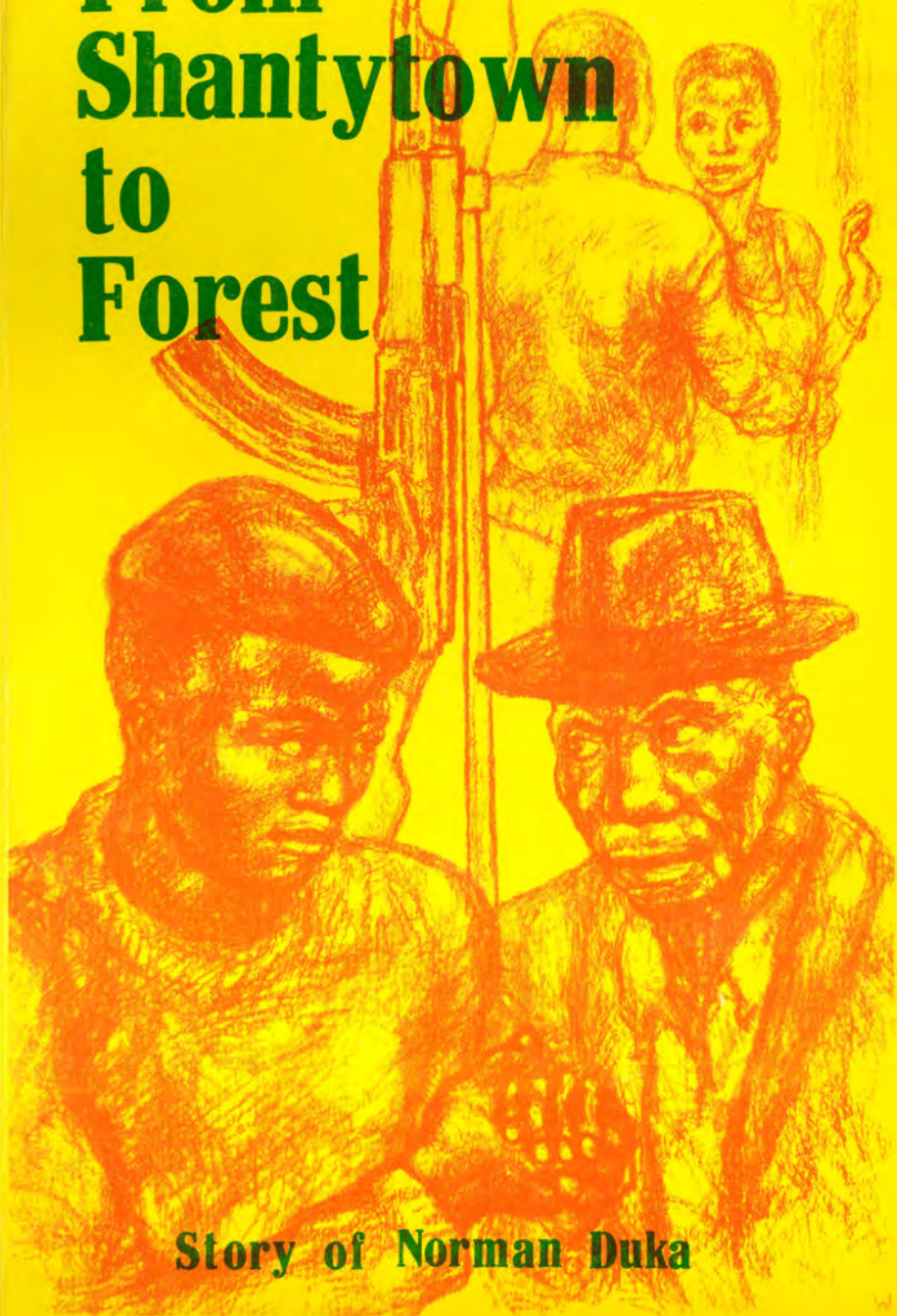


Life Histories from the Revolution
South Africa ANC 1

From Shantytown to Forest



Story of Norman Duka

From Shantytown to Forest

SOUTH AFRICA

LSM Press

Recorded and Edited by

Dennis and Ginger Mercer



From Shantytown to Forest
The Story of Norman Duka



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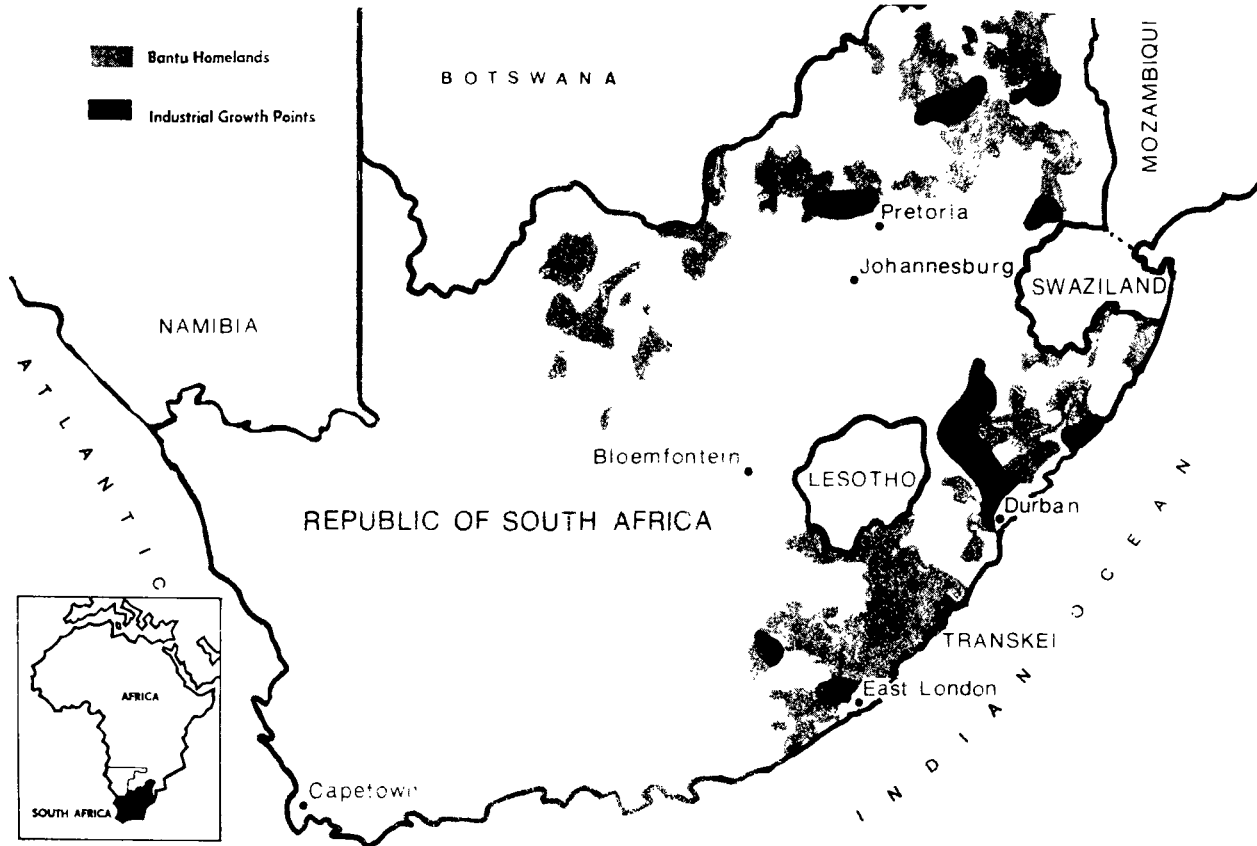
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Foreword

The vast majority of peasants and workers in the super-exploited hinterland of the imperialist system are illiterate. It is part of their oppression. They comprise almost half of the world's total population, some 75% of the population within the "free world," and the emiserated broad base from which all contemporary anti-imperialist revolutions draw their essential moral and material strength. These are the masses who, under the leadership of revolutionary vanguards, are making modern history. Yet, due largely to the chains of their enforced illiteracy, these makers of history rarely have the opportunity to document their own experiences within it. Their "backwardness" condemns them to literary silence as well as to poverty, disease and a short life.

One of our objectives in launching this series of LIFE HISTORIES FROM THE REVOLUTION is to provide a medium through which individual members of these classes-in-motion within the revolution can *speak*. We also believe it important that they *be heard* by those of us who comprise imperialism's privileged and literate metropolitan minority. Their recounted lives throw our own into sharp relief, while at the same time they offer us fresh perspectives on the processes of repression and revolution from a unique vantage point: *from below*. Their life stories provide us with a window into the qualitative - as distinct from the merely statistical and quantitative - aspects of class conflict, thus enabling us to better understand and weigh the various factors at work in transforming oppressed masses into revolutionary classes. Again, their remembered life experiences can provide us with significant insights into the dialectical relationships between material and subjective conditions which shape the revolutionary situation, embrace the revolutionary transformation of individuals and classes alike, and move humanity forward toward a new international social formation.

Not all of the individuals whose life histories are included in this series are illiterate peasants or workers. Some are educated defectors from petty bourgeois classes who have joined the revolution and identified their interests with those of the oppressed masses in a very concrete way. They constitute a very important part of the revolutionary vanguard - i.e., the middle cadres who articulate the relationship between leadership and base, who carry forward the military and civilian programs in day-to-day contact with the armed militants and popular masses. The selfless dedication, integrity, comportment and skill of the middle cadres is an essential ingredient within any successful revolutionary process.

The life histories in this series have been recorded and prepared as historical documents from the revolutionary struggles of our time. The techniques and methods employed at each stage of the process, from initial contact to final editing, have therefore been chosen or fashioned with the purpose of guaranteeing the authenticity and integrity of the life history concerned. These stories, then, to the best of our ability to make them so, constitute a body of data and testimony as revealed by a few of those history-makers normally condemned to silence while others speak on their behalf.

Don Barnett
Director
LSM Information Center

Introduction

This is the story of Norman Duka, a thirty-two year old militant in the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa. Norman was born into a poor working class family and lived most of his early life in an African shantytown outside East London in the Cape Province of South Africa. I met Norman in Lusaka, Zambia in November 1972. He had been working in the ANC office and as a driver for several years after military training in the Soviet Union, combat within Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) as part of a unit headed for South Africa and a period of imprisonment in Botswana. We were introduced in the ANC office at the Lusaka Liberation Center. Norman Duka is a short, sturdy man with a pleasant smile and firm handshake. It had been arranged beforehand by the movement leadership that he would work with me recording his life history. We sat and discussed the procedures and schedule for this work.

Over the next two weeks Norman and I got to know one another fairly well and I had the opportunity to learn a great deal from his recounted experiences. Always soft-spoken, Norman recalled his early years, his family and friends, and the girl he had planned to marry - sometimes pleasant but often painful memories for a young revolutionary awaiting the day when he would return arms-in-hand to participate in a more direct way in the liberation struggle. Often he spoke about going home and of the people's war which had to be waged in order to end the sufferings of the South African masses. He never failed to reflect that combination of optimism and patience, confidence and common sense, which are essential ingredients of a South African revolutionary in temporary exile.

But what made Norman Duka become an ANC militant? What makes the other tens of thousands of peasants and urban workers join such a liberation movement? Surely it is not a *theoretical* understanding of the inherent contradictions within South Africa and the imperialist system of which it is a part - as is often the case with militants from a petty-bourgeois intellectual background. As Norman Duka's story clearly reveals, it is the culmination of a process involving daily suffering, degradation, injustice and lack of hope for personal advancement which leave the masses of people in Africa, Asia and Latin America so little to lose and so much to gain from joining a revolutionary struggle for genuine independence from co-

lonial and neocolonial rule; for a truly human society free from man's exploitation of man and rational in its use of natural and human resources.

But it is not poverty, ill-treatment and lack of political rights alone which generate in the masses the required degree of "revolutionary potential" (i.e. receptivity to an ideology and praxis involving the organized use of violence to restructure basic social relationships). To these must be added the factor of *relative* and *visible* deprivation vis-a-vis a privileged minority and the aspect of differing rates and directions of change among the "haves" and "have-nots" as regards the basic conditions of life. The Norman Duka story reveals but a microcosm of this phenomenon in South Africa; just as the latter mirrors the fundamental contradiction within imperialist society as a whole.

South Africa's color bar and apartheid policies, especially as they relate to wages and real incomes (hence to the rights of trade union activity and collective bargaining), have produced an uneven development and huge current gap in the living conditions of "white" and "non-white" (largely African) workers. A recent study* reveals the economic basis for class collaboration at the political level between the settler bourgeoisie, white workers and international capital. The settler bourgeoisie, threatened by African nationalism from below and by the giant multinational corporations from above, has long needed support from the white working class to achieve and maintain control over the state apparatus in order to protect its minority interests. The working class, in turn, needs the supporting legislative power of the state to secure color bar privileges in the spheres of wages and trade union rights. Thus, since the Nationalist/Labour Party coalition government was formed in 1924, a succession of legislative acts and governmental policies have eliminated white unemployment, raised white wages to "civilized" standards and - beginning in 1926 with the Mines and Works Act - reserved "for Whites only" an increasingly large number of skilled and semi-skilled job categories. Statutory color bars now "safeguard" white workers from "unfair competition" from Blacks in virtually every employment sphere. Not only has the "poor white problem" been solved, but the privileges offered white workers enticed some 343,428 white immigrants to South Africa between 1961 and 1970. Today, while 80% of black workers - comprising 84% of the total industrial labor force - hold low paying unskilled jobs, all but 3% of white workers occupy supervisory, skilled or semi-skilled jobs whose high wages are literally subsidized by the super-exploitation of their "fellow" non-white workers.

This crucial economic fact, according to Davies, that the white working class "...benefits from the extraction of surplus value, ... participates in the exploitation of the majority of the working class," accounts in large measure for the three-way class collaboration in which "...the white working class feels, and is, secure in its alliance with settler capitalism...in a working relationship

*See "The White Working Class in South Africa," by Robert Davies. *New Left Review* #82, Nov.-Dec. 1973, pp.40-59.

with international capitalism. All three elements of the dominant block - the settler bourgeoisie, which runs the State apparatus, the white workers who depend for their economic advantages on the use of political power, and the international capitalists who receive approximately 50% more on South African investments than the world average return - gain from the monopolization of natural resources and the forced direction of African labour which characterizes the South African Republic.*

For present purposes it is useful to simplify Davies' argument and deal with approximate, rounded figures which nonetheless clearly reveal the economic basis for the political relationship between white and black workers. We find that despite a relatively greater rise in the productivity of black labor as compared to white over the past fifty years in the key sectors of mining, manufacture and construction, black workers have suffered a small decline in real income while white workers enjoyed a fabulous ten-fold increase in mining between 1911 and 1966 and a 100% increase in manufacture and construction in the decade from 1959 to 1969.

Calculating what the approximate wages in the mining, manufacture and construction industries would be *if there were no profits* extracted from unpaid labor (i.e. no exploitation) - or what Davies calls the "average allowable wage with no surplus content" - we come up with a figure of some \$2,800 for 1972. This hypothetical wage to unexploited workers is then used to determine the amount of surplus value realized and the rate of exploitation among white and black workers, respectively, in these three industries. We learn that the *actual* average wage for some 363,000 white workers in 1972 was about \$5,000 - i.e. wages containing an average "surplus content" of \$2,200!

But where did this "added" surplus come from? Did the white capitalist owners dip into their own savings so as to avoid exploiting white workers and provide them a "civilized" standard of life? Certainly not! The answer is revealed in the counterpart figures for more than a quarter-of-a-million black workers in these same industries, whose average wage in 1972 was a bare \$560 - i.e. a wage representing a "surplus deficit" of \$2,240 and a rate of exploitation of some 500%. It can thus be easily seen that this "super-exploitation" of non-white, mainly African, workers - constituting about four-fifths of the work force in these key industries - is being (and has long been) used to subsidize the increasingly "civilized" (i.e. high) wages and living conditions for the minority of white workers.

Though we can't go into the details here, a similar phenomenon - realized through even more complex processes of capital concentration and "unequal exchange" - operates at the international level within the imperialist system as a whole. Viewed in this framework, the metropolitan working classes within the advanced or industrial-

*Ibid., pp.44-5, 49. See also, *South Africa: Workers Under Apartheid*, A. Hepple, International Defence and Aid, London, 1969...and *The South African Connection*, First, Steele & Gurney, London, 1972.

ized countries of the West and Japan receive wages subsidized in large measure out of the super-profits and generated from the unpaid labor of so-called "Third World" peasants and workers. Again, it is this economic fact which underlies the political "bourgeoisification" of the metropolitan minority of largely white workers; their class collaboration with domestic and international ruling classes at the political (and subsequently military) level, and opposition to the struggles being waged by non-white workers and peasants within imperialism's colonies and neocolonies for genuine independence and an opportunity to achieve economic, social and cultural well-being within a non-exploitative, socialist system of human relationships.

Returning now to the story of Norman Duka, we find that he was not far into his teens before experiencing much of the exploitation and brutality meted out to urban Africans by the white racist regime: poor housing, low wages and bad working conditions, police raids and harassment, humiliating pass laws and other apartheid measures. Few avenues existed for voicing his dissatisfaction with government and employer policies and seeking redress for his grievances. His father was a member of the African National Congress and Norman started attending rallies in his location in early 1959. He listened with hundreds of others to the speakers and soon began distributing the movement bulletin in the neighborhood. Open mass rallies and other activities were not to last long however. As ANC's numbers and strength grew, so did the repressive measures of the racist government. Within a year ANC was banned and found serious problems of underground organizing and practice. Many leaders were arrested or banned; those who remained had to devise new methods of mobilizing the masses and advancing the struggle while avoiding police arrest and imprisonment. Late in 1961 *Umkonto we Sizwe* was formed as the military wing of ANC. Young men such as Norman Duka were recruited, given a little local training and then sent out of the country for military training in Algeria, the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. There was no longer any hope for a "change of heart" by the white fascist regime: only organized revolutionary violence could bring about the necessary changes.

Norman Duka was one of many young South Africans who endeavored to bring the armed struggle into South Africa and arouse the masses. Most such attempts, however, failed as it was a long and difficult journey on foot across hostile or, at best, unfriendly territory to reach the South African border. This was and remains a major strategic problem - i.e. the difficult logistics created by a South Africa ringed by reactionary white regimes (Rhodesia, Namibia and Mozambique) and the client-state of Botswana. Without a friendly border, liberation movements lack the vital base areas which have become vitally important if not necessary logistical prerequisites for initiating and sustaining a modern guerrilla struggle and people's war. In South Africa this has proved a more untractable problem than in many other areas due to the sophisticated techniques employed by an unscrupulous white police state.

What happens then to the hundreds of ANC militants and leaders who have escaped from South Africa and are now staying in Zambia,

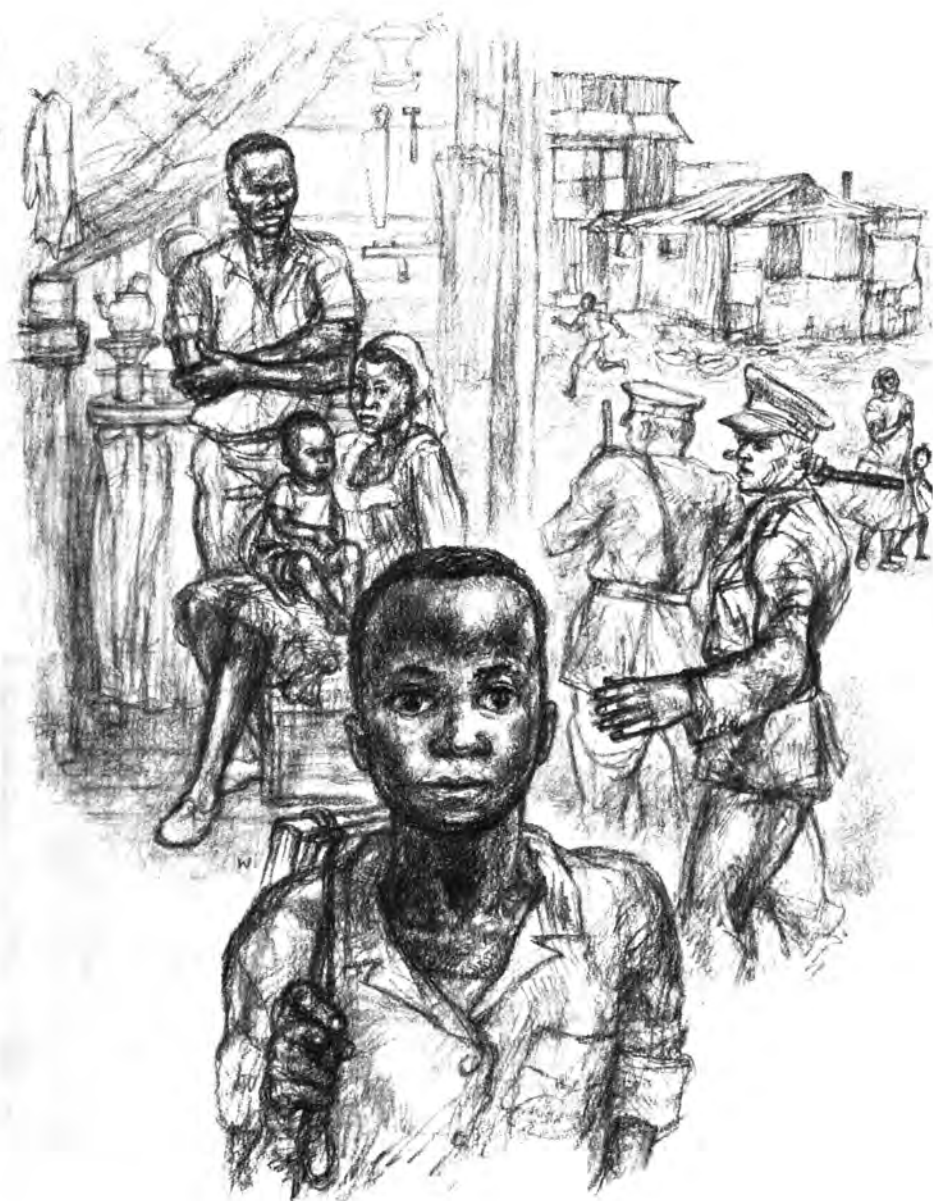
Tanzania, London or elsewhere? And what will happen to ANC's mass base within South Africa? Workers and students have again launched illegal strike and protest actions against the regime and its apartheid policies...but no one questions that it will be a long and difficult struggle to topple the minority regime and expel its imperialist partners. Fortunately, however, the South African masses are not fighting alone. The liberation movements in Angola and Mozambique have made significant gains these past few years and the struggles in Namibia and Zimbabwe are now once again seizing the initiative after serious setbacks in the late sixties. Through allying themselves with the Smith and Portuguese regimes to the north, the South African government has been forced to fight on several fronts and thus disperse its strategic military forces. With a serious weakening of post-coup Portugal's resolve and ability to hang onto its African colonies; with FRELIMO forces pushing ever further south into Mozambique and a friendly border already opened to Zimbabwe guerrillas through Tete district; how long will it be before the dikes begin to crumble around South Africa and merge with the rising tide of African militancy within South Africa? One year? Two years? Five years? Perhaps even longer. But the progress has begun and its unfolding is inexorable.

Norman Duka's story provides the reader with numerous insights into the makers of South Africa's new revolutionary history. He has spoken in the hope that progressive readers will gain a better understanding of the South African liberation movement and, once having understood it, will provide concrete support for those struggling arms-in-hand against what is clearly one of the most repressive, degrading and inhuman regimes yet known to man.

Dennis Mercer
April 10, 1974

Part One

The Making of an ANC Militant



Chapter One

Home

My name is Norman Duka. I was born on 23 September 1940 in the location of Tsolo, a shantytown outside East London, South Africa. I come from a poor, working class family. My father was born in Peddie, a rural area of South Africa, but there was no work in Peddie - no land to plow or other jobs. So, as a young man, he moved to East London. There he met my mother who was then quite young. They married in the early thirties and I was their first child. I grew up in Tsolo. My father was a factory worker and my mother worked at home. Even when I was just a small boy I could see my parents were having a hard time. Sometimes my father was laid-off or the factory would just shut down and he would be without a job. And even when he worked we had very little money.

Tsolo was near the center of East London. There were other locations near ours like New Brighton and Duncan Village - all built for Africans, though some Coloreds and Indians lived there too. The locations grew as more people moved into to escape the poverty in the reserves. Once in Tsolo they would have to make houses from any available materials - cardboard, tin, oil drums, etc. - anything they could find in the rubbish pits. (Few could afford to buy any new things or materials.)

The location was really filthy. There was no place to throw rubbish and washing water was just thrown onto the dirt streets. There were no drains. The toilets were pits with buckets in them, which were collected in the morning and dumped in a special place. Sometimes these buckets weren't collected and you couldn't use the toilet for a long time. There was no indoor plumbing so water had to be gotten from taps along the street a short distance from the houses. Sometimes there were only two water taps per street, each used by as many as twenty families. I remember always seeing long queues of women and children waiting to get water. Some would wake up very early in the morning to get water before the others came.

We had no place for a garden because the small houses were really crowded - so close you could hear your neighbors get up in the morning, brush against their Primus stove or bump the walls. Our house was near the street and we could see people, cars and donkey carts pass. We had one room, partitioned into three sections. One was used as a kitchen, another as a small bedroom for the family and

the third as a workshop for my father. On Saturdays and Sundays, when he wasn't at the factory, he made shoes and other things. He made all the furniture we had except for the beds and I must say that my father was quite a good carpenter. He even made the floor from planks he bought at Sitwell Timber. They had lumber spoiled at the factory which they sold cheaply. My mother used to polish this floor twice a week with a candle stub left over from those we used lighting our rooms. She polished the floor so it shined really nice. In the kitchen we had a table and benches, a cupboard and a Primus stove used for cooking, warming water and heating the house in winter when it was cold. We didn't have electricity. In the bedroom my mother and father each had a bed and there was a cot for me when I was little. It had a homemade mattress made with grass stuffed into a potato bag. These mattresses sold around the location for about ten shillings - a good business as they were always in demand and people couldn't afford to buy better ones in town. I remember that they weren't very comfortable; the grass lumped up when the mattress got old and came out through the sacking. The only furniture my parents bought were their beds, which they got at a second-hand shop. (When Whites leave South Africa they usually sell their furniture to these second-hand shops.) We had blankets on the beds and my mother made pillows filled with chicken feathers.

When I was young my father worked at a shoe factory. He would get up very early to take the bus or walk to East London. Transport from the African locations was so poor that most people walked. My mother always woke up first, prepared a lunch for my father to take to work - usually homemade bread and butter - then made coffee. After that my father got up, washed and sat down to breakfast. Then me. Later my brothers and sister got up and we all had porridge, coffee and sometimes bread and butter. After eating, my father kissed us good-bye and left for work. It was easy to see that he worked hard. He had to make a living for the whole family. While he was at work my mother cleaned, washed clothes, etc., and I went out and played with other kids in the location.

I came in around noon to eat lunch with my mother. She always saw to it I had something to eat - something better than she had. Some days she went to town. I would stay home and do chores and eat the fat cakes she left me. These were made of bread flour rolled into little balls and then fried in fat - a favorite of most children in the location. Usually we had stam-mealies with beans or sometimes potatoes.

My father came home about 5 p.m. and always brought an apple, orange or some sweets for me. I looked forward to this and would wait for him outside the house. When I saw him, I ran and jumped up to him and he swung me in the air and hugged me. Then he reached into his pocket asking me: "Guess what I've got?"

"Sweets?"

"No. Guess again." And I would keep guessing till we got home. Then he talked with my mother and I ran out to share my treat with the other children. This was a normal thing, though some kids were selfish.

At about 7 p.m. the whole family sat down to eat stam-mealies

with beans. On weekends when my father got paid we ate better - meat, vegetables and all that. No matter what we had, though, my parents always gave me a good share - even if my father had to take something from his plate for me. It was these things that made me see how much my parents loved me.

My mother used to tell stories about what I did when I was very little; it made me laugh a lot to hear these tales.

Every Sunday morning a church procession passed in front of our house - people walking slowly, preaching and singing. Once while my mother was cooking I slipped out and joined them, walking with the priest in front, singing. I got tired after a while and they had to carry me back home. My mother was worried, but every Sunday after that I joined the procession. In fact, they used to wait for me if I wasn't ready when they came by. I wore my best suit and carried a short polished stick like the priest's which he gave me as a gift from the church. I always walked in front, singing songs and not even knowing what the words meant.

My mother used to say I'd grow up to be a priest. This made my father mad and he would say: "No! He'll be lost. Don't you see he's going to the wrong church!" But he didn't really care that much or go to church regularly himself. My mother, however, went every Sunday and took me along. Church days were nice. Mother and I wore our best clothes and I got a chance to play with some other kids. It was hard sitting through the whole church service and I rarely did. I was usually fast asleep by prayer time, my mother having to carry me out. At home she would tell my father, "Oh, our little 'priest' just came along to get some sleep!"

When I was five I had my first real illness - the first and the last till now. I felt weak and wasn't eating. No one knew what was wrong. After a week or so my father borrowed money from my aunt and my mother took me to see a doctor. His office was in the hospital and my mother left me in the waiting room while she went to arrange things. I was gone when she returned. Finally she found me running along the corridors making lots of noise with my new shoes. Now my mother was chasing me. It was a game, I thought. She was trying to catch me and the doctor was shouting: "Where is that woman? What's going on?" When I got tired I let her catch me. She apologized to the doctor. "I've just been chasing down my boy; sorry."

"I thought you said he was sick!"

"Well, I don't know; he was sick at home - not eating or playing or doing anything." The doctor examined me, then said: "He's not sick, just naughty. Just give him some of this medicine and he'll be fine!"

Back home I ran outside and played with the other kids. My mother was surprised; couldn't figure it out. So she just went inside and prepared something for me to eat. On the street, down from our house, stood a horse and cart. A man was going door to door selling vegetables and I went over to play under the horse. My mother called me for lunch and a neighbor said, "Hey there! Your kid is under that horse." It was a big stallion. My mother was afraid to call me or come close as the horse might buck or lunge forward. I saw her fear, even from a distance, and left the horse.

When I reached my mother she gave me quite a smack.

My best friend, Temba, lived next door. He used to make wire cars for me. I was younger than Temba and when the older boys bullied me or pinched my wire car he would challenge them and bring it back. These boys were old enough to go to school but didn't. Their families couldn't afford it. Some boys seven or eight years old didn't even have trousers - just a shirt or, if they wore pants, rags ripped and worn so their buttocks hung out. Except for Temba, I played with boys my own age. We used to make a ball from rags or maybe find an old tennis ball and use it for a football, kicking it around the street. There were no open lots or yards to play in so we just used the street, though it was dangerous because of the cars. Girls had their own games but sometimes we would get together and play dolls.

On Christmas Day we went to church in the morning and then came home to celebrate with hot bread and cakes and new clothes for us children. This was also the day we would get together with friends and relatives from other locations.

My mother's sister lived some distance from our location. Sometimes we would visit her on weekends, taking the bus or sometimes even walking. During and just after the Second World War, when things were very difficult for our family, we also walked to my aunt's to get food. It was a long journey and my mother had to carry me most of the way. My aunt helped us out a lot. She was a little better off than we were and even gave me powdered milk. Then she and my mother would spend the day talking or doing housework and I would go out and play with my cousins.

In 1946 Temba started school. I felt lonely being left behind, but my mother promised that I could go to school next year, when I was seven. (There is a law in South Africa that African children cannot start school before they are seven.) This made me very happy.

On my seventh birthday mother made cakes and gingerbeer and invited my friends over. We sang songs, played games, ate and had a very good time. I still remember it well. Soon I started school. Mother handed me a slate and pencil and we set out early one morning with Temba. We met other children. Some joked and said, "Hey, look! Here's a new kid." I felt strange and wanted to hide. The bell had rung when we reached the school and everyone was in line singing a hymn with the teacher in front. Temba joined the others. Mother and I waited by the side. I noticed that a number of kids weren't singing - they looked at me and were whispering. After the hymn, my mother approached the principal and we went into his office. It was easy. I was enrolled and my mother kissed me good-bye and left. I was alone and frightened. The principal called in a teacher, Miss Ngobongwana, and her friendly smile made me feel better. She introduced me in the Sub A class but the children just whispered and made jokes. I was happy when she showed me my seat. The class was learning to write by making many big O's. It looked easy but I found it hard to do.

Wesley School was in the center of Tsole. It was the biggest building in the area, painted white with red tiles. All around the

school were big trees planted by former pupils. It was right in the middle of the location so I didn't have far to walk and was not required to carry a pass. It was more difficult for kids who lived outside Tsolo; they had to be taken to school by their mothers.

The school was divided into six classes, from Sub A to Standard 4, with each teacher handling two classes. Sub A was divided into A-1 and A-2. I completed A-1 in a few months and started A-2. There wasn't much difference. If you paid attention and didn't cause any trouble you just passed on to A-2. Next year I began Sub B. It was better. I was used to the school now and Temba gave me his old books. I had the same teacher, Miss Ngobongwana, who taught both Sub A and Sub B - working with us for a while, then going to the other class while we did our lessons. We started at 8 and at 11 had a 45 minute break to eat and then play rugby or football. After lunch we worked in the garden or did handiwork - making baskets, pottery and so on. We did this till school was over at 2. They call it "Bantu education" - teaching African kids to be good garden "boys" and servants when they grow up. And the English we were taught? Just so we could carry out the orders of the "Missus" or *baas*.

Our teacher in Sub B was very strict. She usually hit us on the hand with a stick for giving a wrong answer or fooling around in class. Sometimes we were ordered to work in the garden or were beaten on the buttocks for breaking the rules. Many parents were against these beatings and some children were taken out of school because of them.

One day in Sub A I saw a teacher beating some kids - he was so mad he was just hitting them anywhere. I was very afraid of being beaten like this and that night I told my mother I was tired of school and wanted to quit. "Nonsense," she said, "you just keep going." I didn't tell her my fears, just said, "I hope a big wind will come and blow the school away."

In 1949 at the end of my second year, we were given an oral examination. A visiting African inspector called on us to answer questions about our studies and then gave us marks. Later our teacher told us who passed or failed. It was a happy day for me, but very sad for those who failed. I ran all the way home to tell my parents and they fixed me a special supper.

In Standard 1 we had a new teacher, Mike Sofuta - we called him "Soft" for short. The subjects were different altogether and included Arithmetic and Geography. (Actually, some very simple math was taught in Sub B like, "How many legs does a horse have if one is broken?") In Standard 1 we started working on adding and subtracting; I felt that I was finally getting something out of school. Competition on exams - held twice a year - was strong between boys and girls. The best student in our class was a girl, Lydia Nywana. She was always number one.

Lydia was from a well-to-do family in Tsolo location. Her father ran a small grocery store. Their house was behind the store, made with brick and proper roofing. There were few nice houses like this in Tsolo - all belonging to small businessmen. Their children played with us poor kids and went to the same African school. Lydia

lived pretty close to our place but we weren't friends.

I joined the Cub Scouts in Standard 1. Michael Sofuta was in charge and we learned first aid, knot tying and other things which we got badges for. Boys who were good at their lessons became Scout leaders. All the boys wanted to join, but some parents couldn't afford the khaki Scout uniform which was required. My mother sewed the shirt and we managed to buy the trousers and cap - a green one with yellow stripes. I learned to play the drums for concerts at school, held in our largest room so that many people would come - parents, old people and children. We sang songs, some in English and some in our own languages. I liked these concerts very much and was proud to be in the Scouts. But my father didn't like it. Sometimes in bed at night I could hear my parents arguing about my being in the Scouts. Father said I should quit, "Those Scouts won't do Norman or us any good. He's just being trained for war and one day they'll take him off to fight something we know nothing about."

During the Second World War many of our people had joined or been drafted into the South African Army, serving as cooks, carriers, bootshiners - but never allowed to serve as soldiers and carry guns. After the war some got prizes - bicycles, trench coats and so on. The white people whom they served, however, got land, farms and money. My father was cynical and didn't want to see this happen again - especially not to me. But my mother would argue that the "Scouts are educating Norman; it's good for him to learn discipline, skills and first aid." It was a constant contradiction and struggle - my father being political and my mother not.

In the late 1940's my father belonged to the ICU (Industrial and Commercial Workers Union), an organization headed by Clements Kadalie. It was a union for working people's rights and was very popular in East London at that time. My father was a fairly high ranking member; he was always busy, coming home from work, then leaving again for meetings. We seldom saw him even on weekends.

Nights when my father was home he often talked with two old Tsolo men who served in World War II for the South African Army. Whenever I could I listened to their discussions and learned many interesting things that happened when they were stationed in places like Tobruk and Egypt in North Africa. Sometimes they laughed, remembering the things they'd been told about being "free" after the war. My father would mimic the white officers and joke: "After this war you will get your freedom!" "But where is our freedom?" "Your freedom now is in those bicycles and big coats. But what do you do with these great coats? Nothing! Nothing at all!" Then my father would say mockingly: "But look 'old man,' we must still work, and sometimes there are no jobs - nobody wants us, not even our old commanders."

But I didn't understand. And when my father said he was against the Boy Scouts, I became bitter. I liked what we did, being with other boys. Most of my neighbors and friends at school were Scouts. And Mike Sofuta liked me. I always did well in my lessons and had won promotions, badges and all that; even during competitions when our parents came, and in our concerts, I always performed

well. So I was bitter with my father, though I knew my mother was on my side and she always won the arguments.

Once, during a discussion, I said I simply would not quit the Boy Scouts! My father got very angry, pounded the table and told me to shut up unless asked to speak. I was sad at his anger, but confident my mother would succeed again. It took several years for me to understand and accept my father's position on the Boy Scouts.

Temba failed Standard 2, so from then on we were in the same class. My parents had to buy my books now and it was difficult. During our three-week holiday in June I went to town looking for gardening jobs. I would get two or three shillings a day for this work, or if I got a good "boss" maybe five...the maximum pay for a boy my age. This money helped pay for my school books.

When I told my mother I wanted to look for a job she said I was too young. "Doing heavy jobs like picking rock or pushing a wheelbarrow could deform you for life." But I insisted saying we needed the money for books and she finally gave in. I had no money for bus fare so I just had breakfast and started off to the European town on foot. I walked and walked and walked, first checking a market for a job carrying vegetables to European shoppers' cars. No luck. Then I tried some rich white man's house. I knocked at the gate, but instead of an answer several big dogs rushed at me. I was on the other side of the gate but was so frightened that I ran away. Already it had been a long journey; my feet were sore (I didn't have any shoes), and I was tired and hungry. But I kept looking.

I went up to a house with a bell and pressed the button. An old white lady came to the door. I could see she was angry, "Why are you ringing at the front door black boy?" I made some excuses hoping she might still give me a job, but she just screamed, "Get out! Get out!" Back on the street I started to cry. "Why?" I couldn't understand what I did wrong. I was angry, hungry and tired so I just sat down on the curbing and cried. Then, after a few minutes, a young African servant at the house came up and asked me if I wanted something to eat. I guess she could see I was young and didn't understand. She took me into her sleeping quarters, a small one-room place separate from the main house. Inside was her bed, a small table, some perfumes that girls use and a big mirror. She gave me a box to sit on and then brought me a mug of strong coffee with sugar and milk and a few slices of bread and butter. At that moment it seemed like a wonderful meal. When I'd finished I felt much better. While I was eating she questioned me - who I was, where I lived, who my father was, and all that. I answered and then told her I was looking for work during the holidays to pay for my school books. She left, returning shortly saying, "Quickly, quickly, put those things down, the Madam is calling you!"

The old woman stood on the back stoop by the kitchen door, hands on her hips. The stoop was high and she looked very big. I was afraid but walked up to her and tried to show my best manners. This was the first time I had approached a European so close - and I never even dreamed they had houses so big. I didn't like the way she

looked at me so I kept my eyes down. "What is your name, boy? And what do you want?" Her tone was offensive but I answered her questions slowly and politely. "Can you do any gardening?" she asked. "Yes," I said, "we learned to do that in school." When she asked specific things I said, "I can do it" - wanting badly to get the job. She told her servant woman to show me the tools. Then she said, "Fix the hose and water the garden! Then dig up this other part and weed and rake it!"

Occasionally, from her window, she checked on me. "Don't pull on those yellow flowers. Be more careful!" "I am Madam, I'm trying hard."

For lunch I was given a bowl of rice and meat and told to sit on the back lawn. It was a nice lunch - something different than I ate at home. Soon the old madam told me: "You rest a bit now and then get back to work." Ten minutes later she was back on the stoop. "Norman! Wake up! Time to work!"

I hadn't been asleep. I got up quickly and started working again. At 5 p.m. she said I could go and gave me three shillings. It was my first pay and I was happy. I put it in a secret pocket - so it would be safe if I was robbed on my way home. I didn't even use five pence for the bus; I wanted to save it all. At home I told my father the whole story. When I told about going to the front door my mother laughed. "Did I forget to tell you, Norman? Never go to the front door of a white man's house. Our place is behind, at the kitchen door."

That evening I ate, had a warm bath and went to bed. And oh how I slept; don't think I moved a muscle. I was really tired and my feet were burning. Next morning I woke up with mother shaking me - yelling for me to get up. I prepared a small lunch and left. My mother gave me a little money and I took the bus to the same place. Lucky enough, I got a job there every day for the full three holiday weeks. The old lady softened a bit toward me - probably because I made some nice improvements on her garden.

After work I met some boys with similar jobs and we usually walked home together, playing along the way and making the eight kilometers go very quickly. We all got between two and five shillings a day for our work. Mother gave me a cash box and I put my three shillings into it every night. By the time school started I was "rich" - for me - I had over three pounds. I really felt like a big man, sitting at the kitchen table and counting that money with mother. I had enough to pay for my books and school fees. My parents only had to buy my uniform.

Temba, Lydia and I started Standard 2 in the same class. Lydia and I had been together since Sub A, but I didn't really notice her till Standard 1, when she was tops in the class. It was the same in Standard 2 - I was second or third. We were sort of enemies, Lydia often boasting about being smarter than the boys. I was her closest rival, and by the end of June I passed her...which really hurt her. We didn't speak for a long time. Then, as time went on we changed positions back and forth. We were the only ones competing, the others just trying to catch up. Lydia had the advantage

- her family was well off and so she could spend most of her time studying. I had to work after school - sometimes for the old lady, but also for others. When I returned from a heavy gardening job I was tired, just wanted to sleep. So I did my homework early in the morning, before school.

I did well in Standard 3 too; we had Arithmetic, Geography, History, Hygiene, English and Xhosa Grammar. One day in History the teacher asked our whole class a surprising question: "What is the work of the South African Police?" Only a few hands were raised, though everyone in our location - even the very young kids - knew the answer. The teacher called on Lydia and expected a good answer. She said, "The work of a policeman is to arrest and raid people who are brewing beer." "Sit down, sit down!" said the teacher. Then he pointed to me. "The work of the policeman," I replied, "is to raid our homes late at night or early in the morning looking for permits, liquor, passes, taxes, anything." "Sit down Norman!"

Now he was really angry; he could see we were all going to give the same answer. We were surprised. We had answered honestly but he shouted that these were stupid answers. The class was silent, everyone looking down. Then, very seriously, the teacher said, "You have the wrong idea about our South African Police. Their job is to safeguard innocent people!" At this, some of the children started to giggle. We just couldn't believe what he said. But he continued. "The policeman's duty is to guard the homes of the people. When a family leaves to go on holiday they can ask the government for one or two policemen to guard their house." Nobody laughed. We were too surprised. First of all, people in Tsolo just didn't take family holidays, and none of us had ever seen a policeman guarding a house in the location before.

In fact, there was no love lost between the people and police. Even a young child shouted in alarm when he saw an officer, and women would pass the word on to their neighbors - "*Kubomvu*" or "*Kwela-Kwela*," "things are bad." People would scatter. Those without proper passes, work permits or tax receipts ran for safety. Mothers who brewed liquor for sale to help make ends meet hurried to try and hide it. The police began their raids by breaking all the big pots of brew they could find on the dirt road. It made the whole location stink. After a "successful" raid there would be little food and no school books bought for a while.

Though our teacher was black, he expected us to lie and say, "The police are good people, they guard us day and night." But we couldn't. Day and night the police raided our homes - banging on our tin and cardboard houses till we thought they were going to fall apart. In fact, it wasn't difficult and the houses often did fall apart. So none of us was willing to play the teacher's game.

I talked about it with friends on the way home and with my parents that night. We all agreed. The teacher had been forced to do it by the police - who were in no way friends and whose job was certainly not to protect us.

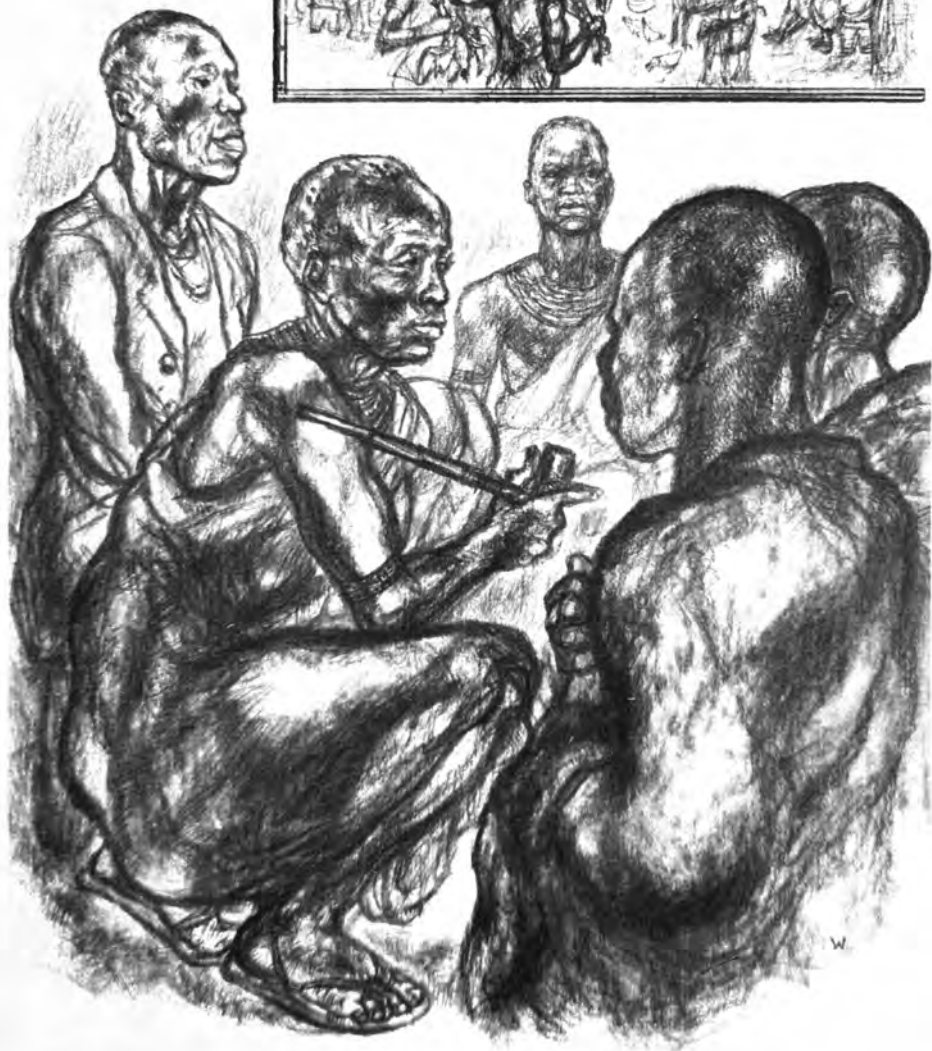
The same year, 1952, my father was arrested. He had become a member of the African National Congress (ANC), which at that time

was organizing the Defiance Campaign against pass laws and apartheid - the white government's policy of racial separation and inequality. ANC members were going places Africans weren't allowed - like to white schools, bus stations, public toilets, parks and pubs - and putting up protest posters. My father was arrested along with many other ANC members during this campaign. He spent nearly three months in a prison not far from our home. It was known as one of the worst prisons in South Africa, mainly for political prisoners.

It was a hard period while my father was gone. There were more children in the family now - two little brothers, Wellington and Charles, and a sister, Ntombi. My mother had to find odd jobs and take in sewing. She worked very hard day and night so that we four kids could eat and continue school. But eventually I had to leave school and seek work also. I helped take care of my younger brothers and sister while my mother was working, and then I went to work myself. When my father was finally released and came home, it took quite a while before he got a job and I was able to return to school.

During this period our house was often raided by the Special Branch of the South African Police (SAP). They searched, beating my mother while questioning her about my father - did he hold meetings at home? who were his friends? who came to the house? and so on. Then they left always warning us and saying, "We'll be back!" I was very bitter, remembering my teacher's words about the police being good people who guarded us day and night. It was terrible, since there was nothing I could do to stop them from beating my mother. Many women whose husbands were also in prison shared whatever they had - food, paraffin, soap, etc. For us, this was a great help. My aunt also invited us to her place fairly often for mealie-meal, asking my mother how she was getting on with her job and helping us in little ways.

When my father finally got back from prison I could hardly recognize him. He had really gotten skinny. He told us of the harsh conditions: very little to eat, no utensils, no exercise or fresh air, and frequent beatings. Those who got sick were given little or no medical treatment.



Chapter Two

A Trip To Peddie

In December, 1952 - when I was thirteen - I asked if I could go to Peddie to visit my grandparents. Both my father and mother had been born there and many relatives were still living in the countryside. They thought it would be a good experience for me so my mother wrote telling my uncle I was coming and asking him to meet me at the bus station. I was very excited. It was my first trip outside East London. We bought my ticket and some clothes, as well as a few presents for the old people. Mother, Wellington, Charles and Ntombi all walked me to the bus station. Wellington begged to go too, but there just wasn't enough money for two tickets. From the bus I waved good-bye and everyone waved back. I could see that my little sister was already crying.

I didn't know how far Peddie was from East London, but it seemed a long trip. I saw many new villages, mountains, forests and different people who - in the "homelands" - wore traditional dress very different from mine. At King Williams Town, we changed buses and then drove straight to Peddie. When we arrived there were many people at the bus stop, some waiting for mail or packages or passengers coming on the bus.

My uncle and several cousins were at the station. I looked like my father and my uncle picked me out easily. Everyone was happy to see me, all talking at once and fighting for my bags. We walked to their house and along the path several people stopped to say hello and introduce themselves. It was a strange experience for me. In town people passed each other on the street without speaking; here people showed great concern for one another - even those who saw us from a distance shouted and waved.

The village in Peddie was certainly different from Tsolo location. Next to the bus stop was a store, the only one in the village, and people had to buy everything they needed there. As we walked we passed a large graveyard on the hillside, then an AME (African Methodist Episcopal) church. From the path I could see big fields, forests and mountains - things I'd never seen before. There were herds of cattle, sheep and goats, with old men and young boys looking after them.

On the other side of the hill was my mother's family *kruaal* - a fenced area surrounding the huts and cattle pens of a big family.

My grandmother had waited there for me. When we approached she stood up, leaning on her walking stick, and came forward to greet me. She gave me a big hug, saying "Oh my, you're so big now," just as if she'd seen me before. Then we went into her hut, made of mud and grass with reeds on the roof. I sat next to my grandmother and she introduced me to many children who came to greet me. The neighbors poured in also and tea was brewed over an open fire in the center of the hut. Everyone asked questions: "How is the family in East London? - Your mother? Your father? What is life like there? What do you eat?" and so on. I told them everything as quickly as I could. Then I unpacked the presents mother had sent for them with me - things like sugar, bread and tea. My grandmother said they didn't eat much bread; it only came from East London on Fridays and was usually stale. Only the white shopkeepers ate it. But she was very pleased to see the tea and sugar.

As the neighbors and family drank tea they asked about their relatives and friends in East London. Some had sons working there they hadn't heard from for a long time. Others wanted me to take letters back. After much talk, grandmother said I should have some rest. She took me to another hut, smaller than the first but of the same type, and laid out on the packed earth floor a woven mat and some blankets.

I found it impossible to sleep. There were so many kids outside waiting for me to wake up and play with them. They kept me wide awake with their laughter and talk. Now and then grandmother went out and shouted "Get out of here, Norman is trying to sleep! You'll see him when he wakes up!" They would leave for a bit, then return. Finally I got up and went out to play. The sleep would have to wait.

There were about a dozen young boys, mostly my cousins, waiting for me. First we went to the forest where everyone was eager to show me the edible roots and wild fruit they ate while herding cattle. Then we chased birds and played some of their local games. We were gone several hours. There were so many things these boys wanted to show me since they saw at once I knew nothing of country life. When we returned my grandmother was angry because my cousins had kept me out so long. She still had many questions to ask me.

That evening we celebrated. My uncle slaughtered a goat and it was roasted. I was given a big piece: "This is for you Norman! Eat what you can and others will finish what you leave."

Very early next morning - must have been around four o'clock - my uncle, cousins and I went out to milk the cows. Of course, they had to show me how to do it. First thing my uncle did was call me over and squirt fresh milk into my mouth, and all over my face. It was warm and thick. The milk was stored in calabashes and placed in the sun to sour and be made into a sort of cheese. Fresh milk was used only for morning tea. After, we separated the calves from their mothers and sent the cattle to graze. That was the work of boys. We took the cattle far from the *kraal*; otherwise they might wander back and destroy the maize in our fields. We guided them with sticks and whips and along the way played a stick game called *shinti*. A short pole was stuck in the ground and we stood some

distance away and tried to knock it out by throwing other sticks at it. I found it was quite difficult - the pole usually broke or leaned over and it took an expert hit to make it come out of the ground. Once we reached the grazing area we all went swimming in the river. It was quite dangerous as the river was very deep and had snakes in it. I hesitated but my cousins thought nothing of it and dove right into the water. I watched from the bank for awhile, then decided to join them in the fun. Everything was so new to me that by mid-day I was very tired. We returned home for lunch leaving the cattle out to graze. After eating we herded the cattle back to the *kraal* for evening milking.

This was done every day. But once, after I had been in Peddie nearly two weeks, we drove the cattle to a different spot not far from the *kraal* near a good swimming hole. We left the cattle grazing and went for a good long swim, playing many games and forgetting about time. When we returned the cattle were gone. We were worried and looked everywhere. Finally someone spotted them. They had headed back home and were already in the fields. As we started running we saw my uncle coming toward us. Ahhh, he had a real fit that day. He chased and beat all the boys. I never saw him so angry. Everyone ran - this time away from my uncle. Finally, he stopped and shouted: "Now get those cattle out of here! They're ruining our maize!"

That afternoon we were still afraid as we headed back to the *kraal*. When we got there he told us to get the buckets for milking - nobody moved. Then he said, "Norman, go bring me the buckets!" I did as he said, but kept a safe distance. "Come now, you must learn how to milk." Everyone laughed watching me squeezing a teat with both hands, trying to get the milk. I had a difficult time getting my fingers to move like my uncle's.

After dinner the old people sat around the fire talking and joking. We children listened to many of their childhood tales and I learned a lot about the history of my people and life in rural South Africa during these evening discussions. They often lasted well into the night and one by one the old people dropped out and went home to sleep. We boys stayed on, told jokes and put out the fire. Then we also went off to sleep.

I slept in a small hut with three cousins. The family had four huts because it was so large. There was my uncle, his wife, their three children, my grandmother and an aunt with four children whose husband had recently died. We had a special hut for storing tools (plows, hoes and other things) as well as for cooking on rainy days. This was the smallest of the four huts.

So my life in Peddie continued like this. Every day I got up early, helped milk the cows and take them to pasture, came home at noon for lunch, then returned to the cattle and brought them back to the *kraal* with my cousins in the evening. One day, as we returned at noon for lunch we saw a group of policemen ride into the village on horseback. People were running in all directions toward the forest and mountains, the police chasing them on horseback. Some got away, some were caught. My uncle told us later they were

after people who hadn't paid their taxes. My uncle paid his, but many could not; tax in the "homelands" was only one pound, but few people worked for money here; most had to raise it by selling maize or a sheep hide or from family members working in the towns or mines. In years of drought people got little or nothing from their fields and hides were few. Most families were forced to send fathers or sons off to East London to work for wages so taxes could be paid and necessary food and supplies bought.

Almost everyone in Peddie had some land to plow - one or two acres at least - but a few had no land at all; they generally worked on the large Boer farms in the area. One of my aunts, my mother's youngest sister, worked in the kitchen on one of these farms. A cousin once took me there to visit her. It was quite a long walk, especially for someone like me, from the city. We travelled a dirt path through the forests and mountains. When we reached the edge of a forest we looked out over a large fertile farm which stretched as far as the eye could see. The cattle and sheep looked nothing like those in the village - these were big and strong, grazing on thick green grass.

It was still morning when we reached my aunt's hut; she was in the Boer's home working and didn't know we had come. Her son and daughter were there and we talked for a bit before one of them ran off to tell their mother we had arrived. She soon burst in and gave me a big hug. She asked many questions about the family: "When will your brothers and sister be coming to visit? How is your family doing in East London? Do you think I could get a kitchen job there?"

I didn't know much about house servants' jobs in East London, but I could see that the Africans working on this Boer's farm were the poorest I'd ever seen. My aunt, for example, had only one hut for herself and children and couldn't keep animals or cultivate any land.

We stayed a short time that day, but I went back a week later to play with my cousins. This time the Boer's son played with us. He was our age, 12, and spoke fluent Xhosa. We hunted birds in the forest and killed one which we cooked and ate together. I remember being surprised that a rich white boy would eat and play with Africans. But this was usual up to a certain age in the countryside, where white children lived on isolated farms far from other white kids and they had to play with the African children or no one at all.

There was another white boy in Peddie who I became friends with. His name was Daltin. He was the shopkeeper's son and about 9 years old. We were close friends during those days in Peddie. Then many years later I met him again in East London where he had probably come on business for his father. I was excited to see him. "Daltin! Hello, hello." He looked at me strangely with confused anger in his eyes. "You must never call me Daltin," he said coldly. We weren't old friends now - he was a "superior" white man and *baas* and I was an "inferior" Bantu.

At Peddie meat was scarce. We mainly ate mealie-meal, cooked like porridge with sour milk, or fried stam-mealies. The cattle, goats and sheep were slaughtered only for very special occasions,

and cows were used only for milking. Sometimes I hunted with my uncle. He had a big white dog which he used for chasing down the game - usually rabbits, birds or spring boar. The dog was the fastest in the village; it brought the animal down and my uncle then killed it with a blow from his stick.

Soon after I arrived in Peddie the time came for several older boys to go through their circumcision ceremony. What I remember is the big celebration. Goats and oxen were slaughtered and roasted on a spit, beans were cooked in several great pots and barrels of *mquombothi* (local beer) were brewed. Everyone in the village came and also some people from quite far away. For two days the village was filled; people dressed in their best traditional clothing and there was a lot of dancing, singing, eating and drinking.

My cousins told me the boys would then be circumcised and leave the village, going to a special camp for four months. They would return as men. I was very interested and observed the celebration closely. The first day everyone danced and sang - including the boys to be circumcised. That night I went with the young people to a hut where we played games all night long; everyone trying to out-do the other. Next morning the boys to be circumcised were taken to a cold river to bathe accompanied by the old man who would perform the circumcision. We younger boys followed, singing and playing as we went.

When these boys returned from the river their heads were shaved clean. No women were allowed in the *kraal* at this time. The boys sat in a corner of the *kraal*, naked except for their blankets, their heads shaved and their bodies painted white. An ox was cooked and the old man gave each boy a special piece; then the old men were given some, next the mothers and sisters of these boys and finally the rest of us. After they ate this meat the boys left for the forest with the old man - no one could follow now. In the village the dancing and singing continued through the following day. Only when the beer was finished did the celebration end and people disperse.

The boys were in the bush for two weeks. None of us could see them and women were prohibited from even going near their camp. Food was sent by the boys' sisters, who left it some distance from the camp. My older cousin told me their houses were made of grass to keep out rain, and that they painted their bodies white and wore a white blanket. They were allowed only a little water and salt. After two weeks they could eat normally and returned home for a gathering with the village men. After this, the boys again left for their training camp, not to be seen for another four months.

I was not in Peddie when they finally returned, but I was told that a big feast would be held. Their bodies and blankets would be painted red by young women and their heads and beards shaved. Then, seated in a special house, old men would bring them gifts of chickens, cows and other animals, while they smoked a pipe together and were told their new responsibilities. "This cow is to milk for your children and to breed more cattle. You must now build a *kraal*, a house and take a wife."

Later the village would fill with people singing and dancing. The young men would play games and could now talk with young women, even swim together with them in the river. Soon they took the red clay off their bodies and entered their new life as men.

When I returned to Tsoilo I told my family about this ceremony. My father said it had always been like that in Peddie. "In the city," he said, "people can't spend so much time away from work and the old ways have died out. Where could the boys go? There is no bush here, only some vacant lots." Even so, some boys did get circumcised in these lots, but the whole ceremony and training took only a few days.

Though I stayed in Peddie little more than three weeks, it seemed much longer. Back in East London I began to compare life in town with that in Peddie, where the people seemed more free; free to work their own land, milk their own cows, build huts, hunt and so on... Not like in the city where almost everyone worked for someone else - in factories, white homes, restaurants, etc. - doing what Whites wanted, how they wanted, at the time they chose. In Peddie people could also walk through the forests and mountains, hunt and go swimming. But they were dependent on the land, which was generally poor and insufficient for most people to support their whole families on. Again, the water in Peddie was awful. It was reddish brown, like the soil, and tasted terrible. My white and bright colored clothes came out yellow when I washed in the stream. People got most of their water from a few big dams built by the government and from local wells. Water from the dams was usually polluted by cattle, which stopped to drink there and by women washing their clothes. Then this same water was used for drinking by the villagers. You can imagine how unhealthy it was.

Another disadvantage was the total lack of hospitals or clinics. A doctor came by once a week, on Thursday. He used a teacher's room in the school for examinations and to operate on people. There was always a long line. The doctor took the most urgent cases first; those he didn't have time to see that day were asked to come back next Thursday. Many people in Peddie, therefore, relied on traditional African herbalists. When my youngest cousin had stomach problems, for example, they took him to the herbalist who prepared a drink from certain herbs and roots which he was to take until cured. It worked in a few days. There were several old herbalists in the village. Some knew how to cure bad stomachs; others, headaches or the flu, etc. Most were men, though old women were also very good.

There were also witchdoctors. I never saw any, but my cousins told me they dressed in leopard or other animal skins and wore beads. Old people often went to these witchdoctors when ill to find out who had cursed or bewitched them. The doctor put himself in a trance by dancing, clapping or singing and jumping around the patient. Once in a trance he would tell what brought the illness on and how to treat it. The witchdoctors were paid either in money or cattle and were generally very rich.

Nevertheless, despite the disadvantages of rural life in Ped-

die, I remember that when it was time to leave I felt very sad. My grandmother said, "Come back again, maybe in June when you have your holidays? But now it is time for you to return to school."

A chicken was butchered and cooked for me to take on the bus for food. I was also given some letters to take to relatives in town and also many verbal messages. The whole family took me to the bus stop. Many people were waiting for the bus. There were lots of boys around that I had played with. "So you're going back," they said, "you must come again on your next holidays." When the bus came I took my bags and got on. We said many good-byes; my uncle and cousins waving to me and my grandmother crying. The bus left and I sat with my head full of thoughts about Peddie and East London. I was not happy. I wanted to stay in Peddie and hoped my mother would let me return.

When I reached East London that evening, my mother and two brothers were waiting at the station. We were very happy to see each other again and there were plenty of hugs and kisses. Then we hurried home to see my father and sister. Everyone asked questions all at once. I had saved most of the chicken and bread my grandmother gave me and shared it now with the family. As we ate they asked about Peddie and I tried to answer all their questions about life and people there. I told them Peddie was very nice and that I'd like to go back to stay.

"You see," my mother said, "he already wants to go live with his grandmother. Well Norman, you can go again. But remember, your brothers and sister have to have their chance too." I gave my father the letters I brought for people and next day he delivered them. There was no one who came from Peddie he didn't know.



Chapter Three

Factory "Boy": The Rude Awakening

On the Monday after my return I started a new school. It was in another location, about a 45 minute walk from home. There were several kids from my Standard 4 class who walked with me to the Welsh Secondary School, which went from Standard 5 through 9. The first day, there was an assembly. The headmaster told us the rules and regulations of the school and said, "While at Welsh Secondary School you must devote your full time to study; you must be willing to give it your all!" Then we went to class. Standard 5 had its own room with a blackboard and a special teacher, Mr. Nchize. There were forty students, all Africans - no Coloreds or Indians. The first day we cleaned up. I washed windows, others dusted or worked on the school garden and grounds. We worked for three hours, then had lunch. In the afternoon we had Arithmetic and Grammar and school was over at 2 p.m.

Temba, Lydia and I were in the same class again. Lydia and I became good friends, sharing the same desk. Many desks were long enough for four people and girls and boys were not separated. Since we sat so close we often helped each other. Lydia wasn't too good in History. When the teacher called on her I sometimes wrote down the answer and quickly passed it to her. Once we were caught. I was given three swats on the buttocks. From then on Lydia and I were separated. We continued studying together, however. Sometimes she came over to my house and at other times I went to hers. When I went to her father's shop on an errand for my mother, Lydia gave me candy from the shelf. We also exchanged books, walked to school together and got to like each other.

By the time we were in Standard 6, like other kids in the class, we often exchanged love letters. Whenever a teacher intercepted one of these he would read it aloud and punish the people involved. But Lydia and I were careful; we wrote many letters before one of hers was caught. It was just before lunch and the teacher ordered us to stay. After everyone left the room he said, "You two won't be going for lunch today! Lydia, why did you write this letter? We can't tolerate that kind of thing here. Both of you must learn to behave."

We sat there and listened to his lecture, not thinking that we were really bad. And in fact, after that, our relationship grew

even closer and we spent an increasing amount of time together. She sometimes brought me marbles from her shop and also bought me sweets for lunch. There were no lunch facilities at school; most kids just brought some bread, while others could afford to buy cakes, fruit, sweets and buns from the small food vendors just outside the school fence. Lydia's family was wealthy and her mother gave her money every day to buy food, which she shared with me.

After school it was normal for a few girls and boys to stay and sweep and clean up the classroom. Lydia and I would wait for each other when one of us had these duties, then walk home together.

I didn't see much of Temba because Lydia and I were always together. Sometimes Lydia got into trouble with her mother for coming home late. I was having my problems too - buying books. I wasn't working after school anymore and my parents couldn't afford books for all four of us. Here again Lydia helped me out. She gave me the money I needed for books. My mother, obviously, became suspicious. "How did you get this book?" she'd ask me. "Oh, I found some money on the way to school." This is how I managed to finish Standard 6. The school work was more difficult now, but I was still in the top four of my class. As at Wesley, we all worked in the garden or did handicraft and carpentry work after lunch. I enjoyed the carpentry.

In 1956 I passed Standard 6. I was 15 years old. My family was having more financial problems than ever. All four of us kids were in school, which meant books and school fees for each of us. My father now worked at the harbor as a longshoreman. But the work was irregular. Some days there just wasn't any work; and no work, no pay. So my mother got a job too.

Ever since my father was in prison she had worked at home sewing for others. Now this just wasn't enough. She got a job teaching, which changed our home life quite a bit. She left at 8 after making our breakfast and lunch and arranging for dinner, which I would prepare after school. She didn't return till after 5 so, being the oldest child, I was in charge of the house. After school I cooked the dinner food left out, collected water from the tap and helped my brothers and sister clean the house. I also helped my brothers and sister with their school work. Charles didn't like to do his homework so I sometimes had to give him a beating. He always cried about it when my mother got home and she would bawl me out. "Well, he's just a kid," I thought.

When school opened again, I started in Form 1 (or Standard 7). Lydia and I were still going around together. She had grown much taller than I and looked older. Not long after school started, however, I had to quit. My father told me the family just couldn't afford to continue sending all of us to school and I should drop out and get a job. I really wanted to continue as I liked school and was doing well. But my mother, too, said I should leave... "just for awhile, until things get better at home." So I agreed, thinking I'd return to school after I had earned some money.

Next day father took me to the administration office for a work pass. This wasn't the complicated pass book we have today; it was

just a one page form. Once I got the pass I began looking for a factory job. That first day I went to Standard Cannery. I found hundreds of men, young boys and women standing in front of the gates. It was very early and the factory hadn't opened yet. All these people waiting in front of the closed gates were hoping to get a job there. When the manager finally came out he chose people near the front. He couldn't even see those of us who stood and held up our passes at the back of the crowd. I left and ran to another factory. Again, no luck. Then to another, and another - I can't even remember how many. I began to realize how difficult it was to get a job; out all day, running from factory to factory and still no job. I returned home very hungry and tired. Then one evening my father said he'd heard Aberdare Cables was employing some machine operators.

Next morning I started out very very early and was in front of Aberdare Cables by 6:30. Some people were already there waiting, but not too many and this time I was close to the front. We waited until a little after, when the hiring agents arrived. By then there were hundreds of people waiting - Africans, Indians and Coloreds... everyone pushing toward the front hoping to be seen by the white man with power. Two men walked from their office and came slowly to the gate. One shouted: "Those with a Standard 6 education come stand over here!"

It was a lucky break for me since most of the people there were illiterate. We stood aside in a line. Then he pointed at us one after another: "We'll take you, and you and you..." Fortunately, I was one of the five chosen. He told the rest to leave. By that time the whole crowd was moving off in various directions to other factories, continuing their search for work.

The *baas* asked to see our Standard 6 certificates. I said I'd left mine at home, so instead he gave me a few math problems just to make sure I'd gone through Standard 6. We then filled out some forms and were taken inside. Our foreman, a white man named Ferom, met us at the door and led us to our department. The factory was extremely noisy. Operators were already at work on their machines, really big machines for making telephone cables - some thin, others very large, underwater cables and so on. As we passed all these machines the noise was so great I couldn't even hear what the man behind me was saying.

At our department the *baas-boy*, an African who worked under the white foreman, showed me the four machines I was to operate. They had spinning plates which wrapped paper onto the cables coming from large reels. All four machines were going at once and it was my job to keep them going. When a plate ran out of paper, I would change it; about that time one of the reels of wire would empty and so I had to replace it. Then I changed the reels holding the wrapped cables, and so on like that all day. With four machines to watch, I was kept very busy. Sometimes a plate broke down and I had to repair it while continuing to operate the other three machines.

As I worked the *baas-boys* would periodically come by and write down how much I had accomplished on a record sheet. In this way the

company kept count of my daily output. If I produced more than a certain number of reels in a day I would get a bonus. But this number was well calculated by the owners and I rarely got a bonus in the three years I worked there. My regular wage was three pounds for a five-and-a-half day week. We started at 8 and quit at 5 with an hour off for lunch and no other breaks.

That first day when I left the factory I was shocked by the great number of workers who crowded out of the many gates in this industrial area and ran toward the only bus stop. I couldn't believe how long the queue was. I waited for nearly two hours, getting home a little past seven. It was too far to walk, nearly 15 kilometers, and too expensive to take an African taxi. That night I told my parents about my job and they were both happy. My father warned me not to quit, even if I wasn't happy with things at first.

Next morning mother fixed my breakfast and packed me a lunch of bread and butter with a thermos of tea. I left before 7 as again I would have to wait in line for a bus. I got to work at a quarter to eight. The gateman let me in and gave me a time card to "punch-in" my hours. At 8 sharp a bell rang and we all started our machines. I was still awkward, but someone was assigned to help break me in during the first two days. On the third day I was set to operating the machines on my own.

After work on Friday I received my first week's pay at the office. There was just one clerk behind the counter and he had to give each worker his money. There was already quite a queue when I arrived and I had to wait for over an hour. At home I gave the money to mother. She used it to buy groceries and books for my brothers and sister. I kept enough for bus fare and food.

I worked a whole year at Aberdare Cables at the same wage. Then in the winter of 1956 we all got very angry when the company asked us to work overtime one night for just two shillings. Most of the workers were really hot. "We won't work for so little money." So at 5 p.m. everyone just shut down their machines and went home. No one worked overtime.

The next day everyone was still grumbling about their wages. An older African worker approached a few of us during lunch and asked: "Don't you want higher wages? We can't keep working for just three pounds a week!" He said, "Tomorrow everyone should shut down their machines, march to the foreman's office and demand more money... And I mean everyone!"

I had some doubts about this approach, and some fears. Could we really get a raise this way? Why wouldn't they simply fire us all? I thought it best if someone just went to the foreman and asked. The rest, however, were in favor of the stronger approach and I decided to join, not wanting to be left alone.

The strike was set to begin after lunch the next day. I discussed it briefly that night with my father. I told him all the workers were unhappy with their pay and that tomorrow we were going to ask for more. I said nothing about shutting down our machines or marching to the foreman's office. My father was reading at the time and didn't say much. "Good!" he said, "You've worked a long time and deserve a raise."

Next afternoon at the appointed time we shut off the machines. It was dead silent. I took off my jacket and walked with the rest to the foreman's office. It was on a high tower inside the factory. He was in there writing and must have become aware of the quiet. Everyone gathered at the foot of the stairs, even the *baas-boys*. I don't know whether they supported the strike or not; they seemed reluctant, but remained silent. Anyway, they couldn't separate themselves from the hundreds of workers crowded around the stairs, so they just stood there among us. In a minute the foreman stormed out. "What the hell's going on here?" he shouted. Everyone remained silent. He rushed back inside his office apparently to phone the manager, who soon appeared with all the other foremen. He pushed his way through the workers, climbed to the top of the stairs and addressed himself to the *baas-boys*. "Why were the machines stopped?" The *baas-boys* just shrugged their shoulders and said they didn't know. Then he asked us: "Why aren't you working?" No one answered. "What do you want?"

One worker stepped forward and said: "We are not getting a fair pay for our work. We want an increase and more money for overtime."

The manager turned on the man. "Is this the proper way to ask for a raise? Why didn't you just come to the office and ask, if that's what you wanted?"

"That's why I'm here now. I want an increase. We all want an increase."

"Is that what you want, eh, a raise?"

We all shouted, "Yes!"

I could see the manager was angry now. "Who organized this strike? Who are the leaders?"

No one answered.

"I ask you again. Whose idea was it to stop production and demand an increase?"

Still no answer; everyone stood their ground.

"Go back to your machines and get to work or you'll all be fired!" he ordered.

But nothing happened. There was no movement among the workers. The manager returned to the office and talked for a time with his foremen. Then he emerged again, this time in a better mood. "All right, starting next week your wages will be increased, and from now on good workers will get a raise every six months. That is, if you return to your machines right now. And you won't be docked for the time you've spent standing around here."

We dispersed and finished the shift. The manager didn't say what the wage increase would be but the next week we got a small raise of Sh. 1/6 a week. I got three additional increases before leaving this job and ended up with a wage of almost four pounds a week.

I was impressed by the strength of the workers during our brief strike. Even when the boss threatened to sack us all, everyone stood firm. We acted as a really united force. The strike was probably organized by the illegal South African Congress of Trade Unions, but I don't think many of the 500 or so workers were members of SACTU.

I stayed at Aberdare Cables for another two years. In December 1957 they gave us a few days off for the Christmas holiday. We received a week's double pay as a bonus plus some cigarettes, a box of sweets and a packet of sugar or tea. I added to my holidays that year with a couple of days sick leave I had coming.

My mother quit her teaching job late in 1956. She had worked 7 days a week for over a year and it caused many difficulties at home. Now, with my pay added to my father's, she was able to stay at home again and sew, providing a little more money for the family to live on.

I didn't spend much time around the house once I started working. On Saturday afternoons I played rugby at the Tsoio stadium. Once I turned 17 I could play on the African men's team. Our uniforms were a shirt, shorts, socks and boots. Lydia often went with me to the stadium and watched. Or, if my team wasn't playing, we'd go together and watch other teams. On Sundays we either went to the beach or to the movies. I'd stopped going to church with my mother a long time ago, so I had Sundays free. When we went to the beach Lydia packed a lunch and we caught a bus. We would swim for hours, returning late in the afternoon. More often, however, we went to the movies. There was an African theatre in town called the "Viceroy." I went by for Lydia at her house. While I waited I'd listen to their radio, look over Lydia's Form 2 books or talk with the family. No one knew we were in love, they just thought we were friends. Lydia's mother always asked where we were going, then told me to have her little girl home early. Lydia wasn't allowed out at night, you see. She was an only child and very well protected. Her mother worried if we were late coming back, thinking we'd had an accident or gotten into some trouble.

I remember that "Samson and Delilah" was the film we liked best. The theatre was packed that day and still there was a long queue of people outside hoping to get in. I bought tickets ahead of time so we had no problem. Before the movie started we sat together and read *Zonk*, a local newspaper. (That and a few romance novels were about all I read at the time.) We also bought candy and soft drinks from vendors in the theatre.

After the movie there was a long queue at the bus stop. We didn't feel like waiting hours so we went to a nearby park and talked. As you can see, the transportation system for Africans was absolutely terrible. There were always long queues of people waiting for buses which were usually late and jam-packed. For Europeans there was no problem. Often two buses would pull up; one practically empty for Europeans, the other African bus already packed to bursting. Sometimes I waited hours while watching empty European buses pass by one after the other.

Sunday night I got my things ready for work: overalls washed and ironed, lunch food bought and wrapped, etc. Then I usually walked to a dance club in the location. Some people went there to learn to dance. Lydia couldn't go so I just watched - never daring to ask anyone to dance.

At Christmas that year, 1958, I made my second visit to Peddie. It was just the same; people had grown older, and some of the boys around my age had been circumcised. They were now "men" and I had to show respect. This time I went to help my family and didn't stay over the whole holiday. Since I knew how to milk cows and herd cattle, this is what I did.

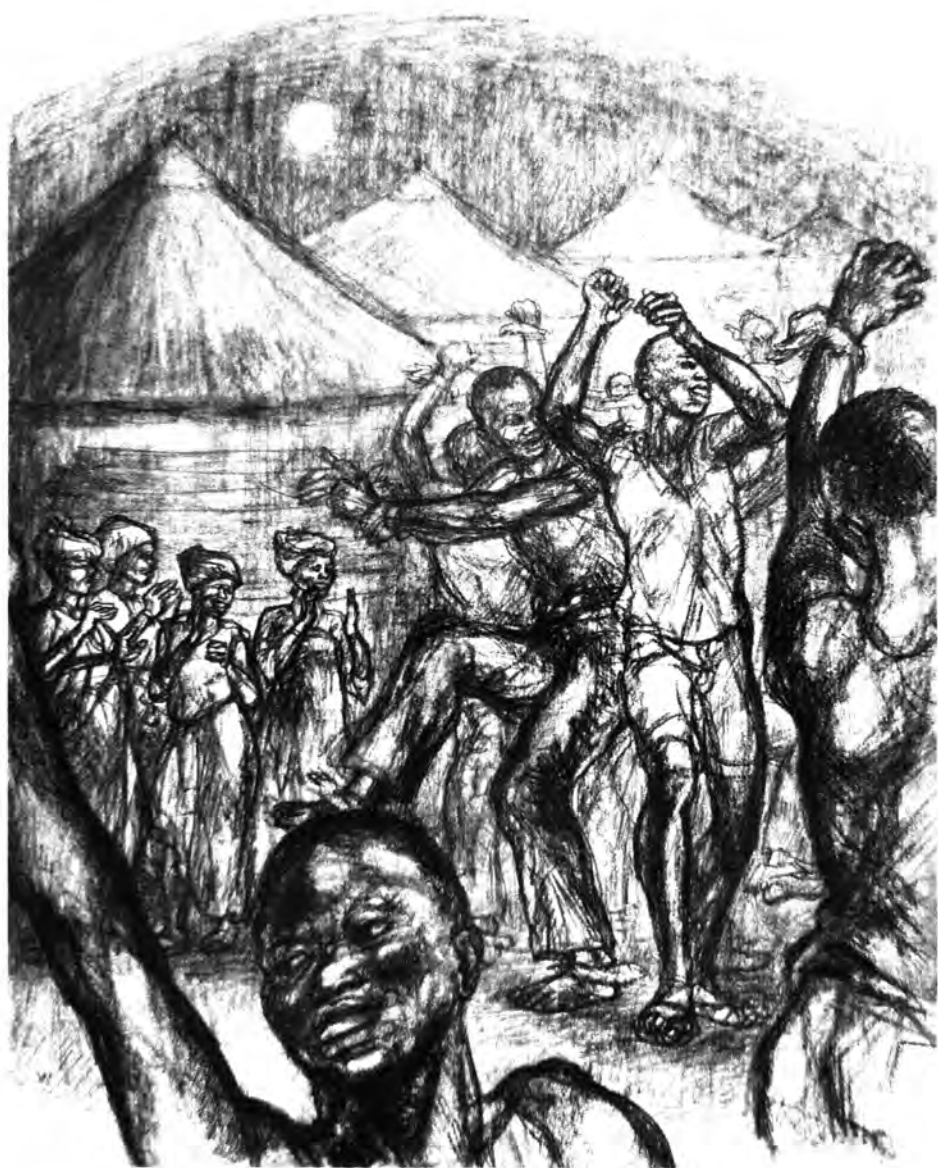
Christmas morning was special. Children got new clothes and the old folks wore their finest traditional dress. Everyone in the village met in front of one hut. We formed a procession - old people in front, next parents and last, the children - and went to every home in the village one after another. In each we were served coffee, homemade bread, beer and meat. Old folks went in first then each of the younger groups. Children sang as we walked along. They were given special sweets and cold drinks. All the food we were given was described to us by an old man. "So-and-so," he would say, "has slaughtered and prepared an ox for us. Another has brewed beer and made bread," and so on. Some families couldn't afford to give anything, others gave only small amounts which everyone tasted. But it didn't matter. Whatever was offered we accepted and moved on to the next hut.

I had beer for the first time - and plenty of it! In practically every hut I was given some and after five or six stops I was dizzy and singing along with the kids. In fact, by the end of the day everyone was singing. What a day it was!

That night we returned to the village meeting place where a big fire blazed and meat was roasting. We sat around the fire drinking and singing. Later, men danced as the women sang and clapped their hands. I jumped in with the men in the center of the circle, dancing like never before in my life. The beer made it seem easy... though I'm not really sure how well I performed the traditional dances. I had seen them before but never tried it myself.

The dancing and singing went on long into the night. Then it stopped and some people began drinking again; others went home to their sweethearts or wives. I stayed with the other boys until morning. I don't remember exactly when, but it was already light when I was carried back home, too drunk to walk.

Next day was much the same, each family finished off the food they'd prepared for the day before. Most danced and got drunk all over again! But not me! My head was still spinning. It was a Christmas I'll never forget! In town Christmas wasn't such a big day for us. There were no organized activities, only many accidents and fights because of all the drinking.





Chapter Four

New Age!

Soon after I returned home from Peddie I attended my first ANC meeting. I wasn't a member but many people in Tsolo were, including my father. He told me there was going to be a mass meeting on Sunday afternoon in the big square near the edge of our location. "Norman," he said, "now that you're a working man you've got to learn more about what's going on in our country, and in the world. It's just not enough to see films and read the local papers." We talked more and I agreed to go. I went to Lydia's and broke our date for the movies. My father went to the square early to set up for the meeting. I went later by myself, getting there an hour early to get a good spot. Plenty of others had the same idea. The ANC had heavily leafleted the location with announcements. When I arrived many people already sat waiting - smoking, talking and passing jokes. I heard several say how powerful the ANC was becoming. One said, "Soon they'll bring us freedom." Others agreed, but one was skeptical: "No, all we'll get out of this is membership cards for our fees."

Over 1,000 people were there when the meeting began - mostly from Tsolo and nearby locations. Others, just passing by, stopped and listened. The police knew about the meeting too and the Special Branch and police were there in force. They stood on the perimeter, taking notes and writing down names. A large platform was up front with chairs for the speakers. People crowded all around the platform to hear the speeches. The first speaker began, he kept turning all around so everyone could hear. He was good! First he spoke about the organization - the work it did, actions it had taken, and what it stood for. Then he talked of the problems facing black South Africans; about the land question in the "homelands" where the soil was poor, with no room for grazing cattle, and so forth. Then he hit against the government pass laws, so harmful to the African people, and the poor housing and facilities in African locations, especially when compared to even the poorest white areas. He ended by calling for African unity, which would give us great strength to fight for our rights against Boer rule.

The meeting ended with the ANC anthem, "*Nkosi Sikelele iAfrika*" (God Bless Africa). After the singing there were shouts of:
"*Afrika!*"

"Mayebuye!"

"Afrika!"

"Mayebuye!"

Everyone knew these slogans and shouted them loudly. It was a moving experience for me, standing in the midst of over a thousand people singing and shouting for African unity and the rights of free men. I began to understand many things I had ignored or not realized before. I'd long seen the injustices the ANC leader talked about, but only now was beginning to understand.

We were oppressed because we were Africans, Indians or Coloreds. I recalled the poor grazing land in Peddie, the bad water from those dams. I thought of the differences between Whites and Blacks in town; the white women who always took their African servants or kitchen help with them to shop; the white women always smartly dressed and the Africans in rags. Did African women ever have white servants? Never! When the "Missus" and her African "girl" reached a shop, the White entered the main door, the African went in through the side or back.

When the meeting was over, people headed off in different directions. I was approached by two African Special Branch agents as I left. They threatened me and some others with all sorts of things. But the meeting gave us courage and people closed in around the African stooges, whispering warnings and calling them "Traitors!"

I reached home before my father. When he arrived he asked, "How did you like the meeting?"

"I was impressed by the speeches," I replied.

"Which ones?"

"The first speaker mainly. The one who talked on the land question and apartheid."

Then we sat down and my father explained in simple language and more detail what the speeches were all about. I listened and asked many questions. He repeated most of what was said at the meeting. On the question of apartheid he told me, "When you go to the beach, you must not stand in the same bus shelter as the white man; you can't take the same bus, and at the beach you can't put your things in the same area of sand. But you swim in the same ocean! And you are both human beings!"

This was the first time my father ever talked to me about the ANC, though I sometimes heard him discuss things with other ANC members who came to our place. Now I would pay more attention to their discussions and soon began to sit in. They talked a lot about articles in the ANC paper, *New Age*. (My father told me it was the only paper in South Africa that gave the true picture.) Or they discussed bulletins produced by the organization. They often sat and talked politics for many hours. It wasn't long after my first mass meeting that my father asked me to help circulate leaflets around the location and during public meetings. I was happy to do this work for the organization. It made me feel part of something important for my people.

I quit Aberdare Cables in February 1959. I told a friend that I wasn't happy with my wages and he said they were hiring workers

at United Dairies where he worked and the pay was better. Next day I quit and went to the Labor Bureau where I received a permit to look for work. It was necessary for all Africans to get this permit; without it I could have been arrested.

I was at United Dairies' gate early the next morning. There was already a big crowd. I talked with a few old men about the problems of getting work and supporting their families. The manager's car drove up and everyone pushed as close as possible to the gate. Half an hour later the manager came out of his office with an assistant. He shouted out various kinds of jobs and the people waved their pass books in the air. Fifteen were chosen. I was one of the lucky ones. While the assistant took down our names, age, education and address, the rest left quickly, hoping to get jobs at other factories. The old men I had been talking with turned sadly and walked away.

I was taken to a department which packed empty milk bottles for washing. Three of us were assigned to pack boxes and sweep floors. The foreman came around to check on us periodically, "Sweep over here! And don't forget that corner! I want these boxes packed right, like this!"

The next morning I was switched to work as a "delivery boy." From then on I started work at 3 in the morning. The delivery lorry picked us up at home as no African buses ran at that hour. There were four African "delivery boys" to a lorry. The driver was European. We worked only in the white areas (they didn't deliver milk in the African locations), leaving the orders on the front stoop of each house on the route. Usually we finished around 10 a.m. and returned to the depot where the rest of the milk was sent out to grocery stores. I worked seven days a week, getting home around noon every day.

I did this kind of work for six months, then was transferred to the company depot where I packed milk into wooden boxes for delivery to grocery stores. This was a better job. I had Saturdays and Sundays off and a raise in pay from £3 Sh.6 to £4 Sh.2/6

After work each day I picked up a copy of *New Age* from the old man who sold them on a corner near our house. Sometimes we talked and soon I began helping him...standing at the corner shouting "*New Age!* Get your *New Age!*" It was a good experience for me. The paper was popular and I met a lot of people who stopped to buy a copy and chat. It wasn't long before I was selling papers every day, getting them from the old man, who was an ANC leader in our location.

One day he came to the house and asked, "How would you like to become a member of the African National Congress? You know it is fighting for the rights of our people." I said, "Yes" and he gave me a membership card which I signed. This was several months after the first ANC rally I attended. I went to many of these Sunday afternoon meetings after that first one. They were held in various places, sometimes far from Tsolo.

In 1959 many ANC members were arrested. One morning I went to a fund-raising concert sponsored by the ANC. It was at a church



in our location. There were no speeches, only singing. After it was over several people were arrested. At home my father said, "We must be careful, Norman. You have a lot of ANC literature here - books, photos of leaders and so forth - which could get us and the organization into trouble. We must hide them in case of a raid."

These raids, which had been sporadic, increased as the ANC became more active. Our house was raided several times over the next few years. The first time they came I wasn't home. They asked my mother if meetings were held at the house and who came to visit us. Special Branch raids came early in the morning. They wore no uniforms and drove unmarked cars. Unlike the SAP (South African Police), which raided all houses in the location, Special Branch raided only the homes of ANC members. They looked for documents, membership lists, literature and other information to use in disrupting ANC activities and making arrests. Despite the increased risks, however, I continued to sell the *New Age* throughout 1959.

My relationship with Lydia had gradually come to an end during this period. She left Tsolo in 1958 for boarding school and a higher education. Her family was well-off and could afford a good education for her. I saw her only on holidays. We wrote to each other at first, but after a time even that stopped. We just weren't interested in the same things any more. Politics were beginning to become a more important part of my life...as they were with many other young Africans.

Then in January 1960 the ANC was banned. At work I saw *The Daily Dispatch* announcing the government ban. It was quite a shock, even though many people had predicted it. On the evening of the ban we held a secret meeting. The chairman of our zone read a set of instructions received from the ANC leadership outlining new methods of work. ANC had become the voice of the African people. That evening my father said, "I've been expecting this. The racist government is afraid the ANC will continue to grow and become too powerful, gaining the support of the masses. They had to take action. But we too will act!" His face was tense during the whole conversation. I could tell the news of the banning angered and disturbed him. Next day the bus was buzzing with talk of the ban. No one mentioned the ANC by name; they were afraid to. Many had friends who'd been arrested. The round-ups continued and many more ANC members were imprisoned or detained. It was very dangerous to be a known ANC member now.

We met often during this period. Messages about upcoming meetings were left with my mother, who passed them on to me when I got home from work. We could no longer risk meeting in each other's houses, so around dusk I would walk alone to a field beyond the location, being careful that I wasn't followed. We met there, nobody talking until everyone had arrived. The meetings were conducted in little more than a whisper and seldom lasted over an hour. A guard was posted to warn of approaching danger. We discussed problems and new tactics for handling our work. There was much discussion about methods - should we continue as in the past,

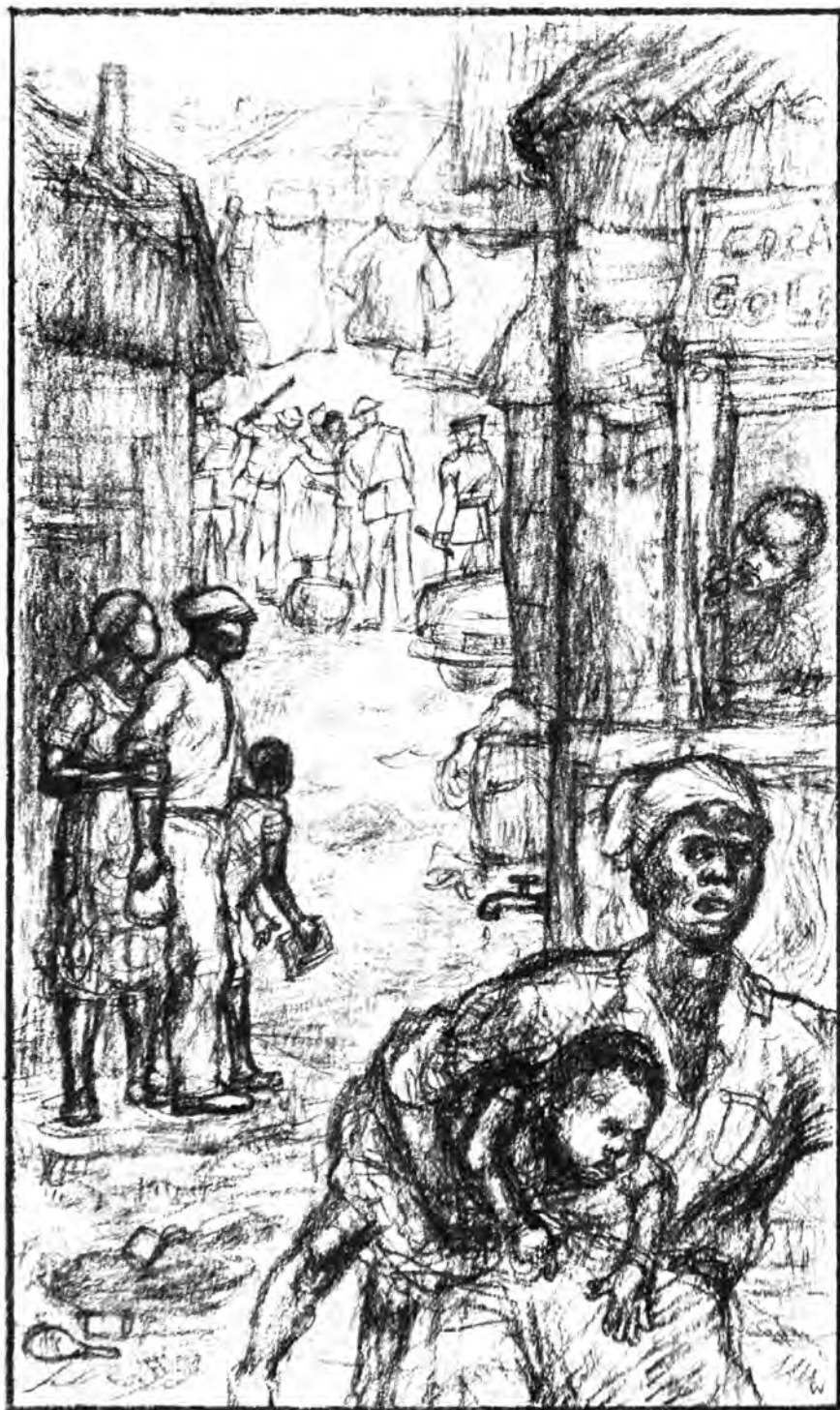
or was it time for more violent measures?

I continued working at United Dairies and passing out ANC literature in the location. This was dangerous now as some of our neighbors were police informants.

I remember one afternoon very well. I was assigned to leaflet near the bus stop in my sector of Tsolo. Others were instructed to do the same in their areas. The police were informed, however, and began patrolling the location. It was dark and I was still handing out leaflets when a patrol car approached, its lights on high beam. I quickly put the remaining leaflets on a bench, covering them with a rock. Then I started walking casually in the direction of my house. There were only a few people out on the streets now. The police spotted me and approached with their siren whining. Rather than wait for questioning, I took off, running across yards and between houses so the car couldn't follow me. Then suddenly I found myself in a high-fenced yard. With a desperate leap I grabbed the top, pulled myself up and climbed over. On the other side I lay flat in a ditch at the edge of the fence. The police had left their car and were running after me with bright torches. All at once, from where I lay, I could see them clearly, seven Africans and a white officer. A frightened woman was watching from behind the curtains in her house trying to figure out what was happening. The police were in the yard now, looking behind the bushes and flashing their torches everywhere. They came so close to me once that I could have reached out and touched them. My heart was beating very hard and fast. I was sure they'd spot me, but then they moved away. The search continued for three-quarters of an hour, but finally they gave up and returned to the street shouting angry threats at me. I heard their car pull out but didn't move for several minutes. At last I got up and tried to climb over the fence again - but I couldn't, it was too high. Finally I made it with a great effort...not nearly as easy as it had been with eight police behind me.

I walked straight home, not going back to pick up the hidden leaflets for fear someone might be watching the area. It was a great relief when I entered my house. I had barely managed to escape arrest or worse. Later I learned that most of my comrades hadn't been noticed and were able to finish their leafleting. Next day I read about our leafleting in the morning paper. And on the bus everybody was talking about it. People seemed encouraged to learn that the organization was still active.

Our place was raided many times in 1960. Each time Special Branch turned our house upside-down looking for incriminating information and ANC papers. They even dug up and searched the yard. But they never found the place where we hid all our movement material. Life became increasingly dangerous for me over the following months. Many people knew I was an ANC member from the leafleting I'd done around Tsolo. But I continued anyway. I also talked with some younger men at work whom I knew pretty well. I tried to explain the reasons they were dissatisfied, how the system degraded and exploited them. When they understood this I'd talk about the



movement. "The only way we can change this racist system is to unite within the ANC and prepare for battle. Otherwise we'll remain victims of the white regime forever."

I often visited an old man who lived near the house. We'd sit on a bench in front of his place and talk. One day I said it was important that the people join ANC. But he replied, "Norman, my boy, you can't keep talking about joining the ANC and standing on platforms speaking about justice. This just gets people arrested. It's time we used other weapons against these white racists. We've got to arm ourselves. Talk is only filling the prisons with our people. When an ANC member is caught, the regime tears him to pieces. Talk has become too dangerous."

I understood his point. People were tired of simply talking. I'd heard this many times - even before the ANC was banned. "Well," I said, "taking up arms is not an easy thing. The enemy is powerful and well organized; they have an army, police and informants. We would have to be very well organized too. Many members must be trained, and the people will have to understand that this is the only way; otherwise some will go to the police and others withhold support from the movement."

"Yes," he said, "organizing the people will take a long time. But remember, we're many times stronger than the Whites, and not just in numbers. Our cause and struggle are just."

I still wasn't sure. "We're not just fighting the Whites," I said. "We're fighting the oppressive racist government. Anyway, how many Africans are prepared to take up arms? And who are they? We must know these things before the time comes."

"Well Norman, you're becoming a wise young man," he replied. Our talk lasted over two hours, then the old woman brought out tea, sat down and we discussed life in general; but even this conversation touched on the political side of our situation. After tea the old man told me, "Go home now Norman, we'll soon talk again."

In 1961 I began working with ANC women who acted as messengers for the underground movement. They delivered cloth to each other's houses and sewed together, at the same time exchanging messages and other information. But after a while the police became suspicious of this. That's when the women began sending me, as their son, with messages and a few yards of cloth to various ANC houses. I had many such "mothers" during this period.

Things were now getting very hot. Many more people were arrested. We knew most Special Branch informers in the location and were careful not to expose ourselves. I was always on guard and we now tried to travel in pairs. Sometimes agents stopped us and asked where we were going. They also spent a lot of time in bars, listening to conversations and reporting anything suspicious they heard to the nearest police station.

One night a well-known police agent was shot and killed in our location. About 3 that morning we were awakened by thunderous pounding at the front door. "Who is it?" I shouted.

"Police! Open the door!" They asked my father what he knew about the murder. "Nothing," he said, "I just learned about it

from you."

"Where were you earlier tonight?"

"Well, my wife can tell you that I've been home all night."

That didn't convince them. They continued asking questions while others searched the house for weapons. After almost an hour they left, saying, "We'll get all of you ANC bastards behind bars before long!" When they left we went back to bed without discussing it further.

Next morning we heard details of the shooting. The informer was asleep at home when someone knocked at his door. He got up, opened the door and was shot. I still don't know if ANC people were involved. That day Special Branch combed the location, searching for guns, interrogating and arresting known members of ANC. The "guilty" person was never found, though the police picked up every suspected ANC member in Tsolo for questioning. My father was one of these. I wasn't home but mother told me what happened. Late at night someone pounded at the door. Mother opened it and several policemen charged in with torches. They woke my father, threw him his clothes and said, "Get dressed fast or you'll go to the station without pants."

Later, he told us about the interrogation. He was questioned for a long time about the underground activities of ANC and *Umkonto we Sizwe* ("Spear of the Nation"), the military wing of ANC. They also asked about me: Was I a member? When did I leave the house? What did I do? He replied only that I worked at United Dairies and was a good, hardworking boy. He said he'd been a member of ANC before it was banned but had nothing to do with it since then.

"We know you held a meeting here the night before the murder! So you'd better tell the truth or we'll beat it out of you!" He was badly beaten and taken to the downtown jail. But he never confessed to the meeting or knowing anything about the killing of the informant.

While he was being interrogated, another man whom he worked with was also questioned. He was frightened and my father feared he would give some information. All members had been instructed to deny knowing anything about recent ANC activities. My father was "detained" under the Preventive Detention Act for three months. While he was in prison, Special Branch raided our house several times. To avoid capture and imprisonment I spent the next three months in town with Linda, an ANC comrade and my new girlfriend.

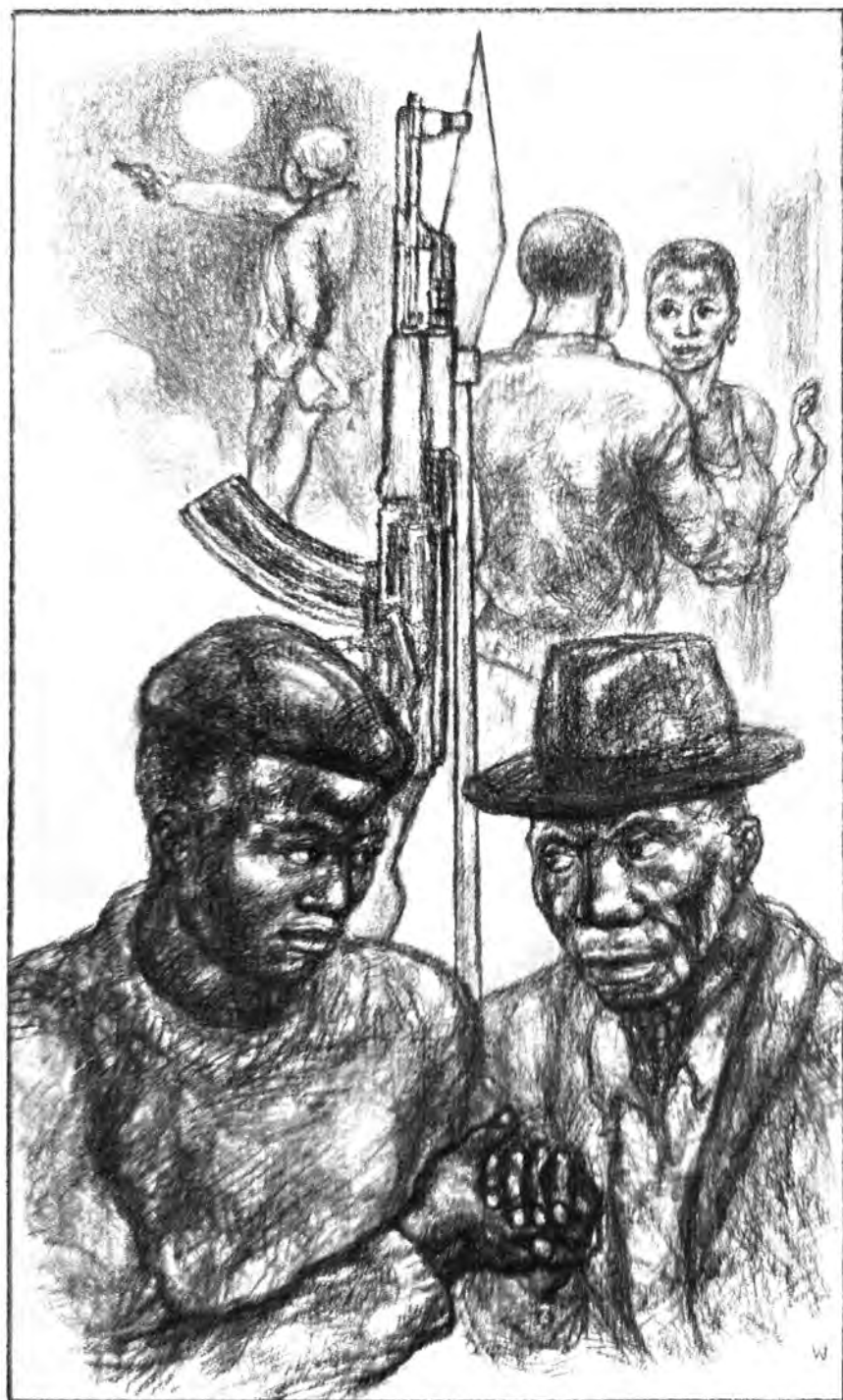
Linda was also from Tsolo location. She worked as a "kitchen girl" in East London and had a small room behind her employer's house where she stayed during the week, coming home only on weekends. I had been there the night my father was arrested and stayed on for several months while the police looked for the person who killed their informant.

I kept working at United Dairies, going straight to Linda's place afterwards. I stayed far away from Tsolo, afraid Special Branch might pick me up. Of course, I knew if they were really looking for me in particular they could grab me at work.

As time went on the government raids intensified. My mother said Special Branch were coming around very often and asking for

me. It became too risky to continue working so I asked for sick leave and went into hiding at Linda's. For about two weeks she brought me water and leftovers from what she'd fixed for her bosses. I'd spend all my time in her small room going out only occasionally for a walk.

The police finally arrested a man they suspected of killing their informer. The others were released, including my father. A week later I returned home and went back to work. Again I began organizing in our area.



Chapter Five

Joining Umkonto we Sizwe

Until 1962 I knew very little about *Umkonto we Sizwe*, "Spear of the Nation"; only what I read in the newspapers. One day in June of that year an old man in ANC named Mareuma came to our house. It was evening and I was drinking with some friends. The old man had a few words with my father then came out and asked if he could speak with me privately. We went outside. "Well Norman," he began, "our work is becoming more difficult now; so many ANC members are being arrested. The struggle must continue, however, though this means we must become trained and organized, ready to fight the racist regime. Some young people are already getting military training as members of *Umkonto we Sizwe*."

He went on, telling me generally about the work and training being carried out. Then he asked, "Would you like to join and be trained with them?" I thought for a moment, then said, "Yes, I would." Mareuma told me I'd work with a partner and we'd both be instructed by someone not officially connected with ANC. I wasn't told the name of my partner. He asked that I meet my instructor the next day at five, telling me the place and saying I knew and would recognize the man.

As he left he said, "I'm sure your work will be a great contribution to our people's cause." I remained outside, thinking things over. I felt pleased, even honored, at being asked to work with *Umkonto*; yet at the same time I was worried about my ability and competence to carry out the work.

Monday I met my instructor at the predetermined place and we took a stroll. We walked to a bus stop and sat on the bench. The buses were all full so we could talk quite some time without looking suspicious. At first he told me: "Never tell anyone about the work you're doing for *Umkonto*. The organization is secret and our work dangerous. No one outside must know anything about it!" I agreed and he went on. "You and your partner will be learning to make explosives and fire bombs." Before we parted he asked me to meet him again the following night at 9.

At home that evening I told my mother, "I'll probably be home late tomorrow night, so don't wait on me for supper."

"Don't go getting yourself into trouble now!" She must have sensed that I was getting involved in something, but I don't think

she thought it was *Umkonto we Sizwe*.

The next night, when I arrived at the instructor's place, there was a young man there about my age. We said "Hello" but weren't introduced. Our leader said it was best if we didn't know each other's name; it was just left like that. He taught us how to make fire bombs that night. "Our job is to make plenty of these, mixing oil and gas in a bottle. You've got to get hold of some empty bottles, gas and oil. Bring them with you tomorrow night, same time, so we can begin our work." I knew I could get the oil and bottles from the dairy.

At work the next day I went to the stockroom and put several bottles of oil into a bag, first wrapping them good in paper to avoid spilling any. We used so much oil for our machines that no one kept watch on the stock. A couple of workers asked what I had in the bag. I just said, "Some oil; I have to repair a donkey cart at home." No one asked anything else and I left without any problems.

I walked straight to our meeting place. When I arrived my partner was already there waiting. We greeted each other, then the leader went into his back room and returned with a pistol. That night we both learned how to load, clean and disassemble this type of pistol. We practiced for over two hours. When we'd finished the leader told me I could leave. It was always this way. I left first, then my partner left later. That way neither of us knew in which direction the other went.

The following evening was a windy, cold July night. The three of us walked to the beach to practice our shooting. It seemed even colder on the beach, the wind cut through our coats and the waves crashed loudly on the shore. The leader unwrapped the pistol, loaded it and fired twice; the sound of the gun was muffled by the waves. Then he gave it to the other comrade who also fired two shots. I was the last to try. We weren't aiming at anything, just pulling the trigger, the gun facing the ocean. My first try was difficult, it seemed so much effort to slowly squeeze the trigger that my whole hand shook. Next, the leader put a target up on a sandy dune. The moon was full and bright and we could see the target clearly. We fired from about 40 yards away. Again our zone leader went first; he was a good shot and hit the target on both tries. The other comrade then shot twice, hitting the target once. He gave the gun to me and I aimed carefully, then fired. I missed both times. The leader said, "Don't get discouraged, it was just your first try. You'll do better next time." We had only ten bullets left and he put them away. We walked slowly back toward Isolo. Once there we split up, each going a different direction. It was after eleven when I reached home.

I continued working with these comrades throughout 1962, learning to shoot and making fire bombs. I'd bring empty bottles from the dairy and sometimes oil. Once the bombs were made we'd store them in a safe place.

Then in March 1963 the old man Mareuma again visited our house. I wasn't home at the time but when I arrived my mother said,

"Mr. Mareuma was here to see you. He said you should be sure to stay around home tomorrow after work." Next evening I waited. At about 8 p.m. he showed up and called me outside. "Norman, we think it's time for you to go outside the country for military training."

What a surprise! I never thought I'd be asked to leave South Africa. Then I remembered reading about one of our comrades who was arrested in Zambia. I now thought that he too must have been chosen for training outside. I wondered if I would be going the same route.

"This is really quite a shock," I said. "Let me have some time to think about it." I wasn't afraid. In fact, I really wanted to go. But Linda and I were planning to get married soon and my leaving would change everything.

The old man spent over an hour trying to convince me of the importance of military training and my role in *Umkonto*. Then he said: "I'll give you until tomorrow evening Norman, but remember you must not talk to *anyone* about this - not even your father or girlfriend." I wondered if the old man knew about my plans with Linda, though I hadn't told anyone but my parents.

He went back inside to talk to my father. I remained outside thinking. I was torn; it was truly the biggest decision in my life. I finally went in. The old man had already gone and my mother guessed that something was wrong. "Why are you so gloomy?" She asked. "What news did the old man bring you?"

"It's nothing, mother. I'm just trying to work something out. Actually I feel like going over to see Linda."

"Well go on!" She took a couple of shillings from the cupboard and gave them to me for the bus. I went into the other room and got my jacket. My sister was there and asked where I was going. "Not far," I responded. "See you later." I ran out of the house and down to the bus stop.

When I reached Linda's I gave the fence a shake (our usual signal) and soon she came out and opened the gate. We went into her small room and kissed. I took off my coat and we sat on her bed. My head was still spinning and seeing Linda just made things worse. She could tell something was bothering me. Leaning over, she kissed me and asked, "What's wrong Norman?"

"It's nothing, just got a headache," I lied.

"I'll get you some aspirins."

"No, that's not necessary. I don't like them anyway."

She wasn't convinced but what else could I say? I spent the night there, lying in bed with Linda and trying to find a way to tell her. Sometimes I'd be just about ready - then I'd check myself, remembering the old man's words. Toward morning I couldn't hold back any longer; I had to tell her something. "You know Linda, I'm thinking of going to Peddie for a holiday."

"How can you go now, it's March? They'd never give you time off so early in the year."

"I could take my sick leave."

"But why do you want to go now? It's so close to our wedding."

"Well, that's one of the reasons. My Grandmother is ill. I'd like to see her again and if possible bring her here for the wedding."

As I lay in bed I realized I had made up my mind; I had told Linda I was leaving. The rest of the night I thought about the military training, how I'd return to South Africa one day to fight for our freedom. By morning I knew what step I had to take.

I left her place in the morning for work, sad as I kissed her good-bye. After work I hurried home, hoping I hadn't missed the old man. Soon I heard a knock at the door. It was Mareuma. He came in and sat down. Mother offered him a cup of tea and he chatted with my parents for nearly fifteen minutes. At last the old man said, "Well, I came to see Norman." My father nodded. I think he knew, though he never said anything to me. It was a cool summer night. I picked up my jacket and went outside with the old man.

"Well, what have you decided, Norman?"

"I'm going." There was a short silence.

"Good. But I must again ask you not to tell anyone - not even your parents - anything about this. I'll see you again on the day you'll be leaving. I'm afraid I can't give you any more details or when that might be."

I stood there, not believing what I heard. He gave me no clue at all about when I would be going - a month? a day? next year? Nothing! We stood in silence for a while longer. I thought how hard it would be to leave without a word to my mother. It wouldn't be so difficult with my father, I thought he knew already anyway. But I would have liked to tell my mother. And what about Linda? I was worried about upsetting her. Just then the old man broke in: "Norman, it isn't an easy life you've chosen. It's a very serious decision, that's why I gave you time to consider it; but you must not feel forced. I know you're determined and committed to the struggle against white racist rule."

I remained silent, still thinking of the difficulties which lay ahead. Mareuma continued: "From my own experience, working with you and hearing reports about your work, I know you've been able to stand up to all the problems you've faced. I wish you the best of luck. You will return to South Africa after training in order to teach your brothers, sisters and fathers what you've learned outside. We're counting on you."

"Thank you. I'll do my best." We shook hands and he went back into the house; I followed. I was thinking about Linda again and what I should say - she mustn't be surprised when she doesn't see me.

Inside, the old man spoke with my father for about half an hour. As he got up to leave my father rose to walk him to the gate. They left and I heard the squeak of the gate as it opened and the two of them stepped out onto the road and started down the street. Later my father came in, sat down as though nothing had happened and chatted with mother as usual.

The following days were filled with suspense. Any day Mareuma could come to the house with a message for me to leave immediately. I spent a lot of time with Linda now. One weekend when we had more time together than usual I talked again about my trip to Peddie.

"Linda, I've decided to go to Peddie to see my grandmother. She isn't getting better and I'd like to bring her to East London

to see a doctor. This doctor in Peddie isn't very good. Perhaps we should postpone our wedding until she is well and can attend." I was so convincing I believed it myself as I said the words.

Linda was sympathetic. "You're right Norman, you should go see her. We can wait. I'd like her to come to our wedding."

"She's a good old woman; always made me feel right at home whenever I visited. I think you'll like her."

Next morning I woke up relieved that this part of my preparations was over and Linda agreed with my going away. She fixed a good breakfast - coffee, eggs and bread. It was Sunday so we took a bus back to the location. All the way home I kept thinking, "Linda, you don't know but these are our last days together. How I wish I could tell you everything!" We walked to her place and I asked if she'd like to go to the movies later. She agreed and we kissed good-bye.

I picked her up later and we went to the Viceroy. Afterwards we went to her place in East London and spent the night together.

For several weeks I tried to think of excuses I could give for quitting work so I could receive my back pay. I was concerned with the money as I knew leaving would cause my parents financial problems. What reason did I have for quitting? I knew they'd ask me this question and each day I thought about it but left work without saying anything.



Chapter Six

The Old Man Returns

Well over a month had gone by since I'd given my agreement to Mareuma and I began to think the old man might have forgotten all about it. Then one Sunday afternoon in May I was at Linda's. We were playing music and joking, really enjoying ourselves when Charles, my younger brother, came in: "There's someone at the house looking for you."

"Who is it?"

"I don't know. Some old man." For some reason it didn't dawn on me it might be Mareuma. Still in a good mood, I turned to Linda and said, "I'll be back in a few minutes." I left my jacket, cigarettes and matches there at her place. Charles went running out of the house and I ran after and passed him, then waited; he passed me and we played tag, laughing as we ran all the way home. I practically ran into the house still laughing and slightly out of breath. When I looked up there was the old man. My heart pounded. THIS IS THE DAY. He stood up and said, "Hello Norman, I'm afraid I'm in a hurry." He turned to my mother who was home alone with my sister and said, "Excuse me, but I wanted to see the boy."

We went out behind the house to our usual spot. "Norman, I'm sorry, but we've got to hurry. Everyone is at the meeting point except you. Take some clothes, but not too much. You don't want to make your mother suspicious."

I frantically thought about what to take, then Mareuma spoke again: "Don't bother with good clothes, just some work things. And please don't say anything to your mother; don't let her see your clothes and don't take a suitcase."

I thought of my kit bag where I kept my rugby uniform, boots and jersey, but it wasn't a rugby day and what would my mother think if she saw me with that? Back in the house I decided on my blue jeans, then pulled another pair of pants over them. I also put on two shirts and stuffed a vest in my pocket. Then I remembered, "My jacket! I left it at Linda's." I told Mareuma.

"You can't go back there now!"

"This is awful," I thought, "What can I do?" Finally I got out an overcoat and put it on. It was really getting hot under all those clothes. Fortunately, my mother was concentrating on her sewing. I didn't want her to see me sweating. I turned to the old

man. "We can go now!" Mother lifted her eyes and my sister who was by my side asked, "Why are you wearing that big coat today? It's not cold. Where's your jacket?"

"My jacket's in the wardrobe, I'm taking this one just in case it rains or turns cold. Got to be careful you know!" She just laughed and went into the other room. My mother was looking at me. Oh, how I wanted to tell her, give her a big kiss good-bye and tell her why I was leaving. But I couldn't. I consoled myself thinking that my father knew and would somehow let her know. "Good-bye mother." Then I went back to the other room to see my sister. When she saw me she said, "Why are you sweating?"

"Because I've got this coat on."

"I told you; it's not cold outside."

I wanted to say good-bye to her, but just stood there for a moment. I was supposed to return in six months, but who knew if I'd make it. I knew my trip would be a difficult one. Then I turned, grabbed my sister's shoulders and held her. "Don't be silly," I said, and gave her a big kiss. As I left the room she followed insisting, "You must come back today! Don't sleep out tonight!" I casually said good-bye to my mother again and went out, opening the gate for the old man. We walked down the road a ways without a word. I was surprised when we stopped in front of a place owned by a man whom I never suspected of being an ANC member. I wondered, "Could he be in *Umkonto*?" Mareuma said, "We'll join our comrades here."

There were three others already waiting. I introduced myself - we were all about the same age: 23. Mareuma said goodbye and wished us good luck. "You are leaving behind a suffering, oppressed people. We will look forward to your return and the beginning of armed struggle." With these few words the old man turned and left.

The owner of the house told us about the importance of our training and future work. He gave us some money for provisions and train tickets, along with details of our travel, contacts, etc. "Are you ready? Is anyone hungry?"

"We're ready," everyone replied, anxious to get going. We took a bus to the East London train station. While we waited the ANC comrade bought us cold drinks and we talked. When the train arrived, he whispered slowly: "Now remember! Take the Johannesburg line. When you get there, you will be met by Mororo; he is expecting you and will identify himself by saying his name - remember, it's 'Mororo.' Good luck and take care of yourselves."

None of us had any luggage. We just gave our tickets to the ticket master and boarded. The train was crowded and noisy. I was thinking, "These people have no idea that we are beginning a mission which could bring a whole new dimension to all their lives." The four of us had our own compartment, but we didn't talk much that first day. We were tense and uneasy, not knowing each other or what lay ahead of us. During the night we passed many towns and villages which were new to me; I watched them fly by my window. I couldn't sleep, thinking about Linda, our marriage plans and months of separation, and of the unknown lands and experiences ahead of me.

We travelled three days and nights on that train, getting food at the stations where we stopped. Finally we arrived in Johannesburg. We were met by Mororo and taken to a bus stop, and from there by bus to a location. "Joburg" was huge and extremely crowded. I'd never seen anything like it before. And they spoke some languages I couldn't understand.

We stayed with a woman in the location. She saw to our needs, prepared food and gave us a place to sleep. Unfortunately we didn't speak Tswana, her language, so we had to use English. The whole week we stayed in her house or very close by; we didn't know the area and there was always the danger of being noticed as strangers by informers or police. Joburg was a rough town, newcomers were eyed with suspicion so we always stuck close together when we left the house. One day a black car pulled up outside the house. A short, stout man with a big belly got out and came inside. He smiled, "Are you the comrades from East London?"

"Yes, we were sent by the organization."

He asked the woman to go into another room, then he spoke to us in a whisper. "Tomorrow you are leaving the country; get some rest now, it's a long trip and some parts you'll have to travel on foot." Then he asked, "Are there any problems, do you have enough money?"

"No problem as far as money is concerned," we replied.

"How about food? I know it's quite different from what you're used to."

I answered, "Everything is fine." They ate stiff porridge with meat instead of stam-mealies, but by that time we were accustomed to it. After the man left we went to bed. I thought about leaving the country, crossing the border. I wasn't thinking so much about Linda now.

Next morning we prepared for the journey. I put all of my clothes back on. We waited to be picked up. This time a young man came in a car. He greeted us and said, "Comrades, I've been asked to drive you to the border, are you ready?" We said good-bye to the woman and thanked her, she had provided us with everything we needed - food, blankets and all that.

"Good-bye and safe journey," she replied. We hopped into the car and off we went. As we drove I thought of the place we were going. "What kind of place will it be? How far away? And what will the people be like?" Then I thought of my family and Linda, so far away already. We stopped after a while for cold drinks, a long ways from the location but still in Johannesburg. Then we continued until about five in the afternoon, when we reached a small town and bought some food - milk, bread, butter, fruit and bananas. We put it in two paper bags along with the rest of our provisions. These two bags were all we carried.

We drove on another twenty kilometers. The comrade stopped the car and said, "We're close to the border point where you'll cross. It's used by local people who go to Botswana to visit relatives. I'll check to make sure it's not guarded." He pulled the car over near a tree where we got out and ate, then he left to check the border. It was dark when he returned. With him was an old man

who looked like a peasant. "This old man is going with you. I must return to Johannesburg. Good-bye and good luck." We were left in the care of our new guide. Once the car was out of sight we picked up our food, putting everything back into our paper bags.

"Things are clear up ahead. Let's get started," the old man ordered. He led, his bare feet moving so quickly I often had to run to keep up. We walked silently for two hours, often stumbling in the dark. Then the old man spoke. "Stop! We'll rest here." It had been a hard walk and I was glad to rest. We all sat down. The old man lit a cigarette, walked away, and returned ten minutes later. "How do you feel now?" he asked.

"Okay."

"Good. We'll cross now." I was filled with anxiety; excited at the thought of leaving South Africa for military training, but feeling a strange sadness too. I was leaving everyone I knew and loved - my parents, Linda, Temba and my brothers - all my friends. As we started again the old man took the lead with his quick stride, apparently feeling no fatigue from the journey so far. Soon we reached the border. In the dark I could make out two high wire fences which blocked our path. We stopped while the old man carefully inspected the area for South African guards. It was clear. He motioned for us to come close and then crawled on his stomach under both fences; the rest of us followed suit. Once on the other side, we walked another ten kilometers. At about 4 a.m. we stopped to rest. The old man said, "Here in Botswana we're out of danger. Go ahead and sleep, I'll stand guard."

The old man's pace had exhausted me and I quickly fell asleep. I woke again with someone shaking me. "Where am I?" I asked with a start.

"Botswana." It was 7 a.m., the sun was rising and I could see the terrain around me. I also heard dogs barking in a nearby village. Before I was fully awake the old man had me on my feet, walking. He took us to a village where we were introduced to an old woman with several young children, relatives of our guide. Both parents of these children worked in Johannesburg so they stayed with their grandmother. When we arrived they built a fire to make us coffee. I was still so tired, I just wanted to sleep. The small pot seemed to take forever to boil. At last we had our breakfast, then the woman showed us to a hut. "My sons, you can sleep here, I'll wake you for lunch." The old man entered the hut while I was pulling off my boots. "I must go back now. Another guide will make contact with you here." I thanked him, took off my trousers and slept till lunch.

We had given this woman money when we arrived to buy some things we needed - tinned food, tea, coffee and soap. We also gave her money for the food we ate while there. She thanked us. "I'll never forget such sons, you're as kind to me as my own." She told us about her son as we ate. He grew up helping her, never leaving the village until he was old enough to go work in Johannesburg. Even then he returned often, bringing her tea and coffee. She must have been 60 years old. A good woman who made us all feel at home there.

"Where are you from?" she asked us that afternoon.

"South Africa." I replied.

"Where are you going?"

"We're going to school."

"Oh, that's good. But aren't there schools in South Africa?"

"No, not the kind of school we want. We finished classes there, now we have to go elsewhere for higher training."

"Oh, you are very educated people!"

It was a large village. Later we walked to a shop and bought paper bags and small cardboard suitcases to keep our extra clothes and other provisions. When we returned a tall middle-aged man arrived. "Hello. Are you the young men on your way to school?" (The old woman was in the hut.)

"Yes."

"The train will be leaving at five today. The station isn't too far from here, but you should get ready to go. I'll be back shortly to pick you up."

Once he left, I took off my top layer of clothes - pants, shirt and vest - and put them in the suitcase I had just purchased. Now I felt free again. After we were all packed we gave the old woman some canned food. She was grateful and thanked us. "When you're through this way again you must stop here - this is your house. You'll always be welcome to stay as long as you wish and I'll be happy to cook for you." She spoke to us in the little Xhosa she knew. I wonder even now if she is still alive? And what she'd think if she knew about our real mission?

The man returned soon. He also knew a little Xhosa which he'd picked up while working in South Africa. We said our good-byes to the old woman and walked to the station. Our guide accompanied us on what turned out to be a slow, cold train ride to Francistown, Botswana. Here we were met by another man who took us to an African location. This new contact lived in Botswana but worked a lot in South Africa and had become a member of ANC and SACTU (South African Congress of Trade Unions). He took us to his place and told us we'd be staying there until our plane arrived. We were given a small hut containing a few furnishings. Next day he took us to the immigration office where we filled out several forms. They asked: "Where are you going? How did you get in?" We said we came across the border and were on our way to school in Tanzania. They knew we were members of a political organization but accepted us as refugees anyway.

Well, we waited in Francistown for over two months. During this time we had many discussions with our contact. He was well-informed about the situation in South Africa and the work of ANC. On the whole, however, my memories of Francistown aren't pleasant. It was very hot and dry and there was little for us to do but sit and wait for our plane. At last we were informed that it would arrive the following day. We were all excited - anxious to begin our mission.

The next morning we packed our bags and listened. Each time a plane flew over one of us looked out. That afternoon we spotted a medium sized plane coming from the direction we expected. It circled the airport several minutes and during one of its turns

came directly over our hut. Sure enough, it was the one we were waiting for. We grabbed our things and jumped into our friend's car. He rushed us to the airport and right up to the plane. People were already boarding. We took our small bags and went aboard. It was the first time I was even near a plane. We took our seats, the engine started and signs lit up: "Fasten your seatbelts." "Seatbelts?" I said. "Where are they?" And once we found them: "How do they work?" The woman next to me told me how, then I showed my comrades. The whole situation seemed funny and everybody laughed.

The plane took off. I saw Francistown below, even the place where we'd stayed. We flew straight to Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. It took a long time; the plane went so slow I couldn't imagine how it kept from falling. We were given cold drinks and I sipped mine till we landed. As we came down my comrades and I were so terrified we got sick. We couldn't hear and our stomachs seemed to be coming up to our throats. By the time the plane came to a stop on the runway we were all sweating and nauseous. I stood to leave and my knees were shaking.

Outside the plane we found ourselves in a completely new environment. It was very hot and humid and I could see forests of coconut trees. It was a shock to see Asians, Africans and Europeans walking through the same doors, using the same facilities and speaking to one another. In the airport, African men and women worked behind the desk and no one asked for my pass! I was very impressed. Tanzania had gained its independence in 1961 and we could see it was a free country.

The ANC had an office in Dar and several comrades met us at the airport. We drove to an ANC house outside the city and over twenty-five comrades came out to welcome us when we arrived. Everyone was anxious to hear about our journey and the situation at home.

We were given a few days to rest. During this time I became familiar with camp life. All comrades took courses taught by those with more education. There was military discipline to prepare us for training abroad. Our leader there said, "Comrades, we are here just in transit. But discipline and good comportment are very important. Some have already left for training in other countries and everyone here will be going at one time or another."

On the third day I joined a few classes - History, English and Math. These were held under the trees as it was just too hot inside to concentrate. In my math class we worked on algebra. Besides our regular courses we met regularly for political discussion, particularly on the South African situation.

Each day began at 7 with physical exercise, then we showered, ate breakfast and began classes at 9. People were assigned cleaning tasks and other chores around the house. Our afternoons were free for homework and house tasks, but when these were finished we were allowed to go into town. The Tanzanians spoke Swahili - which I didn't understand - so it was difficult to make any friends in town, except when I went with ANC comrades who spoke some Swahili. On weekends we'd either drive into Dar or up the coast to one of the beautiful beaches for a swim.

I was in Dar-es-Salaam for almost three months. One day our commander announced, "A number of you will leave tomorrow for military training in the Soviet Union. Pack your things and be ready!" I was among those chosen to go. Warm clothes had already been bought for us. It was November 1963; the weather was very hot in Dar but extremely cold in the USSR. They told us to take care, going from such a warm climate into the extreme cold might make us ill.

Next morning I was up early, packed my things and helped load the truck with our luggage. Twelve comrades from Dar were going, including the four I had travelled with from South Africa. We were all very excited. Our training was about to begin at last! It was already six months since we'd left home. By 5 a.m. we were in the lorry and on our way to the airport. One of the leaders, who was driving, talked of our political responsibilities. "You will be representing the movement so you must be responsible militants at all times. Study hard so you will be able to teach the masses at home all you learn."

I was relieved to see a large plane pull in. "You won't get sick on that one," we were told. We waved good-bye to the comrades from our seats and took off at 8 a.m. In the air we passed over Egypt and I could see the pyramids below. Then over the Mediterranean. When we landed the ground was covered with snow. It was the first time I'd been in snow and it felt strange. We were already in heavy coats but as we left the plane and I felt the cold air on my face I wanted to get back on. It makes me shiver just thinking about it now.

We were met by several officials including an interpreter, an elderly European man. I felt a little awkward. I'd never before carried on a conversation like this with a white man. On the way to camp the interpreter joked with us about the cold weather. Outside I saw men and women working in the cold. The bus was heated so we were warm but I couldn't get over those people being able to work in such freezing weather.

As the bus approached our camp the interpreter told us we were going to a very good school for training. "Many of our officers came from here," he said. As the bus went through the gates I could see it was a large camp. We were shown around our barracks. We had sleeping quarters and a bathroom of our own, but we ate the same food in the same kitchen as the students.

Other trainees had classes in different languages down the hall from ours. Our class was conducted in English through the help of an interpreter. At first we couldn't understand his English and he couldn't understand ours. Soon, however, his English improved. Between classes we usually met with Russian soldiers in the hall for a smoke. We were the only Africans and for many of the Russians there it was the first time they'd had contact with Africans. It was quite a new experience for me and my comrades too - white people who shook our hands and embraced us on meeting and treated us as equal human beings. It was sort of hard to get used to. I'd seen it happen in Dar-es-Salaam, but here we lived with them, shared

cigarettes, rooms and friendship.

We had a strict routine at the training camp. Early each morning we did tough exercises. While the cold weather lasted our group did them in the barracks; the others, however, trained in the snow. Then we changed for inspection and afterwards did marching drills. Next we went to classes where we learned to use various weapons, explosives, etc., and studied the tactics of guerrilla and mobile warfare. We also had an intensive course in Russian. On weekends we were taken to museums and historical sites. The tours were usually very interesting, but we'd sometimes be forced to return to our bus just to warm up. We couldn't seem to adjust to that cold weather. I always dressed warmly, wearing a long bulky coat, fur hat and big, heavy boots. But it just wasn't enough. I was happy when Spring finally arrived.

We also had quite a time adapting to the place in other ways. There were language, cultural and national differences. Even their music bored us at first, but we managed to buy a few English records. As time went on, however, we began to enjoy their music too. Hockey was a big sport, but there again we didn't have much interest. We were very interested in football though.

I was to stay in the Soviet Union for one year. About half way through we received the results from our first exams. The instructors were positively impressed by the quality of our work.

It was now summer and my comrades and I often went to the beach. There we met other African students from Ghana, Nigeria and the old French colonies who studied at various other camps. We were glad to meet other Africans, but we still had a language barrier - many of them spoke only their own language and French; few knew any English at all. After about six months, however, we could all speak a little Russian.

We continued to work and study hard throughout the Summer and Fall. Then in November 1964 we had our final exams, which lasted three days. After the third day we were called into the senior officer's office along with our instructors. The camp commander read our results - which were very good - then wished us good luck in our struggle. He gave us examples of peoples in Europe who had fought against fascist German occupation using guerrilla tactics very successfully.

The following day a party was given on our behalf. We toasted the success of our struggle with the Russian officers, drank champagne and danced. It was late when we returned to our barracks. The last week went quickly and it was soon time for us to leave. We had made many friends among the soldiers we lived with. When it was time to go we shook hands, embraced and said good-bye. "Who knows," I said, "maybe we'll meet again when South Africa is free." The bus was waiting. We put our luggage in and went to the airport.

In seven hours we were back in hot, humid Dar-es-Salaam. Some ANC comrades were at the airport waiting to take us back to the ANC house. There were now about forty people living there, many just arrived from South Africa. The others, most of whom we knew, had also recently returned from training abroad.

That afternoon several of us strolled through the village; we walked and talked a long time, returning to camp in the evening. Later that night we played cards and went to bed.

I wasn't told how long I'd be in Dar, but I was expecting to return to South Africa soon. In the meantime I began working at the ANC office in the mornings and as a driver when needed. In the afternoons I returned to the house for classes on military tactics taught by members trained elsewhere. This way we exchanged views on various military practices and strategies from different countries.

One morning the whole camp was called together. "Those who have not yet gone for training will go now; the other comrades must be prepared to return home." There were no specifics. Those leaving for South Africa were told privately; we'd just see them disappearing, never knowing if they'd left for training or South Africa.

There was a shortage of manpower at the office and I was told not to be in a hurry. When others returned from training I'd have my chance. Though I didn't know it at the time, I was to work in the ANC Dar office for over two years. The routine was generally the same: wake up in the morning, exercise, have breakfast, go to the office, then lunch and return home to study.

During my three and a half years outside South Africa I never once received a letter from my family; nor had I written. It was too dangerous to write. I was told that ANC members in South Africa kept in touch with them and from time to time I'd get news that everyone was all right.



Chapter Seven

A Fight To Return

In early 1967 our chief representative in Dar told me, "Well Norman, your chance has come to return to South Africa. I know you've been waiting a long time." Everything had been prepared. Three of us from Dar would go together. A few days later we got into a lorry which took us to Zambia. There we joined a group of thirty ANC members. We remained in Zambia for five months of intensive training. Much time was also spent on political education - about the situation in South Africa and how best to organize our people politically and militarily. Our diet was greatly improved and after a few months we all felt very healthy.

In mid-August, a few days before leaving, we were given guns and provisions. We cleaned and checked our weapons to make sure they were in good working order. The day we left we were given a medical check-up. Then our detachment leader, Jackson Moloto, addressed us: "Today we are beginning the long journey home, home to those we left behind with a promise to return. We must each be determined to see our task through to the end. The enemy is strong, we must not underestimate his strength; but we too are strong. We are now trained and will meet their bullets with our own."

We were divided into four groups, each going to a different area of South Africa. There we were to mobilize the masses for the struggle. Our work was first to educate the people to the political significance of our struggle. Only when they understood and agreed would we begin military training.

That afternoon we drove close to the Rhodesian border in a lorry and stopped for the night. It was close to the town of Katombora. There were thirty-three of us. The border was near. We checked our guns and supplies; everything was in order. Then we went over our plans once more. We had to leave no trace of our being there; everything we used had to be buried or taken with us. We were planning a march of ten or twelve days to reach the South African border, going straight down through Zimbabwe (Rhodesia), about 400 miles. When we reached South Africa we could expect help from the people. Ours was not the only unit returning to South Africa. We were part of an ANC joint military effort with the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). Most of the units were made up of both ZAPU and ANC militants. Ours started with only ANC members

but a few ZAPU comrades joined us in Zimbabwe.

We rested at this spot till 2 a.m. then made our way to the border. My group took the lead. It was a difficult march. The road was very bad and in the dark we stumbled over rocks and fallen trees. It took us much longer to reach the border than anticipated. It was nearly dawn when I crawled under the two high wire fences. Our group walked on until we reached some bushes where we waited for the others. The last group didn't slip into Zimbabwe till 7 a.m. When we were all together we set our compasses and oriented ourselves. The sun was already hot and before long we had to stop and rest. We were in a forested area which gave good cover but made walking difficult. Commander Moloto decided it best to rest during the day and walk at night because of the heat. It was a good idea. We made camp there for the day. Some comrades were posted as guards and performed this duty on a rotating basis. We all had positions assigned in case of attack. We built small fires in the ground over which we warmed some tinned food. Then we slept. Late that afternoon we cleaned camp, burying our fires and food tins. The group commanders checked to see that no trace of us remained. At sunset we continued our journey.

We kept to this routine for five straight days, resting throughout the day and marching at night. During this period we didn't see anyone, White or African. But our pace was slower than planned; we were getting low on rations, yet according to our map we still had a very long way to go. In the evening of the sixth day we neared a village. Dogs were barking and we saw cattle and some people in the distance. We circled the village trying to avoid contact with the local population.

On the seventh day we ran out of food completely and water was scarce. After many zigs and zags we were lost. I began to feel the weight of my knapsack and boots. The sun was unbearable. We walked on for another four days. We had expected to be near South Africa by now but were far from it. Everyone was hungry, thirsty and very weak; our clothes were sweaty and full of dirt. Each day some comrades hunted game. We were lucky Zimbabwe had many wild animals, but none of us were good hunters. In the open terrain the game spotted us easily. We saw many animals but were able to kill only a few. One of the men shot a buck and this kept us in meat for two days. On the twelfth day since crossing the border we came to a valley. There was a small river where we filled our canteens and washed our socks and uniforms. Two groups scouted the area, one checking the road ahead, another looking for game. The hunters returned only with stories: "I shot a big buck, but it ran off into the forest," etc. We had only a small portion of meat left and Moloto divided it evenly among us. It was a strange experience, being hungry and without food, never knowing when we might get more.

Early the next morning three of us went hunting. We had the whole day to seek out game. Not too far from camp we spotted three zebras grazing. We crept up very slowly and quietly. They didn't see us and we prayed they wouldn't. We moved closer and closer, aimed, then fired simultaneously. We hit and wounded one zebra.

The others ran off and the wounded one tried to follow but didn't get very far. We were all excited and happy. We ran toward the zebra. It looked like a donkey and I wondered if it would taste like one too. But even a donkey didn't sound bad to me at the time. Two of us hurried back to tell the other comrades. Everyone was pleased at the prospect of meat. The zebra was too heavy to carry to camp so we moved our camp to the zebra. Five comrades were detailed to skin the animal and divide the meat. We built fires and roasted large chunks of meat. It was delicious. I ate and ate and ate. Everyone had all he wanted and when I reached my limit I leaned back and rubbed my full stomach, glad to be rid of hunger pains and feel my strength returning.

We packed our knapsacks with roasted meat, but there was a lot left. What we couldn't carry we had to leave behind. We hated to do it, knowing that in a few days our hunger pains might return.

At dusk we covered our fires, picked up our heavy packs and moved on. We marched all night and just before dawn reached a large village. We made camp not far away and sent four comrades to investigate. Two went unarmed to ask for some food, while the other two covered them with rifles some distance away. When they approached the closest hut and asked for food the villagers didn't seem surprised. They invited our comrades in and prepared porridge. The men had been ordered not to say how many we were or what we were doing.

When the porridge was cooked the comrades brought two large pots back to our makeshift camp. It was enough for all. We returned the pots and remained camped outside the village until very late that night. Everyone was inside their huts and we passed through the village unnoticed.

Several more days of night marching passed. We had no more contact with villagers. We saw people herding cattle in the distance but always kept out of sight. Our mission was to reach South Africa without engaging Rhodesian security forces. We were only passing through and the less the local people knew of us the better for everyone. We knew that ZAPU made radio broadcasts to the Zimbabwean people before leaving Zambia saying that if anyone approached their village asking for help they should give it. "These are your sons," they said, "fighting for a free Zimbabwe!" Perhaps this was why we received such hospitality and no questions from the villagers.

It was late August now. We'd been marching for over two weeks.

One morning as we rested under some trees a youth with his herd of cattle approached. We didn't want him to stumble upon us as news of the presence of a large group of well-armed Africans in the area would spread very fast. Before we could decide what to do he stopped and sat down by a creek some fifty yards away. Our troubles weren't over, however. His cattle kept grazing closer and closer to our position. We'd silently chase them away so he wouldn't come after them but soon they'd graze close to us again. The day seemed endless. The boy fell off to sleep and it wasn't until early evening that he finally moved away with his cattle.

Once he was out of sight we left, walking in the opposite direction. We hadn't gone very far when we heard a reconnaissance plane. It passed low, right over the camp we'd just left. We kept out of sight and turned on the small transistor radio we carried. To our surprise the Rhodesian government was already on our track; they were transporting troops into the area, vowing to destroy our entire unit before we reached South Africa. The news was demoralizing. We were already exhausted from weeks of marching and too little food. When the plane left we stepped up our pace, choosing campsites and paths which would be difficult for their vehicles to travel, forcing them to move on foot.

After a night of forced marching we found ourselves near a dam. It was still dark but we decided to rest, drink and fill up our canteens. When morning came we realized it wasn't a good spot. There was little cover - no tall trees and the bush was sparse. Before we could leave, however, a comrade picked up the faint sounds of planes and lorries. "Listen!" he said. "The enemy is coming!" Soon we saw the lead lorry approaching, then five more filled with troops. There was no time to run. We took up ambush positions, camouflaging ourselves as best we could in the available bush. The plane circled above. The lorries drew near. We were only fifty yards from the road as they drove past. I saw an African soldier on the back of the first lorry manning a huge machine-gun.

We had been extremely careless. The jeep was able to follow our footprints. They stopped not far from where we were, jumped from their lorries and rushed to the dam site thinking we were still there. Not finding us they shouted for us to surrender. We remained absolutely still and silent. A successful ambush would have been difficult and a pitched battle probably disastrous. There was no cover and it was broad daylight.

They began shooting wildly in all directions. The plane still circled above - apparently not spotting us. After a while, when we didn't respond to their fire, they got back into the lorries and we heard the convoy drive off, stop, then head back. Fortunately, they kept right on going.

We crept along to a small forest not far away. There we found a good defensive position and dug trenches. We waited. Soon we heard shouting and shooting. It was a good guess on their part; they knew we'd stay close to water - perhaps they had figured out our route. Every now and then I heard them shouting in the air, shouting for us to surrender. "i b uua 'hul' !!" (You are finished!). Then their voices would die away. Sometimes they came close, but we were not discovered. That night they camped about a mile from us.

As they settled in we moved out, walking as fast as we could. Most of us were exhausted. I had blisters on my feet and the pain grew much worse after the rest; once my blood began circulating again, however, I felt a bit better.

Next morning we made camp in southern Wankie. There were no forested areas around so we were stopped in a small bushy zone. We dug trenches, set up guard posts and organized ourselves for defense. We knew now the enemy was close behind. Two comrades

were sent to a nearby village for food. They returned with a full drum of stiff porridge and sour milk. We were beginning to eat it when first we heard some voices and then heavy rifle fire at close range. The enemy had taken us by surprise; two comrades were killed instantly and another wounded. We held our positions, however, and Comrade Moloto ordered us to hold our fire until the enemy was in full sight. No one panicked, though it was our first battle. The enemy closed in, again shouting for us to surrender. Then we opened fire. We were organized in two flanks, one facing the Rhodesian troops and the other facing the opposite direction ... in case the enemy tried an encircling maneuver. Four helicopters hovered overhead. They weren't of much use, however. We were so close to their troops that they couldn't distinguish us from their African conscripts and were afraid to open fire.

There were about fifty enemy soldiers, many of whom turned and ran away the minute we opened fire, dropping everything — guns, radio sets, knapsacks full of food, supplies, etc. We captured a field radio early in the battle and kept it on to hear their reports. The helicopter radioed often, asking how ammunition was holding out and if the soldiers needed additional support; there were no answers to their questions.

We had the Rhodesian forces on the defensive; they retreated from their positions and our flanks advanced. For three hours we held the offensive, killing many Rhodesian soldiers. We lost four comrades at the start of the battle and two others were wounded. When the enemy made their final retreat we picked up the supplies they left behind: several radios, guns and ammunition, medical equipment and plenty of tinned food. We exchanged our worn packs for the new ones left behind. Then we buried our comrades and made a stretcher of wood and canvas for one who'd been shot in the leg.

We headed south immediately. The enemy and their helicopters were gone, but from our radio we learned they were planning an ambush just to the south near a dam. The topography maps captured during the battle gave its exact location. Though we needed drinking water, we skirted the dam area. We could hear gunfire coming from the dam site. It didn't make sense to me at the time.

We moved slowly because of our injured comrade, moving only some five kilometers past the dam that night. We camped in the same type of place as the day before; no trees around, only bushes.

We listened carefully to the radio. The Rhodesian army had reported that they killed a large number of us. According to their figures we would have all been dead; some in fact would have had to die twice! We had a good laugh at that. They admitted only that two Rhodesian officers were killed in battle. Later we heard about the night "battle" at the dam. They announced that a unit of ten guerrillas was ambushed and annihilated. "But what guerrillas?" we asked. This is what we figured must have happened: During our earlier battle many of their troops dispersed, running away. Some must have regrouped and were trying to contact the rest of their troop that night near the dam when they fell into the ambush set for us by the main force. The broken unit probably returned the fire thinking they'd run into us. Of course, the Rhodesian govern-

ment couldn't admit such a blunder so they claimed the dead were guerrillas.

That day we often heard dogs barking some distance away. We assumed we were near a village and two comrades went to investigate, hoping to get some water. They returned a few hours later, reporting there was no village. It seemed odd, a dog but no village; we didn't know what to make of it.

Late that afternoon a bomber passed over, then two jet fighters and four helicopters. The helicopters circled in the air above us, then continued south about five kilometers to a forested area. The planes began bombing the forest. We watched and listened, thankful they had overestimated our walking capacity. As they bombed we sometimes heard faint voices. Perhaps the bombs had fallen near a village and the sounds were of villagers shouting as they fled for safety? Moloto sent two men on a patrol to check.

They started off toward the voices but hadn't gotten far before they saw an African some forty feet away cooking over a small stove. They waved to the man, moved a bit closer then noticed several uniformed men lying about resting. Suddenly realizing they'd stumbled into an enemy camp, and just as the enemy soldier went for his gun, they opened fire. The soldier fell and they quickly withdrew.

We heard the shots and got ready for action; the enemy camp also came alive, firing at our two fleeing comrades. We returned the fire and slowly crept along the bushes toward their camp. We were all in a small bush area. The enemy was stronger than those we met the day before. There were about three platoons. As our firing increased the enemy retreated. Meanwhile the airplanes continued bombing the forest still unaware that their ground troops were engaged in battle. We were soon on the perimeter of their camp; many soldiers again threw off their equipment and ran, leaving the cooking food and other things behind. We entered the abandoned camp and fired at the retreating enemy troops. Some continued to shoot back but most just fled toward the forest. To reach it, however, they had to cross a broad open plain, making them easy targets. Those who reached the other side were lucky.

The battle lasted four hours. We lost two comrades and another was injured in the left arm by a large splinter off his own gun when it was hit by an enemy bullet. Many government soldiers were killed or wounded. Among them we found a South African officer named Smith, an expert in counter-guerrilla warfare. He was badly wounded but still alive. The comrades identified him by his nameplate. When Smith saw us standing over him he pleaded, "Please, don't kill me!" But we had no choice; alive he would return to help the South African government oppress our people and be a danger to us in the future.

After the battle we collected their equipment: more radios, packs, guns, etc. It was more than we could carry. What we couldn't take we destroyed. Then we sat down and drank some tea the enemy had prepared before the battle. We'd been without water for two days and were very thirsty. We sipped the tea with sugar and enjoyed ourselves for a few minutes after the long battle. It was

really refreshing.

We couldn't stay long. The enemy would be searching for us. We gathered our heavy packs, weapons, etc. and moved on. Later that night our commander sent eight comrades to scout for water along the dry riverbed we had been following. They left with only light weapons, some ammunition and a few tins for transporting the water. We waited for them until dawn, expecting them back any moment after the first few hours. When it grew light we realized we couldn't wait there any longer. It was open terrain and we'd easily be spotted. So we had to move on without our eight comrades, hoping we'd find them up ahead. We walked along the riverbed till we reached a tributary which branched off into some bushes and trees. Since the sun was already very bright, we decided to set up camp. It was a good defensive position, giving us a strong advantage if approached by the enemy. Our unit had now dwindled to nineteen men, three of whom were wounded. Guards were posted.

We listened to the radio and learned that the enemy was mourning the death of seven officers killed in the two battles with us. The Rhodesian army, we discovered, didn't report on deaths of their African soldiers. Their news broadcast said there had been no reports of fighting that day. They claimed to have already killed fifty "terrorists." "These are well-trained guerrillas we're up against," they said. "They've lured our troops into the forest then ambushed them." We appreciated these compliments and were pleased that our unit of less than thirty guerrillas was of so much concern to the enemy.

At midday five helicopters passed about a mile away heading toward the site of yesterday's battle. They were probably carrying off their dead.

I sat at my post wishing the bushes offered more protection against the hot sun. It had been nearly a full day since we'd had that tea. I was thirsty and longed for something to drink. I wondered what had happened to our eight comrades. My thoughts went back to the battle and then to the journey which still lay ahead. These thoughts were interrupted by one of the comrades. He asked me to accompany him to the river so he could relieve himself. (We never left the group alone.) On our way back I spotted a tree along the bank. It looked cool and shady. I walked toward it for a moment's relief from the sun. In the shade of the tree the air was almost damp. I dug down a bit in the cool dry soil. Below the surface the ground was moist; then a little deeper it was wet. Both of us started digging very fast. Half a meter down water began rising to the surface and filling our hole. What a treasure for two thirsty men! We drank deeply of the cold water then hurried back to tell the others. I had seen dry riverbeds with water running underneath before in Francistown. People fetched water from wells dug in a sandy river called the Tati. The water below ran fast and cool. If only we'd thought of it before!

The commander could hardly believe us; we had to show him. Then he ordered each unit leader to send a few of their men to get water. Everyone was relieved, drinking their fill, washing and

filling up cans and canteens. Then we opened some tinned food and ate. Moloto reflected on our discovery: "If only we'd known about this yesterday I wouldn't have sent those comrades out in search of water and they'd be with us now." We were all worried about the fate of these men.

Next day we approached a village and sent two comrades in for food. The villagers had heard about us. They spoke a language somewhat similar to Zulu so we communicated easily. The Rhodesian forces had been through the village two days earlier asking about "terrorists." They offered the villagers cloth in exchange for information. When the people said they knew nothing about "terrorists," the white officer threatened: "You'll all suffer if you don't cooperate!" The villagers also told us that the hospitals were full of enemy soldiers. The wounded were told not to say anything about troops deserting during the attack.

They gave us food and in the evening our unit came close to the village and we talked with the people late into the night. Some wanted to join us, but it was not our mission to recruit or mobilize Zimbabweans. We wished there was something we could do, but ours was to be a long journey to South Africa.

Next morning we were well rested and ready to move again. The army hadn't followed us the last two days. They changed their tactics. They were mobilizing troops near the towns and cities we'd have to pass on our way south. Leaving the village we travelled only a short distance before reaching the Botswana border. There was a single fence dividing the two countries. We hadn't intended to pass through Botswana, but since we were there and it was safer we decided to circle through Botswana past Plumtree - a major Rhodesian town on the road from Bulawayo to Johannesburg where we thought the enemy might be laying in ambush for us.

In a Botswana village at midday two comrades bought a goat. At our camp we slaughtered and roasted the animal. After eating and resting for a few hours we resumed our journey, walking all night. Next morning we saw buses and other traffic moving to and from the Zimbabwe border; we knew we must be just on the Botswana side of Plumtree.

It was now September 10th. We rested in the shade of some bushes. Suddenly three Land Rovers and a truck pulled in around us. It was a Botswana mobile police unit. They had been trailing us since we crossed the border. There were only a dozen of them, equipped with old British rifles. The officer asked us to surrender. We remained silent. It was not a question of their being a real military challenge to us ... we were nineteen well-trained guerrillas equipped with automatic rifles and submachine guns. Our primary concern was political. It was ANC policy to seek the cooperation and support of the Botswana government. We discussed the possibility of confronting the Botswana police and decided against it. We knew it would only make enemies out of possible allies. We also knew that many ANC supporters outside would not understand.

The police commander met with Jackson Moloto. He said we had



to surrender our weapons; that the Botswana government was placing us under arrest. Our commander returned and we discussed our situation at length. We knew we could fight and win. A few wanted to do this. Others argued that it wouldn't help matters to fight now; we'd then be followed on *both* sides of the border and we knew that South African troops were waiting for us at Beitbridge near the Rhodesia/South Africa crossing. In a radio broadcast the RSA government warned of our mission and said, "We'll be sure to give 'our boys' a *very* warm welcome home!"

We were prepared for South African troops; we were prepared for Rhodesian troops, but we were not prepared to fight this weak unit of Botswana police.

Commander Moloto agreed to surrender. We handed over our weapons and got into the back of their lorry.

My thoughts were heavy as we bounced along the road under arrest. We had come very far, suffered much and fought well against a stronger enemy. Was it to end in this "capture" by a handful of poorly equipped police? I also thought about what they would do with us, what they were planning. The Rhodesian government, which did not respect the Botswana border, might just decide to cross over and apprehend us. I knew the Botswana police wouldn't resist.

We were driven to Francistown and taken to police headquarters. There we were split into two groups and locked in empty offices. One by one we were called in for questioning. The interrogation took two days. All this time we remained in the offices without food under a couple of African guards. They were friendly, quite unlike their white officers who often shouted insults at us like, "Getting hungry, you filthy terrorists?" Sometimes we'd return their insults: "Oh! Big talkers in the office! If we'd met you in the battlefield you wouldn't be talking now!" That made them furious.

Several comrades had been interrogated before I was called. They asked me many questions but seemed especially keen to get to find out where we had crossed the border and whether we were coming from Rhodesia. I thought they knew the answers already but wanted to confirm it. I gave them no answers.

The man who interrogated me was British. When I refused to talk he threatened, "I'd like to see the bunch of you hanged! Believe me, I'll be there when it happens...unless they send you back to Rhodesia or South Africa!"

"I'm prepared to go to South Africa if you give me back my gun - that's where I was headed anyway." "Get out!" he shouted. I was returned to the office "cell" and another comrade brought in.

On the second day of questioning a comrade was taken out by two Special Branch agents, probably working for the South African or Rhodesian government. A few minutes later we heard him scream. We all rushed toward the superintendent's office. The African in charge was startled and asked, "What's going on here?" "They've got no right to torture our comrade!" we answered.

He went into a room across the hall and asked the Special Branch men what they were doing. "We were just asking this terrorist a few questions," they said. "Guess he got a bit scared and

started to scream. Don't know what's wrong with the bloke." No one was fooled by their reply. The superintendent ordered them to leave and that ended our interrogation.

For the rest of our stay at police headquarters we were treated fairly well. They started giving us regular meals and kept us in offices instead of a cell. Finally, after about a week, we were taken to court. The magistrate listened to our cases one by one. Each of us spoke in his own defense. We were accused of entering Botswana illegally, importing arms and being in the possession of dangerous weapons. We all denied importing weapons into Botswana, saying we were taking them to South Africa. The trial ended within a few hours. All of us were found guilty of the three charges and sentenced to seven years in prison.

The magistrate told us that at the end of our term we'd be returned to the country we came from. In response to his question we told him we'd come from Zambia. The prosecutor then stood and said, "No, my Lord, they came from Rhodesia."

"No!" we said. "All of us have come from Zambia."

The magistrate accepted this, knowing the white prosecutor would have liked to see us sent to be hung in Rhodesia.

After the trial we were taken to police headquarters for the night. Early the next morning we were loaded in lorries for Gaborone, the Botswana capital. It was here, in the lorry, that we met our eight lost comrades who'd been sent to look for water over a week earlier.

"What happened?" we asked. They had walked far along the riverbed without finding a trace of water but felt they just couldn't return empty handed. Finally, realizing there simply wasn't any water to be found in that riverbed, they decided to turn back. Having been gone so long, however, they tried a short cut back to our encampment. That's when they got lost. They even fired a few shots in the air, hoping we'd hear them...but we didn't.

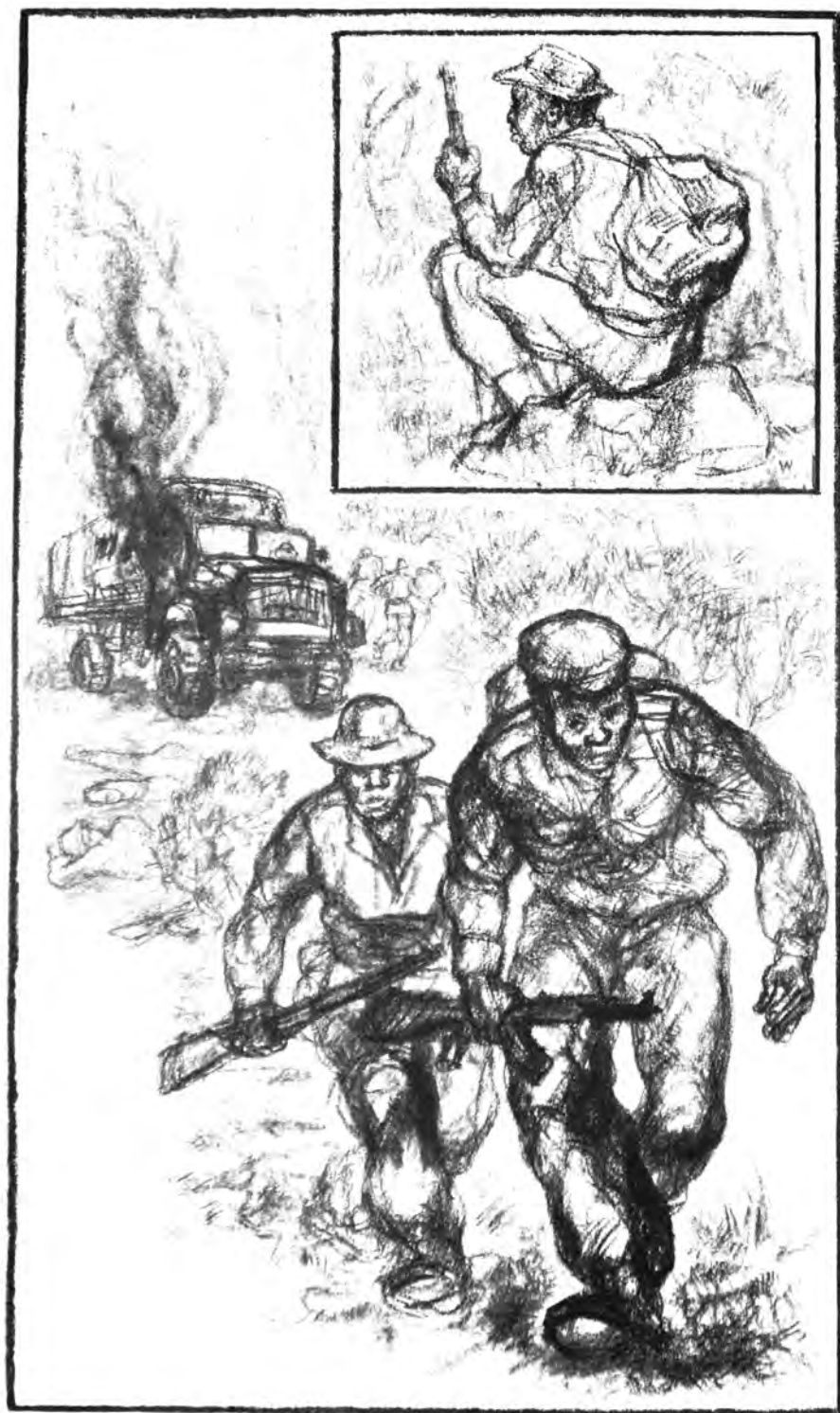
Then they decided to continue the journey on their own, hoping to meet us somewhere up ahead. Low on food, they entered a village. The villagers were sympathetic and offered them food; but while our comrades were resting a troop of Rhodesian soldiers came to the village looking for us. The peasants hid our comrades well and the enemy never found a trace of them.

They walked on till they reached the Botswana border and felt it was best to cross. There they could make contact with members of ANC who could redirect them and provide some food and clothes. Once on the other side they changed into civilian clothes and hid their guns. Travelling as "tourists" now, they stopped in a nearby village and bought supplies. What they didn't know was that the Botswana government was watching for them. A radio broadcast told the people to report any strangers they saw to the authorities.

Leaving the village, they hitched a lift with a passing lorry. They drove a long way and when the lorry stopped our comrades hopped out only to find themselves at police headquarters. That's how they were arrested. After questioning they were sent to Francistown for further interrogation and trial. Even though apprehended without weapons they were given seven years like the rest of us.

Part Two

Other Perspectives



Chapter Eight

The Wankie Battles*

by Umkonto Guerrilla V.M.

All along the excitement of meeting the enemy was very high amongst us. We had forgotten everything but the enemy. In the early morning some of the comrades went to a shop to get something to reinforce our food supplies. They brought all they could manage to get. We moved very fast through the village. We left it far behind us and moved towards the main road to Wankie. As the day was breaking we quickly sought a spot where we could camp for the day. This we had no difficulty in finding. We deployed ourselves as usual. The expected contact with the enemy was not to be even then. We had not seen a single enemy soldier. In the late afternoon we prepared for the next night's march. We marched on in the evening. So dense and bushy was the forest that we could hardly make any progress, until we were forced to move along the road for some time. We went back into the bush and moved on. In the night we crossed a narrow tarred road and entered an agricultural area. We moved in an unplowed field and passed an uninhabited house. Soon thereafter we found a comparatively good area for camping. During the day we shaved, cut our hair, washed some small things and cooked ourselves a soup. Beyond the river valley we could clearly see the movement of the lorries along the road. The "Z" River was nearby and it had not dried up as yet. Nearby also was a young boy who was looking after cattle. We hid away from him the whole day. We continued our march in the evening. Having crossed the "Z" River at a fordable point, the rearguard got separated from the main detachment through misinterpretation of orders. This was quickly rectified. When we joined the main body near the road, we arranged ourselves to cross the road in sections with guards on both sides. Enemy lorries were passing along the road at intervals of two to three minutes. We successfully crossed the road in the intervals accorded by the traffic. The tension of meeting the enemy at the

*From *South African Studies 1, Guerrilla Warfare*, ANC Information Bureau, London 1970. Comrade V.M., a guerrilla in Norman Duka's unit, provides a vivid description of the terrain, his unit's activities and V.M.'s personal experiences.

road subsided. We soon entered a plowed sandy area over the other end of the road. We passed it. Normally our rests were at an hour's interval but this by and large was dictated by the circumstances. More often than not some of the men used to fall asleep during a short rest through sheer exhaustion. We were not yet accustomed to the life we had entered, and the constant expectation of the enemy robbed some of us of time to sleep during the day. This was, however, gradually overcome as time went on.

ELEPHANT AND LION TRACKS

As time went on we entered an area that was apparently constituted of farms. At one of the rest breaks one of our comrades whilst on movement reported having lost his rifle. We delayed and sent him back together with two other comrades to look for it. They could not find it. He asked for permission to use a torchlight. This we could not allow in the vicinity of the detachment. He assured us that he could not get lost as he had a compass and that he would catch up soon with the main body. We moved on whilst he went back. We moved towards the railway line. A train passed. We followed a dry river until we reached the railway line, where we crossed to the trees. We went on as fast as we could. We proceeded more to the west so that we could reach the game reserve as soon as possible. We chose a spot in the early morning for a brief sleep about two and a half to three miles from the railway line. Elephant and lion tracks were in abundance in this area. Water was not a problem. The terrain was deceptive in that it had no clear landmarks. Trees were alike in the majority of cases. This in a way was countered by keeping together as much as we could. When the sun set we proceeded in a southwest direction. We moved along a considerable burnt area. Wild animals were there. The place we were moving across was hilly and mountainous. On one of these hills we spotted the lights of a village. We camped down a dry river valley for that day and we found some water nearby. We managed to wash ourselves and some clothing and also cooked the last remnants of our crusty biscuits with soup. Some of our comrades attempted to kill a buffalo but were unsuccessful.

WE SWAM AND WASHED OURSELVES

We proceeded in the evening down the hill, sometimes going down on our backs. We bypassed some deserted Bushman huts in the forest. We went on until we reached a rather big riverbed that was drying up but still had some water. Here we washed ourselves and our clothing. Some comrades even swam. In the late afternoon a kudu was killed by one of our snipers. We delayed here for the whole night preparing the meat. We were in real need of food - most of our supplies had run out by then. We left this spot only the following morning. Soon thereafter we avoided what appeared to be a game camp, crossed a gravel road that was in use and moved

along a dry ravine up to a spot where we rested. It was at this spot that we separated with some of our comrades who were going to operate at some other point of Zimbabwe. Amongst these comrades there was comrade Pietersen who subsequently broke off from the group and proceeded down south according to the demands of his assignment. By then we had long realized that we were deep in the game reserve, and we had adjusted our movement accordingly. We moved in the evening for the whole night without any sign of water or people. There were only old tracks of animals. We looked for water on the following day using the tracks of elephants as a guide. This never led us to anything on that particular day. Instead we became more thirsty than we were before. At this juncture we yearned for the nearest spot where we could find people. We were in desperate need of them. We consulted our poor map time and again as if it could solve our problems. But to our disappointment it could hardly show us where we were.

ZEBRA FOR SUPPER

Despite all these difficulties we never for a moment lost hope that we would soon enter an inhabited area. In the evening we went on without a halt until on the following morning we found a water pan, by chance. We camped around that area for the day and drank our fill. Fortunately for us this pan was frequented by wild game. We were greatly agitated when one of us missed two wild pigs. At sunset when we were starting to move, some zebras were seen. The detachment commander and another comrade went after them. One of them was sniped through the heart. We were overjoyed by this achievement and hastily skinned and roasted the meat. Believe it or not, up to this day most of us are still speaking about the zebra meat. We can still feel the taste of its meat. Though we were sorry to leave behind a greater part of the meat, we carried in our knapsacks as much as we could.

On the following morning we camped in a dry area, looked for water for the next two days in vain. Our throats were dry. This greatly tortured us. We longed for the day when we could reach people. There were no longer any animals in sight and not even a sign that there could possibly be any. In the evening we moved on and camped near a dry water bed. Nearby there was another that was muddy. We drank the muddy water. In the day, three of us were sent on reconnaissance ... looking for water and signs of people. We were hardly 500 yards from the detachment when a plane appeared. We took cover. After it passed we continued. This was dismissed as a game spotting plane. A few miles from our area we saw a road moving from east to west, crossed it and moved on.

CHARGED BY ANGRY ELEPHANTS

We soon found another road leading southward. Not far from this we found a water pan. It had some water. We drank and took

a rest. There were no signs of people around the area except for the tracks of a vehicle. This gave us hope. This was about 8-10 miles from the detachment. We sought a point where the two roads met and found it. There we also found a borehole that was not in use. From the north to the east the road was in use though not frequently. We went back to the detachment to report. We got lost. We had moved too much to the west. We searched the whole day long. In the evening we fired from our guns simultaneously. Instead of getting a reply from our comrades we were charged by angry elephants. We ran out of their way. Most fortunately they did not follow us for long. We made a fire and slept. Early in the morning we went to the pan and traced our footprints back to the detachment. We moved the whole day until we found our comrades at about five in the evening. They were preparing to move and were happy to see us. We were offered the last remnants of the zebra. The weight of our loads was considerably reduced. We led the detachment to the roads we had seen. We soon camped in its vicinity. By now we had nothing to eat. Some of our snipers could only manage to get us three birds about the size of doves. These we shared amongst us equally and drank their soup that was hardly anything more than boiled water. This nevertheless refreshed us.

DRIED FRUIT SOUP

We detailed some scouts as we moved southerly following the road. It was sandy but we moved as fast as we could with short rests. We found this on our map. The following morning we camped at a place where there was nothing but dry wild fruit which we cooked with the little water we had left. We derived some energy from this. We camped on the following morning without any hope of either meeting any people or finding anything to eat. When evening came we found ourselves just strong enough to carry the knapsacks. We were thin and dirty. We were contorted with hunger. Even under such circumstances the morale and determination of the detachment was never shaken even for a moment.

We all cherished the hope that we would reach home and carry on the armed struggle. In spite of the weight on our backs we never once thought of reducing our ammunition which was vitally needed in the battle we were on the way to stage. Our dreams were ever with our oppressed people. Our hearts were filled with their love. The difficulties that we met were but the realization that there was no easy way to freedom.

The following evening we moved on and the next day we separated ourselves in different groups and went out hunting. We were in desperate need for food. All the groups returned empty-handed. The situation was saved later that day when two of our snipers shot a guinea fowl and seven doves.

That evening we heard over our transistor radio that the comrades we had parted with had clashed with the enemy and that the enemy was combing the game reserve looking for a group of about 30 people heading for South Africa. We later heard as well that some

of us were (falsely) alleged to be stopping cars between Figtree and Bulawayo wearing bush uniform. Another report was that four of our comrades were arrested in Botswana. This news never scared us. We became more vigilant. We went on. After some days, we stopped near the road, not far from a dam. A herd of buffaloes was seen there and this was reported to the detachment. When an arrangement was made to get one of the buffaloes, a spotter plane appeared flying very low. It scared them away. Two of our snipers were left behind to await their return. No sooner had the group from the dam arrived at the detachment a convoy of enemy lorries appeared, stopping directly opposite us - about 50 yards away. It is hard to believe that they did not see us. A white officer got off the lorry and looked around for traces of us and commanded "Forward Jack." He got in and they pulled off. The truck was moving almost without a sound on the sandy road. In the forward lorry there were about 10 in the back with a heavy machine gun. The lorry was also pulling an artillery piece. Five more lorries appeared with about five men each at the back.

OUR PRESENCE DISCOVERED

Soon thereafter some shooting was heard at the dam. The spotter plane became very active. As soon as we got a chance we changed our positions and took all-round defense. Cover was a problem: the terrain was rather too open. Later in the area we heard a helicopter and an additional spotter plane appeared. *Obviously our presence in the area was discovered.*

They moved above the area we were in throughout the day, searching.

In the evening we sent a strong group to look for our snipers. They got lost and looked for them until the following morning and returned without them. Cover did not allow us to change positions. The planes continued their activities. In the evening we went on without a drop of water. On the march we tried to catch a porcupine without avail. We again camped in the game reserve. One of our comrades was beginning to show signs of physical strain. He had difficulty in carrying his knapsack. We distributed his belongings amongst us. Planes were still combing the area. At sunset we moved on. The comrade who was weak found it even more difficult to walk. We assisted him all the way. At last we came across a wire fence and we realized that we were going out of the game reserve.

Outside the reserve there was a dirt road that was heavily patrolled by military trucks. We destroyed our footprints carefully and moved on as fast as we could. We were now seven full days without anything to eat. Early in the morning of the next day we heard the crowing of cocks at a nearby cattle post. We were overjoyed by this obvious sign of people.

Early in the morning we took up combat positions. The terrain was not favorable, cover was difficult to find. Anyway we did our best to camouflage our positions. Two comrades were sent to the

cattle post. They brought back a big tin of sour milk and some porridge. These were mixed together and we feasted. We learnt that the enemy was looking for us high and low. It was offering a sum of £50 for information that could lead to our capture. People in the area were being given cigarettes to try to win them over to the side of the government. There was a nearby military camp and offices of the District Commissioner. The village was also not far away.

ENCOUNTER WITH THE ENEMY

Not long after we had had the sour milk some shots were heard from the enemy against some sections of our detachment. The shouts of surrender were audibly heard. "Surrender!" "*Habanza chalita!*" ("You are finished!") shouted an enemy officer. This was completely ignored. Instead it was answered by a barrage of fire from our side. The fact that the enemy had come into sight was enough. Nobody could stand it any further. No command was needed. In the course of the fight an enemy officer was heard to warn: "The enemy is slipping down - prepare grenades." He was riddled with bullets. The commanders rallied the men to where there was fighting. The enemy was routed on the spot and was sent flying all over the place. They left all they had behind. They did not even have a chance to put off their radios. We opened fire at the spotter plane as it flew low enough. It went away forever. The next thing we heard was the enemy reporting over the radios which were still on, that we had fired at the spotter plane. A helicopter circled around the battle scene trying to contact the unit we had routed. Whilst some of us were collecting the things left by the enemy, some attended to our four dead and two wounded. A proper burial was organized for them under the battle conditions that existed. Casualties on the side of the enemy were two white officers, lieutenants, an African sergeant-major, and 15 privates dead.

CAPTURED ARMAMENTS

We got a number of FN rifles, automatic sub-machine guns and a Bren light machine gun, the latest model - and three radio sets. All these were found with some ammunition for them. Both defensive and offensive grenades were also found. In the enemy knapsacks we found a number of things. A medical knapsack was found with a variety of medicines, bandages and so on. Spare enemy uniforms were made use of as they blended well with the terrain. Identity documents were also amongst the things found on the dead. There were graphic maps. The food they carried was greatly welcomed by us all. We stocked ourselves with it. We heard from their radio that their helicopter wanted to drop some ammunition for them and that we were to be waylaid every 100 yards along the road by a section. There was no alternative but to cross the road. We detailed a section to be an advance party, then followed by the main body carrying a seriously wounded comrade.

ESCAPE

Our movement was rather slow - we crossed the road without incident. We were expecting a shot at every step we took. The main body crossed without incident as well. Visiting the place where we got milk we learnt that we were to be ambushed at the river. We could not find anything from the man beyond that. He was shocked and excited by the incident that took place that afternoon. We avoided the river and went on. We met some enemy stragglers who reluctantly tried to contact us. They probably thought that we were part of their unit. They soon ran away when one of our comrades opened fire at them. We marched on carrying the radio sets and our wounded colleague and some of the captured armaments. This proved to be heavy for us but we carried all. We drank some muddy water where the river was drying up. As we were moving forward, we were shot at by one of the stragglers. But he did not hit anyone. We had hardly improvised a stretcher for our wounded comrade when we heard a barrage of fire at the river. The enemy was shooting at its own stragglers thinking it was shooting at us. We moved that night more to the east towards the next inhabited area and camped in the bush the following morning. Some comrades heard barking of dogs nearby. Two comrades were sent to look for water. After a few hours they returned having found nothing, no people around. At the base it was heard from the enemy transistors that on the previous night they claimed to have killed 10 of us at the river. Obviously it was their own stragglers who were killed.

THE SECOND ENCOUNTER

In the late afternoon two enemy jet bombers appeared in addition to the two helicopters that were constantly flying over us. They bombed and burned an area of about half a mile ahead of us. Shortly after the bombing some voices were heard behind us - behind our temporary base. Some comrades went to inspect the place. They found that the enemy had also camped in the area, hardly 200 yards away from us. Fighting immediately broke out. We quickly deployed our forces to the support of our comrades. The enemy was mercilessly destroyed, together with its police dogs. They tried using mortar fire, grenades and other weapons. Despite all this we routed them. We killed their radio man, while he was frantically calling for the helicopter to shoot down on the battle scene. Darkness set in. The enemy was nowhere to be found. In this battle we killed more than in the previous one. We killed their patrol officer and some other ranks.

In the heat of the battle Jack ran after a fleeing white officer and was shot by a wounded enemy soldier. Without realizing this Donda ran to Jack and was also killed. We spotted the enemy soldier and dealt with him. Apart from these casualties one comrade was injured. We hastily collected weapons and some other valuables from the enemy and it was quite clear that we could not

carry all we had. Our bags alone were heavy. We destroyed the radio set and some other things before we left. We made a quick getaway from the field. We came to a temporary base along the ravine where eight of our comrades went to search for water. They got lost. The detachment changed positions. Early the following morning a squadron of helicopters passed, flying just above the trees. As we were there one of the comrades dug in the riverbed and came across some water that we drank the whole day long.

We left that evening. We proceeded down quietly. We relieved one another in carrying the wounded comrade.

During the day we learnt from our radio that on that day the enemy was mourning the death of a high ranking officer killed in action. They also said that we were provoking them into the forest, and ambushing them. They stopped following us on foot. We moved on with an acute shortage of food and water, as the area we were in was dry. We lived on sugar and lemonade powder captured from the enemy. The wounded comrade seriously slowed us down and we were not as strong as all that. We separated from some of our ZAPU comrades who were to operate elsewhere and the wounded comrade was left with them. From there on we moved faster until we came to a cattle post. We got food and water. In the evening we learnt that the enemy had organized roadblocks all the way down to Plumtree and was actively guarding the roads and water points. We were also informed that the terrain was very bad - it was open - and that we could only find some forested spots up beyond Plumtree.

During the day a jet bomber dived very close to us. That evening we moved on more to the east going completely out of the way of the planes which were following us. On that day we rested away from the plane. We cooked ourselves food we had captured and continued. The terrain was open here. There was only grass and scattered trees. This was a great disadvantage to us. The next evening we moved westward, where we came into contact with people and obtained food and water. The enemy was very active along the road. We crossed into Botswana with the aim of bypassing Plumtree and re-entering Rhodesia once more. Because of lack of cover we were forced to move along the Matemba River for two days. One day we were forced to go deeper into Botswana. We were all arrested by the Botswana police. From then on we were in jail until the end of our various terms of imprisonment. I must mention our two snipers - M.C. and M.E. - who performed invaluable service to the whole detachment throughout our journey South. They often found food when we most needed it.

In conclusion I must add that we were thrilled when we heard, while in jail in Botswana, that another detachment had been in action in the eastern areas of Zimbabwe.

Chapter Nine

On the Eastern Front*

by Umkonto Guerrilla J.M.

I was in the first platoon of guerrillas who set up a base in Rhodesia. In the setting up of our base we were assisted by our Commander-in-Chief and officials of ZAPU who had reconnoitered the area ahead of us over a period of some days.

We were later joined by more platoons. The whole detachment was reorganized into four platoons for the purpose of reconnaissance and to establish further bases. Within a few days three more bases were set up and at each base our engineering units prepared hideouts and storage places for our equipment and provisions.

At this stage we had very good communications between our bases and Headquarters. Our radio equipment was good and our operators were well trained.

Meat was in abundance. We shot a lot of wild game which we cut and dried. We had a long wait at our main base as local organizers who were to have met us had not as yet contacted us. During this period our reconnaissance groups continued with their task of finding new spots to set up further bases.

Bases Five, Six and Seven were established. They were all manned by small units and the material was also transported to these bases, particularly Base Five which was at the foot of the "X" Mountain, which was high with yellow and reddish cliffs on its eastern and southern side and had a flat top. This mountain became a good landmark. Coming back from Base Six and Seven to Base Five became easier. All along these bases the terrain was bushy and hilly. Up to the end of the second month the enemy was not seen anywhere until we saw a road being constructed from Town A to Town B which we later discovered from the local people was to be used by the army. This road was about a few miles from River C. A few days later we learnt that this road was already used for patrolling and that two Land Rovers with army men were patrolling at two-hour intervals.

*From *South African Studies 1, Guerrilla Warfare*, ANC Information Bureau, London 1970. Guerrilla J.M. describes ANC/ZAPU military activities on the eastern front of Zimbabwe.

EXPOSED TO THE ENEMY

Because of our movements to and from the base, crossing some dirt roads used by game scouts and hunters, one of our comrades' shoemarks were left on the ground near the roadside and this, I think, was discovered by the enemy. Soon we found that the enemy was mobilizing its forces around the suspected area. As this was happening, the HQ platoon had already gone further across the enemy's defense belt to our final base from where we had planned to make our assault. But unfortunately they were spotted by the enemy from the air.

The enemy, in the meantime, was mobilizing some 24 miles ahead of us, or more correctly, between the main detachment and HQ platoon (i.e. reconnaissance, security and engineering groups). We decided to cross over the prepared lines of defense to join or wait for the messengers from the HQ platoon to lead us to their new base, without knowing that they were already fighting and some of them like comrade P.M. had been killed and some captured.

Our radio equipment had broken down and we in the main detachment knew nothing about what was happening except that paratroopers were dropped about 24 miles away from us. All the same we crossed the enemy's defense lines up to Base Six where we found a few of our comrades waiting and we immediately organized all our defenses. This was about six in the morning. At about 1 p.m. our scouts reported the approach of enemy troops to the commander.

FIRST ENCOUNTER

The Commander detailed a platoon for watch duties and at about 11 a.m. enemy planes were sighted hovering over the bushes where we were camping. On the same day one of our comrades opened up with light machine gun fire on a small enemy unit and wiped out all except two who managed to cross back a little stream and escape over the banks into the forest. The enemy tried a second assault and fell into a neat ambush laid for just such an assault. They were dealt a severe blow losing 12 men. We had one disadvantage. We could not capture their belongings because the enemy was killed on open ground and leaving our camouflaged positions presented great danger from the helicopters which were hovering over us. We could not wait for darkness to capture the arms dropped by the enemy as the area around us was bombed by planes soon after we had routed them. After half a day's battle the roll-call was called, and we were overjoyed to learn there were no casualties on our side. Our Commander decided to divide the detachment into small units of about 18-24 men. Each of the units was given a definite assignment. A meeting place which was a high point near "I" was arranged and at about 6:30 p.m. we parted. Our unit was to take first a western direction and later a southerly direction to our proposed assembly point. But during the march at night, because of poor topography maps we passed our first point by moving too much to the west and we only discovered this in the morning. We tried to reorient ourselves but it was very difficult.

14 DAY MARCH

At last we found ourselves near Village "E." This was after 12-14 days walk and at this time our food was almost finished. Our Commander detailed five comrades to go to the village for food and two others to try and buy anything edible from the village shops. These two were in civilian clothes and armed with pistols and as they were approaching the shops they were intercepted by Rhodesian policemen who demanded to see their passes. They tried to lie their way out of their predicament. They failed and one of them drew his pistol. Before he could shoot, the police ran away leaving their bicycles behind, and the two comrades ran back to try and alert those who were in the fields, but it was too late. The enemy was alerted and they drove them in the opposite direction. They fought a lone battle and one died in action while the other escaped and joined us. In the meantime the four who went to the village returned to the camp late that evening with mealies. We roasted the mealies at the camp that night.

After our meal the Commander decided that the death of Comrade H, who was killed that day, must be avenged...

Early in the morning we were sent to go and see the enemy's positions and other military installations around the area. At 12:30 midday we managed to reach the point and observed it from a high point. The view was good and we sent four of our comrades back to report that the enemy is not so vigilant. They brought back the unit and found us at 6:30 p.m. and the Commander went for on-the-spot reconnaissance. At about 6:45 p.m. the enemy was preparing for their supper. We left a few comrades with our heavy kits and crawled toward the enemy.

WE CLASH AGAIN

We took them by surprise at about 7:15 p.m. and we dealt with them before they reorganized themselves and some took to their heels while their lorry, which was carrying their food, was burning. Within a short while their airforce was lighting up the whole area, and we were forced to retreat without counting their dead or capturing anything.

That night we started again to try and reach our destination. During the night we came into mealie-fields and took as much as we could.

We proceeded and halted during the morning, and to our surprise the enemy was following us. At about 8 a.m. the fight was on again. We lost four comrades - and the enemy left 12 dead and took their wounded covered by their air force.

Air bombardment was on again until 5:40 but this time we were no more at the spot where the battle had raged. We were now resting and packing our bags some 800 yards from the battlefield and late at night we buried our dead comrades and started on the march again. Our only food was the mealies we had gathered in the fields earlier.

Five days later we reached "P" River which we were longing to reach for months. We discovered that there was an air reconnaissance along the river. The following morning we crossed. The crossing was very difficult because the riverbed was full of stones and the current was very fast. After a long struggle we managed to cross and marched quickly to a safe spot. We rested for some days.

One day we were sent for food in the mealie fields - we were 14 in number. The detachment commander and seven others were left behind. When we returned the following morning we found that the base was abandoned and our comrades' things were left strewn on the ground. We realized that they must have been forced by the enemy to abandon the camp. We looked around the area, but there was no trace of them. We then decided to shift from the area until we reached a village. We camped some 10 miles away and sent some scouts to organize food, whilst others obtained honey. Our scouts came back without food, because the people had nothing to eat themselves but showed them some houses at some distance away where they said we may be more successful.

THE PEOPLE RESPOND

Here our scouts were welcomed, and of course after some questions from the villagers they were given food, i.e. mealie-meal and two chickens, salt and two tins of milk. Here was found an old man who was a member of ZAPU. He promised to help us all he could.

Days passed. We acquainted ourselves with the new area and rested to regain our strength. We reviewed our experiences and received most valuable information about the enemy's activities from the Old Man. He told us that everybody in the area was suspected of being a freedom fighter and that young men who looked dirty were arrested and treated brutally by the police.

Tinned food was strictly rationed at the shops in order to try and check up those who may be trying to help the freedom fighters. A lot of people were being used by the enemy, especially pensioned policemen, teachers and some of the wealthier African farmers.

In the meantime, through the help of the Old Man we began organizing the people to commit sabotage and to contact old members of ZAPU in other areas. This was coming on well. One day when we came to the Old Man he told us that he had heard that an injured guerrilla was being taken care of in the village. We told him to try and bring him to us and after taking all precautionary measures he was brought to our base.

It was Tswimbo! We were overjoyed! He was one of our men. He told us how he survived the surprise attack of the enemy but could not give us full details.

WE LOSE THE OLD MAN

The villagers with whom Tswimbo had stayed suggested that we

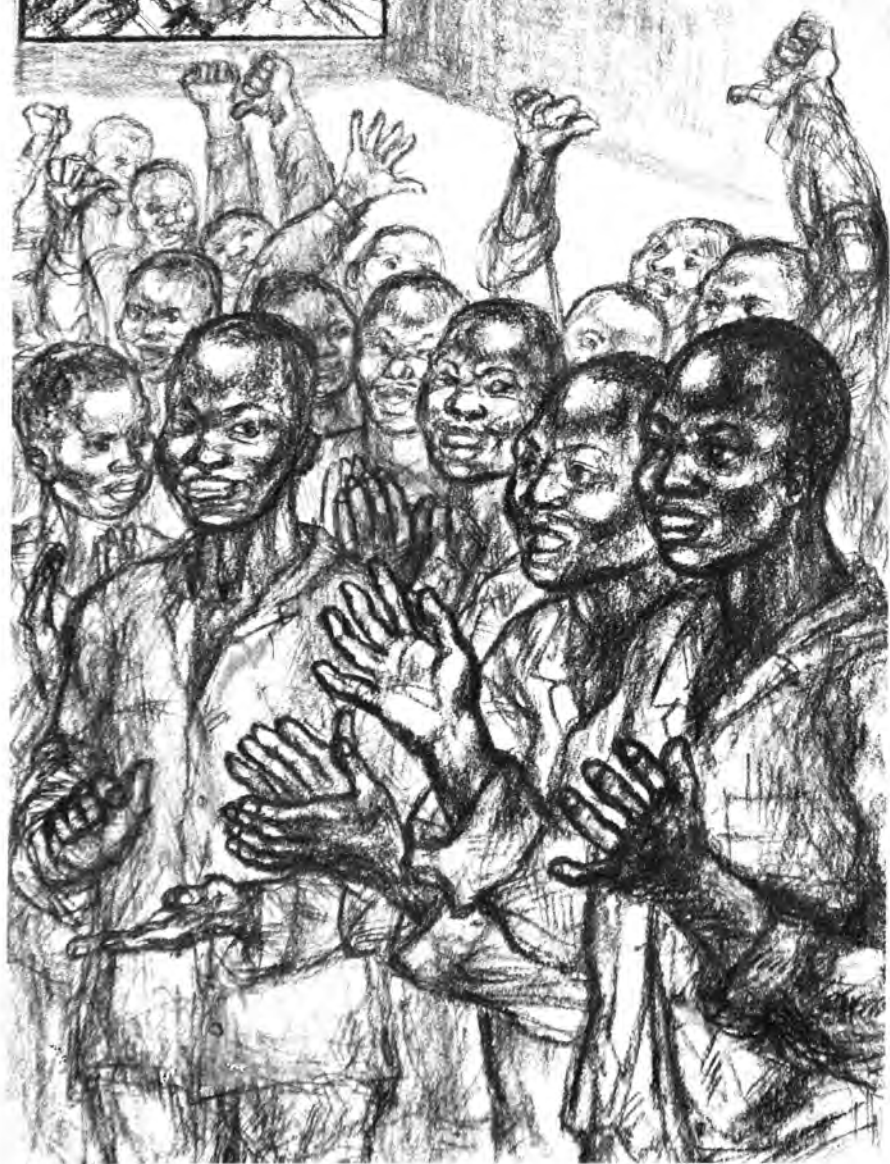
see the local *Maswikiro* (Fortune Teller).

Most of us were very much opposed to the idea but the villagers insisted and some felt that our refusal may offend the villagers. The arguments that followed were bitter and long. We, who had for months fought together and suffered such hardships, faced a serious split. Finally the Commander appealed to those opposed to the idea to compromise for the sake of unity. I felt that we were committing one of our gravest mistakes. We could not do anything to convince the others so we agreed. To our surprise the Old Man who would be most exposed if things went wrong also agreed. Tswimbo and a villager went to the *Maswikiro* on a Saturday evening and reached the place safely. At the place many people were drinking and the villager joined the drinking crowds. Their turn finally came and they were told nothing except a promise that he, the *Maswikiro*, would cover our movement by a thick mist. On their way back on Sunday Tswimbo and the villager were met by members of the Special Branch. The villager was asked who the other man (Tswimbo) was and where he had come from. He told them that Tswimbo was a man from Salisbury and that he had asked him to take him to *Maswikiro*. The S.B. left them, but the villager was arrested on Monday morning, and after questioning he revealed everything. All our plans were shattered. The Old Man was shot dead on Tuesday trying to reach our camp. Thereafter the whole area was combed by the police and army. It was difficult to communicate with the people. Civilians who were suspected were brutally shot out of hand. Finally they discovered our base. In the fighting that followed we lost two ZAPU comrades. I was injured by a splinter in the foot and could not walk. I was taken to a friend who kindly took me to a safe place in the field and treated me with some herbs.

After some days he told me that it was not safe for me or him if I am around the area and he decided to take me to a relative of his nearby. After some time here he told me that the Unit had left the area and since I could not rejoin them he had better take me to a safe place to recuperate and come back to join other forces. He did this successfully.

Part Three

The Long Road To Liberation



Chapter Ten

Prison

Our trip to the Botswana Central Prison in Gaborone was a long one. It took almost a whole day. We arrived late at night and there were many policemen waiting for us. They'd heard of our battles and I guess were curious to see what kind of men had been fighting the Rhodesians.

Inside the gates we were ordered out of the lorry, lined up and counted. The superintendent, an Englishman named Ferguson, told us to take off our clothes. They were packed in paper bags, our names written on them. We were given prison uniforms - blue shorts and a shirt. Our boots were taken from us but we were given no other shoes. While we changed, Ferguson's African assistant made a few cracks about the Rhodesians...how we'd given them a lesson.

We were then taken to our cells. There were two of them, 14 men in each, with a small compound in between. We were separated from all the other prisoners by a high wall. They brought us two blankets and a mat each to sleep on.

Early next morning the superintendent came in to see us. He asked many questions, wanting especially to know why we had come to Botswana. "What do you want in 'our' country?" It didn't take long to form a strong dislike for Ferguson. We told him: "You have *no* country in Africa. Your country is Britain not Botswana."

We were brought our meal of porridge and tea by other prisoners accompanied by several guards. The food wasn't good but we got it twice a day. In the afternoon they brought stam-mealies and meat.

Our cells had cement floors and were "furnished" with only our mats. High up on one wall was a small barred window. It let in a little light and some air but it was too high to see out of. Another window on the opposite wall faced our yard, the tower and guard post. The cell and compound were surrounded and dwarfed by the high concrete walls.

Our toilet was in the open area between the two cells. We were allowed outside during the day when the heat in our cells became unbearable. We usually just sat there and talked. On very hot days the stench from the toilet was really horrible, driving us back into the steamy cells. The "toilet," you see, was just a bucket kept near the gate leading into the main yard. There was

no cover and no privacy. You just relieved yourself in the bucket with the guard standing there and comrades all around. These buckets were emptied by us only once a day, in the evening. We were forced to carry that full, stinking pail across the empty main prison compound to the latrine.

We made several complaints to the superintendent about these bad conditions, telling him we wanted access to the main latrine or at least some enclosure around our bucket to keep down the smell and give us some privacy.

"Stop complaining!" he replied. "When you travelled through Rhodesia you didn't have toilets. You should be used to it by now!" Later when we talked with his African assistant he promised to do something about it. But nothing changed - the bucket was still there when we were released.

Each morning we cleaned and swept our cells for inspection by Ferguson and his assistants. It was at this time that we'd raise questions like the toilet problem. After being in our cells and small yard a week we told the assistant superintendent that we wanted to get some exercise. He was sympathetic. "I think we can arrange some gardening work for you."

A few days later a couple of guards arrived. "Okay, get ready for work." They threw us some caps made of the same material as our shorts and shirt. We were lined up in pairs and taken into the main yard. We were ordered not to talk with the other prisoners on our way. The garden was surrounded by guards carrying batons. We were given buckets to carry water to the vegetables. As we worked I tried to make conversation with some of the guards; they were shy around us, however - perhaps a bit fearful. We worked all morning then returned to our compound for a shower and lunch. Our shower was a high cold water tap which hung from the wall in our yard. Sometimes we worked in the afternoons too, but never with any of the other prisoners. At 6 p.m. we were locked into our cells and at nine the lights were shut off.

After three weeks we decided to appeal our case. We made a written appeal through the prison superintendent. A few days later we were surprised to hear it had been granted. We were given back our clothes and driven to court in Gaborone. This time we found it packed with sympathetic Africans. The judge asked each of us the nature of our appeal. "Our sentences were much too severe," we said. "We didn't come to Botswana to fight, or to import guns as charged. We offered no resistance when arrested and willingly handed over our weapons. We therefore believe our sentences should be reduced."

My statement went something like this: "As representatives of the ANC we are committed to the liberation of the African people of South Africa. We have no dispute with the people of Botswana. In fact, we look to all independent African countries for assistance in our struggle at home. We were surprised that Botswana, an independent African country and member of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) has treated us as an enemy, locked us in prison and taken away our arms."

After our statements the court adjourned for the day. Next morning the judge said, "The court agrees that you did not resist arrest. But our laws forbid bringing large quantities of guns and ammunition into Botswana. Therefore, we feel that the sentences you received were not unjust. However, six months will be taken off and with good conduct your sentences could be suspended in two years." It was still a very long time and we were all disappointed.

We were taken back to the truck. As we sat inside waiting we watched the people leaving the court; most seemed upset by the verdict. We heard one man say to a friend as they passed, "How do they expect our South African brothers to gain freedom if they arrest their militants? Who's going to liberate the country?"

Back in prison we changed clothes and went back to our cell.

We didn't say much that evening. We were demoralized. We had set high hopes on our appeal, confident that we'd win. Now we had to resign ourselves to a long prison sentence. Two years is a lot to lose when so much still remained to be done. We could do nothing, however, but make the best of a bad situation. We organized classes in Mathematics, Biology, Physics and other subjects. Those with the most education in a subject did the teaching. Classes were held in the mornings when we didn't garden, or in the afternoon. We also began regular political discussions once a week. We talked about and tried to analyze the situation at home and how we should proceed to re-enter South Africa once released. We also studied our present and past - the mistakes we had made and the lessons that had to be learned.

We remained a highly disciplined unit throughout our term in prison. National holidays like Umkonto Day, December 16, were celebrated. After breakfast we would gather together, sing our national anthem and listen to a comrade speak about the importance of the day. Then we spent some time in discussion, sang other political songs and finally broke up to play games like chess. In the evening we again sang the national anthem.

The guards watched carefully from the tower during our meetings and celebrations. They were impressed by our unity and spirit and soon became more relaxed around us, asking questions and talking with us whenever they got the chance.

We also developed a communications network with the other prisoners, through our shower pipe. Like I said, we had this pipe coming off the wall in our yard. There was enough space around the pipe that we could peer into the main yard. We talked to other prisoners through the pipe and also used it to pass tobacco through. Some of these prisoners were South Africans, arrested for stealing in Botswana. They told us how the South African army panicked when word of the armed struggle with Rhodesian forces reached them. Many soldiers deserted.

We learned from the guards of more fighting in Zimbabwe by the joint military units of ANC and ZAPU. This news raised our morale. Our comrades in Lusaka, Tanzania and Britain wrote us details of these advances. We also got many letters from sympathizers all over the world. Around Christmas we received stacks of letters and cards. It was very good to hear from people outside...people

who supported our struggle. I only wish I could have answered every one, but we were allowed to send out only one letter a month. Some of the mail we received was censored or held back and we couldn't read it till after we were released.

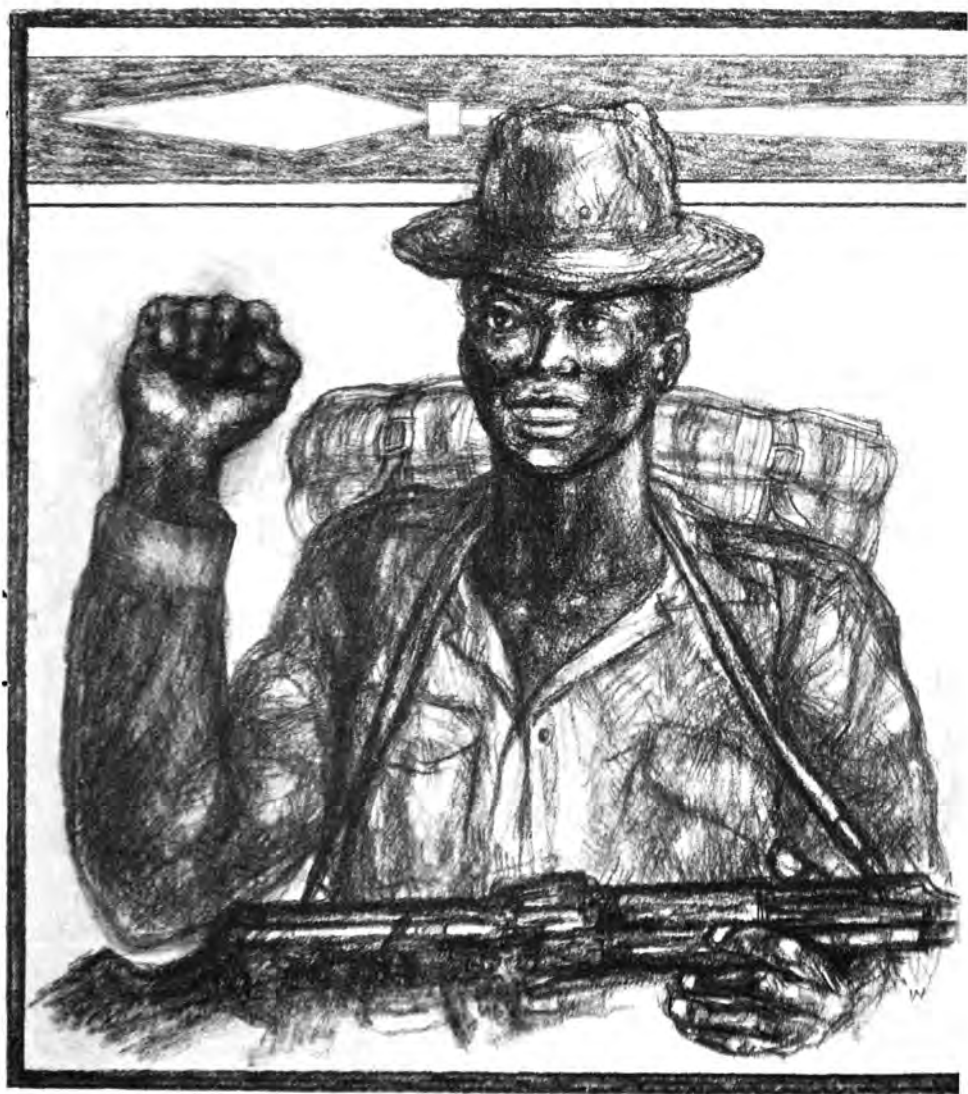
On Christmas Day we had a special meal with a pitcher of orange squash and several loaves of bread. Early the next year, 1969, Ferguson was replaced by a Scot. He was much nicer and allowed us to receive the South African newspapers and magazines we had requested. We were anxious to keep informed on the political situation at home and about military actions in Zimbabwe. Soon five ZAPU militants were brought into our cell. We were sorry to see more militants in prison, but pleased to have their company and the news they brought. These comrades joined us in all our meetings and activities.

Our biggest complaint with administration remained the poor toilet facilities. Also, we were forced to go barefoot for two years because they confiscated our boots, which they classified as military equipment. They offered us rubber tire sandals but we wouldn't accept them. We complained of other grievances as well - the restrictions on our mail and not being allowed visitors. The only other person ever to come into our cell was the Minister of Home Affairs, who was on an inspection tour. He hadn't come especially to see us, but asked how things were going and said he hoped our sentences would soon be over. It was toward the end of our term and he gave us one piece of comforting information: "We will never send you to South Africa or Rhodesia. You can be sure you will be returned to Zambia!"

We were due to be released in August 1969. As the time grew near the superintendent asked us to list the things we needed. The money we had was kept with our other things. We made a list of clothing as most of what we had was in rags after our trip through Zimbabwe. The prison authorities bought us the clothes we needed.

Then came a two-week delay. The Rhodesian government refused to let our plane fly over their country. Botswana is bordered by three hostile countries: South Africa, South West Africa and Rhodesia, and none would let us through. I don't know what arrangements were worked out but finally Rhodesia gave its permission.

Our clothes were returned the day before we left. We packed what we had neatly into boxes and next morning left the prison, being driven to the Gaborone airport. Outside we saw the blue mountains of South Africa. Our prison was very close to the border. We could have been home in a few hours. It was discouraging to realize just how close we had come only to be sent back to our starting point. Some day we would have to begin our journey again. I also regretted losing our weapons, which they never returned. Even our boots and compasses were kept in Botswana.



Chapter Eleven

Freedom

We left Gaborone for Francistown where we changed planes and flew straight to Livingston, Zambia. From there we took a third plane to Lusaka. ANC leaders were waiting for us at the airport. It was a warm exchange of greetings. They drove us to the ANC house where we rested a few hours. Later we met to discuss our mission, arrest and imprisonment. They seemed pleased with our report. Most of our operations had been well executed, though mistakes had been made in the planning stage. Our own mistakes were also pointed out. Though our unit did not accomplish its ultimate goal, we had gained much practical and valuable experience. We now had a better idea about the strengths and weaknesses of our enemy - as well as about ourselves. We had gained much support for our struggle from people throughout the world and knew we had friends whose support we could expect in the future.

I remained in Lusaka until November of 1969. During this time I rested and regained most of the weight I'd lost in prison. Our wounded comrades were well now. They had been sent to a Botswana hospital after our arrest and were treated there. In late November I was sent to Dar-es-Salaam to report to the comrades there about our military operations outside Wankie. Afterward I remained in Dar and worked in our office. I was familiar with the work and began assisting in publishing our bulletins. I remained in Dar-es-Salaam doing this and other work until October 1972 when I was called back to Lusaka. I have been here working in the office up till now - a year later. I work on bulletins, collecting from the newspapers and other sources information which is important for our struggle. And when necessary, I'm a driver.

I haven't heard from my family or Linda since I left South Africa. I don't like living in exile and I think of home every day. I know I won't be really free until I've returned and we liberate our country. There is no other place for me.

The road to freedom is a long and difficult one. We are at a disadvantage in having no friendly bordering countries like Tanzania or Zambia from which to base our operations and enter the country. The South African racist regime is militarily and economically very powerful. Even so, I am confident that in time the people will

win. We have the strength of the masses on our side and as time goes on more countries like Zambia will support our cause. Our struggle is gaining support from freedom-loving peoples the world over.

Inside South Africa, our workers are striking and students are demanding an end to apartheid. All these things make me optimistic about our future. I will continue working each day until my country is free. I know it is only a matter of hard work and time - for we are sure to win in the end our struggle against the white minority fascist regime and build a just and humane society.

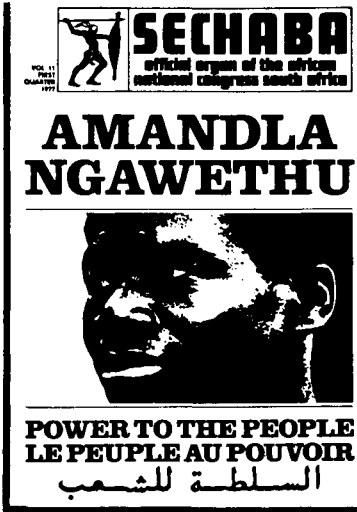


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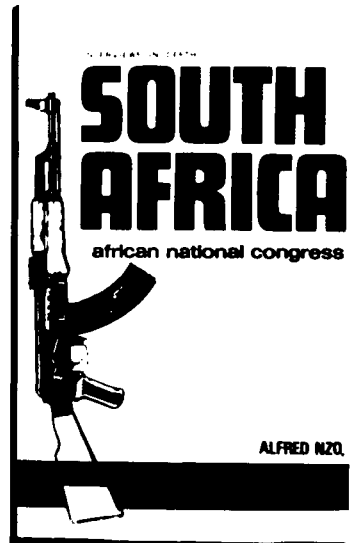
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FROM THE STORY:

"...Life became increasingly dangerous for me over the following months. Many people knew I was an ANC member from the leafleting I'd done around Tsolo. But I continued anyway. I also talked with some younger men at work whom I knew pretty well. I tried to explain the reasons they were dissatisfied, how the system degraded and exploited them. When they understood this I'd talk about the movement. ..."

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