

actual landing boats of the mother ship. Radio signals were worked out from inside, from the beaches, to indicate safety. Arms and equipment were specially prepared so that they could float in. Trucks, bicycles and other means of transport were ready to take the men to various parts of the country. Caches had been prepared in various mountains, ready to receive a vast quantity of armament. Moubaris was involved in some reconnaissance work connected with the beaches which were eventually selected, and also in receiving the men as they came in. He was one amongst quite a big team.

The boat set off and, within a day-and-a-half, returned, with the captain reporting that the radar equipment, which was quite necessary for the purpose of this project, was not functioning. Within a week we flew in new radar equipment. By this time it was becoming clear that this captain and his crew were getting cold feet. When they made other excuses we started testing the boat once again and discovered that both engines were not functioning. We suspected sabotage but at that stage we could not prove it.

We dismissed this crew and went to search for another crew from another fraternal party. We found it and flew it in within two weeks. This crew was absolutely remarkable. They refused to surrender to any complication. Eventually they got one engine working and decided to move with it, against the warning by experts against it. The danger is that the boat, which did not operate by means of sails, would eventually be smashed against the rocks if that engine failed. But this crew said they were quite prepared to take a chance.

So we embarked again. They set out and within about sixteen hours we received a radio signal that the engine had collapsed. Fortunately it was near enough to port and a tug went out and towed the boat in. So the operation failed.

We then attempted to find other ways of getting the same comrades back into the country. We used various techniques, including routes through what was then still Portuguese Mozambique, Swaziland and Bechuanaland. We also used Jan Smuts airport. James April and others were many whom we tried in various ways to put back into

the situation. This went on till 1976 I would say, with one project or another, with none of them really succeeding. But our failures, although one does not plan for them have some kind of impact. It could be seen by everyone that the ANC was persisting in its efforts without end despite enormous difficulties. People were becoming aware

that here was a committed and dedicated group which was just going to continue knocking their heads against this wall until somehow there was a crack in it. I think this was a very important side-product of the efforts most of which ended in failures. But one wonders where we would have been without these stubborn attempts to find the answer..

# THE WANKIE CAMPAIGN

Chris Hani

The Luthuli Detachment was one of those detachments that were well prepared and well trained. I'm saying this because I personally participated in the preparations. A lot of time was allocated for the detachment to be together in the bush to be able to train together in order to ensure that physically we were ready for the rigorous task that lay ahead. But in addition to the physical preparation there was also the political preparation, the need for us to forge an understanding between the forces of Umkhonto we Sizwe and the forces of ZAPU and to understand the historical necessity of the battles of Wankie.

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 know 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.

When we began the process of crossing we were ready for anything and the spirit of MK combatants was very high. The crossing point was not an easy one, it was a place which was quite rocky and the current of the Zambezi was strong. But these seeming obstacles and difficulties did not deter us at all. After crossing the river, there was a spirit of elation and joy,

due to the fact that we had already crossed the first obstacle, mainly the river and we were now all looking forward to participating in the long march deep into Zimbabwe and ultimately reaching our destination, South Africa.

The spirit of cohesion and unity between ourselves and ZAPU was magnificent. We were working together as one unit, consulting and discussing together. There was no friction whatsoever within this unit. This is important to point out if one wants to give an objective assessment of the operations of the Luthuli Detachment or the Wankie detachment.

From the very beginning we began to notice that we were not at all conversant with the terrain across the river. For instance, moving away from the Zambezi river we had expected to come across streams and rivulets with water, but as soon as we moved a few kilometres from the Zambezi river we realised that it was quite a dry area. There were no rivers, no streams, and people were getting water from boreholes. So this problem of no rivers necessitated an earlier contact with the people. According to our original plans we were not going to contact the people that early. We were going to postpone meeting the people until we reached strategic areas within Zimbabwe. But the reality of not having water at all forced us to establish this contact.

Secondly, we were beginning to run low on food supplies. So again we had to contact the people. It is important in all

military preparations, whatever military strategy is worked out, to emphasise the need to contact people. But it is dangerous to contact the people at random and that is what we were forced to do. It is important to follow your own preparations, your own deliberately worked out decisions as to at what point you are going to establish contact with the people, who these people are, what their political views are, etc.

Of course things do not follow a pattern always, sometimes you get into an area where the organisation has no contact and you have got to try very hard to establish a contact. There is an advantage if you actually go into a given area with a contact in hand. In our case there was no contact, we had literally to establish our own contact.

That has got its own dangers because you are likely sometimes to go to a person who is hostile to the liberation movement or you might meet somebody who is actually working for the enemy. But in all fairness when we established this contact we were met with enthusiasm by the people. We were given water and even fresh supplies of food. This was very useful and enabled us to continue for a few days marching towards the South of Zimbabwe. Within the game reserve of Wankie a decision had been taken by our H.Q. in Lusaka that the unit had to split into two. There was the unit that had to move towards the east, towards an area called Lupane, and there was also the main unit which had to march towards the South. Within the unit moving towards the South was quite a substantial number of those comrades whose mission was eventually to reach South Africa and establish MK units within the country. In the unit moving towards the South with the eventual aim of getting to South Africa were comrades Lennox Lagu, myself, Peter Mfene, Douglas Wana, Mbijana, the late Victor Dlamini, Castro, Mashigo (the ANC Chief Representative to Lusaka), Paul Sithole, Desmond, Wilson Msweli, Shooter Makasi, Eric Nduna, Basil February and James April. Lennox was the most senior in our group. I was the group's commissar.

The unit marching towards the East was to base in Zimbabwe, the aim being to establish an MK presence in Zimbabwe which could be used in future to service

MK combatants passing through Zimbabwe. In other words the whole concept of the Wankie campaign was to build bridges, a Ho Chi Minh train to South Africa. That is why it was important to leave behind some MK combatants working with ZAPU, creating conditions in the north and centre of Zimbabwe for the construction of this bridge. Amongst those who were to remain in Zimbabwe were Andries Motsipe, the commander who fell in battle, James Masimini, Sibanyoni, Charles Sharp and a few others.

They made contact with the enemy quite early, about two weeks after we had parted. One of the battles they were engaged



in that will probably go down in the history of MK military operations as one of the most heroic. Displaying outstanding heroism and sacrifice they fought like lions and actually kept Smith's forces pinned down for the better part of a day. We are told that comrades like Sibanyoni handles an LMG in a unique manner, keeping away the Smith forces. Masimini, although mortally wounded, actually refused to be carried by the comrades and advised them to move away whilst he individually remained as a covering group for the retreat of those comrades who had survived.

This premature engagement with the enemy enabled the enemy to discover that we were in Zimbabwe in bigger numbers. He also knew that it was not only Zimbabweans who were involved in the battle but also MK. This frightened the Pretoria re-

gime. For a long time they dismissed MK's capability of actually coming down to the south to engage them. They thought that because the movement had suffered serious setbacks with the arrest of the ANC leadership and High Command of MK they had incapacitated MK. So this caught them by surprise, and there was so much panic that immediately after this the regime in Pretoria dispatched more troops to Zimbabwe to fight the Luthuli Detachment. A big battle was now looming on Zimbabwean soil, not just between the settler forces of Ian Smith but the combined forces of Smith and the SADF. We noticed after three to four weeks of our presence in Zimbabwe that there was a lot of aerial reconnaissance by the enemy. Virtually the whole day there was a flurry of activities and flights of spotter planes and it was quite clear from the way they were moving South, North, East and West that they were looking for us. They wanted to establish exactly the direction of the other section of the Luthuli Detachment. We were sure that it was only a matter of days before we would have to engage the enemy. But interestingly enough there was a spirit of looking forward to battle with the enemy and I think there was a number of reasons which one could attribute this feeling to. We had undergone very serious training in the Soviet Union and other places and had always looked forward to this historical engagement between ourselves and the forces of the enemy. For a trained soldier it is always important to participate in battle because that is where you prove the merits of your training and at the same time there is nothing scintillating and stimulating to a soldier as to test his whole reactions in actual battle, your responses when you are under fire. I think every soldier looks forward to this and we were no exception. So we marched to the South mostly at night.

There were reasons why we moved mostly at night. We discovered once again that the terrain was very bad. It was empty, with no cover except for shrubs, especially as we moved deeper into Zimbabwe towards Matebeleland. We had expected that there would be bush but there was none. In the light of the furious activity of the spotter planes and heli-

copters, it was hazardous to move during the day. During the day we took cover, dug foxholes and trenches in preparation for any possible engagement with the enemy and used the cover of darkness to cover as much ground as possible in our march towards the south. But again I want to point out that I as a Commissar found the spirit of the men quite magnificent. There were no complaints whatsoever and the comrades were facing serious problems of water and food. We could only survive on game meat and that was also risky. Shooting and killing wild animals was a way of signalling to the enemy and his agents that we were around. Yet there were no alternatives. Back to this question of the terrain, one of the best lessons we drew military speaking is that it is important for the soldiers in any military operation or march to have some data because if we had some data as to the nature of the terrain, whether there was cover or not, it could have helped us to prepare in advance how to react to the fact that the cover was poor or non-existent. But of course that belongs to history and I think those lessons have been learnt. Although we faced these problems of food and water, in all fairness, no comrades complained. The spirit of understanding and of standing up to these difficulties was tremendous. I think the biggest legacy of the Luthuli Detachment at Wankie was the sort of absolute commitment of our fighters to the revolution to an extent where to them things like hunger and thirst were not primary. What was primary was the requirement of our movement to reach our destination, despite all obstacles. This was the spirit, and the spirit was maintained throughout.

Then came the days of our battles. The first battle we fought was in the afternoon. We had done the usual: taking cover, digging ourselves in, deploying and organising all round defence of our temporary base. After some time we noticed that the enemy was not far from us. We had detected the motorised enemy earlier. The vehicles were visible from a distance. Since it was during the day we deliberately refrained from engaging the enemy at that particular point in time. But it was quite clear that the enemy also noticed that we were around. They

probably did not know exactly where we were but they knew we were in the vicinity. In the afternoon the enemy moved into the offensive by firing at random at the sector where we had taken position.

We had decided earlier on that each and everyone ought to be very economic with the ammunition he had due to the fact that we did not have access to enough ammunition except what we were carrying. In other words one was not to shoot until he had a clear view of the target so that we could account for every bullet used. Of course the enemy had advantages. He had communication means and could communicate to his headquarters to organise the dropping of ammunition and whatever weapons they needed. But with us it was different. Our headquarters were far and we had to rely on what we carried on our backs, in our knapsacks. So the usual psychological war of the enemy of firing furiously at our sector continued coupled with shouting and calling on us to surrender. From the very beginning during the course of our preparations we had made it clear amongst ourselves that surrender was out of the question. We were not going to fire back unless we had a clear view of the enemy. The enemy got impatient. They stood up and began to ask "Where are the terrorists?" This was when there was a fuselage of furious fire from us. That fuselage, the furious nature of that reply, drove away the enemy. They simply ran for their dear lives leaving behind food, ammunition and communication equipment. In this first epic battle we lost three comrades: Charles Seshoba, Sparks Moloi and Baloi, one comrade, Mhlonga was wounded. On the side of the enemy we must have killed between 12 to 15, including a lieutenant, a Sergeant-Major, a Warrant Officer and a number of other soldiers. The rest literally ran helter-skelter for their lives. One memorable thing about that encounter was the fact that this was the first time that we had what I can call a civilised meal, cheese, biltong, meat and other usual rations carried by the regular army. For us this represented a feast. So it was a good capture. We also captured a brand new LMG, some machine guns, uniforms and boots.

It was a memorable victory and to every soldier victory is very important. This was a

virgin victory for us since we had never fought with modern weapons against the enemy. For us that day was a day of celebrations because with our own eyes we had seen the enemy run. We had seen the enemy frozen with fear. That lifted our spirits and transformed us into a fighting force. We had also seen and observed each other reacting to the enemy's attacks. A feeling of faith in one another and recognition of the courage of the unit developed.

This was important and we knew from then on there was no going back. What was interesting was that despite all these odds, fighting away with no back-up from HQ actually with no communication from HQ, there was never a feeling that: "Guys we are in trouble now, the enemy has attacked us. Let us run back to Lusaka". On the contrary we were all looking forward. We were moving and nothing was going to stop us. We moved on after having that fantastic feast. We proceeded because it could have been dangerous just to celebrate and wait there. We knew the enemy was going to organise reinforcements. But I think we had imparted to the enemy or conveyed an important message, namely that "we are not just push-overs, you enemy must know that we are a serious fighting force." I think the enemy learned that lesson on that day. I don't want to portray a situation of everything being easy. There were problems. We were running short of food, there was no water and our uniforms were tattered. There was not even rivers where we could have a decent bath. But again this has to be taken in its proper perspective. Despite these difficulties basically our morale was not affected. There were days after that when the enemy was quite fanatic in its aerial reconnaissance. A week after this battle there was another one. One afternoon at about fifteen hours our advanced units noted that the enemy was going to camp for the day. The enemy would start at six very early in the morning but at about 1830hrs they would stop all their activities. They were inactive at night and never bothered to do anything in the evening. But this day the enemy must have discovered that we were somewhere not very far for it decided to camp pending the resumption of activity the follow-

ing day. Three hours earlier the enemy had carried out furious bombardment not far from us using Buccaneers and helicopters. But fortunately for us the bombing and strafing was about two kilometres away. Our own understanding was that the enemy thought they had actually hit the place where we had camped and that the main purpose for camping for the night was for a mopping up operation the following day. So the enemy's commander and the enemy's HQ must have believed that the airforce had struck at us accurately and yet the truth of the matter was that we were not affected by the bombardment at all. The commander of the joint MK-ZAPU Detachment took the decision that this was the time to raid the enemy. We organised units to go and raid the enemy. I was in that together with James April, Douglas Wana, the late Jack Simelane, Victor Dlamini, and others. We crawled towards the enemy's position and first attacked their tents with grenades and then followed with our AKs and LMGs. The enemy fought back furiously and after fifteen minutes we called for reinforcements from the rear, and within ten minutes we overran the enemy's position. In that battle we killed the enemy's colonel who was commanding. His name was Thomas, a huge chunk of a man wearing size 10 boots. We killed a few lieutenants and other soldiers.

The story was the same as in our previous battle. The enemy fled leaving behind supplies, weapons, grenades, uniforms and communication radios. Another victory for our detachment. I want to emphasise the question of victory because the Luthuli Detachment was never defeated in battle.

Our supplies became depleted and we were moving to a barren part of Zimbabwe. We decided that it would be futile to continue fighting because the enemy was bringing in more reinforcement. So we deliberately took a decision to retreat to Botswana. The aim of this decision is important to emphasise. This was no surrender to the paramilitary units of Botswana government. It was important for us to retreat to strategic parts of Botswana, refresh ourselves, heal those who were not well, acquire food supplies and proceed. We

then crossed over to Botswana. But by this time the South African regime had pressurised the Botswana government to prevent us from getting into Botswana. We found a situation where the Rhodesian security forces joined by the South Africans were pursuing us and within Botswana the para-military force had been mobilised to stop us from entering Botswana. We had to discuss seriously what our response was going to be if the Botswana security forces confronted us. It was difficult to reach a decision, it was really dilemma. Botswana is a member of the OAU, and in theory it is committed to the struggle for the liberation of South Africa. So Botswana does not constitute an enemy of the liberation movement, an enemy of ZAPU and the ANC. We came to the correct political decision that we were not going to fight them. When they came to meet us they played very conciliatory and friendly, saying that they had not come to harm us. They said their instructions were not to engage us and that all they wanted was that we surrender and our fate would be discussed amicably. They also promised that we would not be detained. We accepted the bonafides and surrendered, only to discover that they were actually being commanded by white officers from Britain and South Africa. This caused problems for us.

All of a sudden we were manacled, hand-cuffed and abused. Of course all this is history now. We were sentenced to long-terms of imprisonment; 3, 5 to six years and ended up in the maximum security prison in Gaborone. One of the most outstanding fighters of that detachment was the legendary comrade Basil February, who has become part of the legend of MK.

He moved far deep into Zimbabwe reaching Figtree which is about a few kilometres from the border between Botswana and Zimbabwe. There he clashed with the enemy for more than two hours and lost his life. We have reports that he killed a number of enemy soldiers and refused to surrender. He exemplified the spirit of the entire detachment, the readiness to fight whether you are alone or with comrades, refusing to sur-

render. I believe this is the spirit that sustains MK even today. We see those comrades who came after 1976 upholding this remarkable tradition and ignoring in fact what happens to one as a person and upholding the fact that the revolution is the most important. The Wankie campaign has been appraised by historians. But some appraisals have been quite hostile. For instance Karim Essack of the Unity Movement who is based in Dar-Es-Salaam deals with this campaign in a very unobjective manner, and refers to it as an exercise in adventurism and a glaring example of desperation. We disagree with that point of view. We believe that it was correct for our movement to be involved in actual practical steps in making preparations for MK to get back to the theatre of action, and that theatre of action is South Africa. It would have been wrong for us to wait for a favourable situation in terms of some rear bases or some country bordering South Africa getting independence. It was important for us to rough it and to participate in creating favourable conditions for ourselves. This is what a revolutionary is and that is what revolutions are about. Namely a movement participating and creating conditions for itself. You never wait because no favourable conditions can come on their own without the participation of the subjective factor and the subjective factor in this case was our movement and its army, MK. So from that point of view the decision for comrades to participate in Zimbabwe and to open a corridor to S.A. through Zimbabwe was a correct one. The ANC and MK continues along that old path opened by the Wankie Detachment. Today we are making our way to our country through a number of countries. Sometimes these countries are hostile to us and are not receptive to the idea that we should go through their countries. In fact they arrest us when they discover that we are there. But that has never stopped us from proceeding to our country. Wankie was an important initial step. Today we continue to move along the same lines. I think the foundation stone of our present gains was laid at Wankie and Sipolilo.