

arrested. After their return, the enemy started looking for me and I had to leave. I left South Africa with Comrade Raymond

Mhlaba, we came through Rhodesia with false Malawian documents, stating that we'd been deported from South Africa.

This enabled us to pass through Plumtree without any problem up to Lusaka where we were assisted by UNIP up to Tanzania.

# DECEMBER SIXTEEN, '61 IN DURBAN

ERIC MTSHALI

It is a known fact that I was in the first Regional Command of MK in Natal. I say it is a known fact because one of the members of that first Regional Command wrote a book "My Road to the Left". That was Bruno Mtolo who was known as 'Mr X' in the Rivonia Trial. In this book he exposed everything and everybody, and in some cases exaggerated things. But Bruno, myself and the other Comrades; Billy, Curnick and Ronnie, were in the first Regional Command of MK in Natal. We got elementary training in explosives from the late Comrade Jack Hodgson, known as the "desert rat". We also learned some other techniques from Bruno himself who taught us how to make a time bomb.

Our first target in Durban was the Durban pass office. Billy, Curnick, Bruno and myself went to plant a bomb there which we had made out of aluminium, potassium permanganate and coffee. I don't remember what other mixtures were there. We planted this bomb at the door of the main office of the pass office in Ordinance road. When we were a few steps away, Bruno said there was something that we did not put correctly and he ran back to correct that. We then proceeded to another area where a pylon was to be blown up. This pylon was situated at a place called Morning Side, in Durban. First we went to prepare the material, placed it at the target retreated. We then heard a big explosion going off. A big cloud of smoke and flames covered that pylon. It was a new experience to us, and we were very proud. We read about it the following day in the *Natal Mercury*. The damage was quite substantial. This operation was more successful than the one in Ordinance road where the bomb did not explode properly and caused very little damage. Well, we thought it was because we were amateurs but later we suspected that Bruno must have sabotaged it when he went back after we had placed everything

correctly.

We then sat down and reviewed our operations and came to the conclusion that although our operations were a success, they were then not what we wanted them to be. We attributed that to our being inexperienced in the field of explosives and we were determined to improve and perfect ourselves. We did not have



Eric Mtshali

any material to use until Bruno discovered a dynamite dump at a road-building site. So we went for it. It was quite an interesting operation. The most exciting one in our case. We took 230 kilograms of explosives from that dump. It was a very clean operation. No one was caught and it was very interesting when we read the following morning in the *Natal Mercury*. The enemy reported that about 230 kilograms of dynamite had been stolen by communists. We then took it to our hiding place and later removed it and dug some dead letter boxes in other townships where we hid part of it. Some of that dynamite was sent to comrades in Johannesburg and Port Elizabeth.

These were the two operations I was involved in. After that we were involved in organisational work. The idea was not that we should also be directly involved

because we were the military command in the region. We had to direct operations, recruit and establish new units. That is why we could not immediately embark on new operations after December 16. Secondly, we wanted to make sure that when we recruit, we recruited the best of people to serve in MK.

We had no knowledge of explosives or military science. We had never been in the army, all of us were young trade unionists who were combining trade union work with MK tasks. We started bringing in some other comrades into the units and because of our strategic positions as trade unionists dealing with workers, we could recruit the best out of the working class. This applied to other areas of the country as well. Therefore, people who went out for military training during that period of the 60's, were mostly workers, starting from the very first group; Mkwazi, Mhlaba, Gqabi and Mlangeni.

The reaction of the people was very good. MK was timely, especially to young people of our days and its formation was welcomed with great enthusiasm. We organised units in Durban central, Pinetown and Pietermaritzburg.

I was then selected by my region to go and acquire the necessary skills so as to teach others upon my return. Our group, which was the second group to leave the country (the first being that of the High Command) consisted of 32 young workers from Durban, Johannesburg, Port Elizabeth, East London and Pietermaritzburg. We left in June 1962, and were supposed to come back before December. That is we were given strictly six months. But the situation changed and we could not return in six months as instructed. Some of those comrades fell in Wankie. Others were given prison sentences of 18 years and more, Billy and Curnick are out of Robben Island and active in the trade unions and the UDF.