



ABOVE: Colonel Gabriel Ramushwana (Venda defence force chief), Major-General Wally Black (former director-general of operations, SADF HQ), Chris Hani (head of Umkhonto we Sizwe) and Thabo Mbeki (ANC executive). **LEFT:** Hein Grosskopf (MK), Paul Brink (former officer commanding Cape Town Highlanders), Colonel Gideon Meiring (SADF intelligence officer).

RASHID LOMBARD

ference, both serving and retired officers made it clear that the SADF would receive a full report on proceedings.

They also made it clear that the dismissive attitude towards the conference of Defence Minister Magnus Malan was not shared by the top echelons of the SADF.

Former Permanent Force Commandant Jakkie Cilliers, responding to a question about SADF support for President F W de Klerk, said this:

"From discussions with the highest levels I am convinced they realise very fully that there is no alternative for South Africa but to move fully and rapidly to a political solution."

Indeed, Cilliers and others closely associated with the military – including Major-General Wally Black, Commodore Andrew McMurray, Commodore Vic Holderness, officers of the Cape Town Highlanders – were adamant that as early as 1976 the SADF were pleading with the government to find a political solution.

Cilliers expressed the view that obstacles to the negotiation process were more likely to come from the police than the SADF, although he admitted that support for De Klerk in the rank and file of the SADF was "another issue".

Both he and Black ("the general" to all delegates) distanced the SADF from the "special forces" under the command of the chief of the defence force.

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THE man white South Africans have been encouraged to hate, 49-year-old MK chief of staff Chris Hani, is as skilled in the art of human relations as he is in guerilla warfare.

During the five days of the conference he was humorous and indefatigable in a quest for hearts and minds that, judging from the sidelines, seemed to have considerable success.

Almost equal to their chief in diplomacy were the about 50 delegates from MK, who showed great restraint in the face of comments from the hawks of the home delegation who were often unconscious of the racist and sexist attitude revealed by their remarks.

Hani himself was deploying jokes on the first evening, challenging Citizen Force officers to early morning jogs around Lusaka, gleefully reporting the opinion of Major-General Wally Black (former director general of operations at defence headquarters in Pretoria) that Hani would rank no higher than lieutenant in his army.

One of the most delicate moments of the conference, for the anti-militarists in any event, was when former Permanent Force Commandant Jakkie Cilliers presented Hani with a glossy Armscor pamphlet.

MK chief a reluctant soldier

near him.

Earlier, in the first paper delivered to the conference, Hani came across in the image of the scholar-soldier, giving an historical overview of armed struggle before turning to the present situation.

"Calls for our unilateral abandonment of the armed struggle, in the face of persistent police and army brutality; in the face of a battery of laws preventing normal and free political activity while giving sweeping powers to the SA security establishment, are as unfair as they are unrealistic," he said.

Other "ominous signs" disturbing to the ANC were "benign tolerance towards the activity of the right wing and vigilante groups, apparent hesitation to release political prisoners, and deployment of the notorious mercenary Battalion 32 in the explosive situation in Natal".

As long as this kind of violence continued, Hani said, MK would continue with the armed struggle. MK had "a moral duty

"I'm sorry I can't offer you a directorship," Cilliers said, entering into the spirit of detente, while Hani devoted himself to making a great ado of pointing out particularly wondrous weaponry to those sitting

Peace mission

"Don't paint us all by them," the general said. "We're proud of our record. We're ashamed of what those people do."

In fact, the anguish behind this remark erupted on the last full day of the conference when former officer commanding Cape Town Highlanders Tony Marriner rose to speak for "the delegates of the SADF".

"We don't have to be convinced of the justice of the ANC cause," he said. "We would not be here if we didn't believe we must stretch out our hands to the organisation which inevitably will be part of the future government."

"By the same token, we haven't come here to be vilified, attacked and identified with terrorists and atrocities. We are soldiers. We have followed the soldier's code."

Marriner went on to warn the MK delegation: "We are mild compared with what you are going to face in future negotiations," and to urge that MK took advantage of the advice he and his colleagues could offer on how these might be handled.

On the other hand, ANC/MK delegates and others chose to exert considerable self-restraint and diplomacy in the face of what ANC leader Thabo Mbeki delicately termed "baggage from the past". Delivering the closing address, Mbeki said delegates had "an obligation to ourselves and to our people to sustain the process of moving forward together".

For this process to take place, it was necessary to assume good faith in those who had been adversaries.

IT IS impossible to sum up in one article a four-day conference characterised by high-level inputs (an awesome range of papers), fierce debate, and the conceptual gulf between two hugely different political cultures.

A book, due out as soon as possible, and seminars in the various urban centres of the country will attempt that task.

However, it is a measure of the success of the conference that in its closing minutes Mbeki could say, with the solemn support of all: "We will act together as comrades because we are united in one common resolve to end the terrible situation at home as quickly as possible so that our country can live in peace."

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Reluctant soldier

to defend our people".

He appealed to the government to realise that the ANC had many disciplined members who could play an important role on the ground, including the control of instances of intimidation and violence.

It was folly, therefore, for the government to drag its feet on the question of the return of exiles and release of political prisoners.

In an attempt to bridge the cultural gap between the technocrats and those who use the language of political struggle, Hani offered this description of MK:

"At the beginning we were only a few individuals, making home-made bombs. We had no facilities, no bases. But we've scored some successes, we've won a sophistication. We've hit Sasol, Koeberg, Voortrekkerhoogte, police stations.

"We were inspirers and organisers, we generated a spirit of defiance, and the youth responded. The state had to take

note of us.

"We have been able to scratch at the regime in our own way. We were like a flea - hence the cross-border attacks against us. We became an example of the spirit of no surrender.

"We've taken a beating. Many of us have died. We have won no territory. But in the townships people are singing the songs of MK," he said.

Off the public platform, Hani reveals himself as a reluctant soldier, involved in armed struggle "out of necessity, not out of choice".

According to a number of (banned) publications, he is a man who has acquired a reputation over two decades as an officer who leads by example. His exploits in outwitting numerous attempts on his life by SA government agents in Botswana and Lesotho are legendary.

He is obviously loved and respected by those under his command, some of whom expressed outrage in private conversation at the way Hani has been de-

monised in the South African press.

Asked to comment about this, Hani himself says this: "I am not a torturer. I passionately believe in social justice and I extend this even to those who have committed crimes against the ANC.

"I have campaigned for a code of conduct for captured prisoners. It's out of character for me to use torture against those already in my hands. I fight them, sure. That's a different thing.

"I was completely bewildered to be accused in the press of torture. I don't believe in capital punishment - for anyone.

"I don't even believe in corporal punishment. I abhor any form of treatment that dehumanises people. I believe in creative, rehabilitative punishment that has the potential to transform a person.

"In our ranks, the label is 'he's too liberal, he's too soft,'" he says, and he laughs.

Such are military tales . . .

IN THE warm Zambian night, three men sat talking, laughing, drinking beer - Paul, Elliot and Martin.

Martin and Elliot could have met as boys in Natal. One grew up in Pinetown. The other stayed in Clermont after school. They could have shot each other dead in Angola in 1980/1981. Martin was a parabat. Elliot was stationed at an MK camp and operating in support of Fapla forces in the area.

A little later and Paul, a former lieutenant in military intelligence, could have debriefed Martin or handed Elliot over to interrogators.

He tells a story of how he was in a helicopter with a prisoner. The man was blindfolded and his arms pinioned behind his back, elbow to elbow.

Paul's duty was to hand the prisoner over to interrogators at the end of the chopper ride. He knew the prisoner was probably going to die.

There were others in the helicopter. He put his hand on the bound man's thigh, touched him and hoped the touch told the man something of humanity.

Such are military tales.

Paul says he is not damaged. Martin says he left the church while he was a soldier.



Former parabat Martin Birdwhistle and MK political commissar Elliot Mduni.

He tells of crossing the Angolan border during the 1980/81 invasion - Operation Protea - the SADF called it. Some 150 vehicles and thousands of troops paused while the army padre told them: "This is a just war. Over there is the enemy. God is with you."

Martin shakes his head. "You can't be part of the church in the army," he says.

Elliot takes a different view. But he joined a different army.

"Up to this moment I still draw strength from some religious teachings. They hold a lot," he says. "The first time I read

about the need of sharing was not in Marxist books, it was in the Bible."

They agree that "the basis of the Bible is social justice", that "it's a socialist book".

They pursue parallel paths -- Elliot seconded from MK to trade union work, particularly with the Food and Allied Workers' Union, Martin to a personnel job in the Natal sugar industry with the same union.

Such were the encounters during evenings off from the formal business of the conference. Such is the tragedy and the promise of our country.