

Justice "Gizenga" Mpanza

Mpanza¹ joined the ANC in 1955. He attended trade union classes in Durban that were run by Stephen Dlamini. When Umkhonto we Sizwe was formed, he was recruited into one of its units. He left the country in May 1963. He received military training in the Soviet Union and is also a veteran of the Wankie Campaign. After serving time in Botswana, following arrests after the Wankie Campaign, he returned to Zambia. There he served as the Chief of Reconnaissance in the Zambezi Valley. He was subsequently sent to the Soviet Union for further military training. He formed part of the group of guerrillas who received training in sea-borne landings. They were planning to infiltrate the country using the Aventura ship.

I was born at Groutville Mission Reserve. My chief was Albert Luthuli, and my father was one of Chief Luthuli's indunas. I was born in 1937, September 5. I was the first born on my mother's side. My father had three wives. The first two passed away and then he married his third wife, a daughter from the MaNkwanyaneni clan. I have five brothers; two have already passed away and three are still alive. One of them is based in Pietermaritzburg. He is the youngest. The one who is after me has taken pension from Shell Company. He stays with me here at home. The other one is at Mariannridge and he also stays with us at home. I also have a sister who is divorced and she also stays with us. These are all the members of my family.

I went to school at Groutville. I stopped going to school when I was in Standard 6 because I was too old. Most of us began schooling when we were eleven or twelve years old. We spent our formative years looking after cattle and all that. When I discovered that I had difficulties continuing with education, I decided to look for employment. This was also because one of my brothers was already working. In 1954 I went to Durban looking for employment. Even though I went to look for work I already knew about the famous 1952 Defiance Campaign during which people were campaigning for their freedom. This campaign reached us in the rural areas. It also happened that when I visited my uncle who lived in Clermont, at eMaNgadini, I heard a lot of stories being told about the Defiance Campaign and mass action undertaken by the people. I soon became aware that they were fighting for liberation from the oppressive rule of the whites. I was convinced that this was the correct thing to do – people should fight for their rights and freedom. Well, I was still steeped in rural traditions, looking after cattle and I also enjoyed stick-fighting very much.

When I first arrived here (in Durban) in 1954, I went to visit Lakhani House. I found Stephen Dlamini there. I also found other comrades who were already in the vicinity. They were holding discussions about the struggle for liberation. I was very happy about what was happening. I also went around looking for work and at last I was successful and I was employed.

¹ Edited by Gregory Houston from an interview conducted by Jabulani Sithole and Bernard Magubane, 12 October 2001, Durban, SADET Oral History Project.

Whilst I was working, there were evening classes on politics from Monday to Friday. I soon became interested. For some time I also used to attend mass meetings that were held at Beatrice Street. As a result, I realised that this issue about the struggle for liberation was becoming serious. I carried on attending the mass meetings until I joined. I became a card-carrying member of the ANC. There were efforts to revive the youth wing but I realised that joining the youth would be a waste of time, hence my conscious decision to join the ANC's mother body.

Well, around '55, '56 I heard lot of stories about action, people wanting action and all that. Hence, I think it was around 1957, when the revolt began in Mpondoland, eNgquza Hill¹, and I heard that Anderson Ganyile was at Lakhani Chambers. He told people about the events in Mpondoland. Hence I was also informed about the Mpondoland Revolt. I felt like going there to join the battle immediately. But others discouraged me and said that amaMpondo would not allow that to happen. Moreover, this was their battle. I replied and said even though this was the case, we must also do something. We were tired of folding our arms. Passfour [Johannes Phungula] was also present – he was in the forefront. He was the instigator and he also used to conduct some of our political classes. There was also another boy whose name was Bafana [Alfred] Duma. He passed away in Swaziland. Duma also supported me and said to me that action should commence immediately because we were tired of the ongoing shop-talk, listening to old men. We then decided to take action on our own. I asked for their opinions concerning such proposed action. Consequently, we met as comrades. I think that during the first day we were thirteen in our meeting, and Duma was going to address us about what type of action we were going to adopt. But Duma did not pitch up as arranged. We do not know what held him up. But the meeting proceeded without Duma. It was suggested that we should adopt a position that would highlight our anger and simultaneously support the revolt in Pondoland. That is how we began our action by burning sugar cane. This was during 1957.

Hayi, the concerted action to burn the sugar cane proceeded relentlessly. I remember that others went to burn forests at kwaNgubomnyama at Harding. Others went to kwaNongoma – cutting down the fence demarcating King Cyprian [Bhekuzulu]'s place. It was during the time when the land was divided into bantustans. King Cyprian was against the formation of bantustans. He seemed to support our action of destroying the fence. It was then that we realised that we were doing the correct thing. We proceeded with burning the sugar cane. We burnt the sugar cane from 1957, 1958 until 1959 when Sisulu was brought down to stop the action in Natal. He asked, “Why is sugar cane being destroyed on such a scale? We suspect that the people behind this act are organised.” *Hayi*, when I arrived (at the meeting), word had leaked that I was amongst those who were burning sugar cane fields. I was very happy. uDuma had gone to leak the news to Chief Luthuli. This was why Sisulu came, because sugar cane was being burnt down in large quantities.

¹ The revolt in Mpondoland was known as Intaba and as Ikongo among the Xesibe in Mount Ayliff. The revolt took place in the districts of Bizana, Flagstaff, Lusikisiki and Ntabankulu. There was also rebellion in the Mount Ayliff district, which is sometimes mentioned as forming part of the Mpondoland revolt. Tension over the betterment scheme and the Bantu Authorities mounted steadily from 1952 to 1959. When Chief Botha Sigcau appointed tribal authorities, rioting broke out in Bizana in 1958, and the rioters formed a committee, known as the 'Intaba' (Mountain) Committee and took to the hills. (Refer to SADET (eds), 2004, pp 177ff.)

Whites were crying. Everybody was concerned about the fact that sugar cane fields were being burnt virtually every day.

It is true that we had a system that we used. We used to spread newspapers at a certain spot in the sugar cane field, place a candle on the paper, maybe cut the candle into pieces and then set it alight. You then immediately vacated the field. The candle would burn, burn, burn until the newspapers caught the flame – hence the fire would spread. Usually the fire would begin during the early hours of the morning. Mmmm, this is how we use to work – clandestinely. That is why they could not catch us as the people who were responsible for burning the sugar cane fields. We used candles for a very long time. Then Sisulu asked us to stop what we were doing. He said that our action would force the government to target them. He said people were not prepared for a protracted violent battle with the state. It was also during the time when people did not have access to guns.

I also remember when we planned to attack the July Handicap. We were asked to stop this action and I do not know how we complied with this instruction as our plans were well advanced. We had a single gun. It was owned by one of us and some of us had never seen a gun before. But also we had never seen this gun that was said to belong to one of us. It was always intimated that it was readily available. We were about 36 as *amabutho* and prepared to storm the July Handicap event. We had told ourselves we were going to harm white people who attended the event so as to precipitate war. We wanted war to begin. This was one of the methods to begin this war. We were already armed with spears and other things. Some of our weapons were kept at Vakalisa's place. We were waiting for the actual day of the event so as to take our things and go and fight. Then during the day before the actual day of the race, 1st July, we went to our office and congregated there. We wanted to find out how we were going to enter the racecourse. We had realised that there were sufficient numbers of people who were to join us. Then it was said we were going to discuss this issue because the race was going to take place the following day. But when we were discussing the strategy during that day, I observed the fact that, as the meeting progressed, our numbers were whittling down. Subsequently, only a few of us remained behind – those who were determined to go and fight. People were disappearing one by one until we realised that only a few of us remained behind. I think about ten of us – or eleven. Nobody had given the people the order to leave. They just left, one by one. When were we going to meet tomorrow? Where? We had not yet discussed all these crucial issues. Then Duma suggested that we should adjourn the meeting and leave and meet again the following day, very early in the morning. *Hayi*, we did return the next morning. But when we arrived there were no people around, even though some of us were convinced that the battle would commence as soon as the race began at one o'clock.

We were not more than six. All the others ran away. *Ewu*, what are we going to do? We waited at the office until we realised that people were definitely not coming. We hid our weapons, bush knives, etc; we left these weapons behind at the office. Even the person who owned the gun did not arrive. *Hawu*, then I boarded a train to Groutville because it was a Saturday. My head was spinning. It was too quiet and therefore it was evident that no action was going to be taken.

I returned back on Monday. Nobody was prepared to discuss the issue. There were even fewer pupils during the political education classes that evening. People were now running away when they heard that we were now planning action. But some were eager.

Ayi, the situation remained dormant until the Mkhumbane issue arose. There was a protest march to the city of Durban. I think this was around 1960. Eleven police officers were killed when the march to Durban took place. Ten men and one woman were killed, hence eleven in total. When this action took place I was already on my way home. It was around twelve o'clock and I had boarded a train for my journey. When I reached home I heard that something had taken place in Durban. When I returned back to Durban on Monday I was arrested and was asked about my whereabouts. Zulu from the Special Branch arrived and asked me about my whereabouts on Saturday. I replied that I was at home. He said:

“You did not go home. You were at Mkhumbane (Cato Manor).”

I replied: “I was not at eMkhumbane. What was I doing at eMkhumbane? I am always at home (Groutville) during weekends.”

Luckily I was helped by one Charles Mpanza, who was based at (Durban train) station. He was a CID. He said he saw me boarding the train at the station. Mpanza was forever present at the railway station. This is what helped me and hence I was let off. *Ayi*, things remained like that (there was no “action”). But also this was during the time when preparations to form uMkhonto were in motion. It was Sisulu who said we had to discuss this issue so that when the armed struggle began people should be well prepared.

Maybe I have omitted the 1957 part. I was very much in love with a woman from the Dlodla clan based in Mangethe. It happened that when we started some of the things (burning the sugar cane field) she carried some of the things during her visits. For example, I was no longer carrying candles with me. Somebody had to carry the candles so as to avoid being caught red-handed. This was her job/contribution. Even during the time when we began the official sabotage campaign, that is, when we stole the dynamite, it was our partners who transported and carried this material to the targeted areas. This was the same woman, Regina, whom I got married to in 1960. She participated in our endeavours, even though she was not fully aware of our intentions. It was only when the sabotage campaign got stronger that she wanted to know more about our intentions. I realised that this should not be the case because of security risks. When we had a house at kwaMashu, G section, we used to keep the sulphuric acid near the sideboard in the dining room. It was in a cup and one would not take notice but we knew the importance of what was inside that cup. She was also in charge of the dynamite if it was supposed to be kept in hiding by me. Even when she had our first-born child she used to strap the baby on her back – together with the dynamite – in order to deliver it to me in Durban. Then we would distribute the dynamite accordingly.

I was in Ronnie Kasrils's first unit. I have forgotten the names of the other members of the unit. But one of them was [Cletus] Mzimela. He was a member of my unit, but he was transferred to another unit. I am not sure whether uGedleyihlekisa (Jacob Zuma) was part of our unit. During that time he was a "kitchen boy" here in Durban – uZuma. We used to hold meetings where he used to stay as a domestic worker/"kitchen boy". I then changed work and was now based in kwaHullet in West Street. I now had a convenient place as my residence. My ANC branch was at Msizini. It was easy now that I was based in Durban. My first sabotage was conducted together with Ronnie's wife, Eleanor. She was our driver. We went to blow up a pylon in Westville. The city of Durban was cast in darkness – including KwaMashu Township. She drove and dropped me home at KwaMashu and returned to her home. She drove fast and police arrived at my place hardly minutes after her departure. Probably their routes crossed.

Ehe. The cops came to my place and knocked and knocked and they found me sleeping. They demanded to know what I was wearing (during the day). I showed them the clothes that I had been wearing. They thoroughly examined the shoes and soon gave up their search – hence they left. I then sat up and my wife asked me what is happening. I said to her the police had just suspected me. The Special Branch had been to my place on countless occasions. This went on until I got information through Zulu when he told Mpanza, the CID, that:

"Mpanza, your son (meaning me – we shared the same surname) is one of those responsible concerning all the troubles taking place here in Durban. We are going to arrest him when the 90 days law takes effect. He has no option but to confess when he is in jail."

This is one of the major reasons that led to me leaving in 1963. Also, my father passed away in 1962. I could not stand being detained under the 90 days law. I do not like going to jail. First it was the 12 days law but nobody was arrested. Then it was the 90 days laws. Then I decided to go into exile in 1963 and left my wife behind here at home. I asked her to return to her parents' place – to her mother. Luckily, my mother-in-law took her back to school and subsequently she completed both her matric and teaching diploma. I went into exile. When I left Durban it was myself, Jeqe, Mzimela, Ken-Ken and Derrick Nkosi. I have forgotten the other one, but we were seven. We left for Johannesburg.

Bruno Mtolo was with us during the first sabotage when we went to blow up the pylon at Westville. The police had suspected for a long time that I was involved in what was happening. We left for exile through Botswana. We first went to stay in Johannesburg, in Soweto. We were picked up from there on our way to Botswana. We were staying with a colleague, Dinga. He took me to Molefe's house. That is where I stayed for two weeks and then we left for Lobatse. We met Chris Hani in Soweto and then we left with Mbatha from Johannesburg. He took us to the border. We found Joe Modise waiting for us on the other side.

When we crossed the border to Lobatse we found Modise and we did not know the whereabouts of Mbatha – the person who was transporting us. He just disappeared like that and then Modise picked us up and put us in a truck. We drove through the desert towards Kazangula.

It was a very long journey and I do not remember the number of days we spent on the road because sometimes we had to push the truck through difficult terrain, including forests, etc – it was chaotic. We killed a zebra during the first day of our journey. We ate its meat with pap. Finally we arrived at Kazangula and again we found Joe Modise waiting for us. It then became obvious to us that he was in charge. He gave money to Archie Sibeko. Archie kept the money and we did not have money. We crossed through Kazangula to the other side where we took cover. They said we must take cover. I remember the fact that I took cover next to a skeleton. I was frightened. We kept cover until late in the afternoon with Mark Shope as our leader. We were with Mark Shope throughout the journey (to Lusaka) after crossing through the border of Southern Rhodesia.

When we arrived at the other side of Kazangula – in Northern Rhodesia – Mark Shope led the group. Archie Sibeko – Zola Zembe (the MK name for Sibeko) – was supposed to help him. When we reached Livingstone a message had gone out that they were looking for people from South Africa. We were then met by people from UNIP (the United National Independence Party led by Kenneth Kaunda) and they provided us with shelter. I do not remember the name of that township/location. We went there and they gave us tea. Then we were instructed to get ready and prepare for a journey by train. Archie Sibeko had the money. Then Mark Shope went to look for Archie, as we were now divided into small groups. We were with Chris Hani until we reached the railway station. Chris was helped by the fact that he had a baby sitting on his lap during the train journey. We were arrested as we were going towards Lusaka. I do not remember the name of the station. It is a famous place. I have forgotten the name. They targeted those who were light in complexion. That is how we were arrested. Chris kept still with the baby and did not even look towards us. *Ehe, Awu*, Hani remained behind in the train. He was amongst the four or five members of our groups who were not arrested and who were collected by members of UNIP and the ANC.

The police took us to immigration, next to the Lusaka railway station. When we arrived there we soon realised that it was tough – we were going to be arrested. I stood up and went out, pretending as if I was going to the toilet. I continued down the stairs from the 4th floor where we were kept. I went out the building through the front door. When I was downstairs I saw a car with a flag. It belonged to Liso who was the ANC's secretary. He asked me whether I was looking for the manager. I replied and said to him do not ask me anything. Just take me away from this place. He did so and took me to his house. That is how I escaped arrest. It happened that Archie and the others were in detention for a very long time. This was until some comrades from the ANC and UNIP went to rescue them from the immigration building. They were supposed to go to court and then get deported to Rhodesia. [Roy] Welensky¹ wanted us badly. I was very comfortable at Liso's house. It was like home for me. It was also during that time when arrangements were made for us to leave because it became apparent that a large group had escaped arrest. The arrangements were made for us to go to Tanganyika. The transport that was going to take us to our destination belonged to Kaunda and Nkambule.

¹ Roy Welensky was Prime Minister of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, which existed from 1956 until its collapse in 1963 (Drew, 1997, pp 358-64).

Their trucks took us up to the Tanganyika border. This is when we began to feel free. We were told that this was a free African country. Julius Nyerere was in charge as a leader. During that era Welensky was in charge in Rhodesia. It was also apparent that during that time, the Boers' line of defence extended to the border of Tanganyika. We boarded buses and we were transported to Mbeka where we boarded a train to Dar es Salaam. When we arrived in Dar es Salaam we were transported to the Luthuli camp.

We numbered about 43 when we went there. There were other people when we arrived. Others were transferred to Mandela camp on the same day. The latter were those who went to exile for education purposes. There was already a unit that went to Morocco for military training. Others were in Algeria. We stayed there until the group from Morocco returned. It consisted of Lambert Moloji, Petrus Mthembu and Isaac Makopo. Then we began the physical exercises and they shared information with us. They told us more about military training and about becoming a soldier. This was good for us. From there, what happened is that, though we arrived in June, in August luckily for us, we were part of the first group to leave and we went to Moscow for military training. Mmm, we did not stay for a long time in Tanzania. We were taken to Moscow. We trained in flats around Moscow. The name of the place was called Ivanov. We were trained in different methods of sabotage and how to command, etc. But we concentrated more on sabotage. From there we focused on intelligence and so on. This was until we completed the relevant training.

We were there from August 1963 until around December 1964. We were now eager to leave and go and fight. We had received training now, but towards the end of our training we were mixed with another group whose presence in Moscow we were aware of. This was Eric Mtshali's group. We returned to Africa together with this group. We went to Dar es Salaam. We did not stay there for a long time and we were transferred to Kongwa camp – on the way through Morogoro. We stayed in that camp until we took a decision that we were leaving. We had decided that we would take a lorry from the camp because we wanted to come back and fight here at home. We would take this lorry as a group from Natal. It was myself, Pangaman, and Problem, together with others, like Msomi.

Hawu, we drove the truck until we reached Morogoro. We were arrested when we reached Morogoro. We were arrested by Tanzanian soldiers after we had taken the truck from our camp. They locked us up. We then demanded to see J.B. Marks in order to explain the reason why we took the truck. But Kotane was sent to us instead. Kotane arrived and castigated us and he pulled no punches. We said, "No, we have sound reasons. We are tired of loitering at the camps and doing nothing. We want to go and fight." There was an old man amongst us in the camps who used to recite the old Zulu proverb about cowards, saying "*umkhonto wegwala uphelele etsheni*". It was Gumede who used the proverb, meaning "the spear belonging to a coward ends up as waste/rubbish amongst rocks in the veld (rather than piercing the enemy's flesh in close battle/combat – particularly after military training)". According to Gumede, people had been dormant for a long time.

But then it was said that we would be taken back to the camp to discuss this issue. Tambo would be part of these discussions. And this was the case. We were then taken back to the camp. But others began to say there was another issue that had to be resolved – tribalism. We said, “No, we are not aware of such an issue.” Tribalism was non-existent. All we wanted was to go back home and fight. We were tired of talking. Then our case was discussed. I am not sure whether there was a person who was found guilty. We were reprimanded. Nothing negative or bad transpired as a result of the (truck) incident. But the leadership became conscious of the fact that something had to be done regarding our eagerness to go home and fight. Then it was suggested that a group had to be relocated to Lusaka. I was amongst the first group that was relocated. We then began operating underground. Chris was already there during that time and he had already done the reconnaissance.

Hayi-ke, even that reconnaissance went on for a very long time without producing a report. Again we thought that nothing was being done, but we were not aware that preparations were being made. I was also part of that reconnaissance mission. I joined for a very long time and I operated around Lusaka, surveying the Kazangula area with no obvious result, as we thought we would immediately cross the border after the reconnaissance was completed.

Mmmh, this went on until the '67 event when we were given permission to enter through Wankie. When we crossed into Wankie, we were in a unit that was supposed to operate in Durban – it was under my command. There was a unit that was going to the Transvaal. *Eeh*, and there was that boy uMlenze who was in charge of the unit going to the Transkei. Chris was in charge of the one going to Cape Town. We were few in terms of numbers. We were about eight in our unit. We were then picked up and dropped at a farm in Livingstone that had been bought. There was everything when we arrived there. When we arrived, every person was given a gun and bullets. It was suggested that comrades should choose bullets for themselves. *Awu*, people chose the preferred bullets and put them aside. But your luggage became heavier and you had to reduce it accordingly. We were also given hand grenades. Hence we were well armed. We also had AK 47s. *Hayi*, we left the farm and went to the river. We did not know the place where we were supposed to cross – it was surrounded by hills and, as result, one would have never thought that a person could walk through that landscape. You know I will die a sad death if I do not visit that place again whilst I am still alive.

There was also another very old man, Castro, *ya*, Castro Dolo. He was the person who encouraged us a lot, kept our spirits high concerning many things we did, because he was always the first one to show up. When we went down the terrain we were given knives. Others dropped their knives. We were carrying too much weight and when we went down the terrain you would put your feet on the hands of a comrade who had positioned himself underneath the rocks. He had to carry your weight and put you on top of other vacant rocks, and whilst doing this you had to keep a firm grip on the rope.

We were trained to use the rope in order to cross, but we did not know that this time would come. Others had never used a rope like this. It was their first time. But the person who gave us lot of encouragement was Tambo.

Tambo was the first person to cross using the rope, and he was in front of Modise. He went down the terrain and waited for us below – to lead us to our boat. When you looked below at iZambezi from our position, you would have thought it was a small fountain – viewing it from the top. Also, when you had reached the bottom you still had to travel for a kilometre in order to cross, and the place was infested with crocodiles.

Ehe, you have already crossed and on your way, your boat was fastened to a rope. The rope was weak and was being blown away whilst we held onto it. *Hayi*, it was fastened to a tree across there. As you reached that point you had to start climbing another mountain using your hands. You did this until you reached another hill holding onto the rocks like this (demonstrating). You are supposed to be upright, together with your luggage. We were climbing up holding onto rocks. *Hawu*, Tambo managed to cross over. He was preparing the path for us (before bidding us farewell and returning to the Zambian side). *Ayi-ke*, we proceeded until we entered Rhodesia. *Hayi*, luckily for us, this place that we decided to use in order to cross into this country was inhabitable and was even avoided by helicopters because you would never think that it was accessible.

Then we proceeded to a nearby forest. There were houses that were identified earlier. Food and other things were prepared there because our comrades from ZAPU were members of our group. Again, we proceeded until we entered Wankie Game Reserve. I think it took us two days to reach Wankie Game Reserve. Then they (ZAPU) led us from there and told us about camps around that vicinity and about camp guards who were protecting the game. They instructed us to avoid such places, including the fact that we were not supposed to make noise. Smoking a cigarette was also not allowed. The commander was the only person who gave people the necessary permission to smoke. Then Chris was chosen to lead the reconnaissance. Ngqwahane was the commander, commanding the whole group. We proceeded together with our respective units. We proceeded until we reached the middle part of the game reserve. We managed to avoid some of the camps, using detours.

I think it was on the 14th day inside the forest when we ran out of food and other things. It was only then that we decided to kill some game. We managed to do so and we ate the meat. We took what was left with us. We proceeded until we reached the far end of the forest. This was now open space. The forest was no longer thick with trees and vegetation. *Hawu*, we then decided to take a rest. We sat down after taking a detour away from the forest. This place was very big. We therefore went around the forest. We now knew that there was an open space inside the forest. We proceeded and suddenly there was a place towards Tsholotsho where we found water. There was a sand river where you had to dig before you could access the water. Our Rhodesian (ZAPU) comrades taught us how to drink this water. It was at that stage that we prepared ourselves for the war.

Now we reached a spot where we roasted the meat – and after that we continued with our journey. We followed a foot track and now we were hunting for animals because we had run out of food. We were so tired that, though we were a sizeable group, we could not kill a wild pig and it managed to escape.

We were very cautious to use our guns because of the place and the surroundings. Then we began gathering dried berries and we ate them. We were now searching for water. We had run out of water. We needed food and water so as to remain alive. We passed the open space again. When we arrived there we located the footpaths that we had used and continued our journey along this track. But we soon saw tyre marks along this track. *Haa!* There is something in the vicinity. We detected that the army was also using this route. It became obvious to us that they were looking for us inside the forest. We avoided the route as soon as we discovered this and we went straight back to the forest. We decided to avoid this route because we suspected that the boers were hiding in order to ambush us.

We were using the evening stars to guide us. We were all familiar with the Southern Cross. We could easily tell when we were safe on our route. Well, we also had compasses until we realised after some time that these would always be a risk. Aah, it was the southern star that helped us a lot. We soon established a temporary base along the track. But whilst we were resting, there were others who were following our footprints. This was after the Rhodesian soldiers managed to identify our footprints. We were resting and had formed an all-round defence. This was according to the different units, and the high command sits in the middle. The boers soon appeared because they had been following our footprints. They began firing in our direction so that we would come out in the open. Gunshots were blazing in all directions.

We then opened our defence formation. Some stood this side and others stood at the other side. We were aware that they had been following our footprints. We opened our defence and waited in anticipation. We allowed them to keep on firing in the air and as a result leaves were crushed – falling on top of us. *Eheee!* When they were nearer, in terms of the distance, we were nearly shot because bullets whizzed past us. I still remember when a bullet hit an object next to me. I said: “Ho, here come the boers.” They were about 50 metres away when they began shooting. We allowed them to enter. Then we Hit! Hit! The boers retreated and ran away. The boers stopped shooting. They had stopped shooting after they had fired in the air. We beat the boers. Other boers ran away. *Hayi-ke*, but the truth is that black Rhodesian soldiers were in the majority in terms of the casualties. And also when we hit them at short range you saw a person, jerking, flying up above the trees and come back down falling hard – to mother earth. His rucksack would fall this way and his gun would fall the other way. Then we realised that we were in control of the situation. But one of our boys was injured. The battle had begun at about 9 in the morning.

There was a boy who was injured. It was Mhlongo. He was shot by the boers. We collected him and put him in our temporary base. Then we decided to chase the boers but they managed to run away and escape. We managed to scatter the boers. Their soldiers now consisted of very small groups. They had met something that they did not expect – hence they were caught by surprise. In the first battle the total number of people we killed was thirty-three. We also got food; we got reinforcements of guns, everything. I do not know what happened to the guns. Maybe these were retrieved by the boers after some days because we had hidden the guns in the vicinity. But we remained around that area and we only left when it was dark. We proceeded with our journey to Tsholotsho, and we met another group that had remained behind.

It was the boers. We captured these boers and asked them to surrender. There was a boy called Mbijane. UMBijane began shooting. "*Awu*, what is happening Mbijane?" "*Awu*," he replied, asking us, "Is this the enemy?" I think he was now a little bit crazy. "*Hayi*," he said, "we cannot persevere when the enemy is amongst us. What are we going to do?" He shot and killed one of them. The other one escaped and we did not see him again. We were not resting but constantly on the move. We moved on from the locality of our first battle. We reached a certain place and established another temporary base. Whilst we were still at this base the boers came – they were using a helicopter. They passed above us. We were sitting next to an open space. But they were surveying inside the forest. We were not far away from the forest but kept our distance. They went past. When you were sitting still you needed a lot of discipline because you could not afford to protrude your head in the open. During all this movement the boers failed to locate us. They went over our heads and continued with their search.

They were looking for us inside the forest although we were in hiding in the open space. *Ayi*, during the evening they waited for us in front because they had established a temporary base. We shot our way through, and they ran away leaving their tents.

During the first battle we captured a radio. Before the second battle we had a means of communication. We could now trace the boers' positions. Then we discovered through the radio that the boers were saying that they could ascertain where we were but they could not pinpoint the exact location. They could hear us talking. *Aah*, we decided to switch off the radio. We concluded that it was compromising us. *Awu*, this was true – it was like that because when we switched it on the boers were communicating because they wanted to trace our exact position. They said that they could pick up radio waves from the radio but they could not locate its exact position. But they were right on track – the way they were following us. We realised that we had to destroy it.

Ehe, it was now very bad. *Hayi*, it was now the second battle between the boers and us. Luckily enough we did not kill anyone. We had to move away from the area very quickly because helicopters were searching for us. We were on the road for three days, night and day, moving towards Botswana's border. When we arrived at that place we found houses. They asked whether it was us (freedom fighters). They bought food for us. The males went to buy food for us and they slaughtered a sheep.

They had already heard that we had finished the boers. We were now hearing the story from them, telling us that we had annihilated the boers. We had beaten them. We were very happy about all this. They also informed us that the operating space was becoming tighter now because we were going towards the Botswana border. They showed us the way – they continued in front of us. They were on a reconnaissance mission on our behalf. They located the position of the border. They then asked us to stay put as units. They went to cook pap and meat for us. Then we ate. We took along padkos. We entered Botswana under the guidance of these people. They could not stop praising us. During the first battle there was one boer whose name was Thomas. He was a mercenary. He was amongst those we had captured. I do not remember the names of the others. But we kept Thomas in the spotlight because it was said he was a notorious mercenary from Port Elizabeth. *Hawu*, when he cried, asking us to spare his life, we did not. We shot him dead.

Ya, he cried and said: “Don't kill me, don't kill me”, whilst he was injured. We did not have a place to keep those injured. *Ayi*, we dealt with him. Even now, I think we captured about seven boers during the first battle. We did not count them during the second battle. We were now in Botswana, only to find out that the baTswana military was waiting for us. We scattered, split and spread in different directions. I found myself running alone in a forest. There was no one around. *Awu*, others were arrested. I stayed put for two days inside the forest. But then I proceeded with my journey knowing that I was inside Botswana and I had my gun with me. I soon reached a house that was alongside a small hillock. They asked me how I had survived because the other cadres had been arrested. I did not understand what they were saying to me but I asked them for food. They gave me *izinkobe*. I kept some in my pocket and continued with my journey throughout the night. After a long walk I decided to take a rest. It was early in the morning. I was snoring and could tell that people were walking past along the route. Early in the evening I woke up and continued walking. Whilst I was proceeding I came across a plantation. I decided to go inside. But whilst I was inside there I saw people pointing guns at me.

They were saying “terrorist this and this”. Then I was taken away. The person who arrested me was very cruel. I was helped by one Commander Matthew Mpala. This person had already armed himself with sticks and wanted to assault me. But Mpala told them that they should not even think about shooting me because we were capable of retaliating by using equal firepower and venom. The other cadres who were following me, because they would receive the information that the locals assaulted me, would retaliate. Mpala said: “Leave these people alone – they will return to South Africa. All you have to do is to arrest them and send them back home.” This is how I survived. I was then taken to a camp where the others were kept. They were also arrested. I was locked up with them. I denied the fact that I knew them. I was alone. Then I was separated from them and I was kept alone. But after a few days we were all taken to Francistown.

I said my name was Dingindawo Siyabefuna. I said I am Dingindawo Siyabefuna. They said “Siyabefuna?” I said *ya*. Then they said amaZulu are very stubborn, and they talk nonsense. They said that they had never heard of such a surname. I said there was nothing I could do about this – the fact is, I am Mr Siyabefuna. We were then taken to Francistown where our names were again taken down. Whilst I was sitting there I heard them shouting: “Reuben Roy Nhlabathi”. I responded and said that was the name that I used when I crossed the border. The place now went dead – it was quiet. I think they also had my photo. I said, “What?” Then they said: “Reuben Roy Nhlabathi, Dingindawo Siyabefuna. *Hawu*, Justice Mpanza.”

There were those in Botswana who hated us. They did not have a heart and really did not want us there. They brought food. This sergeant wanted to assault us. We were tied by both arms to each other. He brought us food in a bucket used by prisoners as a toilet to relieve themselves. You could actually see the excreta. He instructed us to eat. We said never in our lifetime. We would not eat.

Ehe! We did not eat. They said we had pride. We took the excreta bucket and put it aside. Subsequently we were locked up. We slept without eating. The next morning Mpala arrived and we related this story to him. He was a soldier from the local military camp. He objected and asked them to treat us humanely. He then left and they carried on mistreating us. The Special Branch told him off and said they were doing their job that was outside his jurisdiction as a soldier. There was this man called Modise. *Ha!* He did not like us and was full of venom; that Modise. He was in the Special Branch and based at Francistown. *Ayi-ke*, we stayed there and we were interrogated. They accused us of not speaking, confessing our "sins", hence they said "*Hambani*". We were then transferred to Gaborone. They locked us up in the local prison. We were kept in cells where they kept death row prisoners. That is where we were kept. We were sentenced to eleven years, others thirteen, etc.; it was really a mess. We then accepted the fact that we were there to stay. Then they used us as labourers tending the gardens. By then we were planning to escape. Wilson Msweli succeeded and he reached the South African border.

He went through. Certain people sold him out from Zeerust. You were a piece of meat to some of those people when you were an escapee around there. It was as if you were a cow or money to some people you came across, and definitely they were paid. When we planned our escape, upstairs there was a place, patrolled by police. There was a wire near our exit door and there was also a pillar leading to the runaway. True, we said we were going to climb the pillar to upstairs. You would then continue on your way and turn around the corner. At the exit door we would assault the policeman who was on guard and take away the keys. *Awu*, our plan was perfect. When Wilson completed his reconnaissance, he came to fetch us. But there was another policeman that he did not see upstairs. He was always on guard at the other corner. When our heads were protruding in order to check the environs, Wilson was already on his way out running away to the gate. But all of us went back to our cells quickly. We stayed put and did not move. *Ayi-ke, hawu*, suddenly the place was full of cops. The warders were also present. They accused us and said "you are trying to escape." We were fast asleep but the door was not locked. Then they asked us who opened the door. We said you are the only ones who keep the keys. *Ayi*, you left the door open. Wilson made the key. *Hayi-ke*, he went until he reached South Africa. He was arrested and transferred to Pretoria where he found Ken Ken, uLuthuli, this boy Daluxolo.

I think Wilson was held for three months and then he was transferred to Botswana because [Sir] Seretse [Khama]'s government demanded that he should be returned. *Ayi*, he was returned to Botswana. But it was during the time when they were releasing us, taking us back to Zambia. We went out through a parole system. Seretse's son came to see us and six months was taken off our sentence. Also Seretse's wife came to visit and another six months was deducted. Even an ordinary minister would visit and another deduction. I remember one day Kaunda came to visit and a year was deducted from our sentences.

He came to Gaborone on an official visit to meet the government, not us. That is how our sentences were reduced. We ended up serving eleven months; thirteen months; and we were released and returned to Zambia. *Ya*, it was 1968. We returned to Lusaka. We were taken by plane from Gaborone to Francistown. We stayed for three weeks in Francistown until another plane arrived to pick us up. It took us across the Zambezi and dropped us at Livingstone and then went to Lusaka.