

# CHRIS HANI

## A drawing by a close political activist

ON being asked by the *Dawn* editor to make a pen portrait of the Second-in-Command of our victorious People's Army Umkhonto we Sizwe, on the occasion of its 25th Anniversary, my immediate reaction and feeling was that of duty, pride and honour to do so. It is an honour to have shared with comrade Chris Hani the most exciting foundation years of his present political frame. We were to see him soon growing faster than the rest of us to what he is today, a single-minded decisive young rhinoserus who turns adversities and dark storms into rainbows on which to ride, a dedicated simple modest cadre of the people with an immense political potential that cannot be ignored by both friend and foe, a subject of enemy intrigues and assassination plots, a comrade with a clarity of vision and purpose for living, a man who strives to practice what he says.

I met the man at the University of Fort Hare in 1958 — a rather too young to be at Fort Hare chap, thin, tallish, rather shabbily dressed with oversized trousers, virtually one brownish sports jacket, tip-toe striding, more than average to brilliant type of student doing "heavy" B.A. courses and majoring in Latin etc.

I had not joined the Movement by then and I was to learn later on that he hated some of us for indulging in frivolity — moving about with girlfriends whilst he and others were busy with their free time doing political work in Lovedale, Alice and elsewhere. He had no girlfriend, at least in the Fort Hare.

### PRODUCT OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN REVOLUTION

He was an embittered product of the South African revolution who had very little time to attend to himself and bent solely with his academic work and the destruction of the oppressive system in the country, yet so jovial when free and never apologetic or regretful for the cause he had chosen for the rest of his life.

He was recruited into the ranks of our Movement in his teens at Lovedale High School by Cde Siphon Makana, another serious minded revolutionary and former Head Prefect of Lovedale, now a member of the NEC who has himself lived that type of life unswervingly.

To baptise the new recruit into the spirit of the battles of secret underground work, to check his loyalty and discipline, and to enrich or fortify his understanding of the nature of the enemy who at times can be a black working against blacks, comrade Siphon, together with another comrade, one evening

instructed the thin Chris to secretly pick up and carry a heavy suitcase with clothes of an enemy agent into a nearby bush. They gave him matches to burn it. It had to be done — a political order — without questioning the consequences of his future social relations with the agent.

When I joined the ranks of these fighters in 1959 we naturally blended and up to date. It is as from this stage that I knew better the future commissar of our people's army, in our leadership discussions in that area and especially in the implementation of those decisions first and foremost ourselves in the fore-front of the running political confrontations with the authorities and the system. He was the youngest of all the Fort Hare leadership and perhaps in the whole university or within the Movement.



Chris Hani

there. Yet his ideas were the most sober, full of initiatives and influential. He displayed brilliance in articulating the line of the Movement as though he was an experienced Congressite, ever critical of any vacillations in launching ceaseless attacks against the system in whatever way possible.

Despite the poor parentage from which he came as was reflected by his dressing, he had no fears of victimisation for his ideas which were now widely known from mass meetings platforms we organised. Besides political work among the inmates of the campus, he, together with his underground cell inmates, would regularly go out to meet and address underground political cells of workers in Gqumashe and Ntse-lamanzi village, about 15 Kilometres outside. Other times he went out to paint slogans all over the University, Alice streets, the bridge and distribute hand-written underground leaflets to even non-Movement members.

Then there was an order from the above (the tough Eastern Cape Command) that we should close down Bantu Education Fort Hare by force if persuasion fails. He was part of the leadership core of four on whom this order fell to implement. We were not told how to use force nor given any means to do it. We were not trained in the art of force, but force had to be resorted to if persuasion within the entire leadership and membership failed.

Heated and endless debates ensued in the leadership meetings chaired by comrade Stan Mabizela and we failed to persuade or convince the rationalists of the system within the leadership on the need to do this nor could we open the secret and say it is an from above order.

The core had to decide on other means. We decided to start by sabotaging all nice-timing, starting with the week-end and dancing parties in the main dining hall. We failed in action through being spotted by an armed boarding master when we were on the roof of the hall.

One other interesting episode in our political activity was when we were told to be part of the nationwide anti-republican 3-day stay-away as from 31st May 1961. Having successfully organised our area in readiness for the D-day, Comrade Chris was still doubtful about the conviction of some lawyers who might sabotage the 100% success of the plan. He organised a core called Force Publique which was chosen beyond partisanship lines, probably to introduce the mass nature of our struggle. At midnight, under cover of darkness they attacked the rooms of the vacillators, throwing huge stones through their windows, and for the next three days the campaign went on 100% successfully.

### EXCITING CHAPTER

It was indeed the most exciting chapter of our lives where we learnt to know each other politically, our weaknesses, capabilities and loyalty to our people's cause. Our inspiration was always the Eastern Cape political Command under that veteran hero of our revolution, Govan Mbeki (Isithwalandwe). Here we learnt how to place the Movement above all else, beyond personal and parental wishes, despite the poverty of ourselves and our parents.

Then came the order for some ten politically good comrades from the area to secretly leave the country for a six months course whose content we were not told. Chris worked hard for this plan although he personally refused to join the group, saying "the enemy and the struggle is here". The plan was 99% successful and I was to meet Chris already a leading soldier of our people's army ten years later in Lusaka

After Fort Hare he went to join his father in Cape Town. Here he threw his energies into the working class struggles, got introduced to underground structures of such working class veterans as Ray Alexander, Oscar Mpetha, etc. I don't know at what stage he joined MK and what forced him to leave the country at long last. In Lusaka he was already a resourceful member of the ANC's Revolutionary Council structures who had excelled in the grim battles of the ANC/ZAPU Alliance units in Rhodesia (Wankie 1967). Impatient with exile politics, submission to problems and inactivity, he hacked his way through odds homeward and was a leading political cadre of an MK detachment, the Luthuli detachment.

Prospects of reaching home soon via Rhodesia were gloomy and Chris was sent by the leadership to Lesotho to start and establish a political and diplomatic presence of the ANC there. His performance there can only be described as marvellous. The enemy felt it. It made many assassination attempts on his life, leading to the Lesotho authorities advising the Movement that he be withdrawn.

#### PEOPLE'S INTELLECTUAL

He is impatient with lack of seriousness, indecision, dogmatism and theory that cannot be put into practice. He is a young articulate selfless people's intellectual who easily mixes with every class, group, member and friend of the struggle; a jovial, optimistic jokes-cracker even under tension, yet a lover.

He is an open-minded leader who is fearless of criticism of anybody, including self-criticism, but without vindictiveness, bitterness and grudges against those who differ with him, thus earning himself no enemies amongst genuine fighters for the people's cause. He cherishes the counselling of old age and experience but is strongly biased towards the youth whom he believes can move mountains.

Chris has earned himself great respect for this balance of the articulation and use of old experience and its creative application to new conditions of struggle in more active hands and limbs. Because of this ability and his daring readiness to throw off his overseeing leadership garb, physically sharing the hazards and risks of war in the same trenches with his men, he remains essentially a man of the people's army who is destined to play a more vital role in the tough battles ahead against the enemy. He is easily approachable by any cadre of any rank and is deeply involved in the solution of their problems.

Now in his mid-forties, Chris was born from a politically involved peasant-worker family in the Transkei. Because of political persecution by the racist authorities his father escaped into exile in Lesotho in the early sixties. Perhaps a week

or so once a year he still has the privilege to switch off the routine burdens of duty and be comforted by the presence of his loving family from Lesotho. He is a loving father and a dedicated family man of sober habits and rearing.

On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of MK, we salute our fighting masses and their glorious army and leading political commissar! **IHLOMILE COMRADE COMMISSAR!**

## CROSSING THE ZAMBEZI

COMRADE TT Nkobi, the Treasurer-General of the ANC, witnessed the crossing of the Zambezi river by the Luthuli Detachment that fought in Wankie, Rhodesia, in 1967.

The idea of going home via Rhodesia came from the soldiers themselves, the rank and file of Umkhonto we Sizwe. It was then thrown at the leadership to discuss how feasible it was to send our forces home through enemy territory. The leadership had no quarrels with the principle and the matter was referred back to the combatants. I was particularly interested because at the time I was the ANC Chief Representative to Zambia. Our Headquarters was still in Tanzania.

MK soldiers decided they were determined to go home through Zimbabwe. Preparations began and in July 1967 the reconnaissance team went down to the river Zambezi to locate crossing points. The main group followed in August. The President and myself were there to witness the crossing. On the eve of the crossing we slept at the base we had established. A beast was slaughtered that evening and we had a big feast.

The following day, very early in the morning, we left for the river, east of Livingstone. We marched the whole day and spent that night in the bush. The following morning we proceeded. When we reached the river and were shown the points that had been selected for crossing we could not believe our eyes. The commander explained that those were the best points because they were hazardous and difficult and therefore the last places the enemy could suspect.

Ropes had been tied to trees and to reach the river from the bank one had to get hold of the rope and cling to it. From the height we were you could not even see a person when reaching the river down below. Only the sound of something landing in water would indicate that somebody had reached the water. Proper defence had been organised. Positions were taken to cover the whole crossing operation in case the enemy made an appearance.

#### FIRST TO CROSS

The first person to go down was

Chris, the Army Commissar. It was really moving. I had never experienced something like that before. I asked two comrades, Nkwane and Nikita how they felt. These two used to ask me when we were going to go home and I used to tell them that one day we would. One of them admitted that his heart was threatening to jump out through the mouth, he was a bit afraid. I told him that we all have fear but the important thing is to be able to suppress it. Pointing to Chris who had already crossed and was busy doing some exercises, I said: 'You see that man across there also has fear but he can suppress his and conquer it. That's what he is doing as you see him jumping.'

On landing the men had to be rowed across. Two comrades, Boston Gagarin and Guluva, were of great importance in this history-making event. They were experts in rowing. They rowed to and fro, taking one across at a time. It was a long and tiresome operation since about 80 men had to cross. The process began in the morning and lasted till late afternoon. The Zambezi current was very strong at the time but we did not suffer a single casualty. The whole operation was meticulously planned. The President, while looking at Boston at his job, remarked: 'Here is a great guy.' Both comrades are late now. Guluva died in a car accident a few years ago and Boston of natural causes this year (1986).

The crossing of the Zambezi was terrific and really moving. It is a great pity we had no camera to capture the moment because those men were making history when going down and crossing the river. This history ought to have been preserved in photographs for future generations. As it is now we are forgetting some of the heroes who crossed the Zambezi river and fought the Smith's forces. Some fell in battle, others were arrested and sentenced to many years imprisonment in Rhodesia. Many changed course and went to Botswana after running out of supplies.