

# 12 The Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns

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After being formed in 1961, the initial thrust of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the military wing of the Congress Alliance, was to carry out sabotage against symbols of the apartheid state. The creation of MK had confronted the Congress movement with serious problems. Firstly, it had to find ways to train recruits, as the apartheid regime did not allow Africans to join the all-white South African Defence Force (SADF). Who would introduce MK recruits to the art of guerrilla warfare, and indeed, the handling of modern weapons? Initially the task fell to white members of the South African Communist Party, like Jack Hodgson, who had fought in the Second World War.<sup>1</sup> The second challenge was to recruit cadres for military training in newly independent African states and friendly socialist countries. The third problem was to find infiltration routes back to South Africa for these trained cadres.

However, by the mid-1960s, MK was based almost entirely in exile, following the collapse of the second National High Command led by Wilton Mkwayi. At the time South Africa had a *cordon sanitaire* of colonies and states ruled by white minority regimes – Southern Rhodesia, South West Africa and the Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique. Zambia became independent only in 1964, and Botswana in 1966. All the countries of southern Africa were economically dependent on South Africa, and large numbers of their people worked as migrant labourers on the South African mines. The ANC was aware that any independent African state that provided bases for its military campaign against South Africa was likely to pay a heavy price, perhaps even one that would threaten the fragile independence that still needed to be nurtured.

During the second half of the decade, a few attempts were made to infiltrate trained cadres into South Africa, most notably the operation that led to what has become known as the Wankie campaign, the first series of contacts between a combined MK/ZIPRA (Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army) unit armed with modern weapons, and the joint security forces of Rhodesia

1 Eric Mtshali, interview with Jabulani Sithole, 3 October 2001, Clermont, SADET Oral History Project; R Kasrils, *Armed and Dangerous: From Undercover Struggle to Freedom*, Mayibuye Books, Bellville and Jonathan Ball, Johannesburg, 1998, pp 39-41.

and South Africa. This major effort at infiltration was augmented by attempts to establish MK bases in Rhodesia 'to serve MK combatants passing through' that country.<sup>2</sup> In early 1968 another joint MK/ZIPRA unit was deployed, giving rise to the Sipolilo campaign, the second round of armed confrontation with South African and Rhodesian forces.<sup>3</sup>

There has been heavy criticism of the joint ANC/ZAPU (Zimbabwe African People's Union) military campaigns in Zimbabwe from July to September 1967, and from December 1967 to July 1968, from authors who served with the Rhodesian security forces<sup>4</sup> or who were sympathetic to the white minority regimes,<sup>5</sup> authors who supported the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), the PAC and Non-European Unity Movement, and those who were members of these organisations.<sup>6</sup> Pro-Rhodesian writers dismiss the ANC and ZAPU cadres as terrorists or 'communist-trained desperadoes',<sup>7</sup> while those from the opposing camp describe the operations as 'an exercise in adventurism and a glaring example of desperation'.<sup>8</sup> They blame the subsequent military assistance that the South African government gave to Rhodesia on the Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns. Sympathetic accounts of these campaigns are sketchy and few, though veterans of the armed conflict in 1967 and 1968 have recorded some details,<sup>9</sup> and references also appear in the autobiographies and biographies of some participants.<sup>10</sup>

2 Chris Hani, 'The Wankie Campaign', *Dawn*, Souvenir Issue, 25th Anniversary of MK, 1986, p 35.

3 The Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns are sometimes referred to as the Western and Eastern fronts respectively.

4 See, for example, PL Moorcroft and P McLaughlin, *Chimurenga: The War in Rhodesia, 1965-1980*, Sygma/Collins, Marshalltown, 1982; Ron Reid-Daly, 'War in Rhodesia - Cross-border Operations', in Venter, AJ (ed), *Southern Africa within the African Revolutionary Context: An Overview*, Ashanti, Gibraltar, 1989. The co-author of *Chimurenga*, Peter McLaughlin, served as a police reservist during the Zimbabwean liberation war. Ron Reid-Daly commanded the Rhodesian counter-insurgency group, the Selous Scouts.

5 Martin Meredith, *The Past is Another Country: Rhodesia, UDI to Zimbabwe*, Pan Books, London, 1980, Ch 4. Meredith was a foreign correspondent for the *Observer* and *Sunday Times* in southern Africa, especially in Rhodesia, Zambia and South Africa. See also Kenneth Young, *Rhodesia and Independence: A Study in British Colonial Policy*, IM Dent & Sons, London, 1969, Ch 24; JK Cilliers, *Counter-Insurgency in Rhodesia*, Croom Helm, London, 1985, pp 6-9, written while the author was a major and senior gunnery instructor at the SADF's School of Artillery.

6 D Martin and P Johnson, *The Struggle for Zimbabwe*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1981, p 10; A Astrow, *Zimbabwe: A Revolution that Lost its Way?*, Zed Books, London, 1983, p 40.

7 Young, 1969, p 517.

8 *Dawn*, Souvenir Issue, p 38; Vladimir Shubin, *ANC: A View from Moscow*, Mayibuye Books, Bellville, 1999, p 81.

9 D Dabengwa, 'ZIPRA in the Zimbabwe War of National Liberation', in Bhebe, N and Ranger, TO (eds), *Soldiers in Zimbabwe's Liberation War*, University of Zimbabwe Publications, Harare, 1995, pp 24-35.

10 A Sibeko, *Freedom in our Lifetime*, Mayibuye Books, Bellville, 1996; T Mali, *Chris Hani: The Sun that Set Before Dawn*, SACHED, Johannesburg, 1993; Michelle Berger, 'Chris Hani', in Pampallis, J (ed), *They Fought for Freedom*, Maskew Miller Longman, Cape Town, 1994;

## Background to the campaigns

There are two main departure points for understanding what led to the Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns: first, the mounting pressure from MK cadres in military camps in Tanzania on the ANC leadership to send guerrillas back to South Africa to fight the apartheid regime, and secondly, the barriers to successful infiltration by guerrillas.

By 1964, about 300 MK recruits had left South Africa for military training in various newly independent African states, China, the USSR, Czechoslovakia and elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Oliver Tambo, head of the External Mission and deputy president of the ANC, and Nelson Mandela, MK's commander in chief, had visited a number of independent African countries in 1962. Mandela left South Africa in January and visited Algeria, then spent some time in Ethiopia, where he underwent military training and was joined by Tambo. They secured military training facilities for ANC cadres in Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco,<sup>11</sup> but it soon became clear that their training was inadequate:

A lot of the people that trained there – in Egypt and Algeria, and Morocco – were sent for retraining elsewhere, partly because there was a realisation that there was a need to train people in urban guerrilla warfare. The Egyptian group hadn't really quite had that. They would do well in combat, and things like that. So 1963, around August, two groups, selected on the basis of their having, as much as possible, passed matric, or who really could write, read and understand instructions, were sent to the Soviet Union. And these were groups that were trained in everything about urban guerrilla warfare – from pistols up to machine guns, as well as in the making of homemade explosives. Chris Hani was in one of these groups, with a few people whose names are better known today – Lambert Moloï. In my group we had people like Nqose, who is now a general in the army. There was a guy called Lennox [Tshali], also a general. So, training finished in 1964, and the two groups finished almost simultaneously and went back to Tanzania to start the camp at Kongwa.<sup>12</sup>

By 1965, MK had enough trained cadres. However, Bram Fischer's arrest during that year dealt a crushing blow to the liberation struggle. MK cadres in the camps were informed that the apartheid regime had succeeded in smashing the only current attempt to establish an underground network capable of

R Williams, 'The Other Armies: Writing the History of MK', in Liebenberg, I et al (eds), *The Long March: The Story of the Struggle for Liberation in South Africa*, HAUM, Pretoria, 1994, pp 22-34; Rocky Williams, 'Before we Forget: Writing the History of Umkhonto between 1961-2002', *Journal of Conflict and Military Studies*, Vol 1, March 2000.

11 Interview with Chris Hani, conducted by Wolfie Kodesh, 1 April 1993, MCA 6-284, Mayibuye Centre Oral History of Exiles Project, UWC-Robben Island Mayibuye Archives, University of the Western Cape.

12 Interview with Mavuso (Walter) Msimang, conducted by Bernard Magubane and Gregory Houston, 22 June 2003, Midrand, SADET Oral History Project.

receiving and assisting returning guerrillas in South Africa. Mzimela, one of the early MK cadres, related how, after completing their military training in Odessa in the former Soviet Union, they assembled to await orders to proceed home as soon as Fischer sent word that reception centres had been set up. Since the police raid on Lilliesleaf Farm, Fischer had been reconstructing the underground apparatus, so when news of his arrest reached the External Mission, it was devastating. Plans for the return of the trained cadres had to be shelved and a good number of them had to undergo additional training in order to acquire new skills to create an underground structure.<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile, more and more young men and women were leaving South Africa for military training abroad, while a substantial number of MK recruits trained in the Soviet Union, Algeria, Egypt and China were languishing in camps in Tanzania. By the mid-1960s the ANC had about 500 trained cadres at its disposal.<sup>14</sup>

In 1966, many of the trained MK cadres were based at Kongwa, one of four ANC military bases in Tanzania.<sup>15</sup> Recruits from South Africa also found their way to Kongwa, where some of them were trained. It was at Kongwa, too, that MK cadres, especially those from the first two groups that had been trained in the early 1960s, began to complain about what they perceived to be the ANC leadership's hesitancy in sending them back to South Africa to fight. According to Msimang: 'There was always an expectation that we were not going to stay in these places for very long. Nobody even brought suitcases, it would be these duffle bags ... because the understanding was that the transit in Tanzania would be very, very brief. But we went to this camp at Kongwa – central Tanzania – and it became quite clear that transition was going to take a little longer. People wanted to go home, and they just did not want to sit in Kongwa.'<sup>16</sup> Nqose concurred: 'I felt at the time that I could not just stay in Kongwa doing exercises without doing what I was trained for.'<sup>17</sup>

Conditions at Kongwa fuelled resentment, as Isaac Maphoto recalled:

They put us in a place that was far from civilisation, where you hardly saw a person wearing a suit. If you could get a woman, she was a prostitute. We were eating dirty food; sometimes they brought old rice with

13 Interview with Cletus Mzimela, conducted by Bernard Magubane and Jabulani Sithole, 13 October 2001, Ntuzuma, SADET Oral History Project.

14 Shubin, 1999, p 65.

15 The other three were at Mbeya, Bagamoyo and Morogoro. See T Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*, Longman, London, 1983, p 298. Msimang points out that Frelimo and Swapo also had camps at Kongwa on land that had been set aside by the Tanzanian government for southern African liberation movements (Mavuso Msimang, communication with the authors, 4 August 2003).

16 Interview with Mavuso (Walter) Msimang.

17 Interview with General Nqose, conducted by Moses Ralinala and Nhlanhla Ndebele, 29 August 2001, Pretoria, SADET Oral History Project.

worms. There was no bread, nothing! Water was scarce. This would cause runny stomachs and vomiting ...<sup>18</sup>

Msimang disputes that the food was 'dirty', although there were instances when weevils were found in bags of rice. Generally, however, the food was good, and was obtained from a store at Kongwa owned by an Indian, or from Dar es Salaam. And, he pointed out, a military training camp is neither a place where one should expect to find people wearing suits, nor one where women are commonplace.<sup>19</sup>

Whenever the swirling dust on the dirt road leading to the camp signalled an approaching vehicle, a mood of anticipation set in among the cadres. They would leave their tents, stop whatever they were doing and jubilantly shout, '*Kuyahanjwa*' (we are going home), assuming that military transport was coming to pick them up for an operation in South Africa.<sup>20</sup> They would be bitterly disappointed when it turned out that the vehicle was merely delivering supplies or was on some other mission. At one point, after their hopes had been dashed several times, 'Gizenga' Mpanza and other cadres from Natal stole a military truck from the camp and drove to the ANC headquarters in Morogoro to discuss their grievances with the leadership. They felt that the leadership was wasting their time by keeping them in the camps.<sup>21</sup> A major concern of the Natal group was that the leadership was too preoccupied with the power struggle between Joe Modise (who was later appointed commander in chief of MK) and Ambrose Makiwane (Kongwa camp commander) to pay attention to the concerns of the cadres. Mpanza and his comrades were arrested by Tanzanian soldiers and detained under suspicion of being deserters. At a meeting with Moses Kotane, the group explained that they were 'tired of loitering at the camps and doing nothing', and wanted 'to go home and fight'.<sup>22</sup> According to Mpanza:

Nothing negative or bad happened about the [truck] incident. We were reprimanded. But the leadership became conscious that something had to be done regarding our eagerness to go home and fight. Then it was suggested that a group had to be relocated to Lusaka. I was among the first group that was relocated.<sup>23</sup>

18 Interview with IL Maphoto, conducted by Siphamandla Zondi, 2 May 2001, SADET Oral History Project.

19 Mavuso Msimang, communication with the authors, 4 August 2003.

20 Interview with Winston Ngcayiya, conducted by Sifiso Ndlovu, 11 January 2001, Soweto, SADET Oral History Project.

21 Interview with Ruth Mompoti, conducted by Sifiso Ndlovu and Bernard Magubane, 15 August 2001, Vryburg, SADET Oral History Project.

22 Interview with Justice 'Gizenga' Mpanza, conducted by Bernard Magubane and Jabulani Sit-hole, 12 October 2001, Durban, SADET Oral History Project.

23 Ibid. According to James April, the cadres who were involved were charged and tried by a 'people's court', but were not punished for their actions, because it was more important to

The problem was still to find the most suitable route to South Africa. Initially, the Bechuanaland route seemed to be the obvious choice, having served since the formation of MK in 1961 as a major route both for Congress members leaving the country for military training, and for returning guerrillas.<sup>24</sup> Since independence in 1966, however, Botswana came under sustained pressure from the South African government to stop its territory being used as a conduit by members of the ANC and other liberation movements. As a result, the government of Botswana was placed in an invidious position. It could not afford to be accused of harbouring 'terrorists' whose aim was to overthrow the governments of its powerful neighbouring states, for fear of antagonising them, but at the same time, the newly independent country had to appear supportive of the struggle for liberation by fellow Africans.

Economic factors played an important role in determining Botswana's position. The country relied heavily on the Rhodesia-South Africa railway line; the custom tariffs it enjoyed from the two countries were favourable; and migrant labourers from Botswana worked on South African mines. Unlike other countries in southern and Central Africa, Botswana had no option but to cooperate with its white-ruled neighbours for the sake of economic survival. The country thus adopted a policy of granting asylum only to political refugees, not members of the liberation movement's military wings. G Leonard Pitso found that for MK, 'countries like Botswana were very hostile, in the sense that you couldn't move [freely through it]'.<sup>25</sup> Despite this, however, the Botswana route was the only viable option for the ANC at the time.<sup>26</sup>

Early attempts to infiltrate guerrillas through Botswana in 1966 and 1967 failed, largely due to the vigilance of Botswana's own security forces. Simon Senna was one of the cadres chosen to take part in the first operation to return guerrillas to South Africa.<sup>27</sup> The plan was that two-member units would make their way separately and at different times through Botswana.

In August 1966, Senna and Justice 'Gizenga' Mpanza (alias Reuben Nhlabathi) left Livingstone and entered Botswana in a Land Rover that had been specially modified for the trip. They called it the 'space ship' because of the way it was partitioned. The vehicle was fitted with two compartments – one was used to carry fish, the other for secret cargo, in which the two guerrillas hid for the border crossing. The drivers pretended to be fishmongers returning from an expedition at the Chobe River, but immigration authorities at the bor-

maintain unity in the camp than to impose harsh disciplinary measures. Interview with James April, conducted by Moses Ralinala and Nhlanhla Ndebele, 30 July 2001, Pretoria, SADET Oral History Project.

24 See Chapter 11. Chapter 15 offers an example of five MK guerrillas entering South Africa through Botswana in late 1964.

25 Interview with General G Leonard Pitso, conducted by Moses Ralinala and Nhlanhla Ndebele, Pretoria, SADET Oral History Project.

26 Interview with General Nqose.

484 27 Case studies on the pre-Wankie years, compiled by Sifiso Ndlovu.

der became suspicious because of the vehicle's abnormal weight. When they tried to unscrew what they perceived to be a false bottom, they found sawdust, but the driver explained that the compartment had been used to carry ice, and they were allowed to proceed.<sup>28</sup>

Senna and Mpanza spent three days in hiding along the Chobe River to avoid detection by the Botswana police. During this time they quietly observed members of the South African Defence Force (SADF), based in the Caprivi Strip, carrying out drills and manoeuvres in boats. They eventually set out from their hiding place and travelled 26 miles into Botswana before being discovered by Botswana game rangers, arrested and taken to prison in Francistown, from where they managed to contact Peter Ntithe, a member of the ANC. Senna believed that the Botswana authorities wanted to hand them over to South Africa, but after the Zambian government intervened on the ANC's behalf, the two men were released.<sup>29</sup>

Urea Maleka and Theophilus 'Ranka' Cholo took the Freedom Ferry from Zambia to Botswana, but were quickly arrested when a local resident, suspicious of their presence in an isolated area, reported them to the police. They spent the next three years in prison and were repatriated to Zambia only after the Zambian government exerted pressure on Botswana.

Early attempts at infiltration revealed a number of problems. In the opinion of Moagi, the ANC should have had reliable underground structures and procedures in place before sending cadres back to South Africa. As it was, the first guerrilla units had no idea what was required of them once they reached their destination. Their only instructions were to meet a designated commander at a particular location. The leadership failed to inform them that their tasks would include political education and mobilisation of internal revolutionary forces and networks, identifying suitable targets for sabotage and carrying out acts of sabotage.<sup>30</sup>

The Botswana police made other arrests in 1966, including nine insurgents – two MK and the rest members of ZIPRA, the military arm of the Zimbabwe African People's Union – who had crossed the border on 26 September. They were declared prohibited immigrants and deported to Zambia on 25 October.<sup>31</sup> In an official statement two days later, the Botswana government stated that it

... will not permit Botswana to be used as a base, overtly or covertly, for violent operations against neighbouring states, however unacceptable to

28 Interview with Simon Senna, conducted by Sifiso Ndlovu, 10 March 2002, Mafikeng, SADET Oral History Project. He said he still had health problems arising from the five hours he spent in the cold storage compartment. Interview with Lambert Molo, conducted by Moses Ralinala, 5 August 2001, Pretoria, SADET Oral History Project; interview with General Nqose.

29 Interview with Simon Senna.

30 Interview with R Moagi, conducted by Sifiso Ndlovu, 11 March 2002, Mafikeng, SADET Oral History Project.

31 Michael Morris, *Terrorism: The First Full Account in Detail of Terrorism and Insurgency in Southern Africa*, Howard Timmins, Cape Town, 1971, p 152.

Botswana the policies of those states might be. Although the government of Botswana has on this occasion returned the men concerned to Zambia, the government wishes it to be clearly understood that if, in future, any more armed aliens whose purpose appears to be to commit acts of violence against neighbouring states are discovered in Botswana, they will be more severely dealt with.<sup>32</sup>

The leadership of the liberation movements did not take the warning seriously. On 28 February 1967, the Botswana police clashed with 10 SWAPO guerrillas near Saronga on the Caprivi-Botswana border. The guerrillas managed to escape, but had to leave their weapons, ammunition, medical supplies and food behind. The Botswana government was incensed, and doubled the size of its crack Mobile Police Unit, which at the time had 750 members.<sup>33</sup> Meanwhile, cadres in the MK camps were expressing their reservations about the Botswana route because they were reluctant to get involved in a fight against the newly independent country's security forces.<sup>34</sup>

This, together with the failure of the 1966 infiltration operations and the treatment of other insurgents by the Botswana police, convinced the ANC that alternative routes had to be found by which guerrillas could return to South Africa.

Following Rhodesian prime minister Ian Smith's Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) from Britain on 11 November 1965, opposition to his white minority regime increased, and many Africans left the country to seek military training abroad. As Smith's rebel regime was not recognised by Britain or the United Nations,<sup>35</sup> independent African states had no qualms about assisting freedom fighters who sought to overthrow the Rhodesian government.

The ANC had opened an office in Lusaka in 1965, a year after Zambia became independent, and Rhodesia's UDI not only made cooperation between the ANC and ZAPU desirable, but also suggested the possibility of a new infiltration route. ZAPU had set up a camp for ZIPRA recruits in the vicinity of Kongwa, and talks on a military alliance between MK and ZIPRA began in 1966. The ANC appointed Chris Hani to investigate the feasibility of military cooperation between the two liberation movements.

Another leading member of MK's High Command, Mavuso Msimang, had been deployed to Zambia in 1965 as 'part of a reconnaissance group to look at the possibility of a route across the Zambezi into Rhodesia'. However, it 'became quite clear that this was going to be very difficult [and] unless you took people across in ones and twos ... there wasn't going to be much of a

<sup>32</sup> Cited in Morris, 1971, pp 152-3.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p 153.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with General Nqose.

<sup>35</sup> Shubin, 1999, p 69.

movement across back to South Africa'.<sup>36</sup> Msimang's unit was later extended to include Lambert Moloi and others, who made contact with villagers inside Zimbabwe 'who seemed to be quite receptive to the idea of providing hiding places'.<sup>37</sup>

In May 1967, a group of MK cadres led by Josiah Jele was sent to northern Mozambique to investigate potential infiltration routes. According to Jele, pressure from the MK cadres forced the ANC leadership to explore every possibility for sending guerrillas back to South Africa, including a route through South West Africa, even though SWAPO considered that impossible in the light of escalating armed conflict in the region. Jele's unit was to seek a passage via Mozambique to the northeastern corner of South Africa.

Joachim Chissano, chief representative in Tanzania of the Mozambique Liberation Front, or Frelimo, briefed Jele and his unit prior to departure about liberated zones, semi-liberated areas and dangerous terrain in his country. The MK cadres were driven in a vehicle from Dar es Salaam to the Frelimo camp at Netzingwe, near the border with Mozambique, where they met Samora Machel, the Frelimo commander. He brought them up to date on the situation in the war zone and accompanied them to the crossing point on the Rovuma River, where they entered the Niasa province and linked up with Frelimo soldiers under the command of Amando Pangwene. It was a five-day walk through the bush to the nearest guerrilla base, and on the way, a Portuguese aircraft attacked them, but none of the MK cadres were wounded.

It soon became clear that MK would not be able to reach South Africa through Mozambique, as the southern provinces, which bordered on South Africa, had not yet been liberated. Nor were the Mozambicans in the south sufficiently politicised to offer the logistical support MK cadres would need in order to survive. Jele and his men used their time in Mozambique well, however, observing the organisation and strategy of Frelimo and gaining permission to take part in some operations in order to gain field experience. During their six-week stay, they visited several Frelimo bases, some located deep inside those parts of Mozambique in which the Portuguese forces held sway. After a hazardous journey back to Tanzania, during which Jele was separated from his colleagues and spent 10 days alone with a Frelimo soldier, the unit briefed the ANC leadership about the mission.<sup>38</sup>

And we had gained a lot of experience, which we then used to train some of those who were infiltrated into Southern Rhodesia. And some of the guys who were with me also went into Wankie to go and fight there – to

36 Interview with Mavuso (Walter) Msimang.

37 Ibid.

38 Interview with Josiah Jele, conducted telephonically by Gregory Houston and Bernard Magubane, 18 June 2003, Pretoria. He also described how the MK unit and Frelimo forces were ambushed while making their way back to Tanzania. The 10 days he and his Frelimo colleague spent marching towards Tanzania was one of his most difficult experiences. They had lost their compasses, had very little food and no water, and were faced with a communication problem because they did not speak the same language.

impart our experiences. The original idea was for us to infiltrate South Africa in the northeastern part – to go and create bases, mobilise people and fight there. But, when that failed, it became a study mission about how Frelimo was organised and how they were fighting, for us to gain experience.<sup>39</sup>

Another attempt later that year also failed when an MK unit had to return to Tanzania after spending five weeks in the Cabo-Delgado district. The ANC leadership decided that infiltration through Mozambique was impracticable. MK soldiers would have had to cross hundreds of kilometres of territory controlled by the Portuguese forces, and their inability to speak the local language would have vastly added to the possibility of discovery.<sup>40</sup> The only practical route that remained was through white-held Rhodesia.

The idea of a military alliance between the ANC and ZAPU, first mooted in 1966,<sup>41</sup> was supported by the governments of both Tanzania and Zambia, and in 1967 the leaders of the two movements agreed on a joint military campaign.<sup>42</sup> An alliance between the ANC and ZAPU was a natural development, given the similarities of the white minority regimes they opposed.<sup>43</sup> Tambo described the alliance as follows:

We have had close political relations with ZAPU and these developed into relations at the military level until we were in a position to fight together. We are facing a common enemy, fighting for a common purpose, hence a combined force for a common onslaught against the enemy at every point of our encounter as we march down for the liberation of our respective countries.<sup>44</sup>

The ANC leadership saw Rhodesia as the most suitable infiltration route because of common political, cultural, religious and linguistic ties. As the language spoken in Matabeleland was similar to Zulu and Xhosa, the South African guerrillas would be able to communicate with the local population and gain assistance from them while in transit.<sup>45</sup> Venda, a South African language

39 Interview with Josiah Jele.

40 Shubin, 1999, p 77.

41 In the same year, small groups of ZANU insurgents were active in Rhodesia, and the first officially acknowledged clash between ZIPRA and the Rhodesian security forces occurred in April 1966. From that time on, a number of small ZIPRA units began operating in Rhodesia. See Anthony R Wilkinson, 'From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe', in Davidson, Basil, Slovo, Joe and Wilkinson, Anthony R, *Southern Africa: The New Politics of Revolution*, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1976, pp 232-4.

42 Shubin, 1999, p 70.

43 C van Wyk and L Callinicos, 'Oliver Tambo', in Pampallis, J (ed), *They Fought for Freedom*, Maskew Miller Longman, Cape Town, 1994, p 44.

44 *Morning Star*, 23 November 1967; University of the Witwatersrand Archives, A2675, Karis-Gerhart collection, folder 14, News Flash, 26 September 1967.

45 University of Fort Hare, ANC London Office, Thabo Mbeki's Correspondence, ANC London Papers, ANC Archives, University of Fort Hare.

spoken mainly in the far northern province of Limpopo, is similar to Shona and made communication between Shona-speaking ZAPU cadres and their MK colleagues easier.

According to James April, the first indication of an ANC/ZAPU alliance came from a speech by JB Marks in late 1966, when he suggested that southern Africa was one region, and that the various liberation movements in the region should therefore wage one struggle. The enemy forces – South African, Rhodesian and Portuguese – were reinforcing one another, Marks argued, and the liberation movements should therefore cooperate and stand together as well.<sup>46</sup>

Eric Mtshali, MK's chief of personnel at the time, recalled that a meeting was held in Zambia to discuss a joint operation with ZAPU, prompted by the fact that ZIPRA had begun to engage the Rhodesian forces militarily, and the ANC saw this as an opportune moment to set up an infiltration route for MK.<sup>47</sup> Senior ANC leaders, including Tambo, Duma Nokwe (secretary general), Moses Kotane (treasurer general), Tennyson Makiwane, Moses Mabhida and JB Marks, travelled from Tanzania for the meeting, which was marked by tension and took an entire day. At about 5 pm Tambo, who had done most of the talking until then, turned to Mabhida and said: 'All of us have spoken today, Moses, but you have not said a word. What is your view on the matter?' Mabhida said just one word: *Mayihlome!* (Arm and prepare yourself for attack!). There was jubilation and Mabhida was carried shoulder high from the venue. Tambo said: 'Mabhida, if you say we must go to war, no one will oppose that.' Within MK ranks, Mabhida was subsequently called *Mayihlome*.

Later, Tambo requested Joe Modise to accompany him to Kongwa to explain the mission to the soldiers.<sup>48</sup> They were told that their task was to open the route to South Africa via Rhodesia for MK, as part of a joint campaign with ZIPRA. Cletus Mzimela recalled:

We were consulted by our commander and commissar regarding this issue. The atmosphere was tense, as some of us were bitter. Oliver Tambo, Moses Mabhida, Moses Kotane and Joe Modise were present. They suggested that we should adopt a new approach by forming a united front with ZAPU. They would guide us from the Zambezi River right up to the Limpopo River. Then we would find our own way [home]. We had comrades from Venda among us and they would be responsible for guiding us on the other [South African] side of the Limpopo. Some of us were against these proposals, but the majority of our comrades accepted them. Even our top leader, Moses Kotane, agreed and was convinced that this was the right idea – there was no alternative. We thought hard about

46 Interview with James April.

47 Interview with Eric Mtshali, conducted by Jabulani Sithole, 5 October 2001, Clermont, SADET Oral History Project.

48 Berger, 1994, p 18.

the issue and realised that we were being taken for a ride. This had been organised already (by the leadership who had privately reached a decision with their ZAPU counterparts) – they did not want to highlight this fact to us. It was a psychological ploy based on issues of discipline within the ANC.<sup>49</sup>

The initial plan was that large numbers of MK cadres would join the ZIPRA forces, and after passing through Rhodesia together, the MK soldiers would cross the Limpopo River into South Africa. Some ANC leaders, most notably Moses Mabhida, were not happy with this plan. According to Msimang:

He [Mabhida] did think that there was a need to get together [with ZIPRA] but he thought the idea of taking many people at one time, and taking them through Zimbabwe, needed a lot more preparation than what was happening at the time. And the feeling was that this is a desperate measure, reacting to the pressure by people who wanted to go home. That was the whole thing – in fact, there was a lot of pressure. People wanted to go home, and they were sitting in the camps, people had started deserting, or leaving the camp to go to Kenya. Problems of discipline were beginning a little bit – some drinking. But that was all containable.<sup>50</sup>

For many MK cadres, however, this was the opportunity they had been waiting for. General Tshali (MK name Lennox Lagu) recalled:

We said look, we've got these people from Zimbabwe, ZIPRA. There they are. They know their situation. If we go with them through Zimbabwe it would be much more easier and practicable for us to reach our country. And these people will later become of great assistance whatever we do, in ferrying our material for us inside the country. That's how we looked at it. Fortunately for us the leadership approved of it.<sup>51</sup>

In any case, as the earlier attempts at infiltration through Botswana and Mozambique had failed, and Rhodesia was the only viable route left,<sup>52</sup> a compromise was reached. According to Msimang, 'instead of everybody just being shepherded across Zimbabwe into South Africa, part of the group would stay in Zimbabwe and stabilise and create bases and so on. Another group would proceed towards the Limpopo and South Africa'.<sup>53</sup>

Dumiso Dabengwa, ZAPU's intelligence chief, explained that ZAPU was approached by the ANC with a proposal for joint operations because attempts

49 Interview with Cletus Mzimela.

50 Interview with Mavuso (Walter) Msimang.

51 Interview with General L Tshali, conducted by Moses Ralinala and Nhlanhla Ndebele, August 2001, Pretoria, SADET Oral History Project.

52 Interview with James April.

490 53 Interview with Mavuso (Walter) Msimang.

by its guerrillas on their own to infiltrate through Botswana had failed. Moreover, the SADF had a good working relationship with the Rhodesian Army, and this posed the threat of interception if MK cadres tried to reach the Zambezi River via Botswana.<sup>54</sup> According to Dabengwa:

Our reasoning was therefore that if MK cadres were not assisted to enter South Africa, the South African army would be able to concentrate its forces in Rhodesia to our detriment, but if MK was well established in South Africa, the army would have to shift its attention to developments inside its own borders. This is in effect what happened after the ANC established alternative routes such as through Mozambique for its returning fighters.<sup>55</sup>

### **The Wankie campaign (Western Front)**

Once agreement had been reached, preparations for the campaign began. A joint political and military High Command was formed. Tambo and James Chikerema, the head of ZAPU in exile, directed the political level, while Joe Modise (MK commander), Akim Ndhlovu (ZIPRA commander), Archie Sibeko (Zola Zembe, MK chief of operations), Dabengwa (ZAPU chief of intelligence), Mjojo (General Tshali, MK chief of staff), Walter Mavuso (Mavuso Msimang, MK chief of communications) and Chris Hani (MK commissar) assumed responsibility at the military level<sup>56</sup> for personnel, reconnaissance, intelligence and logistics. The latter involved the acquisition of ammunition and food supplies for the mission, as well as the means to transport them. Intelligence was left to ZAPU, due to their knowledge of the terrain and its people.<sup>57</sup> ZAPU also undertook to conduct an awareness campaign in the area of the proposed operation so as to ensure a good reception for the MK guerrillas by local residents.<sup>58</sup>

Modise and Joe Matthews began to assemble the MK fighting units. Chris Hani was to be the commissar, while John Dube of ZIPRA would command the joint MK and ZIPRA units. In honour of the ANC president, Chief Albert Luthuli, who died in July 1967, the MK unit was called the Luthuli Detachment.<sup>59</sup>

Archibald Sibeko was despatched to Tunisia to obtain weapons, and he chose those that the cadres were familiar with from their training in the Soviet

54 Dabengwa, 1995, p 27.

55 Ibid, p 29.

56 Sibeko, 1996, p 89.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

59 Tambo pointed out that the Luthuli Detachment was named on the banks of the Zambezi River, just minutes before the crossing into Rhodesia. See Oliver Tambo, 'Victory or Death', statement by the NEC of the ANC delivered on 16 December 1986, *Dawn*, Souvenir Issue, 25th Anniversary of MK, 1986, p 3.

Union. They were flown by the Tunisian government to the OAU representatives in Tanzania.<sup>60</sup> The ANC assigned Sibeko, Eric Mtshali in his capacity as MK's personnel chief, and Ben Makhubu (alias Lefty Mathebula) to transport the arms from Tanzania to Zambia through the crossing point at Tunduma. This required befriending, politicising and sometimes bribing both the Tanzanian and Zambian border officials.<sup>61</sup> Once the military hardware had been smuggled into Zambia, it was buried at various locations on the Zambian side of the Zambezi Valley. Mtshali was also responsible for establishing military bases near the crossing points.<sup>62</sup>

MK cadres volunteered to take part in the joint mission.<sup>63</sup> In early 1967, they were moved from the camps in Tanzania to the ZAPU camp outside Lusaka. There was a relatively small contingent of MK soldiers, although one of them claimed that his group contained 33 members.<sup>64</sup> Joint training with ZIPRA was not without problems. An MK cadre later said that, unlike MK, most of the ZIPRA fighters had no political education and that this gave rise to lack of discipline in the camps. Three ZIPRA members deserted, claiming they could not understand the basic principles of the alliance.<sup>65</sup> In addition, different lifestyles and privileges also caused problems. Some South African guerrillas found some of the ZAPU leaders rude and merciless, but despite all these problems, a form of mutual understanding and acceptance by both sides was finally reached.<sup>66</sup>

Chris Hani was among those involved in final preparations for the Wankie campaign in the southern part of Zambia, near the Rhodesian border, while James April and others trained near Lusaka.<sup>67</sup> A reconnaissance team, which included Lehlohonolo Lambert Moloji, was given the task of establishing a base on the Zambezi River at Livingstone, to familiarise themselves with the river and possible crossing points. According to Moloji, they 'reconnoitred that border from Kariba Dam right up to Katilunge. I had teams of people doing this. Then we joined with ZAPU. And then ZAPU comrades came in and then I was leading that corps of ZAPU/ANC on infiltration'.<sup>68</sup>

Moloji's team also had to observe what wildlife was around and how they reacted to the presence of humans, inspect the riverbanks and monitor the

60 Sibeko, 1996, p 87.

61 Ibid, p 88; interview with Eric Mtshali.

62 Interview with Eric Mtshali.

63 Interview with General Nqose.

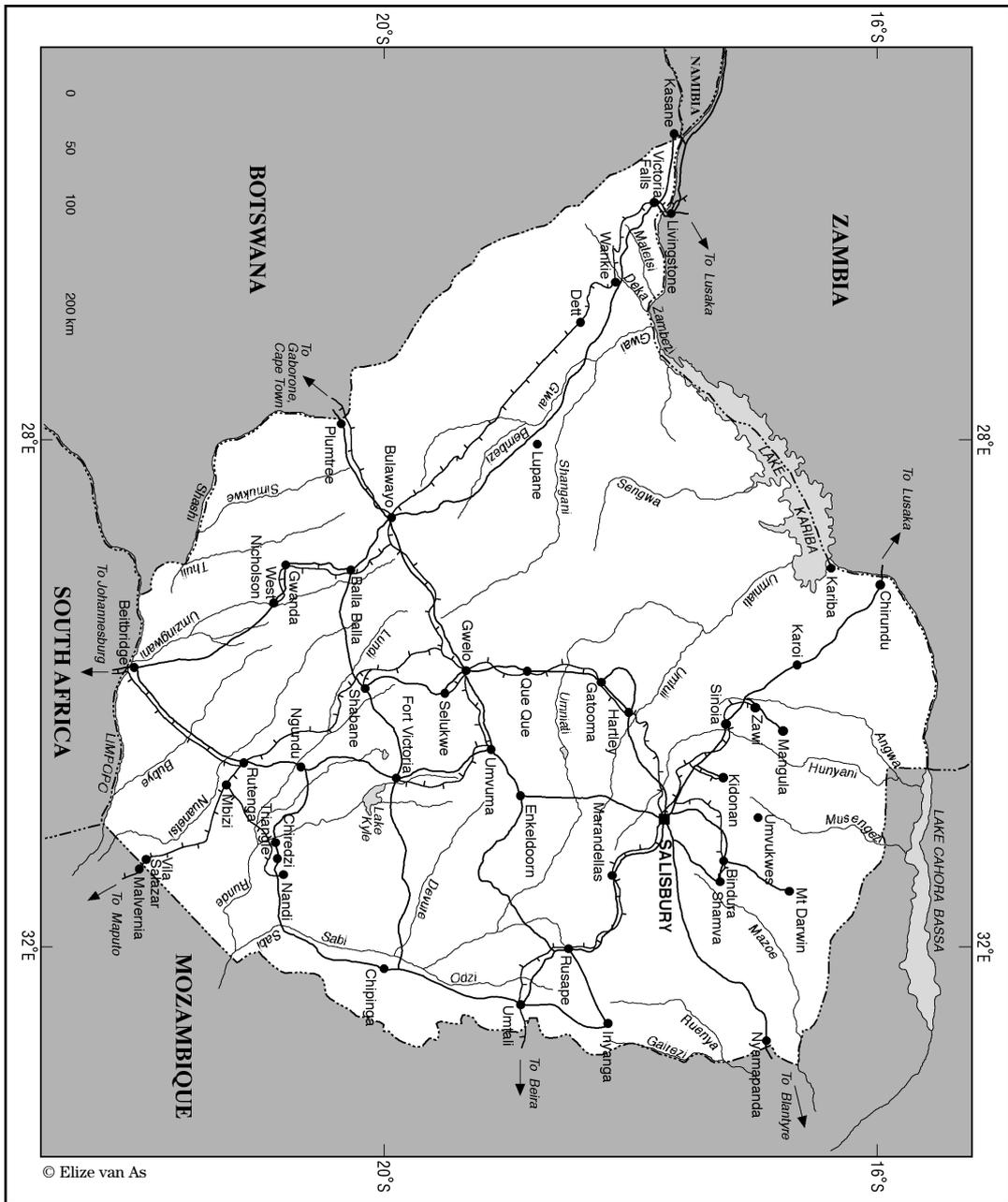
64 Dennis and Ginger Mercer (eds), *From Shantytown to Forest: The Story Of Norman Duka*, LSM Information Centre, Oakland, 1974, p 71, cited in Lodge, 1983, p 299.

65 Interview with Joe Ngalo, who pointed out that more ZIPRA guerrillas deserted after the crossing and were suspected of giving information to the Rhodesian Special Branch.

66 Interview with Alfred Willie, conducted by Thozama April, October 2000, Cape Town, SADET Oral History Project.

67 Interview with James April.

68 Interview with Lambert Moloji.



flow of the river. By July 1967, they had identified the best points at which to cross the Zambezi<sup>69</sup> and hideouts and supply caches had been set up.<sup>70</sup> Three crossing points were identified: near Livingstone in the west; near Lake Kariba

69 Ibid.

70 Interview with Justice 'Gizenga' Mpanza.

in the centre; and near Feira in the east. The first crossing would take place at Kazangula, near Livingstone.<sup>71</sup>

Senior leaders of the ANC and MK, including Oliver Tambo, Modise and Thomas Nkobi, who was by then the ANC's chief representative in Zambia, came to the camp to see the cadres on their way. The night before the crossing, Tambo ordered that one of the beasts from the farm be slaughtered for the departing cadres.<sup>72</sup> On the night of 30-31 July 1967, a group numbering about 80 strong crossed east of Livingstone, 15 km below the Victoria Falls.<sup>73</sup> This was the nucleus of the Western Front guerrilla activity that became known as the Wankie campaign. The point chosen for the crossing was deliberately close to the Botswana border, and the guerrillas could have retreated into that country if it became necessary.<sup>74</sup> More importantly, it was a crossing point that the Rhodesian armed forces would have least expected the guerrillas to use, in the most dangerous stretch of the Zambezi River.

Defensive positions were set up while the crossing was in progress, in case the enemy appeared unexpectedly. Ropes were tied to sturdy trees along the riverbank and connected to a raft in the water. Guerrillas were expected to slide down the face of the cliff using these ropes and drop onto the raft or into the water.<sup>75</sup> Although neither Tambo nor Modise would go to Wankie, they led the way down the cliff, followed by Nkobi, and remained on the Zambian side of the river until all the cadres had crossed safely.<sup>76</sup> Members of the MK reconnaissance unit, Boston Gagarin and David Sibiya (then known as Guluva) took the guerrillas across in a small boat, one at a time. The situation was frightening, the river currents being particularly strong, but since their president and commander in chief were standing there giving them instructions, the guerrillas had no choice. They slithered down the ropes until they reached the tiny boat,<sup>77</sup> and Thomas Nkobi later wrote:

Ropes had been tied to trees, and to reach the river from the bank, one had to grab the rope and cling to it. From the height we were at, you could not even see a person when he reached the river down below. Only

71 Sibeko, 1996, p 91.

72 Interview with M Raamano, conducted by Moses Ralinala and Nhlanhla Ndebele, 2 August 2001, Pretoria, SADET Oral History Project; interview with Cletus Mzimela, conducted by Jabulani Sithole and Bernard Magubane, 13 October 2001, Ntuzuma, SADET Oral History Project; see TT Nkobi, 'Crossing the Zambezi', *Dawn*, Souvenir Issue, 25th Anniversary of MK, 1986, p 38.

73 M Palmberg et al, *The Struggle for Africa*, Zed Books, London, p 188; Mali, 1993, p 44; Williams, 1994, p 27; *Rand Daily Mail*, 26/8/1967, 28/8/1967 and 18/9/1967; *Star*, 18/9/1967 and 7/11/1967; M Horrell, *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1967*, South African Institute of Race Relations, Johannesburg, January 1968, p 66.

74 Mali, 1993, p 44; Berger, 1994, pp 18-9.

75 Nkobi, 1986, p 38.

76 Interviews with Justice Mpanza and Cletus Mzimela.

494 77 Interviews with Lambert Moloi, Justice Mpanza and Cletus Mzimela.

the sound of something landing in water would indicate that somebody had reached the bottom.<sup>78</sup>

The majority of the men could not swim, but the first man across the river was Hani. It took all night for the entire group to make the crossing,<sup>79</sup> and there was much jubilation when the last man set foot on Rhodesian soil. The success of the crossing greatly contributed to building morale and bringing the MK and ZIPRA cadres closer to one another. For MK, the cooperation with ZIPRA was vital, as they would have to depend entirely on the ZIPRA cadres to establish contacts in Rhodesia.<sup>80</sup>

Ron Reid-Daly, who later commanded Rhodesia's Selous Scouts, speculated that the infiltration's objective was the confluence of the Tewani and Nata Rivers, where the guerrillas intended to set up a base camp from which MK could launch attacks into the northernmost region of South Africa, while ZIPRA concentrated on Matabeleland.<sup>81</sup> According to Mpanza, however, the plan from the start was for the South African guerrillas moving south to split into a number of smaller units of about eight members each, enter South Africa and base themselves in the Transvaal, Durban, Transkei and Cape Town. Some units were to proceed eastwards, in order to establish an MK presence in Rhodesia.<sup>82</sup>

It took the detachment two days of hard marching to reach the Wankie Game Reserve.<sup>83</sup> Mpanza recalled:

Then they [ZAPU] led us from there and told us about camps in that vicinity and about camp guards who were protecting the game. They instructed us to avoid such places and not to make any noise. Smoking of cigarettes was also not allowed. The commander was the only person who gave people the necessary permission to smoke. Then Chris was chosen to lead the reconnaissance. Mnqarwana [alias Mjojo, alias Lennox Lagu, real name Tshali] was the commander of the whole group. Then we proceeded together with our respective units until we reached the middle part of the game reserve. We managed to avoid some of the camps, using detours. I think it was on the fourteenth day inside the forest when we ran out of food and other things. It was only then that we decided to kill the game, and we ate the meat. We took what was left with us. We proceeded until we reached the far end of the forest. This was now open space. The forest was no longer thick with trees and vegetation. We then

78 Nkobi, 1986, p 39.

79 Interview with James April.

80 Interview with General L Tshali.

81 Reid-Daly, 1989, p 153.

82 Interview with Justice 'Gizenga' Mpanza.

83 Ibid.

decided to take a rest. We sat down after taking a detour away from the forest. This place was very big. We therefore went around the forest, hence we now knew that there is an open space inside the forest. We proceeded and suddenly there was a place towards Tsholotsho where we found water. There was a sand river where you had to dig before you could access the water. Our Rhodesian [ZAPU] comrades taught us how to drink this water. It was at that stage that we prepared ourselves for the war.<sup>84</sup>

As it moved inland, the detachment encountered its first major problem, which had not been anticipated. They were moving into an increasingly dry area where the local residents relied on boreholes for water, and it became necessary to establish contact with them sooner than planned.<sup>85</sup> The people they approached were cooperative and gave them enough food and water for a few days, which they supplemented by collecting fruit and berries and killing wild animals.<sup>86</sup> Dlamini pointed out that as part of their training in Egypt, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, they had been taught to kill and eat reptiles and wild animals, and this knowledge came in useful in the Wankie Game Reserve, which was teeming with game.<sup>87</sup> Their training also helped them understand the movement of the animals, and by following their tracks, the guerrillas found water, though the supplies were inadequate for their needs.

The bush was so dense that a number of guerrillas who became separated from the detachment were never to meet it again. Tshali recalled that soon after crossing into Rhodesia, Nqose and three others were reconnoitering ahead of the detachment and were unable to reunite with it. A few other guerrillas were despatched to look for them, only to get lost themselves. 'If people disappeared ... you know, it's so treacherous. The trees are the same. It's just a flat thing. If somebody disappears and you move a short distance away from the others, you would have to shout. And that was not allowed there, no, otherwise you are going to call the enemy,' said Tshali. This problem was exacerbated by the fact that most of the ZIPRA cadres were not familiar with the Wankie area.<sup>88</sup>

When the detachment reached the game reserve around 2 August, it split into two units. One moved in a southwesterly direction towards Botswana, in accordance with instructions to make for South Africa and go underground. John Dube of ZIPRA was in command of the 57 members and Chris Hani was the commissar charged with the responsibility of ensuring that the MK cadres infiltrated South Africa safely. Members of this unit included Peter Mfene,

84 Ibid.

85 Hani, 1986, p 34.

86 Interview with Justice Mpanza.

87 Interview with Victor Dlamini, conducted by Moses Ralinala and Nhlanhla Ndebele, September 2001, Pretoria, SADET Oral History Project.

496 88 Interview with General L Tshali.

Victor Dlamini, Graham Morodi, Douglas Wana, Basil February, James April, Paul Sithole, Shooter Makasi, Castro Mashigo, Eric Nduna, Justice Mpanza, Cletus Mzimela, Peter Mhlongo, Marana Mahlatsi, Misheak Madiba and Lennox Lagu.<sup>89</sup> The rest of the detachment, about 23 cadres under command of ZIPRA's Madzimba Matho, with Andries Motsepe of MK as his deputy, moved towards Lupane in northeastern Matabeleland. MK members in the smaller unit included James Masimini, Charles Mhambi, Motsepe, and Comrade Rodgers. Their orders were to remain in Rhodesia and set up a communications network between ANC members in exile and those based in South Africa, and map out a route for future MK cadres to use on their way to South Africa.<sup>90</sup> ZIPRA guerrillas had previously established themselves in the Lupane and Nkayi areas from April to June 1966, and this probably influenced the decision of the ZAPU and ANC leadership to set up bases there in 1967.<sup>91</sup>

The Luthuli Detachment comprised a relatively small percentage of the more than 500 MK cadres who were in the camps in Zambia and Tanzania. MK's personnel chief, Eric Mtshali, had been ordered to prepare more cadres to cross through Rhodesia as soon as news was received of the detachment's safe passage. Mtshali was to return to South Africa with the very last group.<sup>92</sup>

Not long after the detachment split up, Rhodesian security forces detected the group heading east towards Lupane. Some observers have speculated that a ZIPRA member, who deserted on 3 August from the group moving northeast, revealed the detachment's presence in the Wankie Game Reserve,<sup>93</sup> and over the next 10 days Rhodesian patrols in the area were stepped up.

However, some hold the view that the Rhodesian forces encountered the detachment accidentally, during routine patrols, while Reid-Daly maintains that their tracks were picked up at the Inyantui River, near the main Victoria Falls road,<sup>94</sup> and that the Rhodesian forces had already increased the number of patrols in the game reserve after becoming aware that ZIPRA was infiltrating this area. Another possible explanation was offered by the *Star's* Africa News Service in a report that stated:

One of the reasons for the failure of the terrorists in the past is the suspicion of the Rhodesian rural Africans and the cooperation of the tribal authorities, chiefs and headmen, in passing back the information to the troops and police as soon as the infiltrators cross the border.<sup>95</sup>

89 For more details, see Mali, 1993, p 45.

90 Palmberg et al, 1983, p 188.

91 See J Alexander et al, *Violence and Memory: One Hundred Years in the 'Dark Forests' of Matabeleland*, David Philip, Cape Town, 2000, pp 120-3.

92 Interview with Eric Mtshali.

93 Mali, 1993, p 46.

94 Reid-Daly, 1989, p 153.

95 *Star*, 10/8/1967; see also *Rand Daily Mail*, 25/9/1967.

The early detection of the unit was particularly surprising because of the strict precautions taken. The cadres had spotted vehicle tracks in the vicinity of their camp and were thus aware of the presence of Rhodesian security forces.<sup>96</sup> The guerrillas knew that the Rhodesian forces were more active during the day and consequently, they travelled at night, sleeping by day in carefully concealed trenches. As they moved closer to Matabeleland, the dense bush that had offered excellent cover gave way to scrubland, requiring even greater vigilance, and they stopped shooting animals so as not to alert the enemy to their position. Some of these hazards were the result of poor preparation for the mission. For example, the detachment had outdated and inaccurate maps,<sup>97</sup> and frequently had to rely on the stars to guide them.<sup>98</sup>

The first battle between the joint ANC/ZAPU unit and the Rhodesian security forces occurred on 13 August on the banks of the Nyatuwe River, between Wankie and Dete.<sup>99</sup> According to Reid-Daly, a Rhodesian African Rifles (RAR) patrol consisting of 18 African soldiers and a number of British South African Policemen (BSAP) were following the tracks of the guerrillas and were ambushed at 1.20 pm. After a battle lasting seven and a half hours, the Rhodesian forces fled, losing two African soldiers, two white BSAP officers and a white army officer, in addition to two African soldiers being wounded. When they returned that night to retrieve the bodies of their dead, the Rhodesian forces found five dead guerrillas.<sup>100</sup>

Comrade Rodgers offered a different account of the battle. According to him, the guerrillas had set up a temporary camp on the banks of the Nyatuwe River early in the morning. At about 7 am a spotter aircraft began circling the area above their camp, which was attacked 90 minutes later by the Rhodesian security forces. Rodgers wrote:

This sudden volley from the enemy, coupled with white men [sic] voices shouting 'surrender' unnerved some of the comrades. There was some confusion. But fortunately, some of the comrades took position and returned fire. Masimini was shouting on top of his voice, saying he would shoot any son-of-a-bitch who ran away, ordering them to fire back. Others had merely taken cover and were not firing at the enemy.<sup>101</sup>

Helicopters were used to support the Rhodesian forces, and Comrade Rodgers reported that one of the helicopters left the scene with smoke billowing from its tail. He also reported that as the fighting progressed, more and more of the

96 Interview with Justice 'Gizenga' Mpanza.

97 Interview with T Dlamini, 12 September 2001.

98 Interview with Justice Mpanza.

99 Comrade Rodgers, 'Basil February', *Dawn*, Souvenir Issue, 25th Anniversary of MK, 1986a.

100 Reid-Daly, 1989, p 153.

101 Comrade Rodgers, 'The Battle of Nyatuwe', *Dawn*, Souvenir Issue, 25th Anniversary of MK, 1986b, provides a detailed description of the battle.

guerrilla detachment's rifles fell silent, until only two could be heard. Late in the afternoon the guerrillas retreated under covering fire provided by James Masimini.<sup>102</sup>

Masimini is remembered by many for his heroic sacrifice. Despite being badly wounded, he told his comrades to leave him behind and escape to safety. Delmas Sibanyoni was another brave individual who stood his ground against the Rhodesian forces until he was killed by gunfire from a helicopter.<sup>103</sup> Some seven or eight days later, Comrade Rodgers was among the remaining members of the unit to be captured or killed. Rodgers and Bothwell were subsequently sentenced to death by the Rhodesians.<sup>104</sup> South African newspapers reported that during a battle on 18 August, eight guerrillas, believed to be from a group of 30 members of the banned African National Congress trying to make their way to South Africa, were killed in Wankie Game Reserve. Another six guerrillas had been captured. According to the reports, the Rhodesian security forces had suffered no casualties.<sup>105</sup>

The unit that was moving south heard about the battle on a portable radio they carried.<sup>106</sup> As a tactic to demoralise other units and bring about their surrender, the Rhodesian government announced that a large number of fighters had been captured and several killed.<sup>107</sup> A day after the first clash, the Rhodesian security forces dropped thousands of leaflets printed in English and Shona over a small area of the Zambezi Valley, calling on the 'terrorists' to surrender. The leaflets contained photographs of two guerrillas who allegedly 'recently gave themselves up to security forces', and sent the following message to the guerrillas:

You are far from your home. Do you want to die? You have been sent by your leaders in Lusaka to fight against us in Rhodesia. These men refuse to come themselves because they know our strength and do not want to die. They have sent you to die for them.<sup>108</sup>

The propaganda had no effect on the second unit, which proceeded as planned, but Tshali speculated that members of the smaller unit who were taken prisoner might have revealed the existence of the other unit to the Rhodesians.<sup>109</sup>

When news of the military encounters between the MK/ZIPRA forces and the Rhodesians reached Lusaka, Tambo summoned Eric Mtshali, informed him

102 Ibid.

103 *Dawn*, 3 (7), August 1979, p 6. See also Hani, 1986, p 35.

104 Rodgers, 1986b.

105 *Rand Daily Mail*, 19 August 1967.

106 Interview with James April.

107 Interview with Chris Hani.

108 Cited in the *Rand Daily Mail*, 14/8/1967.

109 Interview with General L Tshali.

that the Rhodesians had encircled a section of the Luthuli Detachment near the Zambezi River and instructed Mtshali to organise and lead a rescue team into Rhodesia. Mtshali and Akim Ndhlovu, ZAPU's commander, assembled a group of 12, including Eric Manzi from Port Elizabeth, who was Mtshali's regional head of intelligence. They reached the river in the morning and camped for a day, intending to observe enemy movement on the opposite bank. That night, while crossing the river in three rubber dinghies, disaster struck. Mtshali recalled:

As we were alighting from our boat on the Zimbabwean side of the river, we noticed that one boat had capsized. In no time the water around it turned red with blood. Two comrades were swimming frantically towards the shore. They never made any sound and, up to this day, I do not know why they never screamed. Two others had disappeared without a trace. All we could see was a pack of crocodiles fighting over their limbs. It was a very disturbing sight, and we were all taken aback and furious to lose soldiers that way. It was a very demoralising experience.<sup>110</sup>

Within seconds, the river was swarming with crocodiles. The cadres in the water never had a chance, and to make matters worse, a radio message was sent from Lusaka informing Mtshali that the men trapped at Lupane had shot their way out, breaking through the Rhodesian cordon and inflicting heavy losses on the enemy forces. 'We were told to cross back to Zambia,' Mtshali said.<sup>111</sup> Meanwhile, the unit led by Dube and Hani had its first glimpse of Smith's forces immediately after receiving news of the clashes in northeastern Matabeleland.

### South Africa becomes involved

The sophistication of the engagement on 13 August took the Rhodesian forces by surprise, especially when they became aware of the presence of MK cadres in the unit. The Wankie incursion, and the likelihood of future infiltration along this route, threatened to stretch the capacity of the Rhodesian security forces to unacceptable levels, and Smith's government called on the South Africans for assistance.<sup>112</sup> When the news reached Pretoria, the National Party government was shocked, because it had always underestimated MK's military capability and had never expected MK to succeed in advancing southwards.

110 Interview with Eric Mtshali.

111 Ibid.

112 Wilkinson, 1976, p 235. Although the Smith regime was almost universally condemned when it declared UDI in 1965, South Africa declared material and moral support for the Rhodesians. Then Minister of Transport, BJ Schoeman, stated that the South African government regarded Rhodesia as the country's 'white frontier' on the Zambezi, while the *Sunday Times* commented: 'The Smith Government's future depends on the help that can be given by South Africa and Portugal.' See Vic Aldaheff, *A Newspaper History of South Africa*, revised

At the National Party's annual congress in Durban on 17 August, the Deputy Minister of Police revealed for the first time that MK cadres had been among those involved in the Wankie battles. The *Rand Daily Mail* reported that he told the congress that 'most of the alleged African terrorists involved in the clash with Rhodesian police four days ago – in which five of them were killed – were South Africans'. The Deputy Minister added that the South Africans 'were armed to the teeth' and were 'on their way back to South Africa through Rhodesia after undergoing military training abroad'.<sup>113</sup>

On 19 August, six days after the first clash, Tambo and ZAPU's vice-president, James Chikerema, announced the joint MK/ZIPRA operation, stating that

... the fighting that is presently going on in the Wankie area is indeed being carried out by a combined force of ZAPU and ANC, which marched into the country as comrades-in-arms on a common route, each bound to its destination. It is the determination of these combined forces to fight the common settler enemy to the finish, at any point of encounter as they make their way to their respective fighting zones.<sup>114</sup>

The South African government responded to Rhodesia's request for assistance by despatching a group of soldiers to assist with intelligence and information gathering. Retired Major General Chris Thirion, a former South African military intelligence officer, confirmed the ongoing battles in the Wankie Game Reserve when he and others returned to Pretoria.<sup>115</sup> This led to the deployment of a contingent of South African policemen to reinforce the Rhodesian army. The presence of these policemen was first reported in a newspaper article on 23 August, which claimed that 'army officers and men, including paratroopers of the South African Special Air Services, have been seconded to the Rhodesian forces for anti-guerrilla training'.<sup>116</sup>

The report led to a flurry of diplomatic activity, including the despatch of a note to the British government by the Rhodesians on 28 August.<sup>117</sup> The note informed the British government that the leaders of ZAPU and ZANU were using Zambia as a base from which to 'plan subversive operations directed against the Government of Rhodesia'. The Zambian government was accused

and enlarged edition, Don Nelson, Cape Town, p 105. By implication, South Africa's own future depended on preventing a black government emerging in Rhodesia because the 'white frontier' would then shift from the Zambezi to the Limpopo.

113 *Rand Daily Mail*, 18/8/1967.

114 Statement issued on 19 August 1967 by Oliver Tambo, deputy president of the ANC, and JRD Chikerema, vice-president of ZAPU.

115 Interview with General Chris Thirion, conducted by Bernard Magubane and Gregory Houston, 14 August 2002, Pretoria, SADET Oral History Project.

116 *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, 23-30 September 1967, p 22273.

117 *Note to the United Kingdom Government from the Rhodesian Government, 28 August, 1967*, Government Printer, Salisbury, 1967 (CSR 45-1967).

not only of ignoring such activity, but also of active complicity in 'subversive operations' in Rhodesia. According to the note, 'the Zambian authorities are not only prepared to condone terrorist activities directed against Rhodesia, but are also willing to allow their country to be used as a rallying point for terrorists bent on a campaign of violence against South Africa'. The Rhodesian government lodged 'a strong protest against the British government's lack of action' against the Zambian government for allowing 'the passage of arms and offensive material, the reception and harbouring of communist-trained terrorists and the use of Zambia as a base for offensive operations against Rhodesia'.

Zambia responded with a note of its own a day later, in which it requested the British 'to stop a South African "invasion" of Rhodesia' and warned that the Rhodesian crisis had 'entered a new phase too grave to be ignored by Britain'. The note included a request that Britain should send troops to Rhodesia.<sup>118</sup>

In Brakpan, where South African Prime Minister John Vorster had lived as a penniless young ex-detainee after the Second World War, he ended a speech on 8 September with an announcement that rocked South Africa and the international community.<sup>119</sup> South African policemen, Vorster disclosed, were in Rhodesia, actively assisting that country's security forces in their fight against 'terrorism'. According to *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*:

Mr Vorster emphasised that they were there at the invitation of the Rhodesian government to fight against men 'who originally came from South Africa and were on their way back home to commit terrorism in South Africa'. He added: 'We are doing it openly because it is our duty to protect ourselves. We are doing it as a police measure because it is the task of the police to eradicate terrorism and subversion. I am not going to say how many policemen there are or where they are, because it will not be in the interests of security.' Announcing that Britain had been informed of South Africa's action, Mr Vorster concluded: 'The world must clearly know that it has knowingly permitted terrorists to be trained and that individual nations have allowed this in their own territory for only one reason – to kill our children without warning in the night.'<sup>120</sup>

Vorster added that this was not an attempt to get involved in the Rhodesian political situation, which South Africa continued to regard as a matter for Britain and Rhodesia alone to resolve. South African policemen had been sent to Rhodesia when it became clear that South African 'terrorists' in that country were part of a concentrated force, against whom South Africa had to act. 'It

118 *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, 23-30 September 1967, p 22273.

119 Cited in John D'Oliveira, *Vorster – The Man*, Ernest Stanton Publishers, Johannesburg, 1977, p 228.

502 120 *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, 23-30 September 1967, p 22273.

became clear to us that we must fight where we were allowed to fight ... for that reason, the government decided, with the approval of Rhodesia, to send our people there to take up their posts in the frontline.'<sup>121</sup>

### Other battles in the Wankie campaign

The Dube/Hani unit stayed abreast of developments by monitoring news reports on their portable radio as they continued southwards.<sup>122</sup> The second and third major battles of the Wankie campaign occurred on 21 and 22 August. These were the first and second clashes between the unit moving towards the south and the Rhodesian security forces. On 13 August, with their food and water supplies running dangerously low, John Dube and Chris Hani sent two ZIPRA members to look for replenishments. They never returned. Fearing that the two had fallen into the hands of the enemy forces and disclosed the rest of the unit's position,<sup>123</sup> Dube and Hani despatched five volunteers – two from ZIPRA and three from MK (Graham Morodi, Marana Mahlatsi and Misheak Madiba) – to look for the missing men. They returned without finding a trace of their missing comrades.<sup>124</sup> Tension was running high in the unit, especially after the guerrillas heard a radio report that two 'terrorists' had given themselves up to Rhodesian security forces. Suspecting that the report was a propaganda ploy and that the two missing men might still be trying to re-establish contact with the unit, they decided to wait until dark before moving from their position to Tsholotsho.<sup>125</sup>

Under strict orders to avoid contact with the enemy and focus on their objective of entering South Africa, the unit had stepped up security as soon as they heard reports of the battles in the east.<sup>126</sup> From 17 to 20 August, they noticed spotter aircraft overhead at regular intervals, and as an added precaution, set up defensive lines each time the unit rested.

The members of the unit were tired and had been without food for almost eight days by 19 August, when they shared a small dove that Hani had killed earlier in the day. On the morning of 20 August, Dube and Hani sent two cadres towards the river to hunt for meat. At about 9 am, the spotter planes appeared overhead and an hour later, they heard the sound of military trucks about 100 m from their camp as a Rhodesian army patrol headed for the nearby dam.

Around 3 pm, the unit heard an exchange of gunfire in the direction of the river, and felt sure that the cadres sent out to hunt for food must have been involved. The commanders prepared to send a search party out, but before

121 D'Oliveira, 1977, p 228.

122 Mali, 1993, p 46; Berger, 1994, pp 19-20.

123 Mali, 1993, p 46.

124 Ibid; Berger, 1994, pp 19-20.

125 Mali, 1993, p 46.

126 Interview with James April.

they could set off, the Rhodesian forces attacked, and the first military clash between the second unit and the Rhodesians ensued.<sup>127</sup>

Cletus Mzimela recalled that the ZIPRA cadres were always nervous and slept with their rifles cocked. As a result, shots were frequently fired accidentally, and this sporadic gunfire might have alerted Rhodesian soldiers to the presence of insurgents in the game reserve. On the morning of the battle, Mzimela spotted a military radio antenna through the surrounding bush, and awakened Gizenga Mpanza, who was sleeping next to him. In disbelief, Mpanza thought Mzimela was joking, but then a second antenna appeared, and a third. Then they saw rifles and black berets, but the army trucks drove past without any sign that they knew the cadres were lying there.<sup>128</sup> After the patrol moved on, Mzimela fell asleep again, only to be awakened later in the day by gunfire. He cursed in anger, assuming that one of the ZIPRA fighters had accidentally fired again. As he angrily demanded, 'Who is this fool that is going to attract the attention of the army patrol?', he heard a soldier giving the order for a hand grenade to be tossed into the bush to flush out the guerrillas. The next sound Mzimela heard was an explosion, close by.<sup>129</sup>

Mpanza's recollection was that bullets were flying and leaves were 'raining on our heads'. As the Rhodesians closed in, Hani ordered the men to hold their fire, reminding them that 'every bullet is precious' and that they should not pull the trigger until they could see their targets clearly. The air was thick with tension, but even though this was the first time the guerrillas had come under fire, their nerve held.<sup>130</sup> They allowed the Rhodesians to fire randomly into the air, until a handful of soldiers stood up and called out: 'Where are they? Can you see them?' At that moment, Hani gave the order to open fire. Two of the Rhodesian soldiers fell in the first hail of automatic rifle fire. They happened to be officers, and their loss caused pandemonium. The rest of the group scattered in all directions, leaving their weapons and food supplies behind.<sup>131</sup> Mzimela recalled that 'in their rucksacks they were carrying the best provisions. There were biscuits and pure, crystal clear water'. For two weeks before the battle, the guerrillas had been competing with elephants for muddy and dirty water.<sup>132</sup> They stripped the dead Rhodesian soldiers of their camouflage uniforms and personal items like watches, and the commanders divided the food and water they had recovered among the hungry and thirsty men. For the first time in weeks, they had a decent meal, including cheese, biltong, tinned food and other rations. It was a feast for the guerrilla fighters, and afterwards, they resumed their march to the south.<sup>133</sup>

127 Mali, 1993, p 47; Berger, 1994, p 20.

128 Interview with Cletus Mzimela.

129 Ibid.

130 Mali, 1993, pp 47-8; Berger, 1994, p 20.

131 Ibid.

132 Interview with Cletus Mzimela.

504 133 *Submit or Fight: 30 Years of MK*, 1991, p 12.

Anticipating that the ground force would call in an air strike, they moved away from the dense bush and into the open grass. As expected, aircraft appeared soon afterwards and dropped their bombs into the bush.<sup>134</sup> According to Mzimela, one of the most valuable items captured from the scene of the battle was a military radio. It was old and cumbersome, but the radio operator in the unit

... picked it up. He switched it on. But they [the Rhodesian security forces] could pick up the sound waves, and soon, our radio specialist became aware of this fact. He said, 'Comrades, they can pick up from the airwaves that we are going south.' We asked how that could be possible. We then instructed him to switch it off. Suddenly, two helicopters appeared. We were underneath the trees. The helicopters passed, but then came two Hawker Hunters. These were dangerous English aircraft. They passed over us and fired at something up ahead. We did not know what was in front of us and we thought they were firing at a local settlement. We also heard a machine gun and bombs.<sup>135</sup>

The guerrillas remained under cover until after dark, then continued their journey.<sup>136</sup> They marched through the night and for part of the next morning. At about 2 pm on 21 August, they rested. Graham Morodi and three other comrades were ordered to change into civilian clothes and sent to find food and water. They made contact with the inhabitants of a nearby village, where an old man gave them vital information. He said Smith's soldiers had been to the village earlier, looking for a group of armed men, and pointed out the direction taken by the patrol. It happened to be the same direction that the unit intended to take later that night. The old man gave them maize meal porridge and milk, and they returned to the temporary base.<sup>137</sup> Contrary to South African newspaper reports, which claimed that the guerrillas met a hostile reception from members of the local population in Rhodesia, this early contact went well.<sup>138</sup>

Around 5 pm, while Peter Mhlongo was scanning the surrounding terrain through binoculars captured earlier from the Rhodesians, he spotted enemy forces advancing on their position. Mhlongo sounded the alarm and the guerrillas took up defensive positions. Morale was high and they were less nervous as a result of their victory the day before. Hani ordered the cadres to aim for the commander and the radio operator, and to hold their fire until the Rhodesians drew close to their position.<sup>139</sup>

134 Interview with Justice 'Gizenga' Mpanza.

135 Ibid.

136 Interviews with Justice Mpanza and Cletus Mzimela.

137 Mali, 1993, pp 48-9; interview with Cletus Mzimela.

138 *Star*, 10/8/1967; *Rand Daily Mail*, 25/9/1967; Young, 1969, p 518.

139 Mali, 1993, p 49.

As in the first battle, the advancing soldiers opened fire into the bush when they were still about 200 m away, and before they could see the guerrillas. The unit waited, silently, and when the troops were about 100 m from them, the order to open fire rang out. The Rhodesian radio operator was hit immediately, while the rest of the platoon dived for cover and began returning fire. This was met by deafening silence from the guerrillas, but the Rhodesians continued to fire on their position for about 30 minutes. Assuming that the guerrillas must all be dead, the Rhodesians began advancing once more, and as soon as they were exposed, the MK/ZIPRA cadres poured fire at them. Black members of the Rhodesian security forces tried to lure the ANC/ZAPU fighters into the open by standing up and pretending to flee from the battle. When the guerrilla commanders noticed that only black soldiers were running away, they recognised this as a ploy to expose themselves. They were supposed to think that the enemy was retreating, and if they pursued the black soldiers, they would run straight into an ambush laid by the white security force members. Hani and Dube ordered some of the comrades to toss grenades at the enemy position. There were screams and the rest of the Rhodesian men did, in fact, withdraw in disarray. The Luthuli Detachment had won its second battle, and was once again rewarded by retrieving abandoned food and ammunition.<sup>140</sup>

Later that night the unit left Tsholotsho and marched towards Plumtree on the Rhodesia-Botswana border. On the way, they saw shadows moving stealthily through the darkness and realised these were two of the Rhodesian soldiers who had become separated from the rest of the patrol. The guerrillas decided to capture and interrogate them to gain information on the movements of other Rhodesian forces in the area. However, an MK cadre named Mbijane, who either lacked discipline or was crazed as a result of the recent battle, opened fire, killing one soldier immediately. The other escaped and was not seen again. The guerrillas increased their pace after this incident, resting during the day and moving only at night.<sup>141</sup>

One evening, John Dube, the unit commander, changed into a captured army camouflage uniform and went ahead of the unit, alone. Disappearing into the forest, he evidently stumbled on a small group of white people wearing civilian clothes. He assumed that they were tourists and greeted them in Ndebele/Zulu, calling out, *sanibona bomzala* (hello my cousins). One of the men immediately went for his rifle and started shooting at Dube. The rest of the unit heard the shots and saw Dube running towards them, sweating. When they asked what had happened, he did not reply and just stood there with his eyes bulging. Hani swiftly ordered the cadres to take up combat positions, just as the Rhodesians came running into their encampment, and a battle ensued. One of the battle casualties was Major S Thomas Morgan Thomas, a highly decorated Rhodesian soldier who had been to Vietnam to train in counter-

140 Mali, 1993, p 50 and Berger, 1994, p 21.

141 Interviews with Justice Mpanza and Cletus Mzimela.

insurgency. Thomas was still alive when Mzimela reached him, and the commanders wanted to interrogate him about the Rhodesian presence in the area. However, while he and Hani were questioning Thomas, other Rhodesian soldiers fired on them, narrowly missing both of the guerrillas. The MK/ZIPRA unit returned fire, and while this exchange was going on, Mpanza shot and killed the prisoner. Mzimela and Hani were enraged. Just as Mbijane had done earlier, Mpanza had silenced a captive who could have been forced to reveal vital information about the enemy force movements.<sup>142</sup>

The next day, the guerrillas ambushed a Rhodesian platoon led by Lieutenant Smith, killing both him and a warrant officer, Timitiya, the second in command. The rest of the patrol fled, leaving behind their weapons and equipment, which the guerrillas duly collected.<sup>143</sup> Mzimela recalled:

Lieutenant Smith, who was leading the enemy, instructed his group to attack. One of them had a Sten gun. He was very dangerous. His name was Sergeant Timitiya. *Hayi!* He nearly destroyed us, that man. But we were not to be outclassed and returned fire with our AKs, which were superior to their FN rifles. We annihilated them because of the superiority of the AK rifle. We hit Smith and one of us also managed to shoot Timitiya dead. The others ran away. *Hayi*, we ran after them and shot at them – most of them were shot in the back. We found food in their bags – there were biscuits and clean water, while we were drinking muddy water, which we were sharing with elephants. We took possession of their guns and ate their food.<sup>144</sup>

On the same day, the guerrilla unit heard the sound of an aerial bombardment and realised that the Rhodesian forces were intending to camp in an area adjacent to their temporary shelter.<sup>145</sup> Two RAR platoons had decided to set up base together,<sup>146</sup> and the bombing run had been to clear the area and kill any ‘terrorists’ in the vicinity. The guerrillas realised that the enemy knew they were in the area, and had brought substantial reinforcements after their humiliating earlier defeat. The Rhodesian forces apparently believed they had hit the guerrilla camp from the air, and set up camp that night with the intention of hunting for guerrilla casualties the following day.<sup>147</sup>

According to Reid-Daly, a Rhodesian clearing patrol had come across two guerrillas dressed in captured Rhodesian army kit. After calling out a greeting to the patrol in the local language, Sindebele, the two opened fire, wounding

142 Interview with Cletus Mzimela.

143 Reid-Daly, 1989, p 153.

144 Interview with Cletus Mzimela.

145 Hani, 1986, p 37.

146 Reid-Daly, 1989, p 153.

147 Hani, 1986, p 37.

the warrant officer who was leading the patrol. However, the troops in the base camp ignored the gunfire, thinking it was part of the air strike.<sup>148</sup>

The commanders of the MK/ZIPRA unit decided to attack the Rhodesian forces that night. Chris Hani, James April, Douglas Wana, Victor Dlamini and Jack Simelane were among those chosen for the operation. They leopard-crawled through the bush to a position from which they threw several hand grenades into the camp, then opened fire with their AK47s and LMGs. The cadres had underestimated the number of Rhodesians in the camp and had to call for reinforcements, with whose help they were able to rout the Rhodesians. The latter fled after a 30-minute battle, leaving weapons and equipment behind that the guerrillas collected.<sup>149</sup>

After this battle, the guerrilla unit was running low on ammunition. Resupply from Lusaka was out of the question, and fearing that the Rhodesians would return with an even larger force, they decided to cross the border into northern Botswana after burying their dead. Hani asserted that the intention was 'to retreat to strategic parts of Botswana, refresh ourselves, heal those who were ill or wounded, acquire food supplies and then proceed with our original objective'.<sup>150</sup> Tshali said they had never intended making their way to Botswana, but just happened to find themselves close to the border. Hani and a few members of the unit went ahead to reconnoitre and became separated from the rest of the unit. They would not be reunited until after their arrest in Botswana.<sup>151</sup>

Mzimela claimed that he and the six guerrillas with him only realised they had crossed into Botswana when they were confronted by the police.<sup>152</sup> Nqose pointed out that if one was moving south through Rhodesia without knowing the terrain or having reliable maps, one would inevitably end up in Botswana.<sup>153</sup> Mpanza, on the other hand, recalled moving deliberately towards Botswana:

It was now very bad. This had been the second battle between the *boers* and us. Luckily enough we did not kill anyone, but we had to move out of the area quickly, because helicopters were searching for us. We were on the road for three days and nights, moving towards Botswana's border. When we found a small settlement, the men went to buy food for us, and they slaughtered a sheep. They already knew that we had beaten the *boers*, and warned us that there would be little room for us to manoeuvre, because we were heading for the Botswana border. They showed us the way – they acted as our guides. These people. They could not stop

148 Reid-Daly, 1989, pp 153-4.

149 Hani, 1986, p 37; interviews with General L Tshali and James April.

150 Hani, 1986, p 37.

151 Interview with General L Tshali.

152 Interview with Cletus Mzimela.

153 Interview with General Nqose.

praising us. We were now in Botswana, only to find out the authorities were waiting for us. We scattered, split and spread in different directions. I found myself running alone in a forest. Others were arrested. I stayed put for two days in the forest before deciding to proceed with my journey, knowing that I was in Botswana and I had my gun with me. I came across a plantation and decided to go inside. But while I was inside, I saw people pointing guns at me. Then I was taken away ... I was then taken to a camp where the others were kept. They were also arrested. I was locked up with them. I then denied the fact that I knew them. I said I was alone. Then I was separated from them and I was kept alone. But after a few days we were all taken to Francistown.<sup>154</sup>

There are various accounts of how different sections of the unit got to Botswana. When Dube, Hani and five other cadres went to find food and water, they left Lennox Lagu in charge. He was told that if Dube's group had not returned by dusk, he should assume they were in trouble. They did not return apparently because, as they were heading back to the camp, they saw a spotter plane flying overhead and realised that if they continued, they would give away the position of their waiting comrades. To save the unit, they retreated into Botswana, entering the country near Francistown, where they were rounded up and arrested by the police. Before leaving Lusaka, they had been instructed to surrender without resistance should they be forced to retreat into Botswana.<sup>155</sup> Nine days later, 16 other cadres also crossed the border into Botswana and surrendered to the police.<sup>156</sup>

Mzimela and the others thought that the Hani group had got lost when they tried to return to the camp, because the terrain all looked the same to unfamiliar eyes.<sup>157</sup> In the ensuing confusion of losing the two leading members of the unit, fighters dispersed in different directions. Mzimela and a few others marched for several days without food and water, observing helicopters and spotter planes flying a long distance away from their positions. The ZIPRA fighters with them decided to stay near an unidentified village and the six MK members marched on. They had no compass and were not at all sure what direction they were moving in. One morning, they found themselves on a farm. Mzimela and two other members of the unit changed into civilian clothes and approached a nearby village. They greeted an old man and asked him for directions to the nearest shop. He recognised them for what they were and told them that the shop was a full day's walk distant. He also warned them that soldiers frequently patrolled the area, and volunteered to get food supplies for them early the next morning.

154 Interview with Justice Mpanza.

155 Mali, 1993, pp 50-1; Berger, 1994, p 21.

156 Mali, 1993, p 51.

157 Interview with Cletus Mzimela.

Mzimela said they gave him money and retreated into the forest where they stayed the rest of that day and the night.<sup>158</sup> At dawn, they climbed to a position from which they had a good view of what was happening in the village below. They saw the old man start a tractor and drive away. Several hours later, they heard the tractor returning. That evening, three cadres went to the village to fetch the supplies and bought two sheep, which they slaughtered immediately. They spent two more nights in the bush, and on the morning of the fourth day, were discovered by the Botswana police. They were arrested and taken to Francistown, where they were reunited with Hani, James April and others. Until their arrest, the group had not realised they were in Botswana.<sup>159</sup>

The government had stepped up patrols along its border with Rhodesia following reports that the guerrillas were making their way to Botswana.<sup>160</sup> South African newspapers began reporting the capture of guerrillas in Botswana on 22 August. On that day it was recorded that 'nine suspected terrorists had been caught in a swoop by a Botswana police patrol on the Botswana-Rhodesia border'. A Botswana government spokesman stated: 'Our president, Sir Seretse Khama, has repeatedly made it clear that his government will not allow Botswana to be used as a stepping stone for subversive activities against its neighbouring states, no matter how unacceptable to Botswana the policies of these states might be.' The Rhodesian security forces claimed to have killed 14 guerrillas and captured another eight.<sup>161</sup> By the end of the month, 13 guerrillas had been captured in Botswana.<sup>162</sup>

Newspaper reports on 24 August provided coverage of a confrontation between another guerrilla group and Rhodesian security forces in Matabeleland. The *Rand Daily Mail* reported:

Five more armed African terrorists were killed by Rhodesian security forces in another bloody gun battle on the Rhodesian-Zambian border yesterday. A white officer and an African warrant officer were shot dead by the terrorists. A terrorist was captured and was being questioned last night. Yesterday was the third major anti-terrorist engagement in two weeks, bringing the death toll to 19 terrorists and four soldiers and policemen – one white and three African. A further three whites and one African – members of the security forces – have been wounded during that period. Only the barest details of yesterday's action have been given; the news came in a statement issued by the Rhodesian Information Ministry. The clash was in the Matabeleland bush area close to the Wankie Game Reserve.<sup>163</sup>

158 Ibid.

159 Ibid.

160 *Rand Daily Mail*, 21/8/1967.

161 *Rand Daily Mail*, 22/8/1967.

162 *Rand Daily Mail*, 30/8/1967.

510 163 *Rand Daily Mail*, 24/8/1967.

Two days later, the *Rand Daily Mail* reported that ‘combat planes were used for the first time as Rhodesian troops and police strove to drive a new gang of terrorists from the Botswana border area of Matabeleland. This included Hawker Hunter jets and helicopters’. The report added that this was ‘the largest group of terrorists so far reported, all African National Congress infiltrators, armed heavily with communist-made weapons, [and] was intercepted while making its way through the dense bush to Botswana’.<sup>164</sup> By the end of the month, the Rhodesians were claiming that only mopping-up operations remained. It was reported on 28 August that the guerrilla unit had been broken up, and that members of the advance guard had scattered. The unit was made up of approximately 100 guerrillas.<sup>165</sup> A day later it was reported that three guerrillas had been captured – two about 75 miles from the Rhodesian capital, Salisbury (now Harare), which is hundreds of kilometres from the Wankie Game Reserve.<sup>166</sup>

Basil February was one of the guerrillas in the Wankie campaign who was killed while on a special mission that called for his separation from the joint MK/ZIPRA force. February was part of the unit moving towards Lupane, that had the first confrontation with Rhodesian security forces on 13 August. Just before this, February – armed only with a pistol – was taken to a railway siding in the Wankie area with the intention of making his way to Salisbury. On the train a conductor whose suspicion was aroused because of February’s pale complexion, questioned him. He must have informed the authorities, because three Rhodesian policemen boarded the train at the next stop and confronted February, who fatally shot the white policeman and wounded the two black men with him. February escaped, making his way to Bulawayo by bicycle and car, killing a soldier manning a roadblock along the way. He stole another car in Bulawayo with the intention of driving to Salisbury but, by then, the Rhodesian forces had stepped up security following the first confrontation with the guerrilla force in the Wankie Game Reserve. It appears that February was stopped at a roadblock after taking a wrong turn towards Plumtree, and was killed together with a Rhodesian policeman.<sup>167</sup>

It is difficult to determine how many casualties were suffered on both sides during the Wankie campaign. Reid-Daly put the total guerrilla casualties at 30 dead and 20 captured, with seven members of the Rhodesian security forces killed and 13 wounded.<sup>168</sup> Young said that in the war that raged on the Western Front between early August and early September 1967, 40 ‘terrorists’ were killed and 20 arrested after escaping into Botswana. He also said that seven

164 *Rand Daily Mail*, 26/8/1967.

165 *Rand Daily Mail*, 28/8/1967.

166 *Rand Daily Mail*, 29/8/1967.

167 Rodgers, 1986, p 40. Towards the end of 2003, President Thabo Mbeki conferred the Mendi Decoration for Bravery (gold) on Basil February posthumously for his role in the Wankie campaign.

168 Reid-Daly, 1989, pp 154-5.

black and white members of the Rhodesian security forces were killed and that 'in a show of solidarity, an African soldier rescued a white officer under fire and a white officer lost his life rescuing an African soldier'.<sup>169</sup> Authors Paul Moorcroft and Peter McLaughlin put the figures for the first major operations of the war in August 1967 at 47 insurgents killed in three weeks, and 20 captured. They gave no figures for security force casualties.<sup>170</sup> Relying on official reports, the press put the number of guerrillas at 31 dead and 32 captured during August 1967.<sup>171</sup>

Shubin later noted various contradictions in the official statistics for the Wankie campaign casualties. While the head of South Africa's security police announced that 29 of those killed in Rhodesia during August 1967 were South African, the Minister of Police and of the Interior said in October 1967 that 35 'ANC terrorists' had been killed in Rhodesia.<sup>172</sup>

Likewise, interviews with guerrillas who participated in the Wankie campaign suggest higher security force casualties than the official statistics do. For instance, Mpanza put the number of fatalities among the Rhodesian forces at 33.<sup>173</sup> Mzimela remembered some of the prominent Rhodesian soldiers that they killed, including Lieutenant Smith, Sergeant Timitiya and Major Thomas.<sup>174</sup>

The ANC put the number of MK casualties in the entire Wankie campaign at 25, with 11 dying during or as a result of the battle on 13 August, four in the second battle on 21 August, four in the third battle on 22 August and six during other confrontations in the Wankie area.<sup>175</sup> An unofficial Rhodesian Roll of Honour put the number of soldiers lost during the same period at eight: two each on 13 and 22 August, three on 23 August and one on 24 September.<sup>176</sup>

*Keesing's Contemporary Archives* records that a report in the London *Daily Telegraph* from a correspondent in Salisbury on 10 September put the size of the South African security force in Rhodesia at no more than 50 policemen experienced in anti-terrorist warfare, a squadron of 10 Saracen armoured cars manned by policemen, four Alouette helicopters and at least two spotter planes.<sup>177</sup> It appears that the South African government underestimated the military capability of the guerrillas involved in the battles by sending policemen instead of soldiers. The policemen were not trained for military operations, and proved inadequate against a trained guerrilla unit. Those who were

169 Young, 1969, p 518.

170 Moorcroft and McLaughlin, 1982, pp 19-20.

171 *Rand Daily Mail*, 29/8/1967; Horrell, 1968, pp 66-7.

172 Shubin, 1999, p 79.

173 Interviews with Justice Mpanza and Cletus Mzimela.

174 Interview with Cletus Mzimela.

175 *List of ANC Members who Died in Exile*, ANC submission to the TRC, [www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/deathlst.html](http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/deathlst.html).

176 *Rhodesian Roll of Honour*, [www.mazoe.com/ROH](http://www.mazoe.com/ROH).

512 177 *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, 23-30 September 1967, p 22273.

deployed in Rhodesia had only been trained to control riots, wrote Reid-Daly, 'which is perfectly useless for a bush war. Operationally they did not achieve a great deal, and indeed they suffered many casualties'.<sup>178</sup>

Thirion, who was sent to Rhodesia by Military Intelligence to assess their performance, said of the South African policemen: 'They weren't well trained. I mean, you can train people, but it also has to do with the mindset. You can't take policemen, give them a little bit of training and turn them into soldiers overnight'.<sup>179</sup> Initially, Vorster believed that the joint South African-Rhodesian counter-insurgency operations against the guerrillas would be of brief duration, but the first clashes with the guerrillas showed that the South African policemen would have to stay in Rhodesia for some time if they were to achieve the desired results.<sup>180</sup>

Throughout the Wankie campaign, the MK units acquitted themselves admirably in battle. Msimang pointed out that quite a number of the guerrillas returned to Zambia after their release from prison in Botswana wearing Rhodesian uniforms and carrying some of the arms they had captured from the security forces.<sup>181</sup> Many guerrillas who took part in the campaign attested to complete surprise on the part of the Rhodesian forces,<sup>182</sup> who had not envisaged that the 'terrorists' would stand their ground and be equipped with modern weapons. Both factors sent shockwaves through the ranks of the political and military leadership in Rhodesia and South Africa,<sup>183</sup> and greatly boosted the morale of the cadres. Chris Hani later said of the first battle:

For us that day was a day of celebration, because with our own eyes we had seen the enemy run. We had seen the enemy frozen with fear. We had also observed each other reacting to the enemy's attack. A feeling of faith in one another and recognition of the courage of the unit developed.<sup>184</sup>

Fighters displayed high levels of discipline and strong nerves under fire, and demonstrated unprecedented courage in the face of danger. Michael Morris, a South African policeman, later wrote: 'The tactical skill and other attributes of the group showed clearly that they were vastly better trained, much tougher and more adequately equipped and armed than the groups that had previously forayed southwards'.<sup>185</sup>

In a letter to ES Reddy, Principal Secretary of the UN's special committee against apartheid on 31 August 1967, Tambo made the following observation:

178 Reid-Daly, 1989, p 159. Vorster had strong links with the police, and this is one factor that led to the deployment of South African police in Rhodesia.

179 Interview with General Chris Thirion.

180 *Rand Daily Mail*, 25 September 1967.

181 Interview with Mavuso (Walter) Msimang.

182 Interview with Justice Mpanza.

183 *Rand Daily Mail*, 26/8/1967, 28/9/1967; Horrell, 1967, p 67; Shubin, 1999, pp 78-9.

184 Hani, 1986, p 36; Shubin, 1999, p 79.

185 Morris, 1971, p 41.

The situation in Rhodesia seems to be taking a turn for the better from the point of view of those who support and work for the African cause in that country. Rhodesia is an indivisible part of southern Africa, hence the predictable involvement of South Africa in the battles which our Freedom Fighters are waging stubbornly and courageously in the bushes of Matabeleland. Soon the whole area, and I repeat, the WHOLE area of southern Africa, will be caught up in the crisis. Unfortunately, what happened at Wankie was the beginning of a racial war, which may escalate into an international conflagration. Certainly, for us, the alternative to war disappeared when South Africa rejected the solution so ably and effectively advocated by the ANC under the leadership of the now late Chief Luthuli. With his death on 21 July this year, the last hope for South Africa went.<sup>186</sup>

### The Sipolilo battles (the Eastern Front)

The Wankie battles, which subsequently became known as the Western Front,<sup>187</sup> lasted from 13 August to mid-September 1967. MK headquarters in Lusaka were able to follow events in Wankie, and when they heard of the ongoing clashes, decided to send another unit to Rhodesia to divert the enemy's attention. The plan was to attack the enemy from the east, towards Sipolilo,<sup>188</sup> thereby opening up a second front that would place the Rhodesian forces under pressure from two sides. Msimang recalled:

It became very clear that we needed to reconsider the strategy. We couldn't send more people down the same route. I remember sitting with Oliver Tambo – I was in the High Command of MK, in charge of communications, and when we formed the Joint Command with the ZAPU people, ZIPRA, I also went into the Joint Command structure. We discussed a regrouping, and my own views were that we would only go to South Africa through Zimbabwe. There was an armed struggle taking place there, conditions were okay, but we needed to prepare a lot better than we had done in Wankie. And the preparations started and we went to the east – to Sipolilo, the Eastern Front. That was prepared for a lot better than the Western Front, than the Wankie campaign. The first reconnaissance was carried out by, I think, some ANC guys including myself, and ZIPRA people. And I remember us going across, going right into Zimbabwe, and it was a godforsaken place. There was just nothing, and we went in, came back and said, 'Guys, it's clear ... it's clear'.<sup>189</sup>

186 Oliver Tambo to ES Reddy: Extracts from Letters, 1964-1973, [www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/or/or-es.html](http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/or/or-es.html).

187 Shubin, 1999, p 78.

188 Sipolilo lies in the Urungwe Tribal Trust Land.

514 189 Interview with Mavuso (Walter) Msimang.

Unlike the Western Front – where the MK unit was split in two, one group heading for South Africa to establish bases, the other remaining in Zimbabwe as support for the units that would follow – the objectives of MK's participation on the Eastern Front were not as clear-cut. According to Ralph Mzamo, the intention was to make contact with local inhabitants and train them to organise and participate in the armed struggle.<sup>190</sup> The plan seemed to be to assist ZIPRA to mount attacks on the enemy forces so that a second route could be opened up. The joint MK/ZIPRA operation that subsequently became known as the Sipolilo campaign ran from December 1967 to July 1968. Three large groups of guerrillas crossed into Zimbabwe during this period.

Boston Gagarin again played a pivotal role in getting the first group across the Zambezi River in December 1967.<sup>191</sup> In addition to taking the guerrillas across, his reconnaissance team had to transport 61 crates of ammunition, 10 bags of rifles and a box of explosives into Rhodesia.<sup>192</sup> This crossing was therefore more difficult than the August operation had been, and some arms and ammunition were lost in the process. However, this unit was better equipped than the Luthuli Detachment, and had communications equipment such as a Braun 12-band worldwide receiver.<sup>193</sup> The crossing was made on the night of 29 December at the confluence of the Zambezi and Chewore Rivers,<sup>194</sup> using the same methods employed in August.<sup>195</sup> RMT Ngqungwana reported:

A long, thick rope was tied to the raft and at the other end to a tree. It was pushed into the water. A few metres from the bank five men boarded the raft. Boston swam alongside, guiding the raft by muscle power. From the river bank, we had to control the rope so that the raft did not move too fast. Guluva, one of the frogmen, came running from behind, carrying a small boat, and jumped into the water with it, the boat touching the surface just before he did. But the boat could only carry three men at a time, so Guluva had to remain in the water while the others crossed. Afterwards, he looked as if he had just gone for a short swim in a municipal swimming pool, where the deep water was seven feet ...<sup>196</sup>

The Pyramid Detachment, as it became known, was made up of 74 ZIPRA and 26 MK guerrillas under the command of Moffat Hadebe, a member of ZIPRA.<sup>197</sup>

190 Interview with R Mzamo.

191 RMT Ngqungwana, 'Zambezi Took a Share', *Dawn*, Souvenir Issue, 25th Anniversary of MK, 1986, p 41.

192 Ngqungwana, 1986, p 41.

193 Shubin, 1999, p 78.

194 *Ibid*; Moorcroft and McLaughlin, 1982, p 21; Meredith, 1980, p 69; Cilliers, 1985, p 7. These authors all put the number of guerrillas who crossed into Rhodesia between December 1967 and January 1968 at 123, whereas Reid-Daly puts it at 125.

195 Ngqungwana, 1986, p 42.

196 *Ibid*, p 41.

197 Interview with Ralph Mzamo, conducted by Julie Frederikse, June 1988, London, Wits AL2460, South African History Archives, University of the Witwatersrand.

Members included Ike Maphoto, Ralph Mzamo, Kenneth Mzati, Raymond Chitambo, Felix Gcayiya and Jimmy Mopedi. The unit was to confront the Rhodesian forces only three months after crossing the Zambezi River, but like the Luthuli Detachment, the guerrillas had insufficient food supplies, and were both hungry and weary by the time the fighting began.<sup>198</sup>

In February 1968, another group of approximately 100 fighters crossed the Zambezi in the mountainous region between the Victoria Falls and Lake Kariba.<sup>199</sup> A third group of 91 guerrillas followed in July, crossing near the border post at Chirundu and heading southwest towards Lupane.<sup>200</sup>

Jimmy Mopedi was in the first platoon from the Pyramid Detachment to set up a base in Rhodesia. Assisted by the MK commander-in-chief Joe Modise and ZAPU members who had carried out the reconnaissance work, Mopedi's group was later joined by other platoons. The whole detachment was then reorganised into four platoons to facilitate the establishment of six more bases in Rhodesia.<sup>201</sup> Each base had an engineering unit and a reconnaissance team. Together, they reconnoitred the locations and prepared hideouts and storage places for arms, ammunition and food. During the first three months their radio equipment was in excellent condition and the operators well trained, and they maintained regular contact with headquarters in Zambia. Meat was abundant, according to Mopedi, because they were able to shoot game.<sup>202</sup> Reid-Daly noted that the base camps were established by a group of 125 guerrillas about 20 km apart across the floor of the uninhabited Zambezi Valley, and speculated that the intention was to establish a permanent infiltration route south of the escarpment.<sup>203</sup>

The first contact between the guerrillas and the Rhodesian forces occurred on 18 March.<sup>204</sup> As with the Luthuli Detachment during the Wankie campaign, there has been much speculation about how the Pyramid Detachment was detected. One theory is that enemy agents had infiltrated both MK and ZIPRA in Zambia and that they alerted the Rhodesian authorities to the new routes.<sup>205</sup> Another possible explanation is that, at the time, there was a tendency among the Rhodesian liberation movements to underrate the serious need to mobilise support on the ground. There was a pervading romanticised notion that all the liberation movements needed to do was train a few guerrillas and send them home to fire a few shots in order to spark a spontaneous popular uprising against white domination by the African population. The leaders would then

198 Interview with Isaac Maphoto.

199 South Africa's Deputy Minister of Police, *Hansard*, 'National Assembly Debates', col 4118, 25 April 1968; Horrell, 1968, pp 65-6.

200 Horrell, 1968, p 66; Meredith, 1980, p 69; Morris, 1971, p 65; Cilliers, 1985, pp 7-9.

201 JM, 'On the Eastern Front', in Mercer and Mercer, 1974, p 92. Eric Mtshali identified JM as Jimmy Mopedi, telephone conversation with J Sithole, 12 July 2003.

202 JM, 1974, p 92.

203 Reid-Daly, 1989, p 161.

204 Lodge, 1983, p 299.

516 205 Interview with Eric Mtshali.

emerge and sweep the people to victory.<sup>206</sup> Some critics believe that both ZAPU and the ANC underestimated the importance of garnering support among the civilian population as a way of camouflaging guerrilla fighters, and made the tactical error of seeing the sparsely populated Zambezi Valley as a natural infiltration route. In fact, the choice may have made it easier for the Rhodesian security forces to identify and track insurgents.<sup>207</sup>

While that argument seems persuasive seen against the lack of organised political structures in both Rhodesia and South Africa in the period immediately after UDI<sup>208</sup> and the Rivonia arrests, it is difficult to reconcile with the ANC, in particular, whose leaders in exile took the business of building support extremely seriously, both in Africa and abroad. In addition, it was the very reluctance of the ANC leadership to send cadres back to South Africa after the collapse of the underground network so vital to their survival, that gave rise to dissent in the military training camps prior to the 1967-8 campaigns.<sup>209</sup>

Reid-Daly, Morris, Mopedi and Msimang all concluded that the Pyramid Detachment's presence was detected by a game warden who found human spoor where none was expected.<sup>210</sup> According to Mopedi, during the two months that the cadres spent hiding out in the mountains while waiting for local comrades to contact them, they noticed that a road was under construction between town A and town B (probably Kariba and Karoi). The road was a few miles from River C (presumably the Angwa). The guerrillas had to move to and from their base, and one of them had left a footprint at the side of the road used by Rhodesian security force patrols.<sup>211</sup> The print was distinctive, because the Czechoslovakian boots issued to the MK guerrillas had a figure eight on the sole, and the same prints had been identified by the security forces during the Wankie campaign.<sup>212</sup>

The area was heavily patrolled by two Land Rovers at two-hour intervals.<sup>213</sup> Within days of the telltale footprint being found, Rhodesian troops were ordered to report for duty on 13 March. Over the next week, tracker teams, supported by helicopters and light aircraft, scoured the area<sup>214</sup> from the Zambezi to Sipolilo in the east, their presence blocking all escape routes into Zambia.<sup>215</sup> On 18 March, the security forces found fresh spoor and followed the trail for about two kilometres to the guerrilla position.<sup>216</sup>

206 See Martin and Johnson, 1981, pp 10-1.

207 Cilliers, 1985, p 9.

208 See Astrow, 1983, p 40.

209 Interview with Eric Mtshali.

210 Reid-Daly, 1989, p 161; Morris, 1971, pp 57-8; JM, 1974, pp 92-3; interview with Mavuso (Walter) Msimang.

211 JM, 1974, pp 92-3.

212 Interview with Mavuso (Walter) Msimang.

213 JM, 1974, p 92.

214 Reid-Daly, 1989, p 161.

215 Interview with Mavuso (Walter) Msimang.

216 Reid-Daly, 1989, p 161.

As it happened, the detachment had been experiencing major problems with its radio equipment, and communication between the platoons, as well as with MK headquarters, had broken down. All the main guerrilla force knew was that enemy aircraft were dropping troops about 24 miles from their position. Around 6 am on the morning of 18 March, members of the detachment slipped through the enemy lines and made their way to Base Six to find out what was happening. They found a group of their comrades waiting, and quickly organised defences.<sup>217</sup>

At about 11 am the Rhodesian helicopters and aircraft began hovering overhead and signalled the position of the camp to the forces on the ground. Three hours later, scouts reported to the guerrilla commander that the Rhodesians were approaching the base.<sup>218</sup> By late afternoon, the first assault had been repulsed, thanks to the guerrilla force's light machine-guns. The initial attackers were wiped out, with the exception of two who escaped into the bush across a small stream.<sup>219</sup> But, according to Mopedi, knowing that the security forces would attack again, the guerrillas laid a well-planned ambush, and inflicted further heavy casualties on the Rhodesians. Because they had been killed on open ground, it was not possible for the guerrillas to capture the arms and equipment of the dead Rhodesians, as this would have exposed them to fire from the hovering helicopters. Instead, they retreated swiftly, anticipating that fighter jets would be called in to bomb the area. The battle lasted all afternoon, and the guerrillas were delighted that they suffered no fatalities, according to Mopedi.<sup>220</sup>

However, Reid-Daly claimed that the casualties were 11 dead 'terrorists', one dead and two wounded on the Rhodesian side.<sup>221</sup> The ANC also listed four MK casualties on that day.<sup>222</sup>

After the battle, the detachment abandoned Base Six. This first engagement with the Rhodesian security forces had shown how vulnerable the guerrillas were in a large group. The Pyramid Detachment had been 100 strong when it crossed into Rhodesia, but one member had been lost on the banks of the Zambezi, when he accidentally shot himself while cleaning his rifle.<sup>223</sup> Now the detachment split up into smaller groups of 18 to 24 members each that began making their separate ways to a new assembly point, on top of a cliff.<sup>224</sup>

Mopedi's unit marched west first, then turned south, but in the darkness they missed the rendezvous. They realised their error in the morning, but it

217 JM, 1974, p 92; Shubin, 1999, p 78; interview with Ralph Mzamo.

218 JM, 1974, p 93; Shubin, 1999, p 78.

219 JM, 1974, p 93.

220 Ibid.

221 Reid-Daly, 1989, p 162.

222 From the *List of ANC Members who Died in Exile*.

223 ZNA: MS 591/4, statement written by Isaac Maphoto, MK member captured in Rhodesia in 1968, September 1980.

518 224 JM, 1974, p 93.

was too late to backtrack, as they would have run into the enemy. After 14 days, the unit ran out of food and five guerrillas were sent to the nearest village to obtain food from the inhabitants, while another two were despatched to buy food from the closest shop. The latter were intercepted by the police, who demanded to see their passes. One of the guerrillas drew his pistol and the policemen fled, leaving their bicycles behind. While returning to their unit to raise the alarm about having been discovered, the guerrillas were ambushed, and one was killed. When the second man rejoined his comrades, the commander decided to avenge the dead freedom fighter, and around 7.15 pm they attacked a security force platoon, which was forced to flee, leaving its food lorry on fire. The retreating soldiers called for an air strike, and the guerrillas were forced to retreat without capturing any supplies. The next morning, they again clashed with the security forces, in a battle that left four freedom fighters and 12 Rhodesians dead, according to Mopedi.<sup>225</sup>

After airlifting their wounded, the Rhodesians bombarded the position from the air until 5.40 pm. The guerrillas had retreated some 800 yards from the target area and realised that the Rhodesians had no idea of their exact location. Due to the intensive bombing, however, they had to bury their dead at night, before leaving the area. Five days later they crossed a river (most likely the Hunyani) as enemy aircraft patrolled overhead and set up a temporary base. Mopedi and 13 others went to a nearby village to look for food, leaving the detachment commander and seven other guerrillas at the base. When the food party returned the next morning, they found the base deserted and their belongings scattered over the terrain. There was no sign of their comrades and Mopedi assumed that the security forces had raided the camp and either captured or killed the missing men. He and the remaining cadres set off in the direction of the village once more and made camp about 10 miles away, before going to seek help from the inhabitants.<sup>226</sup>

An old man, a ZAPU supporter, told them that the security forces suspected everyone in the village of either being a 'terrorist' or of harbouring guerrillas. Some of the young men had been arrested and tortured by the police, and the supply of canned food was being rationed to prevent freedom fighters from stocking up. With the help of the old man, Mopedi's unit organised villagers to commit acts of sabotage and make contact with other ZAPU supporters in the vicinity. They also linked up with Tswimbo, a cadre who had been tended by some of the villagers since being wounded. His caregivers insisted that the guerrillas visit the local *Maswikiro* (spirit medium).<sup>227</sup> Although they were not keen, refusal would have offended the people who had offered them hospitality and protection, so after a long and sometimes heated debate, Tswimbo and a villager went to the *Maswikiro*, who told them he would shroud the movements of the guerrillas in thick mist.<sup>228</sup>

225 Ibid, p 94.

226 Ibid, pp 94-5.

227 Most of the fighters who resisted these beliefs were South African.

228 JM, 1974, pp 95-6.

On their way back to the village, they were stopped and questioned by a Special Branch policeman. The following morning, the villager who had accompanied Tswimbo was arrested and revealed everything. The old man was shot dead on his way to the guerrilla camp, and the police and soldiers combed the entire area until they found and attacked the camp. Mopedi was wounded during the fighting and was eventually taken to a safe house where he was able to recuperate. The rest of the unit withdrew from the area, leaving him behind.<sup>229</sup>

Ralph Mzamo offered another version of events on the Eastern Front. He contended that the Pyramid Detachment's objective was to make contact with local villagers and train them to prepare for the armed revolution. Under the leadership of ZAPU commander Moffat Hadebe, it took about three months before they made contact with the Rhodesian security forces. By that time they had run out of food and had resorted to killing wild animals, including elephants and iguanas. They also ran out of salt and began to suffer from iron deficiency, which particularly affected their knees and elbows. Many collapsed, especially city dwellers like Mzamo, born and bred in Port Elizabeth. The terrain proved difficult to master, because they had to march up an escarpment without adequate cover to build a temporary base for recuperation.<sup>230</sup>

When the first contact with the security forces took place, the guerrillas were already tired. Without regard for the possible dangers, a few of them went to buy food at a village store. The first trip passed without incident but on their second visit, the cadres were arrested and interrogated by the Special Branch. Rhodesian forces cordoned off the area and began searching for the rest of the unit. Mzamo claimed that the villagers had informed the police about the presence of strangers, resulting in surveillance of all the shops and the eventual discovery of the guerrillas.<sup>231</sup> In May 1968, Mzamo's unit was ambushed, and he was among those captured.<sup>232</sup>

Mzamo firmly believed that contact with the local inhabitants, mainly farm workers, was the main reason the guerrilla force was detected. Not only were they strangers to the area, but their relatively good clothes were in sharp con-

229 JM, 1974, p 96. Ronnie Kasrils gave the name of the wounded fighter who visited the *Swikiro* as Cele. According to Kasrils, the *Swikiro* examined Cele's wound and said he understood that he had been under great danger and would cast a spell of mist to protect him from further danger. Early the next morning, the security forces came looking for the old man and his two friends. The old man had risen early to collect firewood, and saw the soldiers surround the huts and open fire on the occupants. He fled to warn the guerrillas, who had already been alerted by gunfire and the sound of a helicopter. The freedom fighters saw the old man heading towards their base, pursued by the soldiers. When he realised that he would not be able to reach the safety of the camp, he changed direction and led his pursuers away from the camp. He was hit by machine-gun fire as he crossed a stream (Kasrils, 1998, p 129).

230 Interview with Ralph Mzamo.

231 Ibid.

232 Ibid.

trast to the tattered and dirty overalls worn by the farm labourers, and made them easily recognisable.<sup>233</sup> Whenever local inhabitants were encountered, a guerrilla who spoke the dialect of the area was chosen as a spokesperson and the rest had strict instructions not to speak. Mzamo explained:

You know I speak Shona. I speak Ndebele, but as soon as I open my mouth in Bulawayo – as soon as I open my mouth and speak Ndebele you will find, you know, somebody asking me, ‘Are you Fingo?’ meaning, do I come from the Fingo location about 25 miles east of Bulawayo.<sup>234</sup>

According to Mzamo, reaction of the local population varied from person to person. Some were afraid of the guerrillas, some hated them and wanted nothing to do with them, while others welcomed and supported them.<sup>235</sup>

The ANC, however, claimed that there was a good working relationship between inhabitants of the Sipolilo area and the guerrillas. Alfred Kgokong, Director of Publicity, wrote:

Our guerrillas had been working among the masses in this area for several months before the current phase of fighting. This fact alone testifies to the enthusiastic cooperation of the masses with the Freedom Fighters and again shows that without this mass support, the vicious, all-out military onslaught of the white racist forces would have been most devastating.<sup>236</sup>

In addition to attacking Mzamo’s unit, the security forces also found the base on top of the cliff where the two sections of the Pyramid Detachment had planned to meet. The camp was bombed, but it is not clear whether any MK or ZIPRA members were there at the time.<sup>237</sup>

On 15 April 1968, the ANC leadership published its account of the Sipolilo campaign in its official newsletter, *Mayibuye*:

Bitter and fierce struggles are taking place in Zimbabwe at places widely separated from each other and in the north and south of the country. On 2 April, after eliminating an army reservist and a trooper, the guerrillas laid an ambush for the pursuing troops. In the ensuing battle 22 troops lay dead. This engagement took place in the Acturus district. On the same day, in a mutual support attack, guerrillas operating in the southern part of the country also saw battle: rather a one-sided battle. At a construction site on the Ngwizi River some 20 to 30 miles south of Plumtree near the Botswana border, an army patrol was engaged by the guerrillas in a dra-

233 Ibid.

234 Ibid.

235 Ibid.

236 Report to TANU, 27 March 1968, ANC Morogoro Papers, ANC Archives, UFH.

237 Horrell, 1968, p 66.

matic daylight attack and 35 enemy troops were wiped out, 25 of them Rhodesian and the rest South Africans. The surviving enemy troops fled to the construction site, but they were resolutely pursued by our men and continued their flight into the bush. The fiercest battle of the current guerrilla campaign took place near Mazoe on 3 April. Our guerrillas wiped out 72 army troops. Some well-informed sources have given the number of South African troops killed in the recent battles as 42.<sup>238</sup>

Michael M Morris recorded the Rhodesian and South African forces' account of the Sipolilo battles. According to Morris, on 14 March a ranger from the Rhodesian Department of Parks and Wildlife discovered a well-worn path leading towards the Chiramambakadoma Hill. On closer examination he noticed distinctive prints that had clearly not been made by Africans living in the area. He estimated that at least 40 men had tramped the path, and notified the police immediately. From their hiding place, the guerrillas watched the police inspecting the path but held their fire, because their orders were not to confront the security forces until they were well entrenched. Subsequently, the Rhodesian security forces found more evidence that a large group of guerrillas was in the area.<sup>239</sup>

Morris puts the date of the first skirmish at 18 March, in the vicinity of Mana Pools on the Angwa River. The guerrillas had constructed defences on the side of a hill, and despite a lengthy battle, the security forces were unable to dislodge them. They then called in air strikes, and because a number of guerrillas had abandoned their temporary positions in anticipation of aerial attack, the casualty toll was limited to 11 dead guerrillas and three Rhodesians, according to Morris. Afterwards, the guerrillas split up into four sections, each withdrawing in a different direction. In the days that followed, the security forces adopted 'search and destroy' tactics, gradually forcing the guerrillas to break up into even smaller groups. They were hampered by continuous harassment from the security forces, and by lack of food, communication and military equipment. Morris claimed that these operations resulted in the deaths of a large number of guerrillas, although their commander, Moffat Hadebe, escaped, only to be arrested later by Portuguese forces in Mozambique.<sup>240</sup>

March and May 1968 brought reports of fierce fighting in the Zambezi Valley, involving the second wave of guerrillas who crossed into Rhodesia in February. Maphoto, who was a member of that unit, recalled that following an encounter with Rhodesian soldiers on the banks of the Zambezi,<sup>241</sup> they withdrew and marched for several weeks without incident until they ran into an ambush in May. Those who escaped were forced to retreat into Zambia.<sup>242</sup>

238 Cited in 'Smith-Vorster Lies Exposed', *Sechaba*, 2 (7), July 1968, p 1.

239 Morris, 1971, pp 57-8.

240 Ibid, p 59.

241 ZNA: MS 591/4, statement written by Isaac Maphoto.

242 Shubin, 1999, p 78.

On 12 July, fresh clashes occurred when 21 ZAPU soldiers entered Rhodesia at the confluence of the Zambezi and Gwaai Rivers, destined for Hartley, and a separate group of 38 guerrillas crossed at the Cheware River confluence. The following day, another 28 crossed into the Chirundu district and headed for Lupane. The Rhodesian forces killed 15 guerrillas on 12 July and captured several more. The next day, the South African forces killed 24 insurgents and captured another three. Morris observed:

The kill and capture ratio is extraordinarily high and speaks volumes for the courage, dedication, willingness and purposefulness of the South African men on the border. The South Africans lost Daniel du Toit, who was shot in the head and became the first South African casualty. Four South Africans and two Rhodesians were wounded.<sup>243</sup>

The General Blue Book signed by the Rhodesian Secretary for Defence, Eldon Trollip, put security force losses for 1968 at seven dead and 15 wounded.<sup>244</sup> The fighting had a demoralising effect on the young Rhodesian soldiers and the *Sunday Times* observed: 'Young Rhodesian soldiers, many of them teenagers, experiencing war for the first time, have seen six of their comrades die in the bush and nine injured.'<sup>245</sup>

It is all but impossible to determine the exact number of casualties during the Sipolilo campaign. Both the Rhodesians and the guerrillas were anxious to conceal their own losses and inflate those of the opposing side. Official reports claimed that 55 guerrillas had been killed by the end of April 1968, with six white and one African security force deaths and one seriously wounded.<sup>246</sup> The police reported that they had killed 25 guerrillas by the end of July 1968.<sup>247</sup> The Rhodesian Minister of Defence told the media that more than 160 'terrorists' had been killed by December 1968 and that a considerable number of others had surrendered, been captured or forced to seek refuge in neighbouring countries.<sup>248</sup> It is important to note that the Smith and Vorster regimes never revealed the true number of security force casualties suffered during the liberation wars.

Jimmy Mopedi claimed that his unit killed 12 Rhodesian soldiers during the first encounter of the Sipolilo campaign,<sup>249</sup> but said they could not count the number of enemy dead during the second encounter because an air strike forced them to make a hasty retreat.<sup>250</sup> He put enemy fatalities in the third

243 Morris, 1974, p 65.

244 Ibid.

245 *Sunday Times*, 14/4/1968.

246 Horrell, 1968, p 66.

247 Ibid; *Rand Daily Mail*, 28/8/1968.

248 *Star*, 27/12/1968; Horrell, 1969, p 73.

249 JM, 1974, p 93.

250 Ibid, p 94.

encounter at 12 as well.<sup>251</sup> An ANC/ZAPU communiqué on 25 July 1968 put the Rhodesian dead at 33, with several more wounded.<sup>252</sup>

The most reliable source would be the list of casualties published later by each side to honour their dead. The ANC list of those who died in exile names 23 cadres killed during the Sipolilo campaigns,<sup>253</sup> while an unofficial Rhodesian Roll of Honour lists two dead on 18 March, four on 26 March, one on 10 April and one in an unidentified battle.<sup>254</sup>

Newspaper accounts of the Sipolilo campaign reveal a measure of admiration and respect for the guerrillas. On 7 April 1968, the *Sunday Times* in South Africa reported: 'Terrorists in the new incursions are proving better armed, better equipped, better trained, and tougher than those in previous forays.'<sup>255</sup> The London *Daily Telegraph* said:

In their initial contacts with the security forces, the terrorists displayed a high degree of skill in laying ambushes, concealing their camps and covering their tracks when pursued. They fought hard and well in confrontations, and their ability to trek many miles through the hazardous bush carrying weapons and 200 lb packs bore testimony to the degree of their training.<sup>256</sup>

Moffat Hadebe, the commander of the Sipolilo campaign, hid in the bush with one of his men for seven months before being captured by Portuguese forces in Mozambique.<sup>257</sup> The guerrillas who survived the Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns were either captured in Rhodesia and Botswana, or managed to make their way back to Zambia. A few of those who were captured switched loyalties and joined Rhodesia's Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) or the Bureau of State Security (BOSS) in South Africa.<sup>258</sup> Only a small number of MK members who participated in the Wankie campaign managed to make their way to South Africa.

### Prisoners in Rhodesia

The Rhodesian government responded to the Wankie campaign by passing legislation in September 1967, making it a capital offence for anyone to be found in possession of 'arms of war'. Intended to strengthen the existing Law and

251 Ibid.

252 Ibid.

253 From the *List of ANC Members who Died in Exile*. The list of security force casualties could not be found.

254 *Rhodesian Roll of Honour*, [www.mazoe.com/ROH](http://www.mazoe.com/ROH).

255 *Sunday Times*, 7/4/1968.

256 *Daily Telegraph*, 7/5/1968.

257 Horrell, 1968, p 66.

258 Ken Flower, *Serving Secretly: Rhodesia's CIO Chief on Record*, Galago, Alberton, 1987, p 105.

Order (Maintenance) Act (LOMA), which allowed for a maximum prison sentence of 20 years, the amendment

... laid down that any persons found in possession of 'arms of war' – defined as grenades, bombs, or similar missiles or devices, explosives, ammunition, or firearms – would be 'subject to the death sentence unless he can prove beyond reasonable doubt that he had no intention of endangering the maintenance of law and order in Rhodesia or a neighbouring country'. It also provided for imprisonment of up to 30 years for anyone committing any act of terrorism or sabotage.<sup>259</sup>

On 9 November 1967, Robert Dube, Jeffrey Ngwenya, Joseph Ndhlovu, Freddy Mnisi, Jackson Mpala, Actwell Siwela and Jonathan Moyo were found guilty in the Rhodesian High Court of the murders of Corporal Davison and Private Korani of the Rhodesian African Rifles. They had initially been charged, in August 1967, with unlawful possession of offensive weapons and materials, including hand grenades classified as 'bombs' in terms of Section 36 (1) of the LOMA.<sup>260</sup> All seven were sentenced to death and their appeals were dismissed.

Moyo had admitted in a statement that he was the leader of the unit during the battle and was actively involved. He told police at the scene: 'Our aim was to fight, not to surrender.'<sup>261</sup> During the trial, however, he maintained a defiant silence. The court was unable to prove which of the accused had fired the fatal shots, but concluded that all of them had fired their weapons at some point during the battle, and convicted them on the basis of common purpose.<sup>262</sup>

Three weeks later, William Motau, Tennis Khumalo, Kayeni Dube, Abel Moyo, Morris Ncube, Harry Hadebe and Thula Bophela were convicted of the murders of Sergeant Major Timitiya and Lieutenant Smith of the RAR, also during the Wankie campaign. The state claimed they had been found in possession of offensive weapons and materials, including rockets and grenades, on 22 August. Abel Moyo, Morris Ncube, Harry Hadebe and Thula Bophela were also found guilty of murdering Patrol Officer Thomas of the BSAP and Lance Corporal Cosmos of the RAR. They were also accused of throwing hand grenades and wounding several members of the security forces in contravention of Section 37 of the LOMA. All seven were sentenced to death. Handing down his judgment, Mr Justice D Davies said:

All the accused were enthusiastic supporters of the cause of terrorism for which they entered this country, and of course their offences are extremely serious. This much can be said for them, that however misguided they were in their beliefs, they fought as soldiers with their own

259 *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, 23-30 September 1967, p 22273.

260 Rhodes University, *Rhodesian Cabinet Memoranda (RCM)*, Part 1, 1968. Note of a discussion between the Prime Minister and the security advisers, 10 May 1968.

261 *Ibid.*

262 *Ibid.*

lives at stake, and this feature distinguished their behaviour from the covert and desperate conduct of other terrorists, who have attacked and killed defenceless civilians and their wives, and also distinguishes them from the ordinary run of brutal and cold-blooded murderers who are sentenced to death for the above reasons. I would respectfully recommend that consideration be given to commuting their sentences to life imprisonment.<sup>263</sup>

As the behaviour of the guerrillas was akin to that of professional soldiers, the judge would have acted in accordance with the Geneva Convention if he had recommended that they be treated as prisoners of war instead of criminals. Their death sentences were later commuted to life imprisonment.

Among the guerrillas captured by the joint Rhodesian-South African security forces during the Sipolilo campaign was Isaac Maphoto, one of 32 sentenced to death by Judge Davies in the Salisbury High Court on 9 August 1968. They were reprieved on 11 March 1969, and their sentences commuted to life imprisonment. Maphoto was transferred to Khama Maximum Prison in December 1969, where he remained until his release following Zimbabwean independence in 1980. Maphoto was offered £50 000 to work for the CIO, which he turned down:

I told Inspector Jock McGuinness that what he was trying to do was against my convictions. The best thing he could do was to hang me together with my comrades, and bury me with them in the same grave. I was sent here to fight and free my people. I had no mission to go to South Africa.<sup>264</sup>

Thomas Makoni, Jonathan Maradza, Amido Chingura, Joseph Muyambo and Fungai Bere were found guilty of unlawful possession of arms of war and the intention to endanger the maintenance of law and order, in contravention of Section 48A of the LOMA. They were all sentenced to death.<sup>265</sup> Makoni, Maradza and Muyambo refused to exercise their right of appeal, since they viewed the court as biased in its dealings with freedom fighters. Chingura's appeal was dismissed, but Fungai Bere's sentence was overturned on appeal. He maintained that he was not a member of the unit that originally entered Rhodesia from Zambia, but had met his co-accused near Makuti. The Appeal Court ruled that Bere's moral guilt was less than that of the others, and that his cooperation with the police after his arrest was a mitigating factor that justified a lengthy spell in prison rather than the death penalty.<sup>266</sup>

A Ndlovu and 31 others were convicted of contravening Section 48A of the LOMA, which carried a mandatory death sentence. Their appeal was dismissed

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Statement by Maphoto after his arrest.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

on 3 December 1968 and the Minister of Justice, Desmond Lardner-Burke, observed:

The accused were members of a gang of terrorists who entered Rhodesia from Zambia with a large quantity of arms of war during the period December 1967 to May 1968. The object of the incursion was to indoctrinate and train local inhabitants and thereafter, order them to launch an armed attack upon the government of this country. Most of the accused in statements to the police or in court admitted that they willingly participated in the scheme. The trial judge stated that, at the time the accused were convicted, the death sentence was mandatory and the position was that the court had no discretion in this regard.<sup>267</sup>

The Minister noted that most of the accused were not involved in an attack on members of the security forces at any stage. Only two of them were in a group that fired on a patrol led by Lieutenant Strong on 20 March 1968. Since the security forces had suffered no harm during the engagement, the Minister felt that a more lenient sentence was warranted,<sup>268</sup> but the court had been required to act in accordance with the law. However, the Minister recommended that consideration be given to commuting the death sentences to life imprisonment.<sup>269</sup>

Ultimately, a large number of convicted 'terrorists' had their death sentences commuted, and the law was amended to allow judges to exercise their discretion on a case-by-case basis. This followed an international outcry following the execution of James Ndhlamini, Victor Mlambo and Duly Shadreck, members of the 1966 ZANU Crocodile Gang that operated in the Melsetter (Chimanimani) area. The Commonwealth Secretary had recommended that Britain's Queen Elizabeth should exercise her right to pardon the three and that they should be sentenced to life imprisonment instead of death. The Rhodesian cabinet rejected this decision as unconstitutional and said it was designed to undermine the Smith government. In terms of Rhodesian law, only the head of government had the right to pardon a condemned prisoner,<sup>270</sup> and the cabinet decided to ignore the royal pardon.<sup>271</sup>

The ANC leadership in Lusaka was deeply concerned about the hanging of the three ZANU guerrillas and cabled a message to UN Secretary General U Thant, declaring their executions a crime against humanity. The ANC also urged the UN Security Council to take positive action against Britain and the

267 *RCM*, Part 1, 1969, Memo from the Minister of Justice, Desmond Lardner-Burke, 11 February 1969.

268 *Ibid.*

269 *Ibid.*

270 *Rhodesian Cabinet Minutes*, Meeting held on Tuesday, 6 February at 9 am; meeting held on Tuesday, 5 March at 9 am in the Cabinet Room, Milton Building and continued at 2.30 pm.

271 *Ibid.*

Rhodesian government to prevent further 'judicial murders'.<sup>272</sup> Cabinet discussions that followed led to amendment of the legislation. The ANC/ZAPU cadres were moved from death row and released when Zimbabwe became independent in 1980.

During the 1960s, conditions in Rhodesian prisons were worse than in Botswana, but better than in South Africa, though there were many similarities between the Rhodesian and South African institutions.<sup>273</sup> Isaac Maphoto was initially held at Karoi, but transferred to Khama Prison when he was sentenced to death. At Karoi, the cells were clean and inmates were served decent food.<sup>274</sup> By contrast, Maphoto described the food at Khama as 'fit for pigs, not human beings. We had three meals a day of the same type for my 12 years in jail, sometimes uncooked, with a little piece of meat once a day'.<sup>275</sup>

Conditions in Salisbury Prison were unbearable. Prisoners were often kept in total darkness and solitary confinement for weeks on end, denied access to light or fresh air. Cell lights would be switched on by warders only to verify that the occupant was still alive. Some did not survive the experience. Food was inadequate<sup>276</sup> and medical attention practically non-existent. Prisoners were taken to hospital only on the verge of death, and were frequently given the wrong treatment. ANC cadre Reggie Hlatshwayo died because of poor medical attention and George Mthusi, who suffered from hypertension, died within two hours of being given a range of different medication.

The South Africans were treated no differently than prisoners of Rhodesian origin. Both ANC and ZAPU prisoners were allowed correspondence and visits once a month. Although study facilities were rudimentary at best, many guerrillas learned to read and write or improve their educational qualifications while in prison. They also set up informal political education programmes.<sup>277</sup> Despite the fact that the Rhodesian government regarded the ANC leadership as 'terrorists' and denied them legal entry to the country, feelings of resentment against the organisation arose from the fact that the leadership did not visit the MK guerrillas in prison. Maphoto was one of those who opted to stay in Zimbabwe after his release. Mzamo, who claimed that he remained committed to the liberation struggle when he left prison, had no regrets about his experiences,<sup>278</sup> but chose to return to Zambia three years later and eschewed all further contact with the ANC.<sup>279</sup>

272 *Spotlight*, 6 (10), 8 March 1968; *RCM*, Part 1, 1969, memo from the Minister of Justice, Desmond Lardner-Burke, 1 August 1968.

273 *Objective Justice*, 2 (2), April 1970.

274 Zimbabwe National Archives, MS 591/4, statement written by Isaac Maphoto.

275 *Ibid.*

276 *Ibid.*

277 *Ibid.*

278 ZNA, MS 591/4: interview with Ralph Mzamo, MK member captured in Rhodesia in 1968. Recorded in Bulawayo, 21 June 1980.

528 279 Interview with Ralph Mzamo.

### Prisoners in Botswana

ANC and ZAPU guerrillas who retreated into Botswana during the Wankie campaign in the hope of contacting their headquarters for further instructions knew full well that it was the policy of the newly independent country's government to act against anyone using Botswana as a springboard for military operations. As it happened, they were unable to contact Lusaka from Botswana, because the radios they carried were inadequate or defective, according to James Chikerema.<sup>280</sup>

In August 1967, when police arrested 17 ANC/ZAPU insurgents on the Rhodesian border, the Botswana government decided to make an example of them. Chris Hani, who was part of the group, later claimed that the South African government had exerted pressure on the Botswana authorities to prevent the country being used by guerrillas in transit. The police assured the guerrillas that their lives were in no danger, and that if they surrendered their weapons, the situation could be resolved amicably. They accepted the deal, only to discover that the police were under the command of white officers from South Africa and Britain, who promptly manacled and handcuffed them.<sup>281</sup>

The guerrillas were taken to Francistown, where they were interrogated and placed in cells.<sup>282</sup> A week later, they were taken to court and found guilty of entering Botswana illegally, and importing and being in possession of arms. Hani was sentenced to six years in prison, while the other members of the group were given sentences ranging from six to nine years each.<sup>283</sup> Shortly afterwards, they decided to try and escape, as Mpanza recalled:

There was a place upstairs patrolled by the police. There was a wire fence near our exit door and a pillar under the walkway. We were going to climb up the pillar, overpower the guard and take the keys. When Wilson Msweli completed his reconnaissance, he came to fetch us but there was another policeman whom he did not see. We saw him and returned to our cells, but Wilson ran to the gate. He succeeded but was arrested later and transferred to South Africa. Suddenly the police were all over the place, accusing us of the escape. We dismissed the allegations.<sup>284</sup>

VM's unit surrendered to a Botswana Mobile Police Unit, despite the fact that VM questioned the decision at the time.<sup>285</sup> The members were all imprisoned in Botswana. Duka's unit had no intention of retreating to Botswana, but while

280 Interview with James Chikerema, Harare, 29 November 2000.

281 Hani, 1986, p 37.

282 Interview with Hani.

283 Ibid.

284 Interview with Justice Mpanza.

285 VM, *Zimbabwe Campaign*, handwritten draft, MCHP, ANC London, lecture on South Africa, 1976-1982, p 9. VM's real name has not been established.

crossing a small section of the country on 10 September in order to bypass the Rhodesian town of Plumtree, they were rounded up by three Botswana Mobile Police Units. Following discussions between their commander, Jackson Molo-to, and the police, the guerrillas handed over their weapons. Duka explained:

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 case of being a real military challenge to us. We were 19 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, and that the ANC supporters would not understand. We knew we could fight and win. A few wanted to do this. Others argued that it wouldn't help to fight now; we had been followed on both sides of the border and we knew that South African troops were waiting for us at Beitbridge. In a radio broadcast the RSA government warned of our mission and said [sic]: 'We will be sure to give our boys a very warm welcome.'<sup>286</sup>

On 18 September, after attending the OAU Foreign Ministers' Conference, Botswana's Minister of State, M Nwako, issued a statement regarding the arrest of the guerrillas:

Botswana made strong representations ... that the activities of the freedom fighters, and their incursions into Botswana as they fled from Rhodesia, were causing great concern to the government. The Botswana delegation felt it was incumbent upon the OAU, which backed the freedom fighters through the Committee of Liberation of Africa, to see that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Botswana should not be violated. It was interesting to note that the conference took a sympathetic view of Botswana's case, and felt that it was vital to ensure that the sovereignty and integrity of member states were respected and that in this particular regard, the peace and security of Botswana should be regarded as being of paramount importance.<sup>287</sup>

However, Botswana's President, Sir Seretse Khama, told a press conference on 22 September that his government had not yet received any assurance from the OAU that insurgents would respect its territorial integrity. Botswana had made a request that the assurance be included in a communiqué at the Kinshasa OAU conference, but this had not happened. After a secret meeting between Khama and Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda on the need to free all cadres after 12 months, Khama said, as with any other prisoners, the sen-

<sup>286</sup> Mercer and Mercer, 1974, p 78.

530 <sup>287</sup> Morris, 1971, p 154.

tences of the guerrillas would be subject to review and remission. He also said there was no dialogue between his government and the illegal government of Rhodesia. Even though Botswana did not inform the South African and Rhodesian governments officially about the captured guerrillas, both governments became aware of the situation through their own agents deployed in Botswana.<sup>288</sup>

In March 1968, the OAU informed the Botswana government that the Tenth General Sitting of the OAU Council of Ministers had decided to send emissaries to Botswana to review the position of the freedom fighters. A report presented by the OAU's Committee of Five detailed the experiences of the guerrillas in Botswana, reporting that the ANC/ZAPU forces had made a strategic withdrawal into Botswana for security reasons, not to wage war. Despite this, they had been arrested, charged and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. Their arms had not only been confiscated, but had subsequently also been used by members of the Botswana police in the course of their duties. The Committee of Five recommended that the Council of Ministers should appeal to the Botswana government to release the guerrillas and return their weapons, in order to allow the liberation struggle to continue in countries under white minority rule.<sup>289</sup>

Khama informed the OAU that Botswana was economically dependent on South Africa, that he could not allow guerrillas to enter his country and that the prisoners should finish serving their sentences. The OAU insisted that they should be released and handed over to the OAU, and sent emissaries to Botswana to set this process in motion. On 3 January, one of the Wankie guerrillas had escaped from prison, and after being apprehended on 5 February in South Africa by the South African Police, had been handed back to the Botswana authorities. He was found guilty of escaping from custody and an additional two years was added to his original sentence of two years and a fine of R500.<sup>290</sup> However, pressure from the OAU and the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) eventually led to the release of all the prisoners, who were then sent back to Zambia.

Prison conditions in Gaborone were nowhere near as harsh as in Rhodesia or South Africa. Hani described the Botswana as gentle and sympathetic people, who did not physically abuse the imprisoned guerrillas. They worked in the prison gardens and were allowed to study, were well fed and received medical attention when necessary.<sup>291</sup>

After the guerrillas were released, Botswana adopted a more lenient policy in regard to the southern African liberation movements, especially when the war in Rhodesia intensified. Many refugees passed through Botswana on the

288 Ibid, p 155.

289 Ibid, p 157.

290 Ibid, p 158.

291 Interview with Joe Ngalo.

way to military training in North Africa, and South Africa and Rhodesia were careful not to bully Botswana, in order to avoid being further ostracised by the international community.

### Prisoners in South Africa

Mabalane Molefe, Jaries Sekhomolo, Charles Makaye (also known as Morris Mandela) and Siphon Mkhize were among the MK cadres captured in Rhodesia and deported to South Africa. Morris Mandela became a notorious Special Branch officer,<sup>292</sup> and some of the other guerrillas who participated in the Wankie campaign and managed to make their way to South Africa, also turned their backs on the ANC.

Leonard Nkosi ostensibly handed himself over to the South African security forces after arriving home to learn that his father had been sentenced to imprisonment on Robben Island, and that his mother was living in abject poverty. He became an informer and testified against former comrades in a number of court cases.<sup>293</sup>

Daluxolo Luthuli (MK name Ken-Ken), was among the 12 accused in the 1969 Pietermaritzburg trial of ANC cadres (see Chapter 15)<sup>294</sup> that also included Lawrence Phokanoka, Patrick Matanjana, Gebolkangwe Seleka and Silas Mogotsi. Matanjana, Luthuli and Seleka had been arrested at Wankie, Plumtree, and on a train in Rhodesia, respectively,<sup>295</sup> and all three were sent to Robben Island for lengthy periods. Disillusioned with the ANC,<sup>296</sup> Luthuli joined Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi's Inkatha when he was released.

He had been arrested with Thula Bophela in Salisbury, where Bophela had relatives. Along with Leonard Nkosi, they had become separated from the main contingent during the Wankie campaign, and went underground in Rhodesia for about eight months. Their intention was to head east and return to South Africa by signing on with Wanela, an agency that recruited workers for the mines. But as the trio moved further east, their inability to speak Shona became a problem. When asked by local inhabitants what they were doing in the area, they claimed to be conducting research for a university. When they unwittingly accepted a lift from a security policeman, he tried to arrest them, but managed only to apprehend Bophela, who was wearing the wristwatch that had belonged to Lieutenant Smith, one of the white casualties of the Wankie campaign. Bophela was later sentenced to death for Smith's murder.<sup>297</sup>

292 Ibid.

293 Interview with Mavuso (Walter) Msimang.

294 The Pietermaritzburg trial did not specifically deal with the Wankie campaign. It included many people who were charged under the Terrorism Act for unrelated ANC activity.

295 *The Natal Witness*, 22/3/1969.

296 Stephen Ellis and Tsepo Sechaba, *Comrades against Apartheid: The ANC and the South African Communist Party in Exile*, James Currey, London, 1992, p 50.

532 297 Interview with Mavuso (Walter) Msimang.

Lawrence Phokanoka (Peter Tladi) was caught soon after entering Rhodesia in August 1967. The Luthuli Detachment had stopped to rest, and some time after they resumed their march, the commanders realised that Phokanoka had left his rifle behind. He was ordered to go back and retrieve the weapon, but he never joined the detachment again. Captured by the Rhodesians, he was subsequently handed to the South African authorities and became one of the accused in the Pietermaritzburg trial.<sup>298</sup>

A number of participants in the Wankie campaign were arrested some years later and charged with taking part in the incursion. One of these was Justice Mpanza, who had been arrested with the Hani group in Botswana in 1967 and sent back to Zambia on being released from prison. In the early 1970s, he was arrested again, in South Africa, held in solitary confinement for 265 days, charged with terrorism and sentenced to 16 years in prison, which he spent on Robben Island.<sup>299</sup>

James April was also among those imprisoned in Botswana. Later, while on an underground operation in South Africa, he was arrested and went on trial in Durban on 6 May 1971. According to the indictment against him, April:

- was a member of the ANC and MK who, by June 1967, was already trained in communism, warfare, guerrilla warfare, methods of revolution, propaganda, and methods of secret communication with the intent to endanger the maintenance of law and order in the Republic;
- entered Rhodesia carrying dangerous arms between 2 and 30 August 1967 and took part in armed fighting against Rhodesian security forces with the intention of getting through to organise an armed revolution in the Republic of South Africa; and
- took part in a system of secret communication to promote plans to overthrow the South African government by violent means between 29 December 1967 and 17 February 1968.

The state also charged April with using a false passport and forged documents to enter South Africa in order to organise an armed revolution.<sup>300</sup> Found guilty on three counts of terrorism, April was sentenced to 15 years on Robben Island. One of the main state witnesses was Leonard Nkosi who, the court heard, was one of three guerrillas that deserted the Wankie group in August 1967 after the second contact with the Rhodesians. According to Ellis and Sechaba, Nkosi was betrayed to the authorities by one of his family members while living underground. He was recruited into the security police and became a leading informant, specialising in testimony against his former com-

298 Ibid.

299 Interview with Justice 'Gizenga' Mpanza.

300 MCHO2-41: ANC London, General 1970-1982, *Trial of James Edward April, Durban, 6 May 1971*.

rades.<sup>301</sup> Both Nkosi and Morris Mandela were granted indemnity from prosecution in return for testifying against April.

### The significance of the ANC/ZAPU alliance

ZANU and the PAC subjected the ANC/ZAPU alliance to severe criticism. According to Matthew Nkoana, a member of the PAC's National Executive Committee, ZANU characterised the MK participants in the operation as 'mercenaries' who had been brought in 'to help Zimbabweans', an insult to 'the revolutionary zeal and the ability to fight of every Zimbabwean'.<sup>302</sup> ZANU's attitude was:

In guerrilla warfare we must strive to spread the enemy forces so that we can wipe them out one by one. The greatest help we can get from ANC is for ANC to wage intensive guerrilla warfare in South Africa. If ANC can pin down the whole South African force within South Africa, then Zimbabweans shall be left with Smith alone without South African aid ... as it is now, the alliance has made it easy for Smith and Vorster to unite and concentrate their forces to slaughter Zimbabweans.<sup>303</sup>

Duma Nokwe pointed out that the PAC had 'maligned and denigrated the guerrilla fighting which the joint ANC and ZAPU forces were waging in Zimbabwe' in an editorial entitled 'The Wankie Fiasco' in its publication, the *Azania News*.<sup>304</sup>

Nkoana, on the other hand, saw the unity of action between the ANC and ZAPU as an ideological advance of no mean importance, not only for the liberation movements of southern Africa, but also across the entire spectrum of the African revolution. This was particularly true given the inter-party rivalry that had characterised the liberation movements. Nkoana added:

It is hardly necessary to restate the fact that the fragmentation of the liberation movement in each of the southern African territories impedes the revolution. The launching of guerrilla activity jointly by the Zimbabwe African People's Union and the African National Congress of South Africa has thrown into bold relief the sterile and parochial attitudes that clog the wheel of progress towards united effort.<sup>305</sup>

Nokwe had described the United Front, dissolved in the wake of the PAC's extreme criticism of the ANC, as 'an historic step whose significance was

301 Ellis and Sechaba, 1992, p 50.

302 Matthew Nkoana, *Crisis in the Revolution: A Special Report on the Pan-Africanist Congress of South Africa*, Mafube, London, 1969, p 69.

303 *Zimbabwe News*, 30/9/1967, cited in Wilkinson, 1976, p 235.

304 Duma Nokwe, *The Pan Africanist Congress of South Africa – Whom Does it Serve?*, document prepared and issued by the ANC, Tanzania, p 12.

534 305 Nkoana, 1969, p 67.

hailed by all the oppressed people of South Africa, South West Africa and the progressive world'.<sup>306</sup> For Nkoana, however, the ANC/ZAPU military pact denoted 'recognition of the indivisibility of oppression in southern Africa, and therefore the monolithic nature of the struggle against it', and marked 'a new stage in revolutionary consciousness'. Criticism of the alliance revealed 'a disturbing, persistent thread of chauvinism masquerading as military science'.<sup>307</sup>

For ZAPU, the alliance was particularly important because, in the past, it had found itself 'confronted with an alliance' of its enemy. Successive regimes in South Africa, Rhodesia, Mozambique and Angola had been 'working together to fight against the forces of liberation in southern Africa'. The ANC and ZAPU faced a common enemy, and since 'for the South African liberation forces to enter South Africa to fight, they have to pass through Zimbabwe; and where the South African forces were already in logistical positions, it was logical that ZAPU forces should move in'.<sup>308</sup>

The last word on the alliance should be that of one of the key participants in the Wankie campaign. Chris Hani wrote:

There was a need for us to feel that we were not participating merely to help ZAPU and the people of Zimbabwe, but it was important to see it in its global perspective: the need for the people of Zimbabwe and the people of South Africa to fight against an enemy, an enemy which had forged an alliance. We all knew about the alliance between Smith and Vorster. For us South Africans, what was also important was the fact that we were moving home to participate in the struggle of our people inside South Africa. So there was also this added dimension.<sup>309</sup>

Most significantly, however, the military alliance between the ANC and ZAPU was the first of its kind in the region, and would become a reference point for future military alliances forged by the ANC.

### The aftermath

There is no question that there was a great deal of frustration and disillusionment with the ANC leadership's inability to devise strategies for returning the guerrillas to South Africa to do what they had been trained to do. Some cadres who took part in the Wankie campaign took issue with the High Command for sending them into foreign territory without adequate food, information, weapons and ammunition. The mission was viewed as a deliberate move to get rid of dissenting voices by despatching them on a suicide mission, and the

306 Nokwe, nd, p 6.

307 Nkoana, 1969, p 67.

308 George Nyandoro, 'Our Revolution will be a Complete Success', *Sechaba*, 2 (5), May 1968, pp 7-8.

309 Hani, 1986, p 34.

organisation was resented for abandoning cadres imprisoned in both Rhodesia and Botswana. 'The guys were very critical when they returned,' James April recalled. 'They were very critical of the planners [of the Wankie campaign]. And they made it known publicly.'<sup>310</sup> However, the ANC leadership's decision to organise this mission was largely influenced by the desire to meet the demands of soldiers wanting to go home and fight.

One of the most serious consequences of the Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns was the suspension of Chris Hani and six other MK and ANC members from the organisation. This occurred after they had compiled a memorandum spelling out their concerns about ANC policy and criticising certain leaders of the organisation. Msimang recalled:

When people came back from Wankie – from prison – and found that there was really very little activity taking place, the discontent translated into people grouping themselves to try and find a way forward. Engage the leadership, show them that you know, express an anger, express a desire to move forward. His [Hani's] group could not have spent so much time in prison only to come back and there's nothing, and so on. So, I remember then people started talking about writing a memorandum to expose the leadership, and its failure to lead, really.<sup>311</sup>

A military tribunal suspended the seven from the ANC on 25 March 1969, and the decision was confirmed by the ANC headquarters in Morogoro four days later. Among those suspended were Hani and another cadre who had participated in the Wankie campaign and then served prison sentences in Botswana. They argued that:

Towards the end of 1968 we realised that there was a widespread feeling of dissatisfaction in the movement, and that there was an urgent need and desire for radical changes in organisation, policy and strategy. We agreed to act with the sole intention of invigorating the movement with a new spirit. We wished to create a new feeling of urgency that would lead to a renewal of the offensive against the enemy.<sup>312</sup>

The memorandum contained a political analysis and attributed the weaknesses identified by the group to 'wrong policies and personal failures of some of the leaders'. With particular reference to the Rhodesian actions, the memorandum slated the ANC's department of security, headed by the secretary general, which had failed to provide information about 'the fate of our most dedicated comrades in Zimbabwe'. The memorandum did not criticise the decision to embark on the Wankie campaign, but regarded it as a 'tragedy ... that we have

310 Interview with James April.

311 Interview with Mavuso (Walter) Msimang.

312 *Grounds of Appeal and Addendum thereto in the matter of exclusion from the African National Congress, 1969*, ANC Morogoro Papers, ANC Archives, UFH.

been unable to analyse our operations so as to be able to assess and draw lessons that would make it possible to formulate a correct strategy and tactics vis-à-vis the enemy'.<sup>313</sup>

However, it is the broad sweep of complaints against the ANC's failure to assume leadership of the liberation struggle inside South Africa, the 'careerism of the ANC leadership abroad', the perceived separation between the ANC and MK, the lifestyle of some ANC leaders, and the nepotism involving the children of ANC leaders that truly reflects the anger of the seven who signed the memorandum. The authors demanded that these problems 'be resolved by a conference between the ANC leadership and member[s] of MK, and not just hand-picked individuals'.<sup>314</sup> Even Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda is said to have noticed that something was wrong, and referred publicly to ANC leaders, who were usually seen in hotel restaurants, as 'chicken-in-the-basket freedom fighters'.<sup>315</sup>

According to Mavuso Msimang, the memorandum was not widely supported, because the discussions that led to it were held at the home of Tennyson Makiwane who, along with his brother Ambrose, was not among the ANC leaders criticised in the document. Many ANC members were at a loss to understand why the brothers aligned themselves with the group complaining about the leadership, even if some of the criticism was justified.<sup>316</sup>

After submitting the memorandum to the ANC's National Executive, the group was threatened by members of the military for alleged violation of security and the MK oath. They later learned that orders had been given for their arrest, and that they were to be thrown into dungeons in Livingstone. Only the intervention of one of the leaders, Mzwai Piliso, saved them from this fate, and Oliver Tambo cancelled the orders. However, after meeting with Tambo to discuss their case, a tribunal was convened to investigate the distribution of the memorandum, and suspension of the seven members followed.<sup>317</sup> Hani and his co-signatories were reinstated in due course.<sup>318</sup>

In 1968, a group of MK cadres sought asylum in Kenya, alleging widespread dissatisfaction in the Tanzanian camps. Among the reasons, they claimed, was that the Wankie campaign had been a suicide mission to eliminate dissenters. They also alleged that some of the guerrillas who had been imprisoned in Botswana felt that the ANC was no longer providing any direction for the revolution.<sup>319</sup> A year later, some of these defectors, together with defectors from the PAC, formed an ethnic-based and Zulu-oriented exile movement, called the

313 Cited in Shubin, 1999, p 86.

314 Shubin, 1999, pp 85-7.

315 Sibeko, 1996.

316 Interview with Mavuso (Walter) Msimang.

317 *Grounds of Appeal and Addendum thereto in the matter of exclusion from the African National Congress*, 1969.

318 Shubin, 1999, pp 87-8.

319 Lodge, 1983, p 300.

National Liberation Front of Southern Africa (NLFSA). One of its aims was the creation of a separate Nguni-Zulu state.<sup>320</sup>

Certain MK cadres who were at Kongwa claimed that a Christian missionary group based in Kenya played a central role in the defections. Known to the cadres as the Christian Council, the group allegedly encouraged them to desert the liberation movements by offering transport to Kenya as the first step to returning home. The ANC suspected that the missionaries were using religion as a cover, and that they were linked to both the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the South African Security Branch. The group was seen as such a major threat that the ANC even decided to infiltrate the organisation.<sup>321</sup>

In 1970, ZAPU decided to send another guerrilla contingent into Rhodesia, but the ANC did not nominate any cadres for this operation. The organisation was facing a number of serious internal problems at the time, including the way it dealt with MK fighters captured during the Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns and imprisoned in Rhodesia, Botswana and South Africa. At a joint meeting of their respective national executives in Lusaka on 16 January, however, the ANC and ZAPU strengthened and confirmed their alliance. A joint statement issued by Oliver Tambo and James Chikerema underlined the historic importance of the revolutionary ANC/ZAPU alliance in the struggle against colonial oppression and racial tyranny in southern Africa. Two of the most significant decisions taken at the meeting were that both organisations would:

- intensify the struggle for national liberation on the basis of their programmes, closely scrutinising the machinery to ensure effective coordination of the political, military strategy of the alliance; and
- work out details of an efficient and regular exchange of information at all levels of the two organisations in order to achieve a deeper commitment to the alliance by the peoples of Zimbabwe and South Africa.<sup>322</sup>

From 1970, the South African government stepped up its security force involvement in Rhodesia. According to Ben Turok, information provided by ZAPU indicated that as the new decade opened, the entire line of defence, from Lake Kariba to Mozambique, was manned by South African troops and patrolled by South African boats, helicopters and Buccaneer jets. ZAPU reconnaissance patrols along the 500-mile frontier reported that the South Africans had built large camps five miles apart, each manned by a platoon of about 30 men. Between these were smaller temporary bases and a few miles inland, a number of roads had been newly constructed.<sup>323</sup>

320 NLFSA press release, 6/10/1969, Nairobi.

321 Interview with Winston Ngcayiya.

322 'ZAPU-ANC Unity', *Sechaba*, 4 (4), 1970, p 20.

323 Ben Turok, 'The Zambezi River – Cockpit of African Freedom!', *Sechaba*, 4 (5), May 1970, p 16.

## Conclusion

The 1967-8 joint operations by the ANC and ZAPU failed to achieve their objectives. As Shubin put it: 'In spite of their courage and commitment, the MK units did not cross into South Africa, nor did they succeed in establishing a base in Zimbabwe to facilitate new crossings.'<sup>324</sup> MK and ANC leaders, however, did not assess the operation on the basis of objectives achieved, but rather on the basis of the role played in furthering the struggle. Although Slovo acknowledged that the Wankie campaign was a failure, he argued that it was important because it served as 'a demonstration of the liberation movement's capacity to meet and sustain the struggle in a new way'. Such action was crucial because it was 'a vital way of attracting political allegiance and support'.<sup>325</sup> Indeed, within South Africa, reports of the actions in Rhodesia were inspirational. As Pascal Ngakane put it:

At the time of the Wankie campaign, people were at their lowest ebb. When it happened, it was as if we had salvation. At least we knew something positive was happening. People started to ask how they could go out of the country to join MK. Certainly there was a surge of emotion – at least something was happening. We were getting out of the lull.<sup>326</sup>

On Robben Island, news of the Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns had a major impact. 'It raised our morale,' Andrew Masondo recalled, 'particularly the ANC and the Congress Movement group'. Masondo, one of the first MK soldiers to be sent to Robben Island, said the ANC group on the island was extremely demoralised at the time because of the heavy sentences handed down in the Rivonia Trial and the lack of news of any developments in the liberation struggle. The feeling was that they would have to start from scratch and reorganise the struggle from inside the prison.

Suddenly, you begin to get papers that describe Sipolilo and Wankie ... and it is reported inside the country and people are actually commenting. For instance, I think the first report we read came from *The Economist*. And now you realise, now this is happening. And you hear about it. Even the enemy recognises the abilities of our people. For us in MK, it was just, you know ... even when the warders are passing, you are moving with a feeling of [pride] that yes, this is happening now.<sup>327</sup>

The campaigns also revitalised the spirit of resistance in many cadres in the MK camps. For the first time since the people of Zimbabwe had fought against

<sup>324</sup> Shubin, 1999, p 80.

<sup>325</sup> Joe Slovo, 'South Africa: No Middle Road', in Davidson, Basil, Slovo, Joe and Wilkinson, Anthony, *Southern Africa: The New Politics of Revolution*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1976, p 194.

<sup>326</sup> Interview with Pascal Ngakane, 23 November 2002.

<sup>327</sup> Interview with Andrew Masondo, conducted by Bernard Magubane and Gregory Houston, 29 August 2003, Pretoria, SADET Oral History Project.

the imperialists in the 1896-7 Chimurenga, and the South African people had risen up in the 1906 Bambata rebellion, the campaigns confirmed the willingness of liberation movements to engage in organised armed revolution in southern Africa. The morale of MK cadres was raised to new heights when they heard from participants in the campaigns that Rhodesian and South African forces had been forced to flee in a number of battles.<sup>328</sup> Cadres who returned to Zambia and Tanzania with Rhodesian uniforms and arms provided concrete proof that the enemy could be defeated, despite having superior expertise and highly mobile weapons, reinforced by an air force.

Although the battles took place outside South Africa, this was MK's baptism of fire against South African military forces. By all accounts, including those of the enemy, the MK cadres fought with courage and competence.<sup>329</sup> A senior Rhodesian army officer later pointed out that, 'in the post-mortem that followed this operation, the reputation of the efficiency, professionalism and fighting spirit of ZIPRA increased to such an extent that it was decided as "lessons learnt" that henceforth the security forces would not patrol in less than platoon strength'. Nevertheless, he felt that the high number of Rhodesian casualties in the Wankie battles had caused the guerrillas to be 'credited with a military skill and aggressiveness that they did not actually possess'.<sup>330</sup>

The Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns added richly to MK's list of heroes, headed by those involved in the sabotage campaign of the early 1960s. They would serve as a source of inspiration for new recruits for many years to come. Finally, the Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns were decisive factors behind the holding of the Morogoro conference and some of the changes made to the ANC's strategy, tactics and organisational structures as a result.

328 SOMAFSCO, Director's Office, ANC London Papers, ANC Archives, UFH.

329 Slovo, 1976, p 194.

330 Reid-Daly, 1989, p 155. For the PAC, on the other hand, it was the military performance of the joint MK-ZIPRA forces that signified failure. The PAC accused the fighters of waging 'a conventional-style war' while claiming to be 'waging guerrilla warfare'. Cited in Shubin, 1999, p 81.