

# VUYISILE MINI

(Adapted from a radio script by RMT Ngqungwana)

When we speak of martyrs and heroes of Umkhonto we Sizwe we speak of men and women who were deliberately murdered by the racists for their ideas and activities; we speak of men who were killed for their part in the struggle to rid South Africa of the scourge of racial and class oppression. We speak of the heroic Vuyisile Mini, whose courage never faltered even as he marched fist clenched, singing freedom songs to the gallows.

Vuyisile Mini along with Wilson Khayingo and Zinakile Mkhamba were the first Umkhonto we Sizwe combatants to be murdered by the racist hangman in 1964. He was a man who was never daunted by the possibility of danger. Mini was a member of the volunteer corps of the ANC and forerunner of Umkhonto we Sizwe. He was a youth leader and trade union organiser charged with many tasks like being the organising secretary of the Port Elizabeth branch of the Stevedoring and Dock-workers Union which was an affiliate of SACTU.

He was an active participant in the 1952 Defiance Campaign. For his role he was sentenced to three months imprisonment. He was also later to be arrested during the 1956 Treason Trial of 156 leaders of the Congress Alliance. The trial ended in acquittal because the state failed to prove treason in the activities of the then peace preaching ANC and its sister organisations.

This was however not to be the end as he was again to be detained in Rooi Hell (the North End Prison in Port Elizabeth) with Govan Mbeki and Raymond Mhlaba. It was here that Mini was to experience real hell when the prison officials forbade him to sing revolutionary songs in his famous baritone voice. The sadistic warders were to react to his refusal to stop singing by locking him and his fellow detainees up for twenty four hours a day.

## UNDERGROUND

The racist regime was getting more violent. The African National Congress was finally banned. But this did not silence comrades like Mini and he, like many others, decided to go underground.

During this period of mobilisation and reorganisation Mini and his family were to suffer continuous harassment, as he had become very well known throughout the country by the police.

By 1961 Mini was going up and down the country fully involved in the formation of our people's army, Umkhonto we Sizwe. These travels are filled with many stories and escapades: Around August 1961 Mini and a fellow comrade Brian were travelling for consultations in Johannesburg. From that trip the infant MK was to acquire one of its first weapons. They made this gain during a confrontation with a



Vuyisile Mini

boer train guard. While Mini was standing in the passage of the carriage, the boer guard who was trying to get past spoke to him in a very naughty manner. Mini faced him and said: "Look here you must mind your language, brother" he said, looking the man straight in the eyes. The guard was taken aback and produced a revolver. Through quick work they disarmed him, and left the train making a speedy detour.

He handled all situations in a cool, calm and collected manner, this being one of the major factors for his appointment to the Eastern Cape Command. He was a member not from recklessness or a sense of adventurism but from a deep conviction that this was the only method that would achieve the freedom of his people.

The cadres of Umkhonto we Sizwe were drawn from the active youth of the congress movement. It was the dedication of men like Mini that steered the infant MK into shape. The work involved great risk. The fundamental training was carried out secretly in houses and in the bush. At one time a football field was used for demonstrating manoeuvres and how to place bombs on a target. Arms and explosives had to be manufactured and distributed. None of the command had ever received thorough military training as no African had ever been drafted into military service.

## DECEMBER 16

On the evening of Saturday December the 16th 1961 the whole country was to reverberate from explosions, taking the whole country by surprise. The regime's natural response was to arrest anybody and everybody they suspected, like Mini and semi-blind old men, some of whom did not even believe that the ANC could be involved in 'terrorist' activities. The ECC (Eastern Cape Command) was not crippled. The following day after their release the Eastern Cape was rocked by explosions.

Coupled with all this work of pioneering the formation of MK, he was also actively involved in the work of the ANC and SACTU. But time was running out for him as the reign of terror was being intensified. The notorious special branch policeman Donald J Card was specially dispatched from East London to hunt and hound Mini. But it was becoming apparent that the fly was within. Mini was arrested and tried along with Wilson Khayingo and Zinakile Mkhamba. During the trial Mini displayed his heroism and courage. This was illustrated by Mini's refusal to give evidence against Wilton Mkwayi even though he was certain he would be executed. He refused to be reprieved at the expense of a fellow patriot, a comrade-in-arms.

His voice, his beliefs, his ideas still live on in his songs, in his work, in our history and shall continue to do so even beyond the attainment of freedom in South Africa.

His name shall be written in bold letters on the Roll of Honour.