even if they are your enemies. But if they are trained, and you have got evidence, remove them.<sup>19</sup>

According to Radilori John Moumakwe, when they arrived in Odessa they 'found a lot of comrades there. I come from South Africa. And I know that in South Africa a black man is not supposed to touch a white man, you see, he is going to make him dirty. Now this Russian wants to greet me, you know. I was retreating because I was scared. And they said: "No, this is not

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<sup>17</sup> 'Isaac Maphoto', in South African Democracy Education Trust (eds), *The Road to Democracy: South Africans telling their stories, Volume 1, 1950-1970*, Mutloatse Heritage Trust, Houghton, 2008, pp. 238-9.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Amos Lengisi, SADET Oral History Project.

<sup>19</sup> 'Simon Senna', p. 429.

South Africa, come here, *mo ke mo gae* (this is home), don't worry about these things".<sup>20</sup>

Russian academic Vladimir Shubin describes this episode as follows:

Special courses to train guerrilla commanders and various specialists were organized in Odessa, on the shores of the Black Sea. Odessa had been chosen for various reasons: facilities were available at the local military college; the 'Hero City' was famous for its to the German and Romanian invasion in 1941; and from 1941 to 1944 the catacombs were used as hideouts by guerrillas. A further reason was climatic: the military and academic training of Africans was generally organized in regions where (by Soviet standards) the climate was mild.

According to Shubin, 328 MK fighters were trained at Odessa between 1963 and 1965.<sup>21</sup> Some of the cadres who underwent training at Odessa were sent to Tashkent in Uzbekistan for further training. Here they were given an advanced course for high-level commanders at the local military college.<sup>22</sup> Simon Senna stated that:

We were transferred to central Asia, to Tashkent, where we continued with our training. It is in Uzbekistan, near the border with Afghanistan. We were there for six months. We returned from central Asia to Tanzania, and we left Tashkent to Tanzania via Crimea, Egypt, Yemen, Mogadishu and then Dar-es-Salaam. And then we went back to Kongwa.<sup>23</sup>

Seven MK cadres, including Joe Modise and Raymond Mhlaba, were trained in Czechoslovakia between 1963 and 1964. The training was provided at the Brno Military Academy.<sup>24</sup> James April, who was sent abroad in June 1964, recalled that:

The Academy had many faculties – we were in the foreign campus. At this faculty there were also students from ... Afghanistan, Egypt, and so on. We were given commander's training; training in small arms, explosives, infantry training, engineering, camouflage, how to fire a mortar, how to calculate distances, first aid, how an automobile runs, and political science (very important part of the training). In political science we were taught the fundamentals – basics – of Marxism. They taught us about the national liberation struggle – national democratic struggle. They taught us how capitalism works, and also taught us other aspects of Marxism-Leninism, and so on. The chap who taught me had been a youngster of 16 years old in the resistance to Nazi occupation during the Second World War. He had been involved in organising the resistance during the war and was

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<sup>20</sup> 'Radilori John Moumakwe', in South African Democracy Education Trust (eds), *The Road to Democracy: South Africans telling their stories, Volume 1, 1950-1970*, Mutloatse Heritage Trust, Houghton, 2008, p. 327.

<sup>21</sup> V. Shubin, *ANC: A view from Moscow*, Second revised edition, Auckland Park, Jacana Media, 2008, p. 48.

<sup>22</sup> V. Shubin, p. 50.

<sup>23</sup> 'Simon Senna', p. 429.

<sup>24</sup> V. Shubin, p. 50.

arrested. So, he was sent to a concentration camp in Poland and in Germany. He stayed there a few years. He taught us how they operated underground in the concentration camp. It was more theory. We were also trained how to conduct ourselves in cases of chemical warfare.

We changed our names when we went out. We all took our mothers' maiden names. Basil February's mother's name was Petersen. My mother's maiden name was Brian. We found other cadres there, in Czechoslovakia, who had been there since '63 – we joined them in June '64. But they stayed only a few months while we were there before returning. We were there for about 11 months. There were also about 20 Kenyan students there. And then, the other students who were there were the foreign students from Africa, who were at the university there. There were a lot of foreign students from Africa – Mali, Sudan, Ethiopia and so on – who were studying at the university. They had a Foreign Students' Society. We also interacted with the local population. They did not restrain us. We got off on a Wednesday afternoon from 11 o'clock, and the weekend we got off – Saturdays from 1 o'clock. This allowed us to go out. Sundays we were off the whole day until 11 o'clock. Some chaps got married to local girls there.<sup>25</sup>

The first major MK camp established abroad was at Kongwa in Tanzania. Isaac Makopo provides the following description of Kongwa:

We went back to Tanzania in 1964, around August. We were then transported to a place in southern Tanzania, called Kongwa, an old dilapidated railway station. Few people stayed in houses; the majority of us stayed in tents for two, three years at Kongwa. We were told that was where we were going to stay and we have to make that place habitable. We worked very hard to make it a habitable place and, in the end, it was really a place that you would envy. Other groups that had gone for training to other parts of the Soviet Union, like Odessa, also arrived late '64 and '65. Some groups that had gone to train in Egypt around '65 also came back, but they were redirected to the Soviet Union for further training. ... Kongwa was a very dry, hot, dusty place with lots of funny diseases, especially eye diseases. People couldn't walk. At the beginning, it was really tough, until we appointed a medical officer, Leslie Sondezi, who had some medical training and had worked as a medical orderly in one of the hospitals in Durban. ... We had camps for FRELIMO [Mozambique Liberation Front], MPLA [Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola], and SWAPO, all in the same area in Kongwa. We held inter-camp events every Friday. We held our own concerts in either of the camps. In 1966, some cadres came right from inside the country to Tanzania and were then taken to Kongwa. We appointed a chief instructor to train them because it was felt that there was no need to send them anywhere. We already had the capacity to produce our own cadres. I was then given the duty to handle the training. ... We were restricted to Kongwa, entertaining ourselves and developing vegetable gardens. We developed a very beautiful, big

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<sup>25</sup> 'James April', in South African Democracy Education Trust (eds), *The Road to Democracy: South Africans telling their stories, Volume 1, 1950-1970*, Mutloatse Heritage Trust, Houghton, 2008, p. 56.

vegetable farm. The Tanzanians could not believe it, because it was the first of its kind. They didn't know that people could till that arid piece of land. We actually walked a distance of more than 10 kilometres to a reservoir, somewhere below a mountain, to fetch water that flowed from the top of the mountain. We tapped the water from the reservoir and, with picks and shovels, dug trenches to lay water pipes and redirect the water to the camp. Finally we had clean running water, which we also used to irrigate the vegetable farm that we had started. There were some Tanzanian engineers who were, I think, from the Department of Water Affairs and who helped us. But the spadework literally we did ourselves. We developed that farm and it improved our lives tremendously, health wise.<sup>26</sup>

William Motau also lived in the camp for some time.

In the camps ... you would have a platoon. Your platoon would be on duty. That is, the whole platoon. Some sections would go to the kitchen. Some sections would go to the garden to ... guard duties. And some of the sections would go to this armoury. If their people who are doing educational classes you know, furthering their knowledge in the use of weapons or they going for shooting range or whatever, they would be people there really who would be on duty to issue out weapons. ... And one of these people would be the man on duty of that platoon. He would, he would oversee everything that things are running smoothly in the camp. And he would immediately eh...report to the officer commanding eh.... commanding that camp what the situation is like in the camp and what the soldiers are doing. Eh.... they would be classes in some days, some days eh... people would after lunch, they would be free to go to town to go and just associate and come back in the evening. And in certain evenings there would be political speeches perhaps from a visitor from Dar es Salaam or any other place. Eh....or there would be a concert. Eh....we were keeping ourselves very, very much occupied. .. We were doing certain military maneuvers like eh...we used to go out on marches. Go out in marching but we would divide the camp into half, certain portion of the camp would go on marches and certain portion would remain. They were keeping the camp alive and things like that. Eh.... if there is no activity like that there must be just one thing or the other that is being done. It is either there are classes, political classes.<sup>27</sup>

According to Makopo, the ANC headquarters at the time was in Morogoro, some 200 kilometres south of Dar es Salaam and some 200 kilometres north of Kongwa. Kongwa was about 400 kilometres west of Dar es Salaam. By 1965 the number of cadres based at the camp had grown to 500. By this time the cadres who had returned from training in the Soviet Union were able to provide new recruits entering the camp with training in the making of home-made bombs and handling of weapons. Lennox Tshali, who had been sent to Moscow for training before returning to Kongwa, recalls that:

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with Isaac Makopo conducted by Sifiso Ndlovu, 24 November 2000, Pretoria, SADET Oral History Project.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with William Motau conducted by Lasetja Marepo, Nelspruit, SADET Oral History Project.

We had to come together and standardise our training because we were trained in different countries. So we had now to come and show the others conspiracy, the principles of working underground, how to make homemade explosives and all that kind of thing. Some of us were coming from China as well; they were also sharing their experiences of the Chinese with us. Until early 1966 I was in Kongwa as an instructor with people like Walter Msimang; Ben Tsele, who fell in Zimbabwe in 1968; and Isaac Makopo. Then from there I went to Zambia in 1966.<sup>28</sup>

Another view of the camp is given by Zozo Skhosana:

In about June '65 I joined a big camp at Kongwa, in Tanzania, which had about 600 people. Kongwa was the first camp in Tanzania. ... In Kongwa the ANC lurched from one crisis to another. I was pulled this way and the other way by people who were complaining to me that Kongwa was the research school of diseases. People were falling sick and the major activity was the moving of people from Kongwa to see a doctor in Dar es Salaam and back to Kongwa. And this is not what they had gone into exile for. So much that the first revolt there was made by the people from Natal led by two leaders from Natal. The one was Pangaman and the other one was Boy Nzima. The third one was a certain Bhengu. The ANC has never been able to find the answer for tribalism in their ranks. You must remember the ANC is the party that shies away from the national question. It uses African Nationalism only to put out fires. But then they purported that their true ideology was Marxism-Leninism, because to be an African Nationalist was a swear word at that time. In order to be accepted in the ANC circles you had to be a communist. The crisis that preceded my arrival at Kongwa was to the effect that after the Raymond Mhlabas were arrested the next commander became Mzimkhulu Makiwane. But, because of this tribal politics of the ANC, the Kotanes and the J.B. Marks of the ANC strongly argued with the rest of their colleagues in the exile leadership that the chance should to be given to a Basotho rather than every time to a Xhosa. It was Mandela, Raymond Mhlaba, Wilton Mkwayi and then Mzimkhulu. That could not be. And there was big showdown between the two: Joe Modise and Makiwane, swearing at each other in the presence of that vast camp in Kongwa. That was before I came. So when I came there was this tension. Joe Modise, [who] had the support of Moses Kotane and J.B. Marks, became the new commander in chief and Makiwane had been banished. So when I came there was this bitterness among the guerrillas who preferred Mzimkhulu Makiwane. And now that is how the Natal group came up because they were led by another tribalist who was known as Moses Mabhida. Then [there was] the fight between the people from Natal and those from the Cape. In [the] suppression [of those] from Natal they used Xhosas instead of Zulus. And some of the Sothos were on the side of Xhosas; others were on the [side of the] Zulus. After they had commandeered a truck they were arrested in Dar es Salaam and they served long terms in Tanzanian jails. [Joe Modise] was the commander of UMkhonto We Sizwe based in Dar es Salaam. And these people

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with Lennox Tshali conducted by Nhanhla Ndebele and Moses Ralinanala, Pretoria, SADET Oral History Project.

were paid handsome monies, financed by the Soviet Union. They were supporting the Soviet Union on every question; the denunciation of communist leaders in [Italy and] France who were trying to fit their Marxist-Leninist analyses and ideologies to specific conditions in Italy and in France. The ANC was always on the side of the Soviet Union. So the SACP held complete sway. In exile the ANC were just the paid servants of the SACP. The second conflict in Kongwa was led by a Sotho intellectual group headed by Vincent Makhubu. All these conflicts [took place] in 1966. All these conflicts were fed by the fact that people were doing nothing. And we were burying people and there was no prospect on the horizon of us being sent back in the country to do what we had gone into exile for; that is, save our people from oppression. All types of leaders came and went with all types of excuses that the country was encircled and until one of the neighbouring countries in Southern Africa was free and all that type of thing; and that the situation was not yet right for the armed struggle in South Africa. At one stage [there was a] story that the ANC delegation invited by the Political Bureau of the Socialist Party of Germany [was asked by] the Germans why there was an armed struggle in all the countries that were bordering South Africa but there are no armed struggle in South Africa itself. Then the ANC listed that fact that the apartheid state machinery was the strongest on the African continent. So it couldn't be challenged. The Germans wanted to know the population figures: how many were the whites and how many were the Africans? And they were told that there were 5 million whites and 25 million blacks. Then the Germans said: "But you could hit those whites and they would never know who among you hit them because you are so overwhelming numerically".... Then they wanted the programme of the party. It was written in English. This story was related to us by Mzimkhulu Makiwane. They wanted one of the leaders to read the first paragraph, that South Africa belongs to all, white, black or brown. It's when the German woman exploded in protest and said that could never be the case with Germany. Germany will belong to Germans, whatever colour; if you are in Germany you are a German. They don't compromise on that. And she [said] that that is the main reason why there was no fighting in South Africa. Mzimkhulu identified with what this German woman was saying: that it was the Freedom Charter that was holding up the armed struggle in South Africa. We were told these stories and I was sympathetic, the Africanist block in the ANC. When such stories came up they reinforced my belief in Africanism and the fact that I was in the wrong fold. And I was being exploited in the ANC; whenever there were these conflicts I was made to be one of the speakers to discourage the conflicts. [This was] precisely because, firstly, I was trained in Moscow; secondly, my level of education was high; and thirdly, I was in the editorial department of the army newspaper *Dawn*. There was another [conflict led] by the Sotho intellectuals from the Transvaal mostly, led by Mokhubu, Mthombeni and others. In the end, these people, boMokhubu, walked away from the ANC and went to settle in Kenya. And reportedly they were going to try and run the struggle from there. They were under the influence of SOYA [Society of Young Africans] and some were under the influence of the PAC. That was the other conflict which resulted in a mass exodus of people from the Kongwa camp. They had a way of escaping from Tanzania to Kenya. They had opened their route to Kenya. [A lot of people were dying in the camp from] malaria, tropical diseases and frustration – mental

diseases. There was even fighting between the MPLA of Angola and the ANC. It was [an] OAU [Organisation of African Unity] Liberation Committee camp; there was part which was occupied by SWAPO; another part occupied by FRELIMO; [and] another part occupied by the MPLA. But there was a big part also occupied by the ANC.<sup>29</sup>

Ike Maphoto recalls that:

We finished our training and came back to Tanzania in 1965. We were taken to Kongwa. We were 150 in all; two other batches came until we were 150. That is why we were able to specialise because we were many. We used to call Kongwa our university. If you didn't come from Kongwa, sometimes we had reservations about your ability to cope with hardship because in Kongwa life was tough. You know, Kongwa was no different from prison. People who stayed in Kongwa had no problems in prison because life was almost the same. There was no food; the living conditions were very bad. No one had lived under such circumstances before. We sometimes didn't have clothes. Only combat clothes. The ANC didn't have money and we were in a place far away from civilisation. You could hardly see a person with a suit and most of the women we had access to were prostitutes. We relied a lot in those days on East Germany. I remember one time we had no salt; we had to wait for salt, which came from East Germany. We waited two/three months. They brought us tinned food left by Hitler in the 1930s. We ate that and people would vomit. Their stomachs would be running. Sometimes there was no water because where we get water a snake has blocked the place. Funny beliefs! We also fought amongst ourselves. Things just got out of hand.<sup>30</sup>

Lawrence Phokanoka was deployed to Kongwa after training in Moscow.

And we were transported far away from Dar es Salaam ... to a place called Kongwa, many miles away. You travel almost the whole day, the whole hearted day; a big part of 10 hours or so. A camp was being opened for MK and when we got there we found that we were neighbours with FRELIMO and SWAPO who were more or less in the same camp. But the most occupants of that camp was FRELIMO – and then within one large yard – and led by Samora Machel. And another one by somebody called Castro for SWAPO. We had a common fence. But otherwise there was nothing near us. It was quite an open place – sort of a busy area and it's a small town called Kongwa. ... It was a military camp like any military camp. ... I mean you are just following a military programme. ... We are trained in guerrilla warfare for 24 hours a day. ... You just have a structure for running a camp. There's a camp commander and his staff: chief of staff, chief of logistics. ... We had our veteran Isaac Makopo as a chief of logistics. The two offices are equal in status. ... Now each one of them has [his own] staff. ... Like I'm a chief of staff, for instance. I can tell you there can be chief of operations, chief of

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with Zozo Skhosana conducted by Brown Maaba, 21 September 2001, KwaNobuhle, Uitenhage, SADET Oral History Project.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Isaac Lesibe Maphoto conducted by Siphamandla Zondi, 2 May 2001, Pietersburg, SADET Oral History Project.

planning, chief of reconnaissance, chief of demolition explosives, and then chief of weapons. The chief of logistics is independent. He is equal to the chief of staff. He also has his staff, I mean his chief of supply, chief of this. ... If you can imagine naked soldiers who are not eating, who have no weapons, you just have human beings. ... Now everything from their clothing, boots – everything – weapons, what not, everything. To clothe these naked people just put them in underpants at least, from shoes. Now all those supplies come from chief of logistics, including weapons and ammunition and so on. Everything that is not a human being, equipment, comes from chief of logistics. ... There was chief of medical supplies. It was a certain Leslie Sontesi from Durban, who used to work in McCord Hospital. ... And then everything therefore that is for a human being, that is equipment, is going to be run by Makopo, the chief of logistics. ... If the commander wants a certain operation to be done, the chief of staff must go and plan how it would be done by the staff. The chief of logistics will know whether in doing that thing you will need what, what. And he can tell you whether that thing is feasible or not because of the types of equipment and supplies he has which you need or he does not have. Then he will say that thing can be done or not.<sup>31</sup>

According to William Motau, at Kongwa, after lunch people ‘would be free to go to town to go and just associate and come back in the evening. And in certain evenings there would be political speeches, perhaps from a visitor from Dar es Salaam or any other place ... or there would be a concert.’ They were also undergoing military exercises. ‘We used to go out on marches, go out marching. But we would divide the camp into half. [A] certain portion of the camp would go on marches and [a] certain portion would remain. They were keeping the camp alive and things like that.’ Political classes were also conducted.<sup>32</sup> Walter Msimang draws attention to one of the more serious problems encountered at Kongwa:

... we went to this camp in Kongwa – central Tanzania – and it became quite clear that ... [the] transition was going to take a little longer. But not everybody internalised that. There was a lot of restlessness. People wanted to go home, and they just did not want to sit in Kongwa. That Kongwa camp had ANC people, subsequently even Angolans, MPLA [Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola], coming in, Namibians, SWAPO, and FRELIMO. That’s where Machel and people like that were at a certain time. The leadership of the ANC ... was always in Dar es Salaam. And there was a perception, because none of them really had trained at the time – OR Tambo has to be exempted from this because he always was on the move – but there was this thing about the leaders being in Dar es Salaam, living it up. I don’t think they were quite doing [that]. But not being terribly bothered about finding the way home for the people. They were not really trained after all, and how seriously would they be bothered – in the minds of the people – about finding the way out. So, the restlessness started. ... People wanted to go home, and they were sitting in the camps. People had

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with Lawrence Phokanoka conducted by Siphamandla Zondi, 1 July 2001, Ga-Mankopane, SADET Oral History Project.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with William Motau conducted by Lesetja Marepo, Nelspruit, SADET Oral History project.



started deserting, or leaving the camp to go to Kenya. Problems of discipline beginning a little bit.<sup>33</sup>

MK veteran Ruth Mompati also visited Kongwa frequently, and she stated that:

There were very few women actually at the camp. In fact in the beginning there were hardly any women. ... I remember 4 that came together. I remember Daphne. Daphne was her MK name. And there was Jacqueline, also her MK name. Then there was, this one is now a medical doctor. And then there was Nomsa, which is also an MK name. They were just 4, and they were young. ... The greatest problem was the fact that – I don't remember how many men – 200 or so, and there were about 5 women. The problem was with the men. They all had to be related to these women. This was the greatest problem right through, even later on when we were no longer in Kongwa.<sup>34</sup>

Sifiso Ndlovu provides the following account of everyday life at Kongwa:

Kongwa camp in Tanzania, established in 1964, was situated near an old railway station that had been invaded by tall grass, even inside some of the dilapidated buildings. Among the first inhabitants were the MK cadres who had received military training in the Soviet Union and various African countries, but the numbers soon swelled with new arrivals from South Africa. The Tanzanian government had donated a large tract of land, but the cadres had to work hard to make the environment habitable and self-sufficient in regard to food production. Many of them came from rural South Africa, and were familiar with farming methods. Through dedication, commitment and sheer hard work, they soon turned the land into a successful agricultural cooperative, producing vegetables for the local markets in Kongwa and Dodoma. ... The cadres had to chop down trees, clear the bush and prepare the fields for ploughing. There was no water at the site, but there was a reservoir nearby that captured water flowing down from the mountains close to the camp. ... The first ANC group described Kongwa as extremely dry, hot, dusty, home to many diseases, especially eye problems. ... One of the buildings was converted into a well-equipped five-bed clinic that served not only the camp, but the local Tanzanian community as well. ... Magadu was the second ANC camp in the Morogoro region. Makopo describes it as a camp for those experiencing health problems and those who were not supposed to be at Kongwa 'for certain reasons and assignments'. Among Magadu's camp commanders were Ralph Motsumi, Sthabiso Ndaba, Peter Maqabane and Comrade 'Skorobile'.<sup>35</sup>

At Kongwa the cadres lived in tents, which was still the main form of accommodation for the guerrillas as late as 1971 when a group of cadres who had been sent to the Soviet Union for a refresher course were sent to the camp on their return to Africa.

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with Walter Msimang conducted by Ben Magubane and Gregory Houston, 22 June 2003, Midrand, SADET Oral History Project.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Ruth Mompati.

<sup>35</sup> Ndlovu, 'The ANC in exile, 1960-1970;', pp. 463-8.

The ANC also had a number of small bases that it used to house cadres in preparation for missions inside South Africa. For instance, during the preparations for the Wankie Campaign of 1967 a group of cadres selected for the mission were deployed to a house which had a small piece of land in Livingstone, Zambia. According to Lawrence Phokanoka, the house was: ‘...owned by the ANC, but under the name of a Zambian citizen. We kept ourselves occupied by cultivating vegetables and keeping poultry for eggs. The only thing we were not doing was military activities. We stayed there for quite a long time...’.<sup>36</sup>

The PAC also sent its cadres for training in other African countries. Among the first groups to do so was Philip Kgosana, the leader of the 1960 march on Parliament. According to Kgosana:

...the party had then decided to despatch some of us for military training. Instructions had come from Sobukwe himself in a letter from Leeuwkop Prison where he was serving his three-year jail term. I slipped out of the country early in 1961 and reached Dar es Salaam on 29 March 1961. ... At the end of 1961, however, I was offered a chance to do military training in Ethiopia. By the time I did military training in Ethiopia, however, I had been expelled from the PAC for disobedience to the party. But then I had already negotiated my way through with the Ethiopian government. I pleaded with Emperor Haile Selassie ... and he agreed to let me join the Ethiopian Military Academy in Harar. I was commissioned as a lieutenant in the Ethiopian Army in December 1966. In 1967 I completed my parachute and commando basic training at the Debre Zeit Airbase just outside Addis Ababa.<sup>37</sup>

The PAC also sent cadres for military training in Egypt during the early 1960s. Gasson Ndlovu, who was part of the second group of PAC cadres after Philip Kgosana’s group to go for military training abroad, left South Africa in 1962, and from Dar es Salaam was deployed for military training in Egypt in the same year. He recalled that:

In Egypt we found three comrades who had finished their military training. Ndibongo, Bam Sibotho and Mampe from Kgosana’s group were not admitted in the military academy in Ethiopia. So they went instead to Cairo. ... We were eight in our group now. And just as we finished our military training, another group of comrades came. There were ten of them from Durban, in Natal.<sup>38</sup>

This group was followed by another, which included Zebulon Mokoena.

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<sup>36</sup> Interview with Lawrence Phokanoka conducted by Siphamandla Zondi, 1 July 2001, Ga-Mankopane, SADET Oral History Project.

<sup>37</sup> ‘Phillip Kgosana’, in South African Democracy Education Trust (eds), *The Road to Democracy: South Africans telling their stories, Volume 1, 1950-1970*, Mutloatse Heritage Trust, Houghton, 2008, pp. 157-8.

<sup>38</sup> ‘Gasson Ndlovu’, in South African Democracy Education Trust (eds), *The Road to Democracy: South Africans telling their stories, Volume 1, 1950-1970*, Mutloatse Heritage Trust, Houghton, 2008, pp. 374-5.

... we were the second group to leave to Egypt for military training after the group of Enoch Zulu. Upon completion of their training they waited for further instructions. We went for a commando course in July and came back at the end of November. It was a very tough course, testing our physical endurance.

This was an Arabic country and there was no ideological training. We came back in November and found the group of Zulu in Dar es Salaam.

PAC recruits were also housed in the White House during their stay in Botswana. Ace Mgxashe recalls that:

They had this big house called the “White House”, which was divided into various organizations: PAC people staying together [with] ANC, SWAPO, and so on. The option was that either you go to school or you go for military training. And then if you want to go for military training you would have to be cleared from Lusaka by your representative. And that group was taken right to the north of Botswana, a place called Kazangula.<sup>39</sup>

The PAC camps in the early 1960s can be summarized as follows: camps in Maseru, Lesotho, and the Kinkuzu camp at Leopoldville in the Congo. In the second half of the 1960s PAC guerrillas were located mainly in two camps: one in Zenkobo, Zambia; and the other at Chunya, Tanzania. The first PAC military camp outside South Africa was Kinkuzu camp in the Congo. Gasson Ndlovu describes the Kinkuzu camp as follows:

We didn't have our own camp as the PAC. At the inaugural meeting of the OAU, Cyrille Adoula, then Prime Minister of Congo, promised that his country's contribution to the cause of the OAU, which was the liberation of the entire continent, was to provide military camps to the liberation movements. Then, he chose the PAC. He said let me give the PAC a military camp to train its cadres as our initial contribution to this continental struggle. And we were very thankful for this facility, because we knew how expensive it was just flying from Tanzania to Egypt. Egypt was the only country that offered a uniform training facility at that time.

We went to Congo only to find out that Cyrille was just being sentimental. There was no camp to offer there, let alone food. They ended up putting us in somebody else's camp, Holden [Roberto] (of the FNLA – National Front for the Liberation of Angola), an Angolan liberation organization. It would have been better if Cyrille had just taken us to the jungle. If he decided to throw us into the jungle, and said: “Look, see what you can do for yourselves. This is the only thing I can offer. I have nothing. I have no weapons. See for yourselves.” It would have been better if he had done that. Thrown us into a wild jungle like that. This Roberto man had a few little boys. You can't call them soldiers because those were small boys: 14-15 years old. Little things that he might have collected

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Ace Mgxashe conducted by Brown Maaba, 26 January 2002, Cape Town, SADET Oral History Project.

from the streets in the capital of Angola, Luanda, and elsewhere. Schoolboys, you know, and started calling them soldiers. They were dying literally, when we came there. This malaria was killing them. But even worse than malaria, they were dying from hunger. There was no food. He could not feed them, let alone dress them up in khaki uniforms. No soap. And pathetically emaciated from hunger.

Kinkuzu, that was the name of the camp. It was in the extreme north because the other side if you cross the border, you will get the Central African Republic. The camp was north of Leopoldville, the capital of the Congo. Through lack of transport to carry them to hospital in Leopoldville they would die there. Roberto's little things would die there from lack of medical attention. Halfway between Leopoldville and Kinkuzu there was another town called Stanleyville. Some of these sick soldiers were taken to Stanleyville. Stanleyville was worst off than Leopoldville when it came to facilities, medical doctors, thing like that.

Nana Mahomo came down to see how we were received in the Congo and to see to facilities and so on. Now, I think we were just two weeks there, trying to find what to do there in Roberto Holden's camp. We were in a camp where there are no guns to use for training. There was one machine gun, which was very heavy for these little soldiers of Roberto. It was an old thing. It must have been picked up in Angola or somewhere – an old British machine gun. But then we made do with that. We borrowed it. The recruits from home had never seen a gun before. Trained just to handle it. It was two weeks when we did that.

But after two weeks Nana Mahomo came from London to see to the construction of our camp in the Congo. The old man called me: "Look, you better go to Botswana because in Francistown we have more than 200 men. Recruits from home who have been there for almost six months. They are stranded there. They can't come up here; we sent them money or a hired plane to send them home." I would have sent them to that camp in the Congo or to any camp – Egypt, for instance. I would have done that. They can't move there because there are PAC politicians who are against their moving from there to anywhere else. These people left South Africa for military training, young and old, such as Matthew Nkoane. They had left South Africa for Botswana and found this huge group of recruits. They told them: "Look, where are you going, you people?" "We are trying to go for military training." "Under whose leadership? Who is your leader?" These people replied: "It is Leballo." "Leballo, where is he?" "He is in Lesotho."

He said to me, uMahomo: "You are going to Francistown to fetch that group. We shall try and build the standard of Kinkuza camp. Cyrille Aboula promised to give us a camp. And we are going to show him what is happening here. Because people are sick and here are those that need medical facilities. He must try and find us a better place than this." So I left for Francistown.

I also tried to convince some of the trained chaps in Dar es Salaam to go to the camp in the Congo. It was their democracy we were fighting for. They started talking about malaria. "How is malaria there?" Then I said: "What malaria?" They said, "No, we know it. That's the tropical country. There should be malaria there." And, Congo got its independence in 1960. This is '63. And there were nothing but disorganization in the Congo. The Congolese looted everything.

Nano Mahomo chose one of the comrades from this group of two hundred, took him from the camp, and said: "No, you must come and try and establish an office in Leopoldville until somebody is sent from Maseru." His name is Dr Ncayiyana from Durban. So, I started writing to him, Daniel Ncayiyana. "Here I am. I have been dumped here. Where is this man Mahomo? I've got no food, nothing." And the man gives me a full report about what was happening in that Congo. He wrote to me and said, "Look, there is no camp. I'm the only one left here in the Congo. Everybody else has left, by foot or by ferry. They have left for Tanzania one by one, because they were hungry. There is no food; there is no Mahomo here. He left immediately after you. He left for London and there is no correspondence, nothing." There are those three people dying in Kinkuzu. What I'm trying is to find a doctor that can drive to Kinkuzu. To go and attend to those people there. He sent me a few francs to buy bread to eat in the morning and for supper. Ok, then it's all right. "But then what do you think the position is going to be?" He said: "No I don't know guys. You will see what to do. Try to come back here or go to Tanzania at least. There are a few people there."

There was a PAC office in Tanzania, led by a man called Radebe. There was organization in Tanzania, in Dar es Salaam. Now the OAU was also establishing an office called the Liberation Committee office. The headquarters of the Liberation Committee was set up by the OAU in Addis Ababa. This Liberation Committee was also to establish an office in Dar es Salaam. So that office of the PAC became very important because the OAU was supporting the liberation organizations through their offices. So, at least organizationally, the office of the PAC in Dar es Salaam was the headquarters of the PAC outside South Africa. Under that office was one in Accra led by Peter Molotsi.

There was also an office of what was called the South African United Front (SAUF). The ANC and PAC had come together to open up a front. It was manned by Gaur Radebe of the PAC, and James Hadebe of the ANC. And then there was SWAPO man, SWAPO of South West Africa then. So Dar es Salaam was where things were happening.

The funds were getting exhausted. I can't use planes to go and take people from Francistown. It's very expensive. I must find somebody who will be able to transport these refugees by land rover instead of planes. But they had to be transported from Moshudu, in central Botswana, and not from Francistown, to Lusaka. You can't get to Congo by road from Francistown. These land rovers are going to be used to load these people and carry them to Lusaka. Those planes will be cheaper to fetch them from Lusaka because Congo is a next-door neighbour to Zambia.

Nana Mahomo and Peter Molotsi organised a plane for those two hundred in Francistown. Peter Molotsi was in Ghana as the Representative of the PAC. When we came with those recruits there, there was not even any room to accommodate them. Let alone food now. Our people and Roberto didn't do anything. Mahomo at least provided some money to organize mealy-meal and some fat you know. There was this gun, one machine gun, and it was used by our men. Roberto's young soldiers could hardly carry it because it was too heavy for them. That gun ended up being used by those of us who survived the malaria. So, to this group of 30 men we add a huge group of two hundred men. We could hardly feed them, or give them medications. So the situation deteriorated.

A lot of them started leaving, leaving as individuals. Just disappeared in the forest there. They are escaping this damn malaria. And of course there was very little food and so on. And there was no prospect that the situation would be improved in the near future. Now, Mahomo wants to build this into a five hundred-men strong force. Then he would be able to talk of having a trained force to face the Boers. He is unable to maintain even half of that. ... And there was this man who was very helpful to the PAC, the man called [Mohamed Ahmed] Ben Bella from Algeria. He had fought the French successfully and was the leader of Algeria. He was very prominent in the OAU. And then he offered Leballo a military camp in Algeria. And [President Gamal Abdel] Nasser (of Egypt) also agreed to take whoever was left from that group yase Algeria; those recruits who were in Holden's camp in the Congo.<sup>40</sup>

Kwandi Kondlo notes that conditions 'in this camp were typical of conditions in all PAC camps in Tanzania since then'.<sup>41</sup> Lodge stipulates that this camp was characterized by 'ramshackle logistical systems, inadequate food, poor training facilities, and inhabitability which led to poor health of inmates, death and disease'.<sup>42</sup>

Tor Sellstrom points out that SWAPO was also offered military training facilities at the FNLA's Kinkuzu camp in the Congo as part of the so-called Congo Alliance with the FNLA of Congo, PAC of South Africa, and ZANU (Zimbabwe African National Union) of Zimbabwe in 1963. A number of SWAPO cadres were sent to the camp. However, when SWAPO representative Andreas Shipanga visited Leopoldville he found the conditions extremely bad and that the leader of the FNLA Holden Roberto was withholding OAU funds from SWAPO.<sup>43</sup> According to Morris, discipline among FNLA rebels in the camp was poor and combined with poor administration at their base the troops often took food and women from the local population by

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<sup>40</sup> Interview with Gasson Ndlovu conducted by Brown Maaba, 26 January 2002, Cape Town, SADET Oral History Project.

<sup>41</sup> K. Kondlo, *'In the twilight of the Revolution': The exile history of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (South Africa), (1960-1990)*, unpublished D.Litt et Phil. thesis, University of Johannesburg, October 2003, p. 250.

<sup>42</sup> T. Lodge, *Black politics in South Africa since 1945*, Longman, 1983, p. 308. Cited in K. Kondlo, pp. 250-1.

<sup>43</sup> T. Sellstrom, *Sweden and National Liberation in Southern Africa, Volume 1, Formation of a popular opinion, 1950-1970*, Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, 2002, p. 271n.

force.<sup>44</sup> Conditions in the camp were harsh and a number of cadres perished from fever. In May 1964, the PAC's Kinkuzu trainees were returned to Dar es Salaam where the PAC had established its new headquarters in exile after its leadership relocated from Lesotho.

Zebulon Mokoena recalls that:

At the time the leader of the PAC was Leballo. One day Leballo came and told us that he was still in the process of organizing an army and that it must have a Commander. He brought in Templeton Ntantala. At that time we called ourselves Poqo. There was [another] group that was training in Algeria and its commander was Khondlo. On the day Leballo came with Ntantala he told us that he had come to show us our commander. It was not long after that that Khondlo and Theo Bidi came and joined us. During that time the Tanzanian government had taken a decision that there were too many liberation movements that had offices in Tanzania such as the ANC, PAC, MPLA, ZANU, ZAPU (Zimbabwe African People's Union), SWAPO, and FRELIMO. All these [movements] had cadres who had gone for [military] training and were roaming about. The Tanzanian government was not feeling safe and it opted to open the camps. Each movement was given its own camp. We were given a camp in Morogoro. The MPLA [and] FRELIMO were also around Morogoro. ZANU and ZAPU were also there with the ANC.

There was another scenario that developed during that time there. There developed a concept where some movements regarded themselves as the authentic [liberation movements]<sup>45</sup>. All the authentic [liberation movements] had their camps in Morogoro. ZANU's camp was in Chunya down in Mbeya near the border of Zambia. The government decided to give us a camp in Morogoro but some distance way from the authentic [liberation movements].

Leballo had now formed the High Command and Ntantala was the Commander in Chief. It was 1966. Leballo decided that people must now go home. Gasson Ndlovu, who was already in Lesotho, then deputized Ntantala. George Rankoane was the Political Commissar. Leballo said: "Banna (men), you must go home". Ntantala and Theophilus Bidi had already been to China for military training. There was another group that was already training in China. Julius Nyerere [had gone] to China and told them to support the liberation movements that wanted to fight. The OAU [Liberation Committee] was based in Dar es Salaam, and they would receive the guns and distribute them amongst the liberation movement. The liberation movements used to collect their guns in Mbeya. The camp was also supplied with their quota of arms for training.

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<sup>44</sup> M. Morris, *Armed Conflict in Southern Africa*, Cape Town, South Africa: Jeremy Spence, 1974.

<sup>45</sup> The Soviet Union, following a suggestion put forward by the Algerians, selected a number of the Southern African liberation movements as 'authentic liberation movements' to which they provided political, military and moral support. These included the ANC, ZAPU, FRELIMO, and SWAPO. The PAC and ZANU were excluded from this list.

Leballo said: “Do not stay long.” Gasson was waiting for us there in Lesotho. The decision was taken that we must move forthwith. We used to move from that camp in groups of not more than five through the Tanzanian border into Zambia. Leballo did not want a camp next to the authentic [liberation movements]. Leballo had already negotiated with Kaunda and we were moving to Zambia. We established a camp in Itumbi, near Livingstone – Leballo wanted a place near the border – and not far from a place called Zenkobo. There we used to train on our own and a camp commander was appointed – Siphso Ximba from Natal. We did routine exercises. Finally Ntantala and Leballo organized a movement of arms from Mbeya to Zenkobo. One day, Khondlo came with a convoy of vans and brought some arms for us to train with whilst we were at the camp. Others were still going [abroad] for training.<sup>46</sup>

The PAC also opened a bush camp in Tanzania in 1964, in a place called Chunya. Kondlo writes:

The area needed to be cleared of bush in order to make it habitable. The camp settlement was offered by the government of Tanzania. In Chunya, PAC members erected “rudimentary structures and shacks for accommodation”. It appears that Chunya was the first PAC camp in Tanzania.<sup>47</sup>

The conditions described in Kinkuzu also prevailed at the camp in Chunya. Moreover, as Kondlo points out, the PAC leadership did not commit to developing a full-scale settlement there, and it never developed into a full-scale military camp. The camp also never had more than 100 cadres in it at any one time.<sup>48</sup>

After the formation of the Azanian People’s Liberation Movement (APLA) at the PAC’s Moshi Conference in 1967, APLA was able to move into camps in Tanzania that had initially housed members of the armed wing of the Zimbabwe African National Union. ZANU had begun to relocate its guerrilla forces to Mozambique from the late 1960s, and APLA was able to use its Itumbi camp from 1971 when ZANU guerrillas were moved to a new training camp at Magagoa in Tanzania.<sup>49</sup> Itumbi camp in Mbeya, near Chunya, had been opened in 1965. Chunya has been described as a cold mountainous region of south-western Tanzania.

Mfanasekhaya Gqobose recalls the PAC’s camps in Tanzania in the following terms:

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with Zebulon Mokoena conducted by Thami ka Plaatjie, 7 May 2005, Grobblersdal, SADET Oral History project.

<sup>47</sup> Kondlo, *In the twilight of the Revolution*, p. 250.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Peter Hlaole Molotsi conducted by Brown Maaba, 7 January 2001, Kroonstad, SADET Oral History Project; P.L. Moorcraft and P. McLaughlin, *The Rhodesian War: A military history*, Pen and Swords Books, Barnsley, 2008, p. 69.



As soon as members of Poqo happened to be in large numbers in Tanzania our camps were established there, at Dagamoyo, Siburu and Ndeya. The very first one that was established was Ndeya, in Southern Tanzania. When we got there in '71 the camps had already been established. In fact, there were two of them when we went there. We thought that we could stay there for as long as it was necessary. There was the concept of what we termed the home-going programme. We found that the comrades there, Leballo, were talking about the home-going programme, which meant, of course, that as soon as the people get trained and complete the training they are sent back home to fight. I remember Poqo in Lesotho – if they were sent out to train, they would come back. We found it there, the home-going programme. People were going to be trained. After they were trained, they don't stay in Tanzania. If you trained in Ghana you come to Tanzania. The next step was for them to be sent home.

We were running the camps ourselves. Of course, we had the Tanzanian army helping in the camps with the training. Of course, the disagreements were there, and they would be indiscipline; disobeying orders; running away from the camps; general disagreements; and there were tensions which concealed the power struggle between a number of leaders. I wouldn't say that [we had tribalism in the camps] – not with us – because as comrades we never even used the term Xhosa or Sotho. It was part of the training classes. Several classes would be conducted trying to hammer this question of discouraging cadres [to practice tribalism], any shape of it; not to fight with comrades. Because we realised as leaders that Sotho or Xhosa, we are in the same struggle. So, our most important lesson was to discredit the question of tribalism.

All the military camps were in Tanzania. We never established camps [elsewhere]. Sometimes you would send a group of 200, 150 cadres to a country like Egypt, Ghana, or Guinea. They were just there for training. From there they would come back to Tanzania.<sup>50</sup>

Another APLA camp was established at Zenkobo, in the south of Zambia, where the first APLA trained guerrillas were based.<sup>51</sup> There is no available description of this camp. Zebulon Mokoena stated that:

Our camp was near Livingstone. Leballo wanted a place near the border not far from a place called Zenkobo. There we used to train on our own and a camp commander was appointed, Siphon Ximba from Natal. We did routine exercises. Finally Ntantala and Leballo organized a movement of arms and that they must move from Mbeya to Zenkobo. One day Khondlo came with a convoy of vans and had brought some arms for us to train whilst we were at the camp. Others were still going for training.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with Mfanasekhaya Gqobose conducted by Brown Maaba, 18 August 2001, New Brighton, SADET Oral History Project.

<sup>51</sup> Kondlo, *In the twilight of the Revolution*, p. 297.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Zebulon Mokoena.

However, this camp played a significant role in the PAC's history. It was from this camp that cadres were taken to mount the PAC's most significant operation from exile in the 1960s: Operation Villa Piri in 1968. In addition, in the late 1960s a number of the movement's leaders travelled to the camp to obtain support from guerrillas against PAC leader Potlako Leballo. However, the guerrillas arrested them, and they were detained. Zambian leader Kenneth Kaunda intervened directly when he heard that there was an attempt to kill some of the leaders of the PAC in detention in the camp. Zambian troops were deployed to the camp, and all cadres disarmed and expelled to Tanzania. The Zenkobo camp was thus closed in August 1968.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ka Plaatjie, 'The PAC in exile', in South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 2, 1970-1980*, UNISA Press, Pretoria, 2006, pp. 729-730.

## Chapter 6

### Freedom routes during the 1970s and 1980s

In the early 1970s, the main routes out of the country were still through Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland for most young people who joined the PAC and ANC in exile. Keith Mokoape went into exile in the early 1970s through Botswana.

Not many of us would have had the opportunity to travel outside the borders of South Africa, not many of us would ever dream of going to apply for a passport. And in any case we knew the system would obviously question why do you want a passport? Who do you know outside the borders of the country? But what encouraged us most was that, especially we in Durban, where the headquarters of the South African Student's Organisation [SASO] was, where people like Steve Biko, people like Aubrey Mokoape, people like Strini Moodley, Saths Cooper, Barney Pityana were all operating from, we were one step (more) politically conscious than the rest of the black students' environment. And Pietermaritzburg used to be one venue where the court was used, almost like Pretoria, for what they called terrorism trials. So we encouraged ourselves within the SASO local committee, within our student's environment, to say take time off and go and listen to what these trials are all about, and look at the ..(unclear), hear what they say, hear what the police say they arrested them, etc. And we realised that beneath our political activism there are a lot of things happening and we just wished we should actually go to where these guys got their training and do things better. We would listen to how, what mistake was committed, how they couldn't be received properly, etc., etc., and we said we must go out. Now at the General Student's Council of SASO in Hammanskraal, 1972, I had said to the student body, you know, we mustn't go back to campus. We mustn't go back to campus because then we are going to be endorsing the system. And everybody asked, 'What plan do you have if we don't go back to campus?' And I said I'm not going to tell you my plan until you commit yourselves. So Mosiua Lekota and I tabled a resolution, calling upon this 300 plus delegates to commit themselves not to go back and we got defeated. Then I announced that I, however, shall not go back to campus. Now truly speaking I didn't have a plan, and when I said I am not going back to campus I had no idea of what else I'm going to do. So the evening, we crowded together, the four of us, Malebo Malebo from Central Western Jabavu, the late Archie Tshabalala from Warmbad, Makwezi Ntulu from Alexandria near Grahamstown, all medical students, sat and said what next. We said we've got three things we can try, we could either form a small guerrilla band ourselves, learn as much as possible about the art of sabotage; we could hang around the country and look for these guys before they get arrested by the police, these guerrillas that we've been attending the trials, before they get arrested by the police, by luck we might find some of them; or we simply get out of the country and look for these people. Now, at that time we were neither ANC, neither PAC, neither one, we're just highly politically charged and feel that we must take the struggle to a higher level. So the guys said: "Okay Keith, we'll go back. We will go back, you go scout for a route out". I said: "Fine, but we're not going to landlocked Lesotho or

landlocked Swaziland. I will scout around the borders of Botswana”. Which I did from July 1972 to around end of August. I had found where we can cross illegally. As the Groot Marico comes out of the Western Transvaal and curves meeting with the Botswana border to become the Limpopo, the river is shallow. I did my reconnaissance there and realised that in fact there are certain stones that can be used to go across. To what village that side, we had no idea. So, the guys then said: “Keith, once you have found a route, communicate with us and we will go and meet in a hostel bar, the hostel Scottburgh bar”, because it was important the student body must not see that I’m around. So indeed we met, I gave them a brief, and we agreed that we’ll all get out of this country. So yes, we didn’t know anybody outside. We went to Botswana, I reconnoitred the route and comes this particular Saturday, around the 6<sup>th</sup> of September, we met in Pretoria to catch a train to Rustenburg. From Rustenburg catch a bus, and this bus actually goes to, not only Derdepoort, but over to the village in Botswana called Sikwane. And I had got sufficient information that we can actually pretend to be going to a hospital, there’s a hospital around there, as if we’re going to see someone. So on that particular night, we alighted as soon as the bus stopped, and the border post is going to open the following morning, we then disappear and cross over on foot. ...

I actually got the guys lost. I got the guys lost because the sign that I had seen saying Kameelboom, there were two Kameelboom signs, and I didn’t realise that there was one much earlier. So, the one that I had seen would have given us one kilometre or so of arriving into this town of Derdepoort. So, when I was coming with the guys we saw the first Kameelboom, I said gentlemen: “The next stop we get off”. We got off and walked, and walked, and walked until in the morning, one o’clock. And they said: “Keith where’s the border?” I say: “We will see the light”. And there are no lights. And we walked and ultimately we said: “Let’s rather get in, jump the fence of this farm, that kopi, and we sleep there until the following day”. So the following day we wake up, and we go onto this gravel road again, and the guys said: “Keith, where are you taking us?” So we hike a van, fortunately for us the drivers are black people so they wouldn’t ask us a lot of questions. We say: “We are going to Derdepoort”. They say: “Fine”. We arrived in Derdepoort at about three in the afternoon. Okay. But underneath it’s all calluses, we are swollen. So, however, we managed to cross in the evening and walked along the road until we saw a small flickering light. And we went there, and it was a cattle post. Now, the Batswana, as you know, they’ve got cattle posts all over the rural areas. And we went to this house, knocked, introduced ourselves and said that we are students from Gaborone, the capital city. We had come to a party here in the nearest village. We didn’t even know the name of the village, and we’re going back. I think that gentleman must said: “Oh, you mean Sikwane”. We should have said yes. “And now we’re going back to the university”. But the following day we asked him where we could catch transport. He said very much here. So, we got a lift up to Gaborone, and in Gaborone here we are, and we’re walking and you don’t know who you’re walking to. We had taken the balance of all our bursary money from the university, and, the registrar wouldn’t ask you what are you doing? The bursar wouldn’t ask you what are you going to do with your balance. We

had sold all our clothes. What we were carrying was just enough to carry us forward. We had some few rands in our pocket and we entered this town.<sup>1</sup>

Another cadre who took this route during the first half of the 1970s was Johannes Rasegatla. Rasegatla left the country at the end of 1975. He recalls that:

... we were taken out of the country on 12 December 1975. ... I think comrade Mogale negotiated with some people underground, and then somebody by the name of Mohlala drove us from Alexandra right up to Swaziland. ... We didn't have any documentation to go through the border. When the car we were travelling in arrived at the border, he just got out of the car and went to the immigration offices there and he came back and he drove with us. We never left the car; whether he gave those people some money? ... We just went through into Swaziland. We were received in Swaziland by Jacob Zuma, who spent some quality time with us. Apparently he was ... responsible for organising the transport to get us out of the country. ... I think we were in Swaziland for about 3-4 days, and thereafter he organised that we be taken to Mozambique. ... In Mozambique we were there for about a week and then we left for Tanzania. ... I think after about 3 weeks, ... we were in that group of 18 people [that] went to the GDR (German Democratic Republic). ... I think after about a year or nine months, we completed our training and we came back.<sup>2</sup>

Swaziland soon emerged as the key route for the ANC with individuals such as Jethro Ndlovu and Kgalema Motlanthe playing a central role transporting youths from the Durban and Johannesburg areas through to Swaziland where they were met by ANC cadres such as Joseph Ndluli and Stanley Mabizela on the Swaziland side. Motlanthe recalls that at the end of 1975:

... we started thinking that there is a need to start making contact [with the ANC] and find a way in which we could have a secure route [out of the country]. We thought that's what we wanted to do ourselves as a contribution to the struggle. But in the end we were directed to operate inside and not to leave [the country]. Working there in [the] Johannesburg City Council and in those outlets gave us all that space. I was, at one point, taking out a group from Swaziland once a week and nobody knew that I was leaving the country. We used to have one day off every week – different key people, cashiers, my assistant supervisor, and so on. My days off were on Wednesdays. On Tuesday nights we would hit the road. When the border opens we would go through in the morning. I would hand over the comrades who were leaving. By early evening I would leave for home

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Keith Mokoape conducted by Ben Magubane and Gregory Houston on 11 of February 2004, Pretoria, SADET Oral History Project.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Johannes Rasegatla conducted by Gregory Houston and Bernard Magubane, 15 July 2004, Pretoria, SADET Oral History Project.

round about nine-ish. The following day I would be back at work. I worked very well actually.<sup>3</sup>

Cadres were accommodated in safe houses in Swaziland, before being transferred to Tanzania. The independence of Mozambique in 1975 provided the ANC with an opportunity to substantially step up use of the route through Swaziland. Many cadres were transported from Swaziland to Mozambique and thereafter to Tanzania.<sup>4</sup>

However, it was the June 16<sup>th</sup> uprising in Soweto that led to an exodus of young people from South Africa, and a growth of the refugee populations of Swaziland, Botswana, Lesotho and Mozambique. For instance, Houston and Magubane point out that:

Lesotho became a destination of choice for many youths leaving the country. An escape route was established from Cape Town, through Mdantsane near East London or Queenstown, the Transkei, right up to Matatiele on the Lesotho border and then into Lesotho, from where the youths leaving the country illegally were taken across to Swaziland by Dimpho Sekemane (Hani).<sup>5</sup>

Walter Motau was responsible for couriering recruits out of the country at the time. He recalls that there were many routes into Lesotho, through Quthing, Matatiele, Ficksburg and the Transkei.<sup>6</sup> Tony Yengeni was one of those who went into exile through Lesotho. He recalls:

... it was arranged by the underground. We were told that we should not speak about our journey to anybody. We are not going to get any details about our journey beforehand. But we should convene at a certain spot, at a certain time. I think the time was about 5am in the morning. And then we convened there at about 4 and then a car came and took us away. This car drove us to Langa at the flats, single quarters. And in Langa we boarded a bus that took us to the Ciskei. When we went at the Ciskei we were supposed to get off at Queenstown crossing to the railway station where we were going to meet a man with a yellow duster on his left hand to take us further. But we looked for the man with the yellow duster on his left hand for the whole day. And were forced to communicate back to Cape Town that we had lost our man, can they assist us. So we were forced to sleep at Queenstown that night. Then the following day somebody came and picked us up to the Transkei by car. We drove to the Transkei up to ... a certain farm that was owned by one of the most ... of people. We stayed in that farm for a month. ... and we were joined by another group whilst we were there. A bigger group of 8 people from Cape Town. And

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Kgalema Motlanthe conducted by Noor Nieftagodien, 11 November 2001, Johannesburg, SADET Oral History Project.

<sup>4</sup> For more details about the ANC presence in Swaziland and its use as a route to freedom in the early 1970s refer to G. Houston and B. Magubane, 'The ANC political underground in the 1970s', in South African Democracy Education Trust (eds.), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 2, 1970-1980*, UNISA Press, Pretoria, 2006, pp. 425ff.

<sup>5</sup> Houston and Magubane, 'The ANC political underground in the 1970s', p. 424.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Walter Motau.

then the following day after they arrived we left for Lesotho by van. The van was driven by a comrade who was responsible for the farm. We drove up to one of the towns next to the borders and we got off the van and we moved on foot through the border, the fence, we jumped the fence which was the border between Lesotho and South Africa. ... And the driver of the ... van drove the van through the border gate. And then we met him on the other side. We got into the van again and drove to Maseru.<sup>7</sup>

From Lesotho, many new recruits were transported to Tanzania by plane, and thereafter to the MK camps in Angola. Others were taken to Botswana, before being taken out to Angola. One of these was Yengeni, who recalls that they crossed into a town bordering Lesotho in South Africa before taking a train to Mafeking, from where they crossed the border into Botswana. After spending a few days in an ANC refugee house in Lobatse with a 'dozen or two comrades', Yengeni was driven to Lusaka, Zambia from where he was taken by plane to Angola.<sup>8</sup>

Nceba Ndela left South Africa for Lesotho in 1977. He recalls that:

In 1977 I left for Lesotho. I stayed in Lesotho up until August. ... Then 1978 we left from Lesotho for Botswana and then from there to Zambia from Zambia to Angola. ... We went across Herschel, took a bus there and took a train to Johannesburg, then to Botswana. We passed the borders illegally. We crossed the village between Mafikeng and Mmabatho called Kgotsewo, we crossed there. We joined others there. From there we left for Zambia, crossed through [the] Zambesi.<sup>9</sup>

Many MK cadres from the June 16<sup>th</sup> refugees joined the movement after passing through Swaziland and Mozambique. Jeremiah Mamabolo was one of the students who went into exile through Swaziland. He recalls that:

The old man [Zebulon] Duma ... who had his hand cut in an explosion in Swaziland when he went to fetch the mail. Duma, the old man, he was in ANC logistics in Swaziland. ... He was the one who received us. He was the one who helped us cross the border into Mozambique. They received us from the Swaziland side, and their representative then was John Nkadimeng. We stayed at John Nkadimeng's house in Swaziland. How we crossed the border? I didn't jump the fence. ... This fellow put us in a truck carrying bags of mealie meal, and we were made to lie right on top of the mealie meal up there. Apparently these trucks were transporting this maize meal to Swaziland, and so they were now used to these people at the border. And in most cases they were never asked to open and check. They would just go through. But, I've never been so scared in my life.... They didn't open the doors. They talked and talked and in no time we were pulling out and going through. At the celebration, the other end, with the family, this guy took us all out.

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with Tony Yengeni conducted by Wolfie Kodesh, 14 January 1993, Cape Town, Oral History of Exiles Project, MCA 6 – 386, Mayibuye Centre for History and Culture in South Africa.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Nceba Ndela conducted by Brown Maaba, 12 May 2002, SADET Oral History Project.

We were there. We celebrated. We had crossed the border and we were picked up by a kombi there and were taken to John Nkadimeng's house. ... From there, again, we were taken to Mozambique. Again here we were not taken through the proper channels. This is where I jumped the fence. ... I jumped the Swaziland fence into Mozambique with baba Duma. ... So we managed to jump, no problem. We got onto the Maputo side.<sup>10</sup>

Mamabolo and his group were placed in a camp across from the Swaziland Nomahasha border-post. According to Mamabolo,

... the conditions were very difficult. Mozambique had just got its independence, and just the food... I mean, for us it was a real cultural shock; coming from home, comfortable. ... I think the ANC itself was not very ready to receive such huge numbers of people. ... Suddenly you had this flood of people. ... From Nomahasha we were then taken to Angola, where we met thousands of others who came from home.<sup>11</sup>

Many others that took the Swaziland route would be taken to Tanzania first, where they would pass through a safe house known as Mkhumbane in the Temeke suburb of Dar es Salaam. Denis Ramphomane took this route:

Soweto went up in flames. Everything that belonged to the government and the City Council was burnt down and at some stage some people lost their lives. From then on I left home and we went to Carltonville at the mines. From the mines we went to Hammanskraal. It was myself and 'George Motaoka' – Minden Motsa – 'George Motaoka' was [later] his MK name. From there we organized with some guys – Simpi Mogopodi. His name is Abraham Mogopodi, but his MK name was 'Simpi Molefane.' We planned together that we should go to into exile. We were a group of eight. The eight of us left the same night. We knew exactly that we were going to Tanzania. We had to go through Swaziland, Mozambique and then end up in Tanzania. Who helped us is a guy called Mafanta. He used to stay in Naledi. He was owning some business there. This guy used to provide us with money. And then there was a certain Traffic Officer, called Jomo Khele. Jomo Khele assisted us with transport. And Jomo Khele because he was still working with Department of Traffic, he used to go around checking, scouting on the roads, whether the route is clear [of danger] and all those things. We were driven [i.e. to the border] by a certain chap, he is late, called Sage and Tokyo's younger brother, Johnny Sekxwale. They drove us into Swaziland. From Swaziland, we remained there in the care of the late Stanley Mabizela. He was our [i.e. ANC] Chief Rep in Swaziland. Then from Swaziland we went into Mozambique, where we met Jacob Zuma and another Comrade called Lennox Tshali. We skipped the country on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September 1976. And then in Maputo, Zuma and Lennox used to take care of us. Mozambique, I am sure it was something like two or three weeks. We did not stay long in Mozambique. From there we

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with Jeremiah Mamabolo conducted by Bernard Magubane and Gregory Houston, 6 February 2004, Pretoria, SADET Oral History Project.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.



proceeded to Tanzania, in Dar es Salaam, in a place called Temeke. We stayed there for another three weeks. I remember that before the end of September I was already in Angola. From Tanzania we flew to Angola towards the end of September. We were a group of about two hundred and fifty. The ANC with the help of the OAU or whatever, I don't know, they chartered a flight to Angola.<sup>12</sup>

Johannesburg-based student Jabu Moleketi left the country in the aftermath of the Soweto uprising.

...we ultimately left around the first week of December 1976. It was just a few days after Tokyo Sexwale was involved in the grenade incident along the border. When we left we were leaving illegally. And it was quite a heavy patrol of police around the border areas. We left through Amsterdam, the Swazi-South Africa border. The nearest border post was Amsterdam. The person who took us was Ian Rwaxa. We went into Swaziland. [We] stayed a few days and then went to Mozambique. Then ultimately our training took place in Mozambique, which was a crash course.<sup>13</sup>

Another cadre who used the Swaziland route was Sizwe Matshakiza, who had been responsible for taking people out of the country but was forced to leave in 1978.

Now, in 1978, around March, I can't remember the exact date, but it was in March, I was told to go on leave. And things started not working OK. I received a message from Swaziland. First, let me say that at that time one was having an appointment to go to Swaziland; I had taken my leave to actually go to Swaziland for discussions and, I guess, some kind of brief crash-course training. But then that plan was disrupted by the fact that I received a message that I should immediately come out: things were no longer OK. ... Ja, you know what I would say is that we used to have two trips a week. We were using a train that left Johannesburg at about 7:30, 7 o'clock to, was it?, Komatipoort - I can't remember - but comrades would get off near Amsterdam. That was a route that we used - I know the route - near Amsterdam. I think the station was called Camden Station. Now, we used to take people out on Tuesdays and on Thursdays - there were these two trips. Obviously I was employed at that time. I was not in a position to be always moving through that route. So there were these comrades, including Comrade Eric Ngeleza and one Comrade, I believe he's the late Oupa, and another one from Port Elizabeth - was it Themba, I think was his name, I can't remember exactly. But they were actually the people who were running this route. And we would say that if we have taken out four people, then it was a bad week at that time. But it used to be in the region, I would say an average of about 10 at that stage. ... One then left to Swaziland, to Mozambique rather, stayed in Mozambique for about three weeks or so, en route to Angola, stopped over one night in Zambia, then the next day we left for

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Denis Ramphomane conducted by Bernard Mbenga, 11 June 2004, Mmabatho, SADET Oral History Project.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Jabu Moleketi conducted by Ben Magubane, 2 April 2004, Johannesburg, SADET Oral History Project.

Angola. I stayed, I think, for two days in the city of Luanda itself; then I was transferred to a camp called Funda.<sup>14</sup>

As indicated above, Botswana remained one of the most widely used routes out of the country in the 1970s. Most South African refugees that entered Botswana in the aftermath of the Soweto uprising were accommodated in safe houses rented by the PAC and ANC because there was no refugee camp in the country at the time. These were basically transit centres where recruits were accommodated before being transferred to another country. Nceba Faku described the route through Botswana in the mid-1970s in the following terms:

... there was a very reliable rumour of the route. You know you take a train from PE to Johannesburg, and then from Johannesburg you take a train to another place, I think Mafikeng, or just before Mafikeng. You go out of the train. You then walk to the border, towards a particular direction and people there in the area more or less would be able to help you and give you direction: what is the route to Botswana and so on. Show you the Botswana fence. The route was never a problem. .. And then when you are there, you are out of the [reach of the] South African government. You go to the police station and then they know you are South Africans. You look for the ANC office or go to the refugee house. The police would take you to the refugee house. And then there, the police in Botswana, in that area of the border they knew more or less what the South Africans are doing. So they would take them to various places. There would be one or two Botswana police that were working with the security police. So if it was unfortunate for you, they would take you and put you in a particular place where the South African police would somehow capture you and bring you back. We had a few of those even on Robben Island. There was a case I think of abduction, where a person said I was leaving the country and then I was abducted in Botswana because South African police had no legal rights to arrest me in Botswana.<sup>15</sup>

An MK cadre who went into exile during the course of the Soweto uprising was Jerry Matsile, who left through the Botswana route.

Immediately after June 16, after the arrest of Joe, we had to leave the country. We [were] being seven ... and then we went to Botswana. ... When we left, we also passed [through Mafeking]. ... We were walking. From Seweding [near MMabatho] we walked to Makgobistad. We crossed [the RSA-Botswana border] there. Crossing there was not easy because already people started moving there; it was becoming a common thing. There were some people there who were working for the Boers [i.e. security police] and some guys who wanted to mislead us to say: "We can help you. Come this way." But, fortunately there were some women there who knew about the activities of these guys and said: "No, no, no, never follow those guys. Just cross; those people [in Botswana] will help you." And then we crossed into Botswana and the Botswana Police welcomed

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with Sizwe Matshakiza conducted by Howard Barrell, 17 December 1990, Johannesburg.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Nceba Faku conducted by Pat Gibbs, 26 June 2004, East London, SADET Oral History Project.

us. Immediately they phoned Lobatse. Once they got the information, they would come and collect us quickly because of they knew of the activities of the [RSA] Security Police. They took us to Lobatse. After taking our particulars, we went to Gaborone, in Bontleng. That is where we were staying, in a residence which was later destroyed in the June 14 raid. In Bontleng, I just stayed for, maybe, a week and then we were flown to Zambia. Zambia was just a transit. At the end we were in Tanzania. In Tanzania we were staying in a place called Temeke. That is where I met people like Denis Ramphomane and the others. Then there was an old man I told you about earlier that who was working with my father, Mr Morodi Mashego. He was in charge of us, our commander there in Temeke. He was teaching us political guidance. It was quite interesting because, by then, most of us did not know about the ANC. It was the first time I saw Oliver Tambo, when he came there to slaughter a goat for us. ... Then in 1977, we started moving out, some to Angola, to the Soviet Union and so on. ... From Tanzania I went to Angola. In Angola we underwent our training. We opened that camp in Novo Catengue in 1977. ... After completing my training, I was one of the guys selected for specialized training in the German Democratic Republic. After completing that training, I came back to Angola.<sup>16</sup>

Keith Mokoape was based in Botswana at the time of the uprising.

So when Soweto started, the uprising, we were in Botswana and we were now in the very position that back in 1973 we had said to the ANC the necessary preparations have got to be done because a storm is coming. And so when these young people were coming, the Botswana police were positioned with us to say, whenever a group arrives or even crosses the border, they would phone us and say there is a group here. Now the group is neither ANC, nor PAC: it's fighting youth. And we would say to them: "Now, here are the options. You want to go to military training or you want to go to school?" So we got accused of cheating on students and youth who were not ANC and sort of indirectly getting them into the ANC. And we said let everybody be active. If the PAC is organised it can do the same thing. If you are of a political organisation that the Botswana government can allow to work, so be it. Many, many students did not know that when you look at the map of South Africa and you see a dot saying Mafikeng, it's actually 26 kilometres from Mafikeng to the border. To this day we don't know how many got lost because they will be captured by the police and not be reported anywhere. But the police also took advantage. They trained some young people, especially children of the police, trained them at secret camps. Get them to know the Communist Manifesto, the Freedom Charter, the politics of the ANC, and then say: "You have been part of this burning of the school. When you arrive there you are as revolutionary as each one of them. Because, after all, these other students don't know that we have briefed you. They may just know that you are a son of policeman so and so. But you've been with them". A number of them actually fooled me.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Jerry Matsile conducted by Bernard Magubane, 6 August 2004, Mmabatho, SADET Oral History Project.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Keith Mokoape conducted by Bernard Magubane and Gregory Houston, 11 February 2004, Pretoria, SADET Oral History Project.

The Botswana route was virtually unchanged from that used during the previous decade. However, the influx of refugees during and after the Soweto uprising led to the rapid expansion of the number of safe houses used by the ANC to accommodate new recruits. A number of refugees spent time in Botswana, before being flown to Dar es Salaam via Lusaka. Abraham Lentsoane, for example, travelled from Johannesburg to Gaborone by bus, exiting the country legally with his passport through the South Africa-Botswana border in 1976. From Gaborone, where he stayed for two weeks, he flew to Lusaka with a group of other MK recruits and then on to Dar es Salaam. After spending a month in Dar es Salaam, Lentsoane was flown to Luanda in Angola, where he was initially deployed to the Engineering camp. He was then sent to Benguela camp and then on to Novo Catengue.<sup>18</sup>

In 1985, South African commandos invaded Botswana and killed a number of South African refugees whom the South African government considered to be 'terrorists'. This action posed a security risk and a decision was taken by the Botswana government to establish the Dukwe Refugee Camp about 130 kilometres north-west of Francistown. A number of ANC cadres passed through Dukwe camp on the way to their final destination, the ANC camps in Tanzania and Angola.

One of these was Kenny Leleki, who was part of a group of new recruits who had entered Botswana individually or in groups in 1985. Leleki recalls that at Dukwe they attended programmes such as the morning sport, then kitchen duty, breakfast and then new comrades would be elected to gather firewood and others would be involved in political discussion classes until a fixed programme was prepared. During lunch everybody ate and then they would all gather firewood so that they could have enough around the camp for cooking. The afternoon programme would begin after lunch and it consisted of political discussions and some would go to the plots to plant vegetables or clean the camp. Sometimes they would have jazz hour in the evening which comprised of singing revolutionary songs until bedtime. There were instances when comrades would disobey orders. Some would go to the village to get drunk and would be corrected (not punished) so that they do not do it again. Then it was time to leave Francistown. They took a red bakkie to the train station and about 30 - 35 of them boarded that train.

The train was headed for Plumtree in Zimbabwe where they were met by their representative. They were given money for food but it was given to only one person while another person carried their files. They went to Bulawayo and since the next train would only arrive later they went to the Victoria Hotel which was situated next to Nobengula Street. The train arrived in the morning and they left for Harare. They were instructed to wait on the platform in Harare for somebody who would arrive to fetch them. That person would say nothing but would just stand

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with Abraham Lentsoane conducted by Wolfie Kodesh, 5 April 1993, Johannesburg, Oral History of Exiles Project, MCA 6-305, Mayibuye Centre for History and Culture in South Africa.

in front of them and they should follow him without asking any questions. They did as they were told and got into various kombis that took them to a suburb where they met comrades they had not seen in a long time. Some were amputees who discouraged them from going to the camps as life was extreme there. But they were not deterred. Then they left for the airport. They were given their flight tickets by their representative and they left.

Weizmann Hamilton, a member of the Black Consciousness Movement, also passed through Dukwe in the early 1980s. He recalls that Dukwe was:

... about between 5 and 600 kilometres from Gaborone, close towards the Namibian border where we had to live in tents. I fortunately had already gotten married to a Botswana citizen so I was entitled to continue staying. But I went to visit the camp there. The conditions were terrible, and the people were grouped where they came from politically. You had the PAC setup. You had [the] Black Consciousness setup. You had the ANC setup. And the guy in the ANC camp had a much better life. They got an allowance more than the others. They had opportunities because of the diplomatic things that the ANC had with the UN [and] with other governments. There were opportunities to get out and nobody wanted to stay there. And I think in that sense that was a very important event in collapsing the existence of the remnants of the Black Consciousness Movement in Botswana: others before went to London and formed the Black Consciousness Movement of Azania out there.<sup>19</sup>

PAC cadre Letlapa Mphahlele also spent time at Dukwe in the early 1980s.

We reached our destination, a cluster of huts that had been built by the Zimbabweans. My companion told me that the camp covered about five square km (sic) and once housed twenty thousand Zimbabwean refugees. All but a few hundred had gone back to Zimbabwe after the Smith government, the British government and the Zimbabwean liberation movements had signed the Lancaster Agreement, paving the way to democracy in their country. Their huts were now empty.

John and Morena showed me the hut that was to be mine. They helped me clean the hut and gave me a candle, a box of matches, three blankets and a sponge mattress. They warned me about snakes and scorpions and said that they had killed a big snake near their hut that very day.

After they left, I had a restless night under the cloudless and starlit African sky. The buzzing and stinging mosquitos kept me awake. There was an earthy smell from the mud floor and walls and the thatched roof. I did not cover my body as it was hot and dry.

I woke up at sunrise and surveyed my new surroundings. There was bush all around us, with a lot of mophane trees (that sustain mophane worms). The mud huts of Dukwe were built in clusters. Some refugees used blue tents supplied by the United Nations.

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Weizmann Hamilton conducted by Simon Zwane, 22 October 2004, Eldorado Park, Johannesburg, SADET Oral History Project.

Many youths fleeing the country after the Soweto uprising that eventually joined the PAC passed through the same routes used by those that joined MK. Following the release of political prisoners in the early to mid 1970s, the PAC underground inside the country was revived by older members such as Zeph Mothopeng, John Ganya, Mark Shinnars and Isaac Mafatshe. These individuals played a key role in transporting youths out of the country during and after the uprising. John Ganya was the leading figure in taking groups of youths to Swaziland and Botswana for military training. Julius Landingwe and Zolile Ndindwa were responsible for transporting young people from the Western Cape to Johannesburg, from where they were taken to Swaziland. The PAC would use taxis or hire cars to take the new recruits to Swaziland or Botswana.<sup>20</sup> Mr S. Qhina, a PAC veteran who was responsible for recruiting for APLA during the course of the Soweto uprising states that:

There were officials in Lesotho who received the people we were sending out and they would from Lesotho send them through to Botswana and the officials there would send them through to other countries for training. That's how it worked. ... It was very difficult to cross the borders. They couldn't cross during the day because there were also crocodiles. They don't eat you while you are inside the water. They jump on you when you leave the water. They can't bite when you are inside the water. They would wait until the sunset and then cross the river and go under a fence that separates the border which crosses in the river. I also saw one day when we went to Lesotho how they crossed the border. The police would go up and down with their vehicles guarding the border. The fence was an electric fence. There are six rows of electric fence that you have to go through. The vehicles patrol through the fences. We would guard the cars when they pass and then cross. They wouldn't get arrested once they have crossed to Lesotho ...<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> T. Ka Plaatjie, 'The PAC's internal underground activities, 1960-1980', pp. 697-9.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Mr. S. Qhina

## Chapter 7

### ANC and PAC camps and training abroad in the 1970s and 1980s

In the first half of the 1970s, the main destination for military training abroad for MK cadres was the Soviet Union. Charles Sitsubi was sent for military training in Moscow in 1975. He recalled that:

I was made the commander of the unit that went to Moscow, the then Union of Soviet Socialist Republic, where my unit specialised in what we call military and combat work. This is the art of creation of the revolutionary army. This combined also military training. We went there at the end of 1975 up to August 76. And then on completion of the course we went to Angola. But let me say when I was in the Soviet Union, it was such an exciting [experience]. I used to say I'm behind the iron curtain to feel elated and all, you see. I am in Red Square. It was really fulfilling in terms of spirit. ...

You know what the Russians do? You are never told where you are for security reasons. And mostly sometimes the places we go, you wake up hidden in the morning in a camp. And you won't know where you are geographically. And you ask that question you won't be told where you are. ...

It was a military garrison, not a camp; the whole military district around Moscow. Well it was within the Moscow military district under the directorship of the minister of Home Affairs. From day one when you arrived there you mingled with other soldiers..... First and foremost, we had fighters from the PLO, Sandinistas....

So there were many names of liberation fighters [in what was] called [the] International camp. We shared bilateral talks, strategies and tactics. ... And what I specialised in is what we call MCW, standing for Military and Combat Work. The theme of this course is the art of creating a revolutionary underground. Having qualified there we were to be re-infiltrated back into the country, to come and build what we call revolutionary cells. Our unit was not an assault unit or combat unit in terms of armaments. .. There were so many South African units. Some specialising in propaganda, education and information; others specialising in sabotage, like Tokyo's brother, and some specialising in communication. ... So there were many fields of specialisation. A new unit is created out of various specialities to make one unit. For example, in my unit when I came inside the country I had a comrade who specialised in sabotage.<sup>1</sup>

Sitsubi stayed in Moscow for about a year.

...it was [a] general military course: the use of tactics in the field: the weaponry, explosives, politics, Marxist-Lenin politics. You know, that involves political economy,

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Charles Sitsubi, 19 July 2001, SADET Oral History Project.

historical materialism and dialectics as well. All that fused together. ... I discovered that to them a year becomes a year. If it happens to be a Tuesday let's say the 1<sup>st</sup> is the International Working day. You must replace that Tuesday with a Sunday. So on Sunday we will be in a classroom. ... But basically all basic training specialised with this ability to create underground work.<sup>2</sup>

After the influx of youth during and after the 1976 Soweto uprising, a number of MK cadres were sent to the Soviet Union for training in special courses. One of these was Dennis Ramphomane.

From there I went to the Soviet Union for specialization in artillery and an artillery piece called "Grand P" ? This is a small Stalin Organ, a very powerful weapon. From the Soviet Union we came back during 1978, around May.

Ramphomane also underwent training in a camp of the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) in Angola:

We went to Angola and from Angola we went to Zambia, in the eastern part of Zambia. We were with some ZIPRA guys [i.e. Joshua Nkomo's military wing of ZAPU]. We were doing a survival course for three weeks. We did it for three weeks and then one extra week was added into our training. ...

The conditions were bad because there was no food. We had to go around hunting to get food to eat. Mind you, it was a survival course. We had to go around hunting but then we could not come across any animal there. The only animal we could come across was a mouse. And one day we were hungry and we got hold of this poor mouse and we 'chowed' it, you see. We did not have a match, we did not have anything. We used to use, eh, apply old methods of making fire by taking a stick and some dry grass that causes friction....<sup>3</sup>

In the late 1970s a number of cadres were sent to the German Democratic Republic (GDR) for training. This included Sizwe Matshakiza, who stated that in the GDR:

We were trained in small arms. That is AK, pistols, explosives, hand grenades – not heavy artillery – MCW. ...Especially MCW. ... Ja, what used to happen is we used to stay in a house in GDR and only go out to the shooting range or to a camp for fixed periods. And you would find in the camps when you go there - I think it's small camps, specially prepared for such kind of training - it would be vacated; we would be the only people there with their instructors. And then, let's say, we were going to do orientation or topography, we would go

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Denis Ramphomane conducted by Bernard Mbenga, 11 June 2004, Mmabatho, SADET Oral History Project.



with the instructors, do the marching at night, using our compasses and so on, come back, perhaps do some shooting, then go back to the flat after that. That was the kind of training that we received. Writing of leaflets, using of roneo machines, leaflet launchers as well. ... Obviously, under MCW, survival, how to create legends, how to create DLBs, cover stories.<sup>4</sup>

Lincoln Ngculu recalled his training in the GDR in 1978 as follows:

Our destination was Teterow, in the northern part of the GDR. We arrived at a double storey building with a basement. We were then asked to take our belongings inside the building, whereupon rooms were allocated to us and we were then shown the washing area and other necessary places. Two people were allocated to each room. Smoking was not allowed in the room. There were designated places, called 'smokers' corner', where people could smoke. The level of discipline required immediately impressed us. We were shown how to make our beds – the bed had to be well-organised with no strands allowed. We were then shown how to pack our clothes in the wardrobe and how to fold our shirts and vests. We used a newspaper called "Morning Star" for our measurements. The "Morning Star" was the newspaper of the Communist Party of Great Britain. The wardrobe had to be neat and well-organised. Regular room inspections were held to check on the state of organisation in each room. If any room was in disarray the responsible person would be called in front of the group to be reprimanded and given a warning.

We normally woke up at about five in the morning. There was no bell but a whistle. We had to be in our full training gear within five minutes. The physical training instructor then led us to our morning exercises. After the exercises we were given thirty minutes to have a shower and be in formation in the dining hall for breakfast. The food was splendid and in abundance. We had not had such food for a long time. This included boiled or fried eggs, with bread and sausage and a glass of milk, followed by tea. Lunch was also good, with potatoes forming a sort of staple food, and pork. We always enjoyed the food and the way the Germans ensured that we ate a lot. It was important to eat and be strong because the training itself was demanding.

The training was the mandatory morning exercises that mainly consisted of running on a track that was normally used for motorbike racing. It was a heavy track to run on and we had to run for very long distances. After breakfast we were also required to go to the gymnasium for other exercises and judo lessons. The programme was more or less similar to the other training we had undergone, but at a higher level and better resourced than the training courses we had in Africa. We used blanks for shooting. We would shout and imitate the noises made by guns when practising tactics such as ambushes and raids. The training gear was a bit cumbersome. You were expected to be in full military gear with your rucksack, field spade, field saw and helmet. We did not like the helmet, which was a bit cumbersome and inconvenient around the neck. The training was physically demanding. The set of obstacles to be overcome was slightly different to the ones we

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Sizwe Matshakiza conducted by Howard Barrell, 17 December 1990, Johannesburg.

used in Angola. These included a tree-high rope that you had to climb up and then cross a big gap of trees on another rope. The other difficult obstacle was running on a see saw plank. But after a while we got accustomed to the obstacles and most of us would scale them with ease.

The politics lectures were delivered by both German and South African instructors. Germans are generally proud people. They would boast about prominent German writers on politics and philosophy, such as Hegel and Karl Marx, Germans in science such as Hertz, and Germans in the military sciences such as Clausewitz. The instructor would emphasise that we should not regurgitate everything they say but use the lectures as a guide. We would be told that Marxism-Leninism is not a dogma but a guide to action. This became a bit intricate when we discussed the national question. We would think of Jack Simons's lectures when discussing the national question and Lenin's writings on the Soviet Union. We would agree that even Lenin could not solve the national question in the Soviet Union. Some of us contended that because of our empirical experience the application of the national question in Russia was prone to create tensions and ruptures because of the dominance of the Russians over other national groups.

One instructor once asked us whether there was one or two German nations. This debate lasted almost a whole week. At the time Germany was divided into the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) –West Germany – and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) – East Germany. Some argued that that there were two nations while others said that there was one German nation. Ultimately, the argument that there were two German nations prevailed. This was based on the use of Stalin's definition of the nation where he emphasised that the key criterion for the nation is the economic system.

Even though the training was tough and demanding, we were all gaining a lot of weight. We were gradually running out of clothes that fit us. The most pleasant periods were the weekends. We would clean our rooms and then go for lunch. After lunch we would play volleyball or some other indoor game such as scrabble or chess. In the evening we would have supper and then go to the clubroom downstairs. There we would get beers, aperitifs and brandy. We would play music and watch TV whilst enjoying our drinks. This would be a time when we would begin to think about township life in South Africa. When a song appeared on TV we would dance the township style and for a time we would completely forget about exile. There were those who drank liquor for the first time and would get so drunk that the following day they could not remember what happened. There were those who were in the habit of over-indulging and would forget about discipline. When it came to criticism and self-criticism meetings the problems arising from the abuse of liquor would be raised and comrades would be told to learn how to behave.

When we had completed approximately four months of training we were told to prepare for a week-long holiday. This was in preparation for the next session of the training that would take us to another place called the Summer camp. We had already heard stories about the Summer camp from previous groups. All of us were scared and intimidated by this camp and yet looked forward to the experience. We were quite fit and we all wanted the challenge.

On the day our holiday began we prepared our luggage and boarded the bus for the journey to the southern part of the GDR. We were taken to the Thuringian forest near the border with Czechoslovakia, to a town called Suhl. We were accommodated in a holiday house owned by the Socialist Party of Germany (SED) and told to forget for a while that we were soldiers. After we were allocated rooms we were taken to the dining hall where we were shown the bar and given a buffet dinner. There were no regulations regarding the time to sleep or wake up. Everything depended on the individual. We had our meal with drinks, particularly beer. Within no time we finished the beer in the fridge and requested an additional supply. We would mix the beer with brandy and most of us got totally drunk. The following morning we drank the wines we took along to 'cure' the hangover. Every day after breakfast we would be taken on an excursion, which once included a visit to the Wartburg castle where Martin Luther translated the bible into German.

After the holiday we went back to Teterow for our preparations for the Summer camp. Things were completely different at the Summer camp. We were now back in the army barracks, which was such an anti-climax. We were welcomed during the first night by a mock attack. We had to jump out of bed immediately and put on all our gear. A quick inspection was held and those not properly dressed were reprimanded. We were then told that the camp was under attack and that we had to retreat. After going through various battle exercises we returned to the camp in the afternoon after having had only a few hours sleep the previous night. We were tired and hungry. The food we were given was not nice and consisted mainly of cabbage and potatoes. In the afternoon we were taken on an obstacle course. The obstacle field at the camp was huge and had a number of obstacles we were not familiar with. After going through the obstacle course we went on a long march which lasted over two days with limited breaks. While marching we would be attacked and had to retreat a number of times. At the end of the march all of us had sore feet plastered with blisters. On the way to the base we had to go through the obstacle course again while in such pain. There was no way of escaping because the only route back to the base was through the obstacle field. The holiday mood disappeared and life was similar to that we had while we were in the camps in Africa.

After a month we completed the course at the Summer camp and then travelled back north to Teterow. We were all very tired and the only opportunity we had to sleep was while we were travelling in the bus. We knew that in Teterow things were not going to get better. However, we knew that at least the living conditions there were better.

A number of ANC instructors joined us at Teterow. These instructors would take us through South African history and the history of the ANC. Pallo Jordan, a member of the June 16<sup>th</sup> Detachment, was responsible for teaching us the history of colonialism and the wars of resistance. He was a moving encyclopaedia on our history and, as products of Bantu Education, we hated the way the National Party (NP) used this education system to brainwash us. Francis Meli presented a course on the history of the ANC. He was a person with a wry sense of humour. Aziz Pahad lectured on the period of the "Roaring Fifties" up to the banning of the ANC. He would come to the lectures well prepared with written notes that he would go through very quickly. We always struggled to keep up with him and in order to do so had to engage in discussions with him during leisure time.

We would play table tennis with him. He was so good that he would beat our best players. Ronnie Kasrils presented a course on the history of MK in what we called the MK Series. He would take us through the course from “Why had the time come to turn to armed struggle” to the “Significance of the Wankie-Sipolilo Battles”. He would also deal with Jack Simons’ favourite topic: understanding of subjective and objective conditions.

After the course was completed it was time for us to specialise in military engineering. The emphasis here was on sabotage, booby traps and home-made explosives. Only ten people were selected for this part of the course. The selection was based on the ability to deal with mathematical calculations, in particular the ability to understand mathematical formulas. The main implements used during the course were those universally available such as drawing pins, pegs, tins and other electronic equipment. After completing the engineering course it was time to return to Africa.<sup>5</sup>

During the 1980s, a number of MK cadres were sent to Cuba for specialized training. One of these was Nceba Ndela, who stated that: ‘In 1986 [I] left for Cuba. ... I did engineering, military engineering, small arms, [and] manufacturing explosives. After 18 months I came back to Lusaka again.’<sup>6</sup>

In 1969, ANC and PAC camps in Tanzania were closed down when the Tanzanian government expelled both organizations from the country.<sup>7</sup> The ANC had to withdraw all its military personnel from Kongwa camp within fourteen days of receiving a notice to vacate in July 1969. Most members of MK were sent to the Soviet Union at short notice.<sup>8</sup> However, when the ANC was allowed to return to Tanzania in 1971, Kongwa continued to be the major MK camp in the early 1970s.

The influx of recruits following the Soweto uprising led to a growth of MK numbers in Dar es Salaam. Most passed through Mkhumbane, a safe house in Temeke. Graham Morodi was in charge of the safe house, and he was responsible for giving the recruits physical exercises in preparation for their military training. They were also provided with political training, and Mark Shope taught them trade unionism and the history of the labour movement in South Africa and politics in general. Elias Mahlase (Banda) introduced them to military tactics.<sup>9</sup>

In the second half of the 1970s, however, a process began that led to the establishment of MK camps in Angola. The independence of Angola in 1975 provided the ANC with the opportunity to seek out assistance from the Angolans for sites to set up military camps. Angola was sufficiently distant from South Africa to ensure that the camps would be secure from attack,

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<sup>5</sup> L. Ngculu, *The honour to serve*, pp. 90-94.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Nceba Ndela conducted by Brown Maaba, 12 May 2002, SADET Oral History Project.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the reasons for the expulsion refer to S. Ndlovu, ‘The ANC’s diplomacy and international relations’, in South African Democracy Education Trust (eds.), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 2, 1970-1980*, Pretoria, UNISA Press, 2006, p. 662; Ka Plaatjie, ‘The PAC in exile’, p. 732..

<sup>8</sup> Ndlovu, ‘The ANC’s diplomacy and international relations’, p. 662-3.

<sup>9</sup> Senzangakhona et al., ‘UMkhonto remembered – Part two’.

while Mozambique, because of its greater vulnerability, only allowed the ANC to have transit camps. Negotiations with the Angolans began at the beginning of 1976 and by the end of the year the ANC had set up its first military camp. Cassius Make was appointed chief representative and, together with Max Moabi, established bases with the necessary infrastructure. The first group of MK soldiers in Angola was sent to a camp in the south of Luanda called Gabella, in the province of Kwanza Sul. Gabella was a small town near Porto Amboim and Gambalu. Opened in 1976, Gabella was occupied by people who had gone into exile in the 1960s.<sup>10</sup> They were joined by the first batch of twenty-one new recruits on the 7<sup>th</sup> September 1976. Thus, Gabella also catered for the first group of 40 MK cadres to receive military training in Angola, and was under the command of FAPLA (Peoples Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola) and Cuban instructors.<sup>11</sup>

This camp was closed in 1977 when ANC cadres in Angola were deployed to a camp called Novo Catengue, and later to Funda, Quibaxe, Fazenda and elsewhere. Soon after the establishment of the Gabella camp, groups of new recruits were brought from Tanzania and other forward areas and were sent to a transit camp in Luanda called Engineering. This was a huge complex where Mozambican soldiers, Cuban internationalists and cadres of the Zimbabwe African People's Union were quartered.<sup>12</sup> The first group arrived from Tanzania in late October or early November 1976 and included seven women, who were accommodated at the former South African Embassy in Luanda, while the men were housed at Engineering. Abraham Lentsoane, who arrived at Engineering in December 1976, recalls that it was merely a reception camp at the time, basically a workshop with a lot of mechanical implements. The recruits began with a physical exercise routine and informal classes to introduce them to military science. Recruits were also introduced to subjects such as Orientation in the terrain, Topography, the theory of fire-arms, and military engineering. The recruits used uniforms supplied by the OAU, in brown, yellow and green.<sup>13</sup> Engineering was closed in 1977, as was Gabella, and everybody was moved to Novo Catengue in the south.<sup>14</sup> Solly Shoke recalls his training at Engineering camp in the following terms:

We first went to a camp called Engineering in Luanda. And then we were separated. [My first military training] was a short course specialising in urban warfare. I did a lot of training in between, but that was the initial training. And then we were back into the country. Urban warfare involves security and counter security, intelligence and counter intelligence. It involves engineering, how to bridge minefields, how to construct explosives using home-made equipment, how to use remote control devices, booby traps

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<sup>10</sup> Refer to G. Houston and B. Magubane, 'The ANC's armed struggle in the 1970s', in South African Democracy Education Trust (eds.), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 2, 1970-1980*, Pretoria, UNISA Press, 2006, p. 468; Ngculu, *The honour to serve*, pp. 42-3.

<sup>11</sup> Senzangakhona et. Al. 'UMkhonto remembered – Part two'.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Houston and Magubane, 'The ANC's armed struggle in the 1970s', pp. 468-9.

and so forth, how to fight within a closed area, close combat, how to fight in a built up area, and so forth. You fight within enemy lines and in the long run it is meant to support the guerrilla force when they launch the final offensive. It's those people who are inside the urban areas [who must] be the leading force to launch the final offensive. South Africa was not suitable for classical guerrilla warfare where one would go into the bush. So we had to rely on the people and urban warfare was suitable for our cities because South Africa was and still is a developed country.

Political training was the focus of [the] main effort as far as the ANC is concerned. I can say [that] the ANC invested a lot politically in MK. Before you could do anything in MK, you [had] to be politically mature, and the ANC had to be convinced that you were politically [mature]; you were able to make politically sound decisions and whatever you did actually was not going to be in contrast with the ANC. I can say in fact [that the] bread and butter of the ANC [then] was politics. We ate politics, we slept politics. There was nothing to discuss outside politics and that was the occupation of each and every MK cadre.<sup>15</sup>

Dennis Ramphomane began his training at Engineering camp in 1976, and went to a number of other camps as well as the Soviet Union.

Our training was supposed to ... be for two months but we could not remain there for two months because there were mosquitoes and the conditions were not that conducive for training for us to remain there. But the material was there; we had instructors. We were with a group of, I should think, thirty-four from SWAPO. We [ANC] were twenty-three.<sup>16</sup>

The other ANC camp in Angola at the time was in Benguela, which also accommodated MK recruits before Novo Catengue was established in 1977. Benguela camp, in the south of Angola, was in a dry, desolate place. The only house in the camp was used by Cuban forces guarding the area. It was a double-storey building, while a care-taker's quarters and an unroofed building were the only other structures on the camp. There was no accommodation for the recruits, and no water and sanitation facilities. The 11 women in the first group to be housed at Benguela camp were given a room to share in the house and the 500 men were accommodated in tents. Malaria was a very serious problem in this camp. The training for the general course was started almost immediately. The day's schedule began with physical exercises, followed by morning ablutions. After breakfast, the recruits were assembled and some cadres read out the news to them. This was followed by instruction: firearm training, political classes, shooting range practice, marching and drill. While one company was busy with one of the activities, another was doing a different

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with General Solly Shoke conducted by Ben Magubane, 2 June 2004, Pretoria, SADET Oral History Project.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Denis Ramphomane conducted by Bernard Mbenga, 11 June 2004, Mmabatho, SADET Oral History Project.

part of the course. Lunch followed and the instruction continued in the afternoon until about 16H00. The general course took six months, followed by specialised training that lasted between three and four months.<sup>17</sup> Charles Sitsubi was among the MK cadres deployed to Benguela camp when it was opened in 1976.

1976, our first camp was in Benguela outside Luanda, when we had our first ... suicide. So his grave lies there near the sea. ... It was simple frustrations and tensions. You know, to be in the bush was stressful to others. To me, I was used to boarding school [which I] started at the young age. I never had problem. ... There are many factors really; stressfulness of the combat situation as well because earlier on before we came to Benguela, I was placed in a central area called Ruambo. And in a place called Kalimo there was a strong South African backed UNITA (National Union for the Total Liberation of Angola) [stronghold of [Jonas] Savimbi. We were working to the limit there; we were fighting. We were not in the front line. We were in a Cuban contingency there; reconnaissance unit to establish military camps. But we had to withdraw from the area because it was too hostile for us.

I stayed for two months because I was a commissar there [at Benguela camp], part of the political commissariat. The unit was under comrade Mark [Shope]. I stayed a month or two there. ... The whole [Angolan] nation was in the middle of war. It was difficult to get supplies. But with the help of Fidel Castro of Cuba and his armed forces – who were in the international mission in Angola – we managed to share their supplies with us because that was the main reliable source of supplies. We ate tuna fish from Cuba. We got rice either locally or from Cuba or even Moscow; sugar, tin stuffs, a lot of them. Moscow was supplying us there in the camps. But locally, [we got] a lot of very good Angolan fruit. Mangos, guavas, tropical bananas, etc. ...

The camp was basically run by Cubans. They were the key guys that were training our [cadres]. ... We came as an administrative staff. But training was in the hands of the Cubans.<sup>18</sup>

Another description of life in this camp is provided by Abraham Lentsoane:

Came into the camp, allocated to the platoons. We started ... proper military training. ... it's fire arms, engineering, ... training, politics, topography, just a combination of their military science doing different aspects. But this is ... general course. ... all the instructions were planned and executed by our comrades ... South Africans. ... Benguella, where we were, [was] almost a flat area....<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Houston and Magubane, 'The ANC's armed struggle in the 1970s', p. 469.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Charles Sitsubi.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Abraham Lentsoane.

Most of the inhabitants of this camp were moved to Novo Catengue and it was ultimately closed in 1982.

Novo Catengue became the major training camp. It was situated in the hilly and mountainous region of Benguela. Conditions here were much better. There was suitable accommodation (although some of the recruits still had to live in tents), water and sanitation facilities, as well as electricity. The camp was commanded by Julius Mokoena, while Francis Meli was the camp's commissar before Mark Shope joined. The chief of staff was Thami Zulu, while the chief of security was Alfred Wana. Cuban forces assisted with the training. Johnny Sexwale describes his experience at the camp as follows:

So, in Angola we were taken to the camp in the south of Angola. That was a camp called Novo Catengue. It was a camp owned by the Portuguese. I remember we went there by buses, to the Cubans who were going to be our instructors. And we were met by a group of comrades who were in a camp in Pongola. These were comrades who left early in '75 and so on. Some of them had been trained – come from Moscow, from Germany, and all those places. Some of them were actually qualified instructors, amongst this group. And we joined them, went to Novo Catengue. We formed a very, very beautiful camp – with barracks and things like that. We formed detachments – we had about four detachments. The detachment comprises of – one, two, three, that's thirty, forty – say 120 people. It's actually four – a detachment's got four platoons. Now each platoon's got thirty men. And each platoon's got a commander. So you've got four platoons, and four platoon commanders, and one detachment commander. Oh, and commissars, by the way. So you had a platoon commander and a platoon commissar. Now platoon commissars were responsible for morale, and the commander it's normally command – giving orders and stuff like that. And, so we had four detachments. I was made a platoon commander in our detachment. So, under me I had thirty people. I was also training – we were all training. But I was the leader of the platoon. So, we trained there at Novo Catengue; about five hundred of us in the camp. Six months training. But it was extended for various reasons. The training was tough. The conditions were not easy. The food was not the food that we were used to. We were eating rationed foods. We were eating foreign foods, smoking foreign cigarettes – Russian cigarettes, Cuban cigarettes. All those things: the shortage of food sometimes; the shortage of water in the camp. But we went on. It does seem that, at the time, all of us were encouraged by the fact that we were all there for one thing, and one thing only: to liberate the country. So what motivated us and kept us was the fact that the country is on fire. So the only thing was that we should finish training and go back home and fight, and get rid of the system. So that kept us going. But as you would expect, it's not all of us who were strong. There were guys who were weak – not that weak – but who couldn't take the pressure. Not that they were weak. But some people could not take the pressure. It was tough – in the bush far away from home, and so on. So we had a lot of people who took their lives. Out of the frustration, a guy would just take an AK47, put it under his chin, and shoot. So many times! Because, in many cases, especially guarding the outposts with a gun, you've got a shift – guarding from two o'clock to four o'clock in



the morning. You're standing out there in the outpost, on your own, and all these things going through your mind. And you just put a gun under his chin. And all what you hear is just a gunshot. When you go and investigate, a guy is lying there. I can't describe how the situation looked. You can just imagine if someone shoots himself. It's horrible. And others attempted to hang themselves, and all those things. But it's not the overall picture. The overall picture is that everybody was strong. Most people were strong, determined. Very determined, and kept by the spirit of liberation. And we had very good commissars – they would motivate us – like Mzwai Piliso. Mzwai died immediately he came back. I mean that guy was a motivator. We definitely would wait for that guy to come to speak to us, because when he addressed us, the whole camp, he would motivate us. I mean, even if it's negative thoughts, immediately you become (unclear). They had people like that who kept us going. And, Novo Catengue was the training camp. There were about ten, twelve women there. We kept going with cultural units – singing and all those things, and military stuff. Marching, training and stuff like that. And celebrating Christmases there, and so on. Christmas day wear civilian clothes, have a beer – one beer was enough. [laughs] And that's it. So we trained. And then people started leaving for further training. Now groups of people were leaving. And that was a sad period when people started leaving – you know they would come and choose a group of twenty, thirty, and get into the bus or something, and gone. And the thing is, and all of it you think about when is it going to be your turn. You know, to leave, because you have finished training now. So people were leaving for further training, or deployed elsewhere, or to go home, and so on. But, most of us wanted to go home. And then I was, in the camp, I was one of the last people to leave the camp. It was not a nice experience because people were just going and, you were just thinking what's wrong with you. And ultimately we had to leave to another camp in Angola – in the north of Angola.<sup>20</sup>

There was also time for leisure. Lentsoane recalls that:

We used to play soccer. Just engage in other activities, music, drama, all those thing. ... we had guitars, drums, people were performing, drummers, just to try and make life more varied.<sup>21</sup>

He described the camp routine as follows:

... you wake up in the morning, you exercise, exercising, you wash. After washing you go for breakfast. Then [after] breakfast you go for news ... in the square. ... From there we go to classes ... around 8 ... and we discuss and we go to classes and come back for lunch. After that we go for studies.... Sometimes we had classes in the evening. If there

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with Johnny Sexwale conducted by Nhlanhla Ndebele and Moses Ralinala, 18 September 2001, Pretoria, SADET Oral History Project.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Abraham Lentsoane.

are no classes in the evening you got the discussions in the evening, you got practices, a whole lot of activities in the morning to the evening.<sup>22</sup>

Most of the ANC camps in the late 1970s and 1980s had a similar leadership structure. According to Tlali:

A camp must have a camp commander. It must have a chief of staff who is responsible for the staff. It depends on what kind of a camp it is. It must have a chief training instructor. It has a group of instructors.... It must have a logistic man who supplies food and so on and so forth, and under whom if falls where you could grow ... stuff and you produce food and so on and so forth. He must see to the cleanliness of the water that people are drinking and all that kind of a thing. I think those are the main things depending on the needs of that particular camp.<sup>23</sup>

Lodge describes the military training in MK camps as follows:

Here they receive introductory lessons in South African history and politics, lectures on explosives, map reading, and military tactics, as well as physical drilling and exercise sessions. Weapon handling begins in a second camp; recruits are taught to handle automatic rifles, RPG 7 rocket launchers, hand-grenades, as well as the light weaponry employed by the South African Defence Force. The instruction is usually supervised by Cubans and its quality is excellent, according to South African police sources. The trainees learn how to use explosives and deploy them in sabotage, they are taught the principles of clandestine organisation and communications, and they are instructed in guerrilla tactics as well as the military techniques employed in more conventional forms of warfare. The range of weaponry and equipment to which trainees are introduced is much wider than the variety actually used by UMKhonto in South Africa; apart from theoretical classes in the operation of heavy artillery, the Angolan trainees programme has included lessons on the use of land-mines since 1977 (eight years before such devices were introduced into South Africa) as well as radio communications.

After the completion of basic guerrilla training UMKhonto members are given more specialised courses, sometimes in a different camp: different programmes are arranged for rural and urban warfare, some people receive special training in ordnance and logistical support, and others (especially women) graduate as couriers.<sup>24</sup>

Lodge adds that:

Paralleling the military training is an extensive academic programme with a heavy emphasis on South African history, political economy and philosophy. The teaching is by South Africans, in the early stages of the development of the camps by eminent leaders of

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Tlali, SADET Oral History Project.

<sup>24</sup> Lodge, 'The ANC in exile', p. 7.

the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP), later on administered by the hierarchy of political commissars who provide a second element in the command structure of the camps from platoon level upwards. The academic programme includes courses on the history of South African resistance, ANC ideological principles, especially those associated with the Freedom Charter, the analysis of the South African economy, and the basic essentials of Marxism-Leninism.<sup>25</sup>

Novo Catengue, known affectionately as the University of the South, was closed after the South African Air Force bombed it on the 14<sup>th</sup> March 1979. The attack led to severe damage: three MK recruits died and 14 others were wounded. The cadres were evacuated to Pango, about 200 kilometres north of Luanda. Pango, a massive camp, was closed in 1988 following a decision of move MK forces out of Angola as part of the resolution of the Namibian question. Pango was established in 1979 on an old coffee estate in the province of Kwanza Norte. Ngculu describes it as follows:

Pango was more or less like Quibaxe. However, because of the bombings, more serious attention had to be paid to security, particularly because the camp had fragile structures. We thus built underground bunkers and tunnels. This was a labour intensive exercise that required digging, felling big trees and carrying huge logs to be put in the dugouts in the main areas. This was a very difficult and physically exhausting exercise. It was used as a form of punishment.<sup>26</sup>

Camps which had been established prior to Pango in the same area were Funda, Fazenda and Quibaxe camps, which were all established between 1977 and 1978. Viana was established as a transit camp near Luanda in 1979. In 1980, when the Zimbabweans achieved their independence, ZAPU moved out of Angola and gave their facilities to the ANC. These included two camps, Camsalundi, which doubled as a farm, and Caculama in the province of Malange, which served as a major training camp.

Funda camp, which was located about twenty kilometres outside Luanda, was opened in 1976 and was used as a preparation camp for cadres who were being sent inside the country (South Africa). It had previously been a game reserve, and abounded with wild game such as warthog, buffalo, pythons and antelope. At the time there were peasant villages in the area, while soldiers of the South West African Peoples Organisation (SWAPO) were housed in a camp in the vicinity of the ANC camp.<sup>27</sup> Johnny Sexwale was deployed to this camp for a while:

Now Funda, the purpose of Funda is that we had people there who were ready to go home, who were already selected to go home. And the purpose of Funda was actually to get them ready, and to demilitarise them, in Funda, so that they must not walk like they

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>26</sup> Ngculu, *'The honour to serve'*, unedited manuscript.

<sup>27</sup> Senzangakhona et al., 'UMkhonto remembered – Part two'.

are marching. They must walk properly like normal human beings. Must not walk like soldiers. Nice, they wear civilian clothes. No uniforms, etc. So that was Funda. But we did some training there as well, especially lots of shooting. It was final training now. They were shooting like nobody's business. And we had instructors there. It was a small camp, very small. At the time, I think the maximum would have been 60 people at a time, including the administration. We had already formed machineries, people to look after the interests of people going into the country in Lesotho, Swaziland and Botswana – called the Forward Areas. We had people like Yakuza who were responsible for Swaziland.<sup>28</sup>

Sizwe Matshakiza was sent to Funda in 1978. He recalled that: '...it was sort of a transit camp.... About 70 at that time. It's a very, very small camp.'<sup>29</sup> This camp was also infested with mosquitoes and was not conducive for people being prepared for the front. It was therefore closed in 1979 and its facilities were moved to a new camp centre called Caxito, which performed the same task as Funda.

In the late 1970s, Fazenda camp, or more correctly, Villa Rosa camp, was the main camp for preparation of MK cadres for infiltration into South Africa. Fazenda was located north of Quibaxe in northern Angola, and in November 1978 the majority of trained MK cadres were moved to this camp to undergo a survival course to prepare for the conditions of rural guerrilla warfare.<sup>30</sup> Lincoln Ngculu describes Fazenda as follows:

Fazenda was not far from Quibaxe camp, and shared the same town – Quibaxe. The Donge River separated the two camps. Fazenda camp was in the middle of nowhere at a place called Villa Rosa. We were happy to find some comrades there who we had not seen for a long time. We were also astonished to find others who we thought had been deployed to the front. There was a rumour that Fazenda was the dumping place for ill-disciplined comrades. The leadership strenuously explained that such information was not only false, but malicious. What struck us immediately was the high morale of the camp.

Fazenda, like Quibaxe, was a former Portuguese coffee plantation, and the name itself means 'farm' in Portuguese. There were only three buildings in the place. One was used as the administration block, another as a kitchen and the last block was what was called the headquarters platoon. The headquarters platoon was a newly introduced concept. It was the platoon that supported the administration to maintain discipline and order in the camp. The rest of the detachment stayed in the bush in tents or slept on hammocks. Our beds were made out branches cut from coffee trees. We used blankets and clothes as mattresses, or, if one was lucky, an air mattress. It was quite painful sleeping on these beds initially, but after a while we got used to them. The river, which we used as a source

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with Johnny Sexwale.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Sizwe Matshakiza conducted by Howard Barrell, 17 December 1990, Johannesburg.

<sup>30</sup> B. Ketelo et al., 'A Miscarriage of Democracy: The ANC Security Department in the 1984 Mutiny in UMKhonto we Sizwe,' *Searchlight South Africa*, 2(1), (July 1990), p. 37.

of water and where we washed ourselves, was about five kilometres from the camp. Drinking water, used mainly for cooking, was obtained from a spring about 300 metres from the camp. It was a difficult exercise to go and wash. We would go there early in the morning in order to avoid the tsetse flies and gnats. We called the gnats “buccaneers” because of their painful sting. The toilet at the back of the administration block was converted into a sleeping place for the politics department and a library.

The camp commander was Tom Gaza (George Johnson), a dark, Coloured comrade from the Cape Flats.<sup>31</sup>

Fazenda camp was closed in 1980, and the guerrillas that had been based there were distributed among the two main camps, Pango and Quibaxe, north of Luanda.<sup>32</sup>

Quibaxe opened in 1977 as a transit camp. Tony Yengeni, who went to Quibaxe in 1978, says the living and training conditions in the camp were relatively good. The daily meals consisted of beans, rice, and tinned foods donated by the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic. Quibaxe was used for training in basic survival for cadres who had completed military training and were being prepared for missions inside South Africa. Conditions in Quibaxe were similar to those in Benguela: cadres had to live in tents and the water and sanitation facilities were rudimentary. It was a small camp and was more like a reception area – almost all the cadres were living in tents.<sup>33</sup> This camp could accommodate about 300 people, and it was closed in 1988. Lincoln Ngculu describes Quibaxe as follows:

Quibaxe camp was founded in late 1977 as the transit camp. It was about 200 kilometres north of Luanda in the province of Uige. The road to the camp from Luanda was hazardous and full of potholes. It passed many villages and small towns and was known as a dangerous route largely because the northern part of Angola was infested with bandits who attacked those using the route in order to obtain supplies of weapons. In later years, it was the main area where the UNITA bandits tried to ambush and engage our combatants. We lost a lot of good comrades in the process. Because of the increase in the number of new recruits in the late 1970s, Quibaxe was made an important training base in 1978.

The area in which the camp was established had once belonged to a Portuguese farmer. It was far smaller than Novo Catengue. The only buildings were the barracks for the administration and the administration offices, the guardhouse and the library, while most of the comrades slept in tents. The area set aside for a football field was not good. The field was not even, and had a mound that made it difficult to play properly. The red ground was also hard.

The camp was a former coffee plantation with lots of fruit trees, especially bananas. We were not allowed to pick them. These were supposed to be picked by specific people so that they could be shared by all in the camp. However, people would

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<sup>31</sup> Ngculu, *The honour to serve*, pp. 95-6.

<sup>32</sup> Ketelo et al., ‘A Miscarriage of Democracy’, p. 39.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Abraham Lentsoane.

creep out of the camp to pick bananas, which they stored in what we later called DLBs (dead letter boxes, used by the underground for secret communications). We used this term because it was related to our training in storage and communication. It was generally taken as an offence if you were discovered with bananas that did not come from the official supply. However, because the theft of bananas from the fields was so rampant the authorities generally turned a blind eye.

The farm also had avocados, pineapples, red and green chillies, and peanuts. The chillies were used as the main spice for the normally plain food. Our diet ranged from tinned meat from Eastern Europe (mainly known as 'Slava', to indicate association with the Soviet Union), and tinned fish, mainly from China (which we called 'Mao'). We also had powdered eggs and oats for breakfast. However, because of the high level of humidity in the area it was common to find a lot of worms in the oats. There was no time to sift all the packets of oats, and we would often eat our food with worms in them. Nevertheless, the kitchen staff was a very creative unit. Sometimes they would bake bread using the oats and powdered eggs. It would be a high-fibre bread that would compensate for the lack of nutrients in our food.

After some time, the pineapple field was exhausted and stopped producing any fruit. The peanut field later suffered the same fate. In addition, our overuse of chillies, which we would pick even when the chillies were still young, made these difficult to find. At times, the camp would run out of supplies of food. We then had to be content with tea and biscuits, which we called 'amaplanga' (planks) because they were hard. The area, perhaps because of the banana fields, attracted monkeys and birds, as well as a lot of snakes. We would kill pythons and eat them. Pythons made a very nice meal, and a number of comrades became experts at preparing a python meal. When eating a python, we would imagine that we were eating Kentucky Fried Chicken.

Later we tried to farm pigs and chickens. This soon became a problem when it became clear that the only people who benefitted from the pig and chicken farming were those in the administration. It was like Christmas whenever we had pork for our meal. The kitchen staff played an important role in keeping our morale high and our long stay in the camp pleasant. But after a while there would be relapses into boredom and frustration.

As we stayed in tents in Quibaxe, we had to dig down and create furrows so that water did not get into the tents. We used plastic for flooring because it provided a barrier and prevented the damp earth floor from harming our health. Quibaxe dramatically introduced us to the tropical diseases of Africa. The sun in that part of the world was scorching and the altitude high. You would particularly feel it when doing roadwork. If you were not acclimatized to the area a 10-kilometre run would make you dizzy, and in some cases people would lose their sanity temporarily.

One disease developed that made our mouths rot. Everyone who caught it felt miserable and frustrated because there was no way to hide it. Gentian violet was smeared on the mouths of sufferers to prevent mouth decay and to dry out the sores. Another disease that was widespread in the camp was caused by sandworms. The worms would burrow into your big toe, giving rise to sores that made it impossible to wear boots. This was quite painful and discomfoting. If we did not iron our uniforms the sandworms would

hide in them and burrow into other parts of our bodies. We had to use a pin or needle to pull the worms out.<sup>34</sup>

Sam Mkhabela was deployed to Quibaxe as an instructor after undergoing training in the Soviet Union. His task was to ‘train a unit in artillery that can be able to defend those camps’. He recalls that the camp was in what ‘used to be a coffee plantation’. He noted two problems at Quibaxe. The first was that it was difficult to obtain supplies from the regional command in Malange. The second problem was ‘continuous attacks by UNITA on our own units in that area because’ the MPLA gave that area to the ANC in order for MK to defend it. MK cadres became responsible for keeping the area clear of UNITA rebel forces, and many died in ambushes.<sup>35</sup>

Viana was another camp located close to Luanda, and it was established in 1979. The camp was used mainly as a transit camp for newly recruited members of MK on their way to other camps for military training. According to Ketelo et al., Andrew Masondo used this camp to develop a crack security unit, known as People’s Defence Organisation (PDP), whose task, was to protect the ANC leadership when they visited the camps, and enforce discipline and smash any eruption of dissent and ‘disloyalty’.<sup>36</sup> The average number of cadres based at Viana was about 400. In January-February 1984, Viana camp housed between 900 and 1,000 guerrillas who had been withdrawn from the units deployed to support the MPLA against UNITA forces and cadres from other camps.<sup>37</sup> The camp was closed in 1989. Ngculu has the following to say about the camp:

Viana was a transit camp for people who had just arrived from home en route to the training bases. It was about 20km outside Luanda. Its commander at the time was a humble chap from the Eastern Cape, Dan Hatto, who was nicknamed ‘Quatro Cabesa’ (4 heads in Portuguese) because of his big head. He was a sociable young chap who did not fit the role of a conventional commander. But he was able to maintain the camp. Later, Dan Hatto was deployed to command at the front in Botswana, where he was equally good and fitted the underground requirements of survival in a hostile terrain. Once, when he was making a crossing of the Zambezi River in a rubber dinghy, Dan was gored in the stomach by a buffalo. He had to endure the pain until he reached the safe house in Zambia. We then changed his nickname to “buffalo soldier”.

Hatto’s chief of staff was a fitness fanatic from Cape Town, known as Hector Sizwe. He was a person who would put on his tracksuit and then cover himself with a plastic and a wooden hat when going for a run. His theory was that this made him sweat and ensured that he lost weight. Chris Hani later recognised his abilities by deploying him to Lesotho. He was involved in a number of daring escapades in South Africa,

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<sup>34</sup> Lincoln Ngculu, *The Honour to Serve*, pp. 88-9.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Sam Mkhabela.

<sup>36</sup> Ketelo et al., ‘A Miscarriage of Democracy’, p. 39.

<sup>37</sup> G.M. Gerhart, and C. L. Glaser, *From protest to challenge: A documentary history of African politics in South Africa, 1882-1990: Challenge and Victory, 1980-1990*, Indiana University Press, 2010.

especially in Cape Town. He died in the SADF [South African Defence Force] raid on Maseru in December 1985.<sup>38</sup>

There was also Caxito camp, about fifty kilometres north of Luanda, which was used as the preparatory camp for the cadres en route to the front. This camp was infested with mosquitoes and malaria casualties were very high. Yengeni, who arrived from Quibaxe when Caxito was opened, recalls that the camp was in an open field with one or two buildings without roofs. They set up two tents, one for the cadres, and the other for the administration. The first night a defensive guard was deployed. On the following day the unit started constructing the defences, trenches and buildings for accommodation. When the construction was completed Soviet instructors joined them and the unit was given a commander's course. The group was 26 strong and was being prepared to infiltrate the then northern Transvaal to open a guerrilla base.<sup>39</sup> Yengeni described the camp as follows:

[Caxito] is ... either in the middle or little bit southern part of Angola. Its [a] very bush[y] area with a lot of mosquitos, deadly mosquitos, huge things. ... Malaria – you know, gives you very serious bout of malaria. We set up two huge tents, one for the unit – the platoon – and one for the administration. And we started guard duties in the evening. And the following day we started our defence construction, the trenches, and we also started a construction, the very building of the camps, the buildings, you know, putting on the roofs, windows, you know, doors. And when the place was ready we were joined by our Soviet instructors who were coming to instruct us on ... a commander's course. So it was a very small unit of 26 people who were involved in camp construction, who were involved in our defence when we obtained the commander's course. We had to do those things being 26 people. Over and above that we had to guard the camp. ... Now the conditions were better at Caxito because that unit was prepared specially to go home as a unit. So food-wise there ... was a vast improvement. We had everything. We had milk, we had cheese, we had butter, we had jam, we had chocolate.<sup>40</sup>

Sikose Mji, who spent six weeks in Caxito after undergoing training in Moscow, states that:

... the course I remember which was the most difficult in the practicals was called tactics, because there ... you do the physical part of training. You wake up for example in the morning – we leave the camp at say 4 in the morning, with nothing but soldiers' biscuits. And we leave the camp running – we hit the ground and you run for say 3 to 4 hours non-stop ... singing. ... It's a ... platoon more or less. And then you are in uniform, those heavy boots with the heavy socks and you sweat like nobody's business. And then, of course, it's pushing you to your maximum. And you have to learn to take this because that very exercise is called survival. ... It's male and female as we go for the exercises. But when we come back in the camp itself, the tents where we live are separated. Ours,

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<sup>38</sup> Lincoln Ngculu, *The Honour to Serve*, pp. 168-9.

<sup>39</sup> Houston and Magubane, 'The ANC's armed struggle in the 1970s', p. 471.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Tony Yengeni.



the smallest was called Mzana. I'm told [the name] Mzana comes from Fort Hare – that was the Girls Hostel. That is what it used to be called. And the male ones, of course, they were many. And of course we were the cream in the camp. Everybody wants to talk to you as a female comrade. ... And we are few and all of us are supposed to be beautiful because of the rarity of women in the camp. And we are always getting these requests for a kiss or a hug or even beyond, you know. So, all the time we are being protected of who we are and we are being watched also with a very keen eye by everybody. But there are some nice things that happen in the camp. Like you tell the comrade who is working in the kitchen, you lie to him and say if he gives you that nice bread, which is called *smokolo* because he steals it on your behalf, and you say: "I will have an affair with you". And, of course, once he's done giving you all the bread you change your mind. You say: "I didn't mean that". And then of course you do all the illegal things. Like you are told not to take food from somewhere to the camps – you steal powdered milk. Every morning when you are given a bit of powdered milk you put it away until you have something like a cup full. Then you mix it with water and you put it in a tin under your bed. You are making sour milk, just to change the diet. ... It's like prison: you smuggle things, you do things there that you would normally not do.<sup>41</sup>

Another person who was provided with a brief training course at Caxito is Essop Pahad. He remembers that it was:

... the worst possible camp you can think of. ... I used the name Mohammed because that was easy to remember. ... And when I first got there – it was a long trip to Caxito – I was standing around and the platoon commander comes over and says: "Who are you?" I said: "I'm Mohammed. I've been sent for training". He said: "Don't stand here. Go, there's a political education class there." ... The training was very tough. Fortunately the trainers were good to me because they realised that I was not in a very strong physical condition. So we would do all the training but they treated me a bit lightly. And then, because in Caxito malaria was rife, I had malaria three times.<sup>42</sup>

There was also a facility called the "Plot", which served to train paramedics and was also used to train ANC members in carpentry and building. Another ANC facility called "Moscow" was used mainly for technical training, including the training of mechanics, drivers and electricians. It had Soviet and Finnish project managers. The Russians provided mechanical and other technical training, while the Finnish specialised in plumbing and electricity. The purpose of this camp was to provide ANC members with certain skills as well as a recognition of the problems that kept on cropping up in the camps. In addition, it assisted in providing an alternative to comrades in the camps who became bored with military training. The facility was provided to the ANC by the Angolan government, while the Soviets and Finns provided material, financial and human

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with Sikose Mji conducted by Neo Ramope, 14 November 2007, Pretoria, SADET Oral History Project.

<sup>42</sup> Interviews with Essop Pahad conducted by Sifiso Ndlovu, 2008, Johannesburg, SADET Oral History Project.

resource support.<sup>43</sup>

Caculama camp, which was established in January 1981 in the Angolan town of Malanje, became the main training centre for MK cadres in the early 1980s.<sup>44</sup> A description of life at Caculama is derived from an edited version of an interview with Kenny Leleki, who entered Angola in 1986.

Introductions were made and then they were shown their base where they were to stay, shown the commander's base. The commander was Welcome Sirhayeni and his commissar had been sent to the Northern front within a week of their arrival and was among the group of commissars murdered by UNITA. When the commissar left they received a signal that most of the commissars had been murdered and the commander's commissar was among those murdered. Mr Leleki had developed a deep connection with the commissar to such an extent that he was the only one who cleaned the commissar's house and would fix things that were damaged at his house; and he was heartbroken that was the last time they would see the commissar. The chief of ordnance was a man from Cape Town by the name of Andile. And there were instructors for physical training, topography, medico, tactics, firearm and artillery. All those classes were allocated to the comrades and each was allocated a commander. They were also told about the different sounds and signals of the combat bell that gave signals to the entire base. So, for example, if the combat bell made a constant sound then it was signaling the presence of the enemy. So, it was an emergency and comrades had to be deployed in the defense trench until further instructions were given on the next step. There was also the roving unit which comprised of trained commanders who knew what to do according to information they had received. They would then check the enemy status and would be the ones to declare whether it was safe or not for the comrades. The other sound made by the combat bell was slower which indicated that it was time to queue up for certain orders and instructions. That was the way in which communication was carried out.

Nobody was loose on the camp; each and every soldier had their own task to perform. Commanders were part and parcel of training and recruitment. Morning sport was not compulsory for commanders. They only went when they wanted to maintain their fitness. New recruits were required to be at training at all times. They wore blue tracksuits and trainers for the morning sport. They would wake up in the morning for morning sport which included running. Then they were given five minutes to bathe, dress and make their beds and then go to the gathering place (GP) and sing revolutionary songs. During the commencement of the training they were organized into platoons. For instance, platoon one, two and three. Mr Leleki was in platoon one, section one. Each section had a commander, commissar and the troops. The entire platoon was under the leadership of a platoon commander who was already trained. Their platoon commander was Lelord

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<sup>43</sup> Lincoln Ngculu, *The Honour to Serve*, p. 44.

<sup>44</sup> Ketelo et al., 'A Miscarriage of Democracy: The ANC Security Department in the 1984 Mutiny in UMKhonto we Sizwe,' *Searchlight South Africa*, 2(1), (July 1990), p. 35.

Dweba, who was unfortunate because he had no platoon commissar – so he was both commander and commissar. The commander for platoon two was Siphwiwe Bamla, and his commissar was a fellow from Soweto. The commanders taught them how to take care of themselves as soldiers. In the morning they would all wake up at the same time as their commander and the commissars took them for morning sport. Trainees were responsible for their entire base, from fetching bathing water, making fire to warm the water, fetching wood for cooking, cooking, to serving food. Four people were assigned the task of fetching wood. So they would chop down the huge trees and then cut it further into stacks of about three metres. The height of the stack had to be the same length of a man's raised arm when he is standing upright. All of this had to be done in one day, from the morning at 7h00 up until 13h00 when political classes ended so that platoons had wood. Before or after eating soldiers would put their books down and carry their weapons and stretchers which they carried with another soldier on their shoulders all the way to the base. The distance and the weather did not matter to such an extent that they would hard formations on their shoulders due to the load of poles they carried - but they quickly grew accustomed to it. These were some of the daily duties of the base and platoons took turns on performing the base duties. Soldiers had to report on where they would be chopping wood because the commander or officer on duty had to know of the soldiers' whereabouts for security reasons so that if there were sounds heard of the rifles the roving unit had to quickly go to the spot where the soldiers said they would be.

Soldiers would sometimes be on duty and guard the platoons, for example soldiers would guard from 18h00 - 20h00. So the target had to be reached smoothly, there should be cooperation and if an officer on duty was dissatisfied with the performance of the soldiers they would have to repeat these duties until they did them correctly. Soldiers also had afternoon events at the base such as playing soccer, have operation moonlight where they march the drill while others chop the wood. Mr Leleki even tore his flesh once due to carrying those stretchers with soldiers of different heights. Even today he can feel the pain from that wound. On Saturdays they would hold indoor games of the entire base and would all eat at the park, wear civilian clothes, reminisce about home, sing songs by South African artists, dance, play chess, political discussions, and food up until sunset. After the evening program of political discussions everybody would have to obey the 20h00 curfew at which all soldiers should be asleep. The only people permitted to be walking around the base were the soldiers on duty and those soldiers had passwords in order to recognize people who came in. For instance one soldier would shout sun and the respondent had to say moon. That password was given to soldiers by their commanders and only known by the soldiers on duty. If a soldier did not respond then he or she would be at the risk of being shot since soldiers on duty could not determine whether it was an enemy or not. If comrades did not know the passwords and had been out and about in the village at night then they had to identify themselves to avoid being shot and have their livelihood put at stake. In some instances comrades were suffering from cerebral then they would be unaware of where they were so soldiers on duty were cautioned against just opening fire on comrades who did not know the password. They also had soccer clubs such as Bullshaving, and the People's Club and guerillas would initiate competitions. They would have fun the

whole day. Rugby and boxing were forbidden in case comrades disrespected their commanders in the boxing ring or tackled them on the rugby field, or perhaps intentionally injure a soldier they had a squabble with.

Occasions celebrated were June 16, March 21, August 9 and December 16. Mr Leleki recalls the last December 16 they celebrated in Angola in 1988 that was based on P. W Botha's life. He describes it as being hurtful, beautiful and politically strong. Commissars staged a play where there were people who played the role of the prosecutors and wore the attire with all of them on the stage. Then there was the prosecutor who sentenced Botha on charges he had committed and he was found guilty and was to be hanged. His coffin was there and soldiers had lit tins that had soil and swabs that were immersed in diesel from the stage ground to the Cetywayo route then to where he was to be cremated. He was found guilty, put in a coffin; they carried him along the path with the lamps singing revolutionary songs to a huge bonfire of diesel and tyres. They then put his coffin in that fire surrounded the fire and sang so loudly while the commanders fired rifle shots until P. W's coffin burn to the ground. After some days they had that play they heard that Botha had suffered a major stroke back in South Africa and they were delighted that had happened as when they had performed that play they had done so with so much pain in their hearts caused by Botha.

Comrades passed away in Angola in a number of ways. Some would be involved in a car accidents, accidental shootings, tractor accidents, sacrifices, starvation and the bad conditions they were living under, ambushes and so on. To such an extent that in each and every country that comrades lived in there were numerous graveyards. During funerals the ceremony and procedure would be carried out by the security of the movement and not the soldiers themselves. In some instances however it depended how a soldier passed on. There would be various questions asked such as why he shot himself, the motive behind his suicide and the commanders or chiefs would then account for that. For example in Tanzania the parents of one soldier who was killed by a tractor took the ashes of their son as he had been cremated. There was a lot of tension when a soldier passed on and there would be some unfamiliar aura around camp and comrades would ponder deeply about life but in most instances would not be demoralized as the enemy would get the satisfaction that they were being defeated and they could not be caught at a vulnerable hour as sometimes the enemy was among them. There were also soldiers who tried to leave the camps. In Angola if soldiers tried to escape and did not die they would surrender to UNITA and would be declared as being defeated and most captured soldiers would tell the enemy of their operation in the camp therefore compromising the mission. Life was good and normal sometimes and crises such as starvation did not lower the morale of soldiers. Duties would still carry on. During one case Mr Leleki and Sikhulu came across a python on the way to get wood in the morning. Even though they chopped the huge snake with their axes and since it was still alive they decided to shoot it. The roving unit was there immediately. They had to tell the unit they had shot a python as soldiers were required to account for MK bullets to avoid waste. That was because with every bullet wasted workers in the Soviet Union worked extra hour overtime. So if soldiers shot something they had to

take it back to camp as proof - so the python was taken back to camp and the soldiers had a huge feast that night.

The combat for the soldiers consisted of the RICE which they got from East Germany, the OAU combat and the khaki combat from the Soviet Union were their three main combats. The green mamba was used for training and they wore no berets but a khaki panama hat that came with the Soviet Union combat. They borrowed their drill from the former Soviet Union, East Germany, North Korea and Cuba. In the camps Zulu was the common language and soldiers were encouraged to speak the language as it was quite dominant. The dwellings were built from scratch. They would determine how big a dwelling should be in order to accommodate the large number of soldiers. It had to be dug in deep in the trench and the dwelling's walls were slightly slanted and not upright. If they had been built upright it would be very easy for them to collapse. The advantage of having them slanted was that they could fight the enemy without leaving the dwelling as it had holes to fit in their weapons so soldiers would lie flat on their stomach and attack their enemy in the dwelling. The relationship with the peasants and the community around the base was quite interesting. In Angola they stayed the longest in the bush so had to develop rapport with some of the peasants. The unfortunate part was that at times the soldiers would try to trick the peasants and unfortunately for them, peasants have great memories and would remember the soldiers who did them wrong. This led to a lack of trust between the peasants and the soldiers as peasants hated to be tricked. In some instance soldiers would exchange toiletries and undergarments for money, cigarettes or marijuana. So when the guerrillas ran out of deodorant they would refill the empty containers with a mixture of perfumed crushed soap with water therefore tricking the peasants into believing it was the original deodorant. The problem would arise when intoxicated comrades start telling the peasants of how they had been tricked. Even though that happened the comrades would do everything in their power to ensure that such information did not reach the commanders on camp or else there would be problems if comrades would be accused by peasants. In some cases peasant would be wearing combat in the village, or have cooking oil, sleeping bags, zinc, and shoes and so on. So the commanding personnel would raid the village and ask peasants where they got their merchandise so peasants would be asked to go to camp to identify who they got the material from. During the line up the peasants would start blurting out what each soldier sold in the village. Luckily for Mr Leleki he sold his items in another village so not to be identified by the local peasants. He would sneak out at night and would be back by 04h30 in the morning so that he can attend morning sport. Commanders had to account for their soldiers if they disappeared. In MK it was forbidden for comrades to smoke marijuana. To such an extent that if a soldier smoked he would be punished immensely as commanders could not get through to him, he had no control, would also analyse orders issued by the commanding structure. So it was emphasised that soldiers not smoke marijuana.

Another cadre who spent time at the camp notes that:

This Malange shares the border with [the] DRC[Democratic Republic of Congo] – it was Zaire then. From Luanda to where this camp was is four hundred kilometers. It is where the former Zaire and Angola share borders. So, preliminary training took place there. That is where I started my training in guns. I taught myself politics. We were taught politics every day: that how this world looked like, that this is Africa, it has 51 states. What is happening, and all of those things. We were taught international politics. We were taught this and that so that we knew how South Africa was relating with the outside world. ... [Among those who taught us was] Albie Sacks. ... Others like Klas Maphepa, who is the head of the Intelligence (National Intelligence Agency) now: they call him Vusi Mavimbela. They were amongst others who were already from the party schools in Bulgaria who were teaching us politics. Amongst other people who were lecturing us was ... Thabang Makwetle (popularly known as Thabang Makwetla).<sup>45</sup>

APLA's Zebulon Mokoena underwent another training session in 1976 when he led a group of APLA cadres that went to China at the beginning of 1976 'for military training. We stayed for three months', Mokoena states. 'After coming back from China I went to Libya with the SASO group. We stayed there for nine months doing the infantry course. During the outbreak of the 1976 riots we were in Libya.'<sup>46</sup>

In the mid-1970s the Itumbi camp at Mbeya near Chunya was run by members of the Lesotho Liberation Army (LLA), with which the PAC had close links. Many APLA cadres lived with their families in the camps, and were unarmed. After the uprising in Soweto in 1976, a number of APLA recruits who had been sent to Libya for training were deployed to the camp, and leadership shifted from the LLA to APLA. According to one of these cadres:

There was no activity in the camp when we arrived. We started some poultry projects and because of the health conditions there no poultry survived. We started a piggery and it was also not going well. We whiled away time by doing fitness training. Each time the High Command members came to the camp we would always put pressure on them now that we had finished training. There was one answer that P.Z. Mboko would give us. He would say: 'Hang in there, I am preparing.' There was a programme to train as pilots in Nigeria and Ireland. We felt that we needed to start implementing our training before we could do the specialised training and we refused.<sup>47</sup>

Gason Ndlovu, who lived in the Chunya camp from 1970 to 1980, recalled that: 'There was no training there. It was a waiting camp. The camps in Tanzania were waiting camps: to hold

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with Tlokwe Masemurule conducted by Lesetja Marepo, 11 July 2002, Matlala Village, SADET Oral History Project.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Zebulon Mokoena.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Bobo Moerane cited in Thami ka PLaatjie, 'The PAC in exile, in South African Democracy Education Trust (eds.), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 2, 1970-1980*, Pretoria, UNISA Press, 2006, p. 737.

trained personnel of these liberation organisations of southern Africa.<sup>48</sup> Ndlovu adds that Edwin Makoti was responsible for political education. According to Ndlovu, the camp was a joint camp with ZANU, and Chinese instructors were allowed to visit the camp. Ndlovu adds that:

There are exercises that we used to do. Ordinary physical exercises karate things. These Chinese were good in martial arts when there were there with us. They were very handy to us, teaching us a lot of things. Theoretically or otherwise. During the day we were doing exercises then in the morning we wake up both camps, yi ZANU ngaphaya nathi ngapha. We plan the day. Siyahamba siyakutheza iinkuni madoda, ii-fire wood. This is the forest. Let's go and get fire wood. Siyahamba ngoku sibheka ehlathini. A big forest there. This is also Tuna is the game reserve area. Game reserve there was lions and elephants and tigers and leopards. There is no tiger in Africa any longer in the whole of Africa. Tiger was staying prevalent in Africa that was the tiger then. So, we used to hunt you asked us ukuthi what did you use to do there? We hunt meat. Our meat supply was the combination of Vanesin and that is the animal meat and supplied from the OAU in Dar Es Salaam. Supply meat supplies every day. Brought to us by this CDU, Commissioned Defense Unit. It will bring us food supplies and then guard us, as it is the duty of this CDU. And to supplement and to complement that there is Vanesin meat from the animal. What animal? We hunting not using any guns, we don't have guns. Except when we met with leopard somewhere and first threatened us. Then we borrow a gun from the CDU. They were the people who had guns, they were not supposed to give us guns, but we plan to ask them, please help us there is a leopard somewhere there. Let's hunt it down, they said no go report it to the game reservists. You can't kill any animal you people here. Especially those protected animals, leopards. There is a wild Boers used to kill wild pigs. Those for meat, Zebras like that. Zebra, we used to trap them. You know what zebra is? ...

We used to trap it siyibophelele siyakhele islarhastile esithile. And we skin it there in the mountain there. Because akufunekanga ibonwe ke ngaba bantu ukuba sibulele lanto because its skin is very valuable. Government needs the skin. Nayo I-leopard leyo I-skin siyafuneka. So don't shoot it in the body, shoot it in the head. So when you want to kill the leopard is in the tree there, you must take a slipper person with a good shot. Aph'ebusweni apha, kill it. The bullet must go through the eye, so that you don't damage the skin. The skin fetches a lot of money for the government. So, it used to be an offense for soldiers to kill certain protected animals. Like the ivory yenantsika, ubhejana lo. Yintoni ubhejana?

I-rhino and the elephant. You don't kill those. You will be in trouble then. But we used to enjoy the meat of an elephant. Xa siyitrepile indlovu le siyitrepe. Siyihlinzela khona apho esigangeni. It takes us a week to skin it.

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with Gasson Ndlovu.

Ja. Sivukela khona every morning spend the whole day skinning the thing. Let alone carrying the meat. Siyiqwayite ke inyama yakhona. And the giraffe, what a nice meat giraffe. Le inentam'ende le, ewu yhu yhu yhu, nice very nice, especially the bill-tong. Make it bill-tong. It used to be nice wena.<sup>49</sup>

The Itumbi camp, according to Kondlo, was a small-scale military settlement along the lines of the camp at Chunya. It consisted of a red-brick double-storey building in the middle of the forest which the cadres nicknamed the 'Carlton Centre' after the centre in Johannesburg. On the ground floor were a small camp press, store-room and dispensary. Cadres were accommodated on the first floor, as well as in a few tents that had been borrowed from the Tanzanian military and were pitched near the building. A kitchen was separated from the building by a water tap. The parade ground used for drills by the soldiers and for sporting activities such as volleyball and soccer was in front of the building. The headquarters, named Shanghai, was located about 200 metres from the 'Carlton Centre' at the edge of the forest. It was used as quarters by the camp commander and his juniors, and by visiting leaders of the PAC. Close to the camp fowl-run was what was known as the 'Historic Tree', where meetings were held. The benches and tables were made of crudely split logs.<sup>50</sup> Zolile Hamilton Keke recalls:

Now others were at Bagamoyo. Now at Bagamoyo there were some gardens which people were growing crops, you know. The training camp was at Itumbi. At Itumbi there people also were growing crops. For quite some time they were allowed to stay in a place called Magagaule, which used to be the training camps of ZANU PF. But they were later removed back to Itumbi. Itumbi, when you go to Ithumbi, you go via Mbeya. When you were in Mbeya you would get South African radio programmes, very clearly, Springbok Radio, Radio South Africa, etcetera, right.<sup>51</sup>

The other camp established in Tanzania in the early 1970s, Mgagao camp in Iringa, was slightly better than Chunya and Iringa in terms of infrastructure and facilities. Vuyani Mgaza recalls that Mgagao camp 'was right in the tropical veld forest', and was infested with Tsetse flies.<sup>52</sup> According to Kondlo the camp consisted of six spacious dormitories, a large administration complex, a big kitchen, a shelter for firewood, flush toilets and showers. However, because of prior incidents in the area when neighbouring villagers murdered cadres of the MPLA and ZANU, inmates of this camp were forbidden free movement into the surrounding villages. This strict control of movement was the cause of much discontent in the camp. Nevertheless, the situation in the camp was better than any other PAC camp at the time because it had been possible to grow vegetables such as cabbages, beetroot, onions and carrots, while a large field

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<sup>49</sup> Interview with Gasson Ndlovu.

<sup>50</sup> Kondlo, *In the twilight of the Revolution*, p. 252.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Zolile Hamilton Keke conducted by Sean Morrow, 21 October 2001, New Brighton, SADET Oral History Project.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Vuyani Mgaza conducted by Brown Maaba, 31 November 2001, East London, SADET Oral History Project.



was green with maize. The camp also had a piggery which was a major source of meat for the inmates.<sup>53</sup>

Because the inmates of the three camps – which ranged between sixty and one hundred – ‘changed constantly as recruits came and went for military training’ they could be described as ‘temporary in nature’.<sup>54</sup>

In the wake of the Soweto uprising, the PAC established the Ruvu camp in Masuguru, in the Bagomoyo district of Tanzania in 1978 in response to the influx of new recruits. Initially the camp was a small transit camp for new recruits awaiting transfer elsewhere for military training. It was also supposed to serve as a ‘rehabilitation camp’ for enemy agents and cadres who had committed serious offences.<sup>55</sup> A tremendous expansion of the camp occurred in 1982 when the Tanzanian government granted 440 hectares of land to the PAC in order to establish a settlement for self-reliance and other developmental activities. It became possible to remodel the camp on the same basis as the ANC’s settlements at Mazimbu and Dakawa. The PAC was able to establish facilities such as a clinic, classrooms and mechanical and agricultural training centers. It was possible for cadres to live with their families, while some residents in this camp were taught technical skills such as horticulture, poultry-farming, carpentry, sanitary engineering, plumbing, piggery, motor mechanics and electrification.<sup>56</sup> In short, the PAC’s Ruvu settlement became similar in kind to the ANC’s settlements in Mazimbu and Dakawa, and is therefore not the subject of this article.

Nevertheless, it is worth including a quotation from an interview with one of the PAC’s chairpersons during the 1980s about the camp.

...in Ruvu, that is the place which was headed principally by two departments: the Department of Economic Affairs because we had projects. We had, for instance, gardening where we cultivated some vegetables and the like. We had fruit. We had rice, maize, and even corn being grown. We also had livestock, from poultry to goats, to cattle and pigs. It was developing very well where we could see that some of our people who had been trained in agriculture went to some of the schools in Tanzania, getting the knowledge to run that place effectively. And Welfare and Health were also playing an important role there. They would rally for support because it’s in the coastal region; therefore malaria is rampant. But we had our own clinic there, as we had a clinic in the military camps. Now Mgagao is a transit [camp]. It’s where people who are not soldiers generally went, and even those who were going to be soldiers, occasionally, to avoid staying with a large population in town in Dar es Salaam. We took them out there and then their screening would be done there and they would be passed on. These ones are

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<sup>53</sup> Kondlo, *In the twilight of the Revolution*, pp. 253-4.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255.

going for educational programmes. They will go to such and such an institution. And these will go to a military programme. ... So they were being sorted out and screened there for various tasks. Some who had been in the army would come back and then we are also saying that those who have families must settle around here. They also have plots of their own plus the common plots of the PAC. And they are able to live there, and they are able to have a nursery school of their own for the children there, and school at a higher level, etc., etc. We were working to develop along those lines. Basic infrastructure was there and the area had earlier been abandoned by a sugar farmer because it is a bit of a mushy area. And after the sugar farmer the prisons department tried to take it over. But because of the floods that occasionally impede normal passage of people you find that when it's the rainy seasons, for two months or more, ... no vehicle can actually reach the camp. So people stop at Titonga village and they have to carry things on their heads, cross over. ... You build a road, discover that the Norwegians were assisting us in this because many governments and countries would not give assistance of a capital nature, to build infrastructure of that time, building a road. They would rather want to help you build houses.<sup>57</sup>

Another PAC leader stated that:

The PAC attempted to start a school at Masiburu [after the 1976 uprising.] It was started by me. Masiburu was mainly the place where the youth from the 1976 group were congregated. And of course there were older ones. But that was a mini camp in Masiburu. Well, it was established as a military camp to train [people]. That's where the concept of self-reliance began to take root. In fact, we asked the Tanzanian government to give us a place where we could practice or exercise.[The idea of self-reliance] means you exist from your own means. If it means you must exist with ploughing, then you must learn to plough. So [it was] recommended that we could be given a [piece of] ground to plough and we ploughed there. We could have cattle there; you [could] have pigs, you could grow anything on that piece of land. And that was for our own sustenance.

The idea of self-reliance we got from China. The strongest socialist country supporting our struggle was China. When the PAC sent cadres to China to train, they were going to train not only in handling arms. We had to learn all sorts of things. We had to learn even the nature of the Chinese revolution. We had learnt how to subsist without having supplies. You had to plant your own crops. That was also an aspect of self-reliance. You had to subsist on your own as long as you get the ground and tools to do that.

When we got this piece of land to farm (Masiburu), you had to do whatever you can subsist on. The first thing was to grow food, to plough. You start with that. And after that you then develop things there and learn. There are certain skills that pertain to farming. And you make roads to that camp. And you have to learn how to make roads. It has to take you from your main route into the camp. We didn't have the concept of starting a

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<sup>57</sup> Interview with Johnson Mlambo, SADET Oral History Project.

school as such. When it came to things like that – we found in ‘71 that if there were cadres who needed to go to school – we would send them to Tanzanian schools. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) used to supply us with vehicles and experts to help us. So we were helped financially and otherwise by the UNDP. Throughout, there were other funders. The Masiburu complex was a vocational school rather than a military camp. Children of the comrades who were there and went to Tanzanian schools learned the Tanzanian language. When I got to Tanzania, there was already a camp under the Chinese. There were Chinese instructors training our people.<sup>58</sup>

The APLA cadres were not allowed to have weapons in the camps in Tanzania, and were protected by a unit of the Tanzanian Army. According to Gasson Ndlovu, ‘We used to call it CDU, Commission Defense Unit. It was the defense unit responsible for guarding our camps.’

It was organised along military lines and military discipline. We stated to call it a camp, but it was not a training camp as such. Except ideologically training soldiers now ideologically as I am trying to say to you, we keep on having these night meetings. Discussing about our own country. The way how we are going to fight and all those kinds of things. How going to organise people? After fighting if we defeat the enemy what are we going to do? Like these phases we are trying to talk about here. What are we going to do? Whom are we going to target now? For instance, in this revolution we are talking about, socio-economic revolution.<sup>59</sup>

In 1988, following negotiations on the independence of Namibia, the agreement reached in the New York Accord required that the ANC dismantle and remove all its bases and other military facilities in Angola. At the time, the following camps were in existence: Engineering (average number of cadres present was 200); Quibaxe Training Camp (around 200 cadres); Funda Training Camp (fewer than 100 cadres); Pango Camp (around 400 cadres); Viana Transit Camp (around 400 cadres); Camalundi (around 300–400 cadres); and Caculama/Malanje (around 400 cadres).<sup>60</sup> In 1988/89, MK camps in Angola were closed and cadres moved to Tanzania, Ethiopia, Zambia, Uganda and elsewhere in Southern Africa.

According to Sellstrom, the Soviet Union provided assistance to airlift about 10,000 MK cadres mainly to Uganda and Tanzania.<sup>61</sup> About 2,000 of these cadres were housed at two camps, Masaka and Mbarara, in Uganda in October 1989.<sup>62</sup> In 1991 they were brought together in a single camp, the Dr Hugo Nkabinde camp, some 120 kilometres northwest of Kampala.<sup>63</sup> Sellstrom notes that the camp housed between 2,500 and 3,000 people.<sup>64</sup> Thousands of other MK

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<sup>58</sup> Interview with Mfanasekhaya Gqobose.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Gasson Ndlovu.

<sup>60</sup> African National Congress, *ANC second submission to the TRC – Part 2*, available at [www.anc.org.za](http://www.anc.org.za).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 815.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 837n.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 819n.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 839.

members were settled in Tanzania, where they were housed mainly at a camp outside Tanga, about 280 kilometres north of Dar es Salaam, and Iringa, about 500 kilometres west of the capital. Smaller numbers were relocated to Mazimba and Dakawa in Tanzania.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 838n.

## Chapter 8

### The ANC's prison camps

The ANC's camps for detainees have been the subject of a number of studies.<sup>1</sup> The most notorious of all ANC prison camps was nicknamed Quatro (four in Portuguese) by MK cadres. It was named after the Fort in Johannesburg – popularly known as 'No. 4 – where many political detainees had been imprisoned in the 1960s. According to Ketelo and others, Quatro was formed after the leadership of the ANC became aware of increasing discontent in the camps. Cadres who were undergoing repeated courses in preparation to infiltrate the country were becoming dissatisfied with the failure of the movement to send them back to South Africa. Added to this was the criticism that commanders were inefficient because many of the cadres who were infiltrated at the time were captured or killed. Ketelo et al. state: 'Something had to be done to stamp down this resistance'. This led to the reorganization of the security organ of the ANC in all camps, including the deployment of young people in all MK camps. The ANC also began to construct its own prison camp, Quatro.<sup>2</sup> According to Ketelo et al.:

Established in 1979, it was supposed to be a rehabilitation centre of the ANC where enemy agents who had infiltrated the ANC would be 're-educated' and would be made to love the ANC through the opportunity to experience the humane character of its ideals.

Quatro was located about 15 kilometres from Quibaxe, to the north of Luanda. According to Ketelo et al., there were seven communal cells, some which used to be storerooms of the former Portuguese owners of the property, and five small isolation cells. Because of minimal ventilation in the cells, conditions were suffocating, dark and damp. Each cell had a five-litre bottle-like plastic container covered with a cardboard in the corner that was used as a toilet. Prisoners were issued with lice-infested blankets that were not washed for months. Prisoners were treated in ways designed to humiliate them – a combination of physical and psychological activities that were aimed at achieving this goal. Prisoners were given invective names that were meant to destroy them psychologically.

Andrew Masondo, who was National Commissar of the ANC at the time, provides another perspective. He states:

Another aspect of the national commissar is that in national executive meetings I was obliged to give a report about the state of the morale, the state of the situation in the ANC, and the camps. For instance, if an MK person was arrested and locked up, I'll go to

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<sup>1</sup> Ketelo et al., 'A Miscarriage of Democracy: The ANC Security Department in the 1984 Mutiny in UMKhonto we Sizwe,' *Searchlight South Africa*, 2(1), (July 1990), pp. 35-65; P. Trehwela, 'The ANC prison camps: An audit of three years, 1990-1993', *Searchlight South Africa*, 3(2), (Apr. 1993), pp. 8-30; P. Trehwela, *Inside Quatro: Uncovering the exile history of the ANC and SWAPO*.

<sup>2</sup> Ketelo et al., 'A Miscarriage of Democracy, pp. 37-8.

see that person. I'll listen to him. If I think that he was unfairly treated, I go back to the commander, and discuss with the commander; and go back at the security people. In some cases I'll make a strong case and get him released. ...

Later we decided: No, it's not good to take our people and lock them up in an Angolan prison. Politically it wouldn't be right because they have not done anything wrong to the Angolans. A chap called Douglas – we used to call him Phiri on Robben Island – who was a builder came to Luanda. We then got a place in Quibaxe, and camp 101 was then created, which people came to call Quatro. We then transferred him and the others to Quatro. Now, we built Quatro. It was comrade Mzwai [Piliso] and myself who were supervising that. But basically it was comrade Mzwai because he was in charge of personnel. Then it was built. Now, you can imagine: here are young people who spend most of their prime time in a bush, looking after people they think had come to do bad things. They were bound to develop negative attitudes towards these people. I went there to go and discuss with them. I am the person who then also said to our people: “These young people, at least once a week, or once in two weeks, must get leave to go to Luanda to relax, because the pressures they have are great. They also think that the bad people want to escape and things like that.” And some of them were also young. Some of the prisoners there, who were more experienced than them, would taunt them. But I said to them: “Look, you must be careful that you don't develop to be sadists. These people have been put in your custody. Don't ill-treat them.” And this is something I said. And every time I visited them I told them these things. In the beginning they didn't even have uniforms. I am the one who said to comrade Mzwai: “We need to give them some uniforms.” Incidentally, I actually locked up a district chief of security and a camp commissar for beating up a cadre and pointing a gun at him. I locked them up. The one was Stix. He was the district commander. It turned out that both of them were also suspects. The other one I arrested was Godfrey Pule. I locked them up because I thought they were violating the human rights of other people.<sup>3</sup>

The ANC also had a prison camp at Nampula in Mozambique, according to one of the editors of *Search Light South Africa*.<sup>4</sup>

The prison at Nampula was deep in the bush, surrounded by wild animals and in an area heavily affected by malaria. The majority of prisoners were MK veterans of the war in Zimbabwe, where they had fought in the military wing of the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). When they refused to be transferred to fight in the civil war in Angola, demanding to be sent to fight in South Africa itself, they were confined to Nampula, where some went mad. [Ronnie] Kasrils did not deny knowledge of this camp in a press conference in Johannesburg in January 1993.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Interviews with Andrew Masondo conducted by Sifiso Ndlovu from 15 May 2002, Pretoria, SADET Oral History Project.

<sup>4</sup> P. Trehwela, 'The ANC prison camps: An audit of three years, 1990-1993', *Searchlight South Africa*, 3(2), (Apr. 1993), pp. 8-30.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

Winston Ngcayiya, an ANC veteran who had been active in MK's sabotage campaign in the early 1960s, was based in Mozambique in the 1980s. He recalls that:

Nampula was not far from the border with Malawi; but a very nice, suitable place. Our friends FRELIMO, when they gave us that place they said: "Comrades, your struggle is tough. ANC, we cannot pretend not to see and we've got a duty. RENAMO [Mozambique National Resistance] is giving us problems. We can give you a military base in a true sense of the word military base. We can give you any type of gun you want, anti air craft whatever." Nice place. I went there too because I was I was in charge of the logistics. They said to us: "Alright, you choose. We can give you weapons and mount them for you. Only then can your personnel operate it. Or you do it yourself". So we chose to do it ourselves. So we said: "Comrades what you have done is great because this is a military base". Things were going to be more serious compared to camps in other countries. Now this arrangement was called off because it was that time of Nkomati which sort of disturbed relations between us and them. But some of us understood the difficulties. ... This camp thing faded away because of the Nkomati thing. Some of us were very angry against the Mozambicans but we came together as friends and colleagues. ... Now that Nampula thing collapsed because some of the security members belonging to FRELIMO said: "There's nothing they can do against the boers. They are too powerful". ... So what we planned in Nampula could not work because they knew about the whole plan.<sup>6</sup>

Sam Mkhabela was based at Nampula from 1980 to mid-1982. He recalls that:

... we were in the middle of nowhere. Logistically we were not supplied. We did not get food. At a certain stage we could run for three months without getting any food supply. We used to wash in the river. We were staying in camps and the tents were so dilapidated that even at night lions used to come just next to the tents and then they would roar. No electricity, no light, no beds, no mattress. You know, we used to cut down some trees with pangas, which are V-like, and then cut the logs like this (demonstrating) and make the beds. Then take some grass so that it must be at least soft. ... And then in the morning we used to go to the morning spot, that is, physical education. And then, we used to be educated also in other basic ... [aspects of] military. But most of the time we spent learning about the actual politics; about what was happening. And in the whole camp we had only one radio, which was at the commander's office. We can call it a commander's office but it was a tent. ... Then every morning ... [there were people who would] listen to the BBC, listen to Radio South Africa, listen to whatever and write the news and you go and read it to the comrades in the morning assembly. .. John Zulu ... was one guy who was teaching us politics. ... I started teaching other comrades who could not read and

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Winston Ngcayiya conducted by Sifiso Ndlovu, 11 January 2001, Soweto, SADET Oral History Project.

write. I taught them literacy classes because there were some comrades ... who did not even know how to read and write. You know, there were also cultural activities.<sup>7</sup>

What is known about Nampula is that in 1980 the South African government pressurized the Mozambican authorities to act against ANC members based in the country after the Zimbabwe elections. About 40 ANC members were expelled from Mozambique and the majority of ANC members moved to the Nampula province in the north of the country.<sup>8</sup> Cadres of the ANC were still based at a camp in the province towards the end of May 1983 when, according to Vladimir Shubin, Mzwai Piliso and Chris Hani had discussed the situation in the ANC camp in Nampula ‘in an attempt to ensure the further stay of MK cadres there’.<sup>9</sup> The ANC did not acknowledge the existence of the prison in its camp in Nampula to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

According to Ketelo et al., the ANC also had secret prisons in places known as ‘R.C.’ and the Green House in Luanda, ‘and at a place in Tanzania disguised as a farm near the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO) at Mazimbu’.<sup>10</sup> The ANC claims that the ‘R.C.’ was in Lusaka, and it characterized the facilities here as follows:

Initially this building was used by Military HQ, and MK cadres who had been found guilty of disciplinary offences would be confined here for limited periods as punishment – a kind of “detention barracks.” Later, it was used to hold discovered agents or definite suspects in transit to Camp 32. It was closed in 1987 when Sun City was opened to take its place. Conditions at the RC were good, and very few people were held here at any time; it is not possible to give an estimate, as requested by the TRC, for the number of inmates at the RC at any one time. The RC did not have a commander as such; those responsible for people held at the RC would be senior MK and NAT officials in the region.<sup>11</sup>

According to the ANC:

The Farm was established in late 1987 as a rehabilitation centre for ANC members based in the area who had committed offences in terms of the ANC’s code of conduct, but whose cases the Tanzanian government considered too petty to be dealt with in their courts of law (for example, stealing and selling clothing.) It was also at times used as a holding facility for confessed agents and definite suspects whilst the security structures in Tanzania were waiting for tickets to arrive from Lusaka so that these agents or definite

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with Sam Mkhabela (Ndaba Zimvu) conducted by Lesetja Marepo, 5 October 2002, Acornhoek, Bushbuckridge, SADET Oral History Project.

<sup>8</sup> Sellstrom, *Sweden and national liberation*, p. 632.

<sup>9</sup> V. Shubin, ‘Comrade Mzwai’, unpublished paper, p. 11. Available at [www.sahistory.org.za](http://www.sahistory.org.za).

<sup>10</sup> Ketelo et al., ‘A Miscarriage of Democracy’, p. 41.

<sup>11</sup> ANC Second Submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Available at [www.anc.org.za](http://www.anc.org.za).



suspects could be flown out of the area. Conditions were not harsh; the centre consisted of proper buildings with tiled roofs; there was running water and flush toilets.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 9

### ANC dug-out camps and other bases inside the country

In 1977 the MK central Operations Headquarters established the Transvaal Urban Machinery (TUM) in Maputo. TUM's operational zone was primarily the then Transvaal, with a focus on the major urban areas. Charles Ramusi was appointed first commander and Sphiwe Nyanda commissar. Ramusi died in 1978 and Nyanda assumed command in early 1979. Infiltration of cadres from Mozambique began in earnest in 1977. One of the units created to infiltrate was the so-called G-5 unit, which included Solly 'Jabu' Shoke. The members of the unit initially lived in the townships. However, this became dangerous and the unit decided to establish its own base in the mine dumps in Mzimhlophe. The idea was to establish dugouts in the ground where cadres could live and store weapons. According to the commander of the unit, 'Comrade Ken' (real name Johannes Rasegatla):

You know what we used? A mine dump. It's a mine dump there, but about 100 metres away from this there is a hole. That hole it goes down for about two metres, and then it ends there. From there it goes this way (illustrating) and then big enough for you to crawl for a very long distance. So that was our hideout. And then proceeded that way, and somewhere there in front opened it up and made it a nice hole. That's where we were staying; a very warm place. But sometimes when it had rained, there was part of this passage that goes there that used to trap water. To this day you have to go through water. But that was nice in terms of camouflage. ... Now this skirmish line [of police searching for the guerrillas], I'm looking at them. People are trying to relate what has happened there. They were saying this and that. Lying. Exaggerating. It's so nice to listen to people talking about something you know and they start making it much bigger and much nicer than it actually was. But what was interesting was that they just walked over that hole, because that hole when you come there, you look there you just see where it ends. But they never cared about that. And what used to happen, from Meadowlands going to New Canada, they used to pass there and some of them would shit there and there would be a lot of shit around there. And we were saying we don't remove this shit. This place must appear to be as wild as that. We will just reduce the amount where to walk in and out. But we want it the way it was. So nothing was discovered. And about 5 metres away from there, that's where there were tin trunks, military hardware buried there. And with their dogs they couldn't even see it. And what we used to do, without being told this thing at training, was to dig one and half metres down and put in whatever we want to hide there. And have the first of soil, cover it up and go and buy this Ntsu snuff and pepper. We would sprinkle it there and put a lot of soil again. Stamp it and sprinkle again a mixture of snuff and pepper – red or what – and put it there and there and there. And then thereafter we camouflage. It must look like any other place around. So our theory was that. And it worked. If there is any smell that this hardware is emitting, that smell cannot

be stronger than this snuff and pepper. ... And, indeed, that is why even the sniffer dogs could not sniff that.<sup>1</sup>

After a few days living in the mine dump the cadres found the situation unbearable. The group then moved to a place full of reeds between Riverlea and Diepkloof where they built dugouts. Rasegatla explains:

You know, we were digging a place as big as this (illustrating), maybe 2X3X2 metres. Go down, go down, go down. And we only have the night to do that. We dig at night. It's becoming daylight, we have to close and camouflage because people start going up and down and then they will see us. We are limited to work only at night and we start late at night. So it takes us quite some time: digging, bring the soil back. The following day we have to take out the soil and start digging until we managed to reach the level that we want. And thereafter we had some corrugated iron. We put it on top and then supported by some pillars there. And then a lot of soil there. Now, our breathing pipes were not well done or they were not effective. We would make another tunnel that goes out and then use a dustbin lid to close it and turn it upside down so that it can take the soil. But make sure that it is in a place where even if a person walks through there he can't go through there. It's in a shrub. Now the day we finish digging that we were all tired. We had primus stove and we had brought in some tin bags and we had water. Everybody wanted to go down there and have a cup of tea and we are using primus stove. We had, I think, two breathing pipes. Those pipes proved not to be effective. Fortunately not all of us were in there. But those that were in there getting tea suffocated. And I was inside there. I just felt some headache. Now the commander of the unit, the late Nsizwa, wanted to go out. He was suffocating so much that he couldn't take it any longer. On his way out he collapsed and blocking the whole exit. You can't pass there. And we all want to leave and there is this person here who is blocking the way and he is semi-conscious. They call him. He is not responding. I had to shout at him very much and he really jumped this way and he hit the dustbin lid with his head open. And he got out. That's how we all managed to get out. Now he was somehow mentally disturbed. He was not normal because he started running away. Then I said to another comrade: "Chase this guy. Get him." It was some drama. We are trying to understand what is happening here. We did not correctly anticipate carbon monoxide: how dangerous it is. We are trying to ascertain what is happening. "No, it's carbon monoxide." So this guy is running and there's this other one chasing him. He is not running very far. He is just running in circles. And fortunately running like that helped him: the circulation to get rid of that. But fortunately the base was finished and it was now a home.<sup>2</sup>

Solly Shoke provides another description of the dugout base:

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Johannes Rasegatla conducted by Gregory Houston and Bernard Magubane, 15 July 2004, Pretoria, SADET Oral History Project.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

We used to dig at night, actually the top soil. We used to preserve that top soil and put it somewhere safe and then after we have removed about maybe half a meter layer, you put it safe somewhere on a plastic and then you start digging. And the one that you dig here you have to throw it somewhere in a river. Normally we preferred areas where you would be able to conceal the soil that you have dug out. But then after you have done that, you will take pillars, support pillars that you normally use for roofing ... And then after that you put back the pillars and the soil that you preserved back on top and then you bring back what you call camouflage. And normally camouflage would be the leaves that you got from the trees. You try to make the place as original as possible. And then once you have dug the place there is enough to accommodate 5/6 people and equipment. And then we used to do what we call ventilation. So you will take chimneys, a pipe where you put a chimney, then put it next to a tree. Then you put a sail as if [it was ] a net that would prevent snakes and other reptiles to come in. ... Then you make that little hole where the chimney comes out to be as concealed as possible, next to a tree and what have you. And then there must be cross ventilation as well. ... And then your entrance: you will dig it round. In fact, the size of a dust bin. Actually you first make it square. Then you put support pillars, planks; you make them cross. Across it should be a square there. But then take sheets, the ones that we make, not drums (*igogogo*). You cut it correctly. In fact you shape it according to the dustbin lid shape. ... Once we have made the shape of a dustbin we then take the soil, put on the dustbin lid and plant grass on that dustbin lid that would overflow to hide the round shape of the dustbin. And then when you go out, you lift it up, put it on the side. Then you are out and then you put it back and you camouflage it properly. ... So what we normally used to do then, during the day, we used to go and practice to see if each one now will be able to do it properly. ... Unfortunately that base was exposed when Bonny Tsotsobe was arrested. Actually, even the cops, when we read through ... Drum magazine, they confessed that actually they wouldn't have discovered such a base. It was a shock to them when they discovered it.<sup>3</sup>

Towards the middle of 1980, after the unit had expanded in number to include other guerrillas such as Gordon Dibeku (Linda Jabane), Bobby Tsotsobe and Havia Zengwe, Shoke and Nicky Hlongwane were deployed to set up bases in the Pretoria region because there were now too many of them in Soweto. It was decided that those who had acquired experience be sent to set up the bases. Shoke, Marcus Motaung and Hlongwane linked up with Rasegatla's brother who was living in Winterveld. They established an underground base at Ga-Rankuwa, commanded by Shoke, and another at Hammanskraal, commanded by Hlongwane. The Hammanskraal base was established on an island in the Apies River on a farm owned by a Mr Rens. The Ga-Rankuwa base was next to the Ga-Rankuwa Hospital, about 500 metres from the railway station and long grass in the area provided sufficient concealment. Simon Mogoerane and Jerry Mosolodi were arrested at the underground dugout base on the island in the Apies River in Hammanskraal in the late afternoon of the 28<sup>th</sup> December 1981. The location of the base had been discovered when an old man called Samson saw people on the island and went to investigate. The guerrillas decided

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Solly Shoke conducted by Bernard Magubane, 2 June 2004, Pretoria, SADET Oral History Project.

to leave the base and just as they were removing their possessions the police raided them. Mosololi, who was inside the base passing on their possessions to Hlongwane, was unable to escape, but Hlongwane managed to run away.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Houston and Magubane, 'The ANC's armed struggle in the 1970s', pp. 496-7.

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## **Interviews:**

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- Interview with Nceba Faku conducted by Pat Gibbs, 26 June 2004, East London, SADET Oral History Project.



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Interview with Lesaone Makhanda conducted by Thami ka Plaatjie, 8 May 2007, Walkerville, SADET Oral History Project.

Interview with Isaac Makopo conducted by Sifiso Ndlovu, 24 November 2000, Pretoria, SADET Oral History Project.

Interview with Ureah Maleka conducted by Sifiso Ndlovu, 12 January 2001, Soweto, SADET Oral History project.

Interview with Jeremiah Mamabolo conducted by Bernard Magubane and Gregory Houston, 6 February 2004, Pretoria, SADET Oral History Project.

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Interview with Vuyani Mgaza conducted by Brown Maaba, 31 November 2001, East London, SADET Oral History Project.

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Interview with Sikose Mji conducted by Neo Ramope, 14 November 2007, Pretoria, SADET Oral History Project.

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