

HOW MK GREW

Bobby Pillay

I joined MK in 1961 when I was recruited into the Durban Central unit. We were four in our unit and my commander was Ebrahim Ismail. One of the first acts of sabotage we committed was blowing up an office of an Indian businessman who was *closely collaborating with the enemy*, namely A. Kadjee. Our charge was a fire-bomb made out of a mixture of petrol and oil. Unfortunately a guard spotted us and we had to retreat. We ran in different directions with the guard chasing us, blowing his whistle. Fortunately we were too fast for him and got away. We reassembled at an agreed spot and decided to still do something that night. We went to the Durban municipal bus depot, with the intention of burning a number of buses, but again to our disappointment the depot was well guarded.

Subsequently we went to the Durban Central Railway station, bought tickets to the Lower North Coast and boarded a train at about 2100hrs. Once inside the coach, two of us, (one later turned a state witness. He is in London now, David Perumal) took up strategic positions so as to keep guard just in case anything happened (we were still armed with the incendiary bomb which was in the possession of one comrade). I covered my face with a newspaper as if I was reading so passengers could not see me clearly. Suddenly I saw Ebrahim and the other comrade running out of the coach. The train was about to reach the first station and it was already braking. We also ran and the passengers realised that there was something amiss and began to panic. As the train was about to stop we jumped out of the still moving train, crossed an overhead bridge and disappeared. Subsequently, during our trial, we learned that the bomb was placed under the seat of an old black man. Thanks God it did not go off. It seems there was *something wrong with the timing device*. If one recollects now and look at what is happening today one would regard that as a soft target. At that time we were a bit adventurous. We wanted to act by all means that night whatever the cost. Fortunately the bomb did not go off otherwise the result would have been disastrous with serious conseque-



nces for the movement as this would have been a kind of terrorism. I think the judge when considering sentence realised that the regional command had not instructed our unit to carry out that act. The judge was convinced, and rightly so, that MK had always spared human lives. Our targets were government structures, powerlines, railway lines, etc.

We then planned once more to blow up the Kadjee building. It was late afternoon around 1700 hrs and this time we were making use of proper explosives. If I remember well we used either *gelignite or dynamite*. Our squad consisted of four, one was on guard while the other three carried out the act. It was a very successful operation. I walked past the office the following day and found the office totally smashed. The safe of the owner was also destroyed. There was a lot of publicity given to the destruction of this office by the forces of MK. On my way home (I was living in Cato Manor about 6-7Km out of town whilst the other comrades stayed within the city) I was stopped by the police. They demanded my identity and asked where I came from. I told them that I had gone to visit a friend. (I had pre-arranged with my friend that in the event of any eventuality he was to say I had been with him from early afternoon till late).

They took me to my friend's house, left me outside and inquired from my friend whether he knew me. He said of course he knew me and I was a good friend of his. On further ques-

tioning my friend convinced them that I was at his place for about 2-3 hours listening to music.

Our second operation was blowing the Victoria railway lines below the Victoria bridge. This was one of our major operations. We blew up three tracks and a signal box. Here again going home was a problem for me. It was very late at night and I had to catch a taxi and jump off at least 2 Km away from home and run home to be on time in case one came and asked what time I came home (I had told my mother earlier that in case the police asked what time I came home she was to say at nine). And indeed whilst I was asleep I heard a knock and as usual the police were there. They left after a brief questioning.

The next operation we carried out was unsuccessful using a pipe-bomb. Our engineering squad was experimenting with different forms of charges because we had difficulty getting material. We created this pipe-bomb using certain chemicals. We put this charge against an electric pole. The charge did not go off and the following morning when I passed the place I could still see the charge attached to the pole.

One of our (I personally was not involved) most dramatic acts of sabotage not only in Natal but the country as a whole was the destruction of the pylons in Montclear, New Germany and Sania. There were three very strategic pylons. The unit that carried out that operation was a select group consisting of Ebrahim Ismail, Billy Nair and the traitor Bruno Mtolo. What made this operation such a success was the proper co-ordination and timely reconnaissance, studying and intelligence work. The state also acknowledged this during our trial and came out with maps captured at Rivonia. Due to proper planning and intelligence gathering we practically put the whole of Durban and surrounding areas into darkness. The enemy did not expect that at that stage MK would be in a position to carry out such professional acts of sabotage. The following morning newspapers ran bold headlines about the presence of Cubans and Algerians in the country who carried out the act. What a joke it was to us.

We were given very rudimentary training and used basic

SAWING ELECTRIC PYLONS

chemicals to make timing devices. We did not use watches and modern electronic devices for timing. We merely used sulphuric and nitric acid and capsules. We were also not armed like MK is today. But we were already involved in the struggle and we knew the enemy. We were learning, and the enemy was also learning, learning from us, from the mistakes we were making. Eventually it was the passing of the ninety-day detention law and the Bruno Mtolo's that led to our capture. Many key members of the regional and district command broke under torture not only in our region but throughout the country. This led to a chain reaction and of course I was also rounded up on the 7th August 1963. They came to my working place, a restaurant where I was employed as a waiter. I had no chance of escaping, the back door was locked. The security branch led by Steenkamp who subsequently became a deputy commissioner of police detained me.

I was taken home and the place was thoroughly searched. Let me add that I had realised the dragnet was closing and although I had a passport I decided not to leave the country as I was not instructed by my command. Little did I know that the dragnet was also closing in our command which was set up at Kloof in Northern part of Durban after the Rivonia arrests and called Little Rivonia. I was heavily tortured and I realised the police had all the information which they obtained from other members of my squad and of course the traitor Bruno Mtolo. Our trial ran simultaneously with the Rivonia Trial and lasted for four months. There were 18 of us. The minimum sentence given was five years and the maximum was 20 years, given to Billy and Curnick who are out now and once again playing a prominent role in the UDF and trade unions. I got ten years and was released in 1974.

Finally the birth of MK was practically, in a very classical sense, the beginning of people's war. The very first phase of this form of struggle was initiated by the people themselves. Our organisation was inside, our base was inside and our rear was inside. Our strength was within the masses, the oppressed masses. This is how a people's army grows, this is how MK grew.

Comrade Andrew Masondo is the Director of the ANC Department of Manpower Development. A veteran of MK, he relates his role during the Sabotage Campaign.

The Sharpeville and Langa massacres in 1960 and the banning of the African National Congress created a new atmosphere amongst the people of South Africa and within the liberation movement. People began to question the concept of a non-violent struggle. There began sporadic acts of violence. Even liberal elements began to think of resorting to violence and consequently began to form an organisation committed to armed action, the African Resistance Movement (ARM).

Some members of the Congress Movement were attracted towards ARM. This was an indication of the impatience of the membership of the movement with the concept of non-violence in the midst of the brutality of the racist regime.

The idea of the movement moving away from its non-violent stance was discussed within youth circles even earlier than 1960. I remember that a group of us at Fort Hare actually formed a group to prepare for the eventuality of an armed struggle taking place.

We gave ourselves the task to gather information about military camps in the country. The group did not go far because we then lost contact as some left the country and others did not keep up the correspondence. One of the weaknesses of the group was that we were not a homogenous group ideologically. Therefore it is not surprising that the group died.

When Umkhonto we Sizwe announced itself, for me it was something I received with enthusiasm and envy because I was not a member of the founding group. I promised myself that I shall join Umkhonto we Sizwe as soon as I could find out how.

One day I discussed the whole question with Comrade Govan Mbeki. He told me that he was not very much interested in me joining Umkhonto we Sizwe because he had given me a task which he thought was as important. At that time I was working as a rural area organiser in the area from King Williams Town to Fort Beaufort.

In the Regional Rural Areas Committee I was working with people like Castro (Kati Maya), Vuyisile Mini. It was these two comrades with whom I was very close and both were active in Volunteer Corps that I expressed my desire to join Umkhonto we Sizwe and be involved in violent struggle. Though I did not know then that Mini was in the Regional Command.

It was not until October 1962 when Mini came back from the Lobatse Conference that he recruited me into Umkhonto we Sizwe. He reminded me that the two of us were in fact being indisciplined, going against the word of our Chief, Govan, who had advised against my joining Umkhonto we Sizwe. He then told me that my task was to create MK units and command them. I was not to involve myself in acts of sabotage. In spite of the oath to obey instructions of my senior commanders I once more defied another order.

I created three units in the Victoria East area and one in the Middledrift area. The Victoria East units consisted of one in Fort Hare, and two in Ntselamanzi. We used to act in all the units and acted with all of them.

I continued to do my work as an organiser in the rural areas. One of the burning questions at the time was the culling of stock and the rehabilitation scheme. The peasants were against this scheme. They were against the fencing of the land and the contouring of their fields. In Gaga one of the peasants ploughed against the contour lines and we had to go to court and fight his case.

One of our units was detailed to cut the fences and we did this consistently. The peasants were employed to build the fences and we agreed that they must build them because they had no work. In this way we organised the peasants and developed a powerful movement of peasants.

OBSTACLES

One of the obstacles we faced was lack of explosives