

THE JOURNEY TO WANKIE:

A BIOGRAPHY OF JAMES APRIL

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FOR JAMES, BASIL AND DARINA



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[NICOLE (NICKY) VAN DRIEL]

"The ANC [African National Congress] is a great movement. It is the spirit of the African people. As long as you do not satisfy the aspirations of the African people you will never crush the ANC ..."¹

This was part of a statement, James Edward April² delivered in the Pietermaritzburg Supreme Court on 10 May 1971, after being convicted on three counts of terrorism³.

James April, [hereafter referred to as April] was a member of the ANC's military wing Umkhonto we Sizwe [otherwise referred to as MK]. What might have seemed unusual to the court that day, and to many onlookers, was the fact that here was a "Cape Coloured"⁴ man espousing his allegiance to the ANC, and praising it as " ... the spirit of the African people".

April and Basil February [his close friend and comrade] were among the first non-African people to join MK, thereby recognising the common destiny of all black people⁵.

In part, to tell April's [and Basil February's] story⁶ is to explore from an individual perspective the capacity and ability of people to overcome their socialisation, and to rise above conformity and social restrictions.

Most of all, April's story is of an activist whose political involvement led him to realise the inevitability and necessity of armed struggle. Furthermore, it is the story of the commitment of his life to this very armed struggle.

What will be of particular interest in this essay is the process of politicisation which James underwent: the influence of his father; his active involvement in community structures; his intellectual development within the Non-European Unity Movement [NEUM]; the harsh, repressive measures of the state against the legitimate demands of blacks; the inability [and unwillingness] of the NEUM to meet the challenge of armed struggle; his experience training as a guerilla and his participation in the Wankie Campaign of 1967.

James April's trial of May 1971 in Pietermaritzburg was short, it lasted approximately three days. Aside from James' father, Jacobus April II, and Helen, James' sister, there were no other friends or family members able to offer some support⁷. However, as the trial progressed James discovered that he did have supporters in the gallery. They were members of the National Union of South African Students [NUSAS], an organisation of White university students. Unbeknown to James then was a NUSAS student, Renfrew Christie, who himself was later convicted of passing sensitive information about the Koeberg nuclear power station to the ANC. During those dark, depressing days James welcomed his unknown support from the public gallery. On two specific occasions during the trial he remembers verbal applause from the NUSAS students. On one occasion a state witness described his unit's skirmish with the ANC-ZAPU guerillas. The Rhodesian soldier, described by James as "the man with a thousand

wounds", inadvertently told the court how he and his fellow-soldiers had "run away" from the pursuing guerrillas. On the second occasion, applause was heard from the public gallery when James delivered his statement from the dock⁹.

Although the charges against James were of a serious nature - that of undergoing military training and attempting to overthrow the South African government through revolutionary means - the court and white South Africa felt secure. The year was 1971 and the Nationalist Party had effectively dealt with most political opponents. It was most probably this factor, the psychological security of whites, which influenced the court not to impose the death penalty on James⁹.

What the court did not know, and the history it did not consider was that centuries ago some of James April's ancestors in all probability had also found it necessary to defend themselves and their rights militarily¹⁰. The April family's social origins can be traced to the area of Genadendal, which was originally inhabited by the indigenous Khoi-Khoi people¹¹.

The proper noun Khoi-Khoi means Men of Men, a name used by the said people to describe themselves with pride. The White colonists who came into contact with the Khoi-Khoi used the derogatory term of "Hottentot".

When landing at the Cape in 1652, Jan van Riebeeck's purpose was to establish a half-way refreshment station. One of his priorities was to acquire fresh supplies of meat which he did from the Khoi-Khoi in whose area he had settled. The trade between Van Riebeeck and the Khoi-Khoi took the form of bartering.

In 1657 the Dutch East India Company [DEIC] freed some of its employees from services. These freeburghers trekked inland and became agricultural farmers¹². The DEIC continued to monopolise cattle barter with the Khoi-Khoi in order to keep beef prices low. The company also wished to prevent direct contact between the Khoi-Khoi and the freeburghers¹³. Despite the ban on bartering between the Khoi-Khoi and the freeburghers, the latter continued the practice, sometimes even taking cattle by force from the Khoi-Khoi. Soon cattle-keeping became more attractive than agricultural farming to the freeburghers. This inevitably led to clashes and bloodshed over grazing land and cattle. The Khoi-Khoi were heavily defeated and their numbers even further reduced by small-pox epidemics. The Khoi-Khoi way of life, that of pastoral tribalists was destroyed forever. The land which they had once held in common as a community was now occupied by foreigners¹⁴. At this point the Khoi people were impoverished, dispersed and on the threshold of extinction¹⁵.

In 1737 George Schmidt, a Moravian missionary, was sent to the Cape to convert the indigenous people to Christianity. Schmidt

settled in the Baviaans Kloof [Kloof of the Baboons], in the Riviersonderend Valley. Here he established the first mission station in Southern Africa, in the area which was later to be called Genadendal¹⁶.

The mission station became a sanctuary to farm labourers, runaway slaves and some of the dispossessed Khoi-Khoi people¹⁷. Many farm workers who were treated badly on the surrounding farms went to the mission station as a place of *skuiling* [refuge]¹⁸. The mission station offered another important attraction - the opportunity for blacks to obtain a basic education in literacy¹⁹.

The number of inhabitants in Genadendal increased to such an extent that at one point, it was the largest settlement in the colony after Cape Town²⁰. It was most probably around 1875 that Jacobus April I and his young son Simon came from the Riviersonderend area to settle in Genadendal²¹.

Simon April later married Henrietta Adonis, a primary school teacher in Genadendal²². While Henrietta taught during the day, her husband Simon farmed a piece of land on loan to him from the Administering committee in Genadendal. Simon employed farm hands to help him work. As time went on however, it became more difficult for Simon to compete with white farmers for labour.

Henrietta bore Simon 8 children: 6 boys and 2 girls²³³. The second eldest child was Jacobus April II, who was later to father James April, the subject of this essay. Jacobus April II completed Std 2 at the local primary school²³⁴. Genadendal by now provided a reservoir of labour to the surrounding white farms²³⁵. Jacobus immediately went to work as a farm-hand in the neighbouring areas, the experiences of which he would later tell his children²³⁶. Towards the end of the 1920s, all the April children had moved to Cape Town in search of better employment prospects²³⁷.



In 1927 Jacobus April II married Wilhemine Driver in Cape Town. They were both 26 years of age. The Driver family was from Greyton, a place just outside of Genadendal²⁹.

Wilhemine and Jacobus stayed briefly in District 6 and Wynberg before they settled in Bokmakerie where the family stayed from 1934 to 1974. The April's had seven children, five boys and two girls. The children were Helen, Simon, George, Frank, Monica, Ronnie and James, the youngest, who was born on 20 March 1940.

Bokmakerie was built in the early 1930s²⁹ in Athlone about 10 kilometres outside of Cape Town. It housed a small close-knit community of Coloured labourers³⁰. Although economically life was hard for this low-income group, the inhabitants of Bokmakerie took pride in their children and their homes³¹. A formal gardening competition existed on an ongoing basis among most the neighbours of Bokmakerie. Jacobus April was one of the champion gardeners. So although the families were poor the houses were neat and boasted well-kept gardens³².

Jacobus was a strict, dutiful parent who believed strongly in discipline³³. Wilhemine, unlike her husband, was a soft and lenient parent who kept house³⁴. Jacobus' strictness alienated his older sons Simon, George and Frank, who rebelled against their father's discipline and authority³⁵.

The youngest son James became the favoured child and accompanied Jacobus to sport meetings and when visiting family and friends. A close relationship developed between the father and the son. The father was the first person to stimulate his son's interest in politics³⁶.

James and his sister Monica first attended the Methodist Primary School and later Central High in Athlone. The Methodist school was housed in the *Weldadige boodskaaap saal*. The structure of the building consisted of iron and zinc³⁷. In the early 1940s there existed few government schools, Bokmakerie Primary was one of them. It was only later, when the Department of Coloured Affairs was established, that the government took control of schools³⁸.

James went to school barefoot. He thirsted after all the knowledge he could acquire and thoroughly enjoyed the lessons. His primary school teachers were well-equipped and versatile. They were comfortable teaching a different range of subjects from music, art to sports. Some of the male teachers had been in the Second World War and would talk of their experiences during that time. At Central High, later Alexander Sinton, he received two book prizes for academic merit. According to James these early years were important in his overall development³⁹.

At the age of eight, James first became aware of his father's

atheist ideas. He remembers a small group of Apostolic brethren visiting the family home in the hope of converting the occupants to their spiritual way of thinking. Instead, Jacobus April challenged the brethren about the existence of God. Where does God come from? What is he made of? And how do you know he exists?⁴⁰ These are some of the questions Jacobus put to his visitors. James watched and listened intrigued by the exchange. It was then that he first heard of any reference to Lenin. Jacobus spoke of "an even greater man than Stalin lying in state in the mausoleum in Moscow"⁴¹.

The source of Jacobus' political inspirations is not known to his family⁴². Jacobus was only interested in the class struggle. He never spoke of the national liberation struggle. He was a fervent supporter of the Communist Party of South Africa [CPSA] and would regularly attend their meetings on the Grand Parade⁴³. This was prior to the Party's banning in 1950 under the Suppression of Communism Act.

Jacobus April was a simple man who worked all his life as a labourer. He was a gardener in Kenilworth for twenty years at the home of Judge Twentyman Jones⁴⁴. Jacobus was a self-educated person who read the newspapers daily and listened to the radio news broadcasts.

A neighbour who lived two streets away from the April's, a Mr

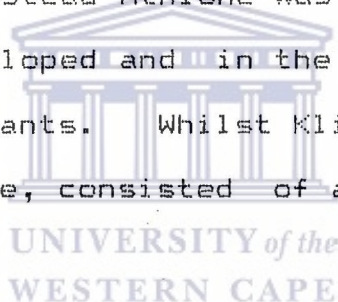
Pedro, was the person with whom Jacobus always discussed political issues. They would visit each other and over cups of tea discuss Lenin, Stalin, the Soviet Union and so forth. One night Jacobus returned from visiting Mr Pedro's home and reported to his family about radio reports on the Berlin Crisis. Jacobus stressed the serious nature of the crisis and the possibility of a pending nuclear War⁴⁵. The crisis passed and James entered high school in 1953.



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As James was growing up he looked forward to the family excursions to Genadendal and Greyton. The purpose of these journeys was to visit the April and Driver families respectively. In Greyton James enjoyed riding with his grandfather, Thomas Driver on his donkey and cart. For the April children rural life was so different, so exciting and offered opportunities to be close to nature⁴⁶.

Other than the occasional rural visits, James world view was to a large extent influenced by life in Athlone. In the 1940s and 1950s, Athlone was not the busy, populated and industrialised area it is today. Instead Athlone was a geographically confined area that was undeveloped and in the main offered inadequate housing to its occupants. Whilst Klipfontein Road, the main thoroughfare of Athlone, consisted of a narrow stretch of unlit pathway⁴⁷.




Athlone was occupied mostly by Coloured families, the majority of which were poor. In 1940, a study conducted by the Sociology Department of Cape Town University [UCT] found

"... that 53% of coloured households in Cape Town lived below the poverty datum line". In its conclusion, the study cited the root of the problem as "... the low level of Coloured wages, kept artificially low by the economic colour bars"⁴⁸

Few people (including teachers) owned cars or had telephones in their houses. Most Coloured people were either labourers or factory and domestic workers. The elite consisted of teachers

(in the main), doctors, lawyers, artisans and small businessmen⁴⁹.

James attended Alexander Sinton High School during the years 1953 to 1957. The school did not have a political reputation like Harold Cressy High or Trafalgar High which were in District Six⁵⁰. Alexander Sinton's principal at the time was Mr Franklin Joshua⁵¹, who had been a member of the Coloured Advisory Council [CAC]⁵². Mr Joshua was politically conservative. The history of the 1940s informs us that the CAC, aside from being a dummy-body, was meant to appease the political aspirations of Coloureds without granting them full political rights⁵³.



The appointment of a CAC [and future Coloured Affairs Department] by the South African government in 1943 caused a storm, especially in the Western Cape where an intense struggle within the Coloured community took place⁵⁴. Young, radical intellectuals of the New Era Fellowship [NEF] which was founded in 1937 in Cape Town, inspired and led a boycott of the CAC⁵⁵. The concept of non-collaboration was for the first time successfully applied *en masse*, on a national level⁵⁶. The NEF militants initiated an Anti-Coloured Affairs Department [Anti-CAD] conference in 1943. The Anti-CAD committee was based on a federal structure with representatives of many different organisations including sport and church bodies⁵⁷.

The boycott of the CAC was immensely successful²⁰. One could therefore conclude that a person like Franklin Joshua was not a popular person in his community. All those who supported the CAC were ostracised, called quislings²¹, and regarded as traitors²². In spite of Franklin Joshua, there was a radical presence at Alexander Sinton, that of the Teachers League of South Africa [TLSA].

The TLSA was formed in 1913 with the initial purpose of organising Coloured teachers²³. At the outset, it had strong ties with the African People's Organisation [APO]²⁴. Teachers were subject to Missionary control at school and the TLSA was to some extent intended as a smoke-screen of a non-political image. Up to the 1940s, the TLSA conveyed requests for improvements in Coloured education, "with effective moderation and with becoming dignity"²⁵. This changed when individuals like Ben Kies, Ali Fataar and E.W. Erntzen propagated a more radical view on education. This group believed that one could not draw a distinction between "educational" and "political" matters, that the two were inextricably linked²⁶. The TLSA became a powerful organisation with branches in remote villages of the Western Cape. At its height, the TLSA embraced more than two-fifths of all Coloured teachers²⁷. This is an important fact, as teachers had historically occupied a pivotal position in the community.

During the 1940s and 1950s, the small number of high school students in the Western Cape were indelibly influenced by the ideas of the TLSA.

James, too, was influenced by his class teacher, Monica Jacobus. Monica was one of a few TLSA members at Alexander Sinton. She invited her students to attend a lecture on Indonesia which she delivered at a Cape Flats Educational Fellowship [CFEF] meeting. James was sixteen years old and his political life had started. The next five years he spend working within the structures of the Non-European Unity Movement [NEUM]; the Gleemoor Civic Association [GCA] and the Athlone Parent Teacher Association [PTA]⁶⁶. James attended many of the CFEF and NEF lectures which opened a new intellectual world to him. He heard a vast range of issues being discussed and debated. Topics included the struggle, the nature of the struggle within South Africa and so on. It was at CFEF that James met a number of people including Hosea Jaffe, his wife Beatty, Bill Bartman and Dr Mureson. Jaffe stayed in Hazendal, an area adjacent to Bokmakerie. James became a firm friend of the Jaffe's. He visited their home and regularly accompanied them to meetings⁶⁷

James worked hard in both the GCA and the Athlone PTA. He attended meetings regularly and always volunteered when work needed to be done. His diligence and commitment did not go unnoticed by his fellow-workers. At the age of 18, he became the youngest member of the GCA's executive⁶⁹.

In 1958, the GCA supported NEUM's boycott campaign of the first separate parliamentary election⁷⁰. Under the Nationalist Party government, Coloureds in the Cape were removed from the common voters roll. They were instead incorporated under the Separate Representation of Voters roll. Four whites were then allowed to represent the interests of Coloureds in parliament. The Congress of Democrats [COD] put forward a candidate in the Western Cape with the support of the South African Coloured Peoples Organisation [SACPO]⁷¹.



The NEUM's boycott campaign was resoundingly successful. Of the 19,138 Coloured voters on the roll in 1958, the COD Candidate, Beyleveld, received 813 votes, and Abe Bloomberg of the United Party received 2183 votes⁷¹. As a result of this boycott campaign, the Anti-CAD in the Western Cape reached its zenith. The Anti-CAD, which consisted of grassroots affiliates, now enjoyed an influential position among Coloureds⁷².

James intellectual development and political consciousness was improving in leaps and bounds. He had come into contact with

theory which fundamentally challenged ruling class ideology. The NEUM theoreticians' objective was to develop a "people's ideology". In the process they left a legacy which decades later became the *modus operandi* of all organisations in the liberation movement. They were the concepts of non-racialism and non-collaboration⁷³.

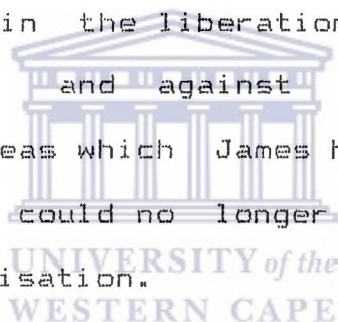
Ben Kies, in his lecture, "The Contribution of the Non-European People to World Civilisation", forever debunked the myth of a superior white/European race. He demonstrated historically that contrary to common belief the first civilisations flourished outside of Europe, among those people in Asia, Africa and America who were later colonised⁷⁴.

In the 1950s, a history from the point of view of the indigenous people arose to challenge liberal and Afrikaner historians⁷⁵. Hosea Jaffe's "Three Hundred Years"⁷⁶ and Dora Taylor's "The Role of the Missionaries in Conquest"⁷⁷, have today still not received their just place in South African historiography⁷⁸. To many academics, these works either never existed, or are too peripheral to mention⁷⁹.

The history writing of Jaffe and Taylor created three important landmarks. Firstly, they were the first to refrain from using derogatory terms like "Bushmen" and "Hottentot"; instead, they used "San" and Khoi-Khoi respectively⁸⁰. Secondly, they both

used an Africanist approach as opposed to a Eurocentric one. Finally, they recalled a history wherein black people were dispossessed, plundered and colonised.

So James learnt and grew in the NEUM. However, he did not become a passive recipient. He came to question and criticise the attitudes of the NEUM leadership, especially in relation to the ANC. After the hugely successful campaigns of the 1950s, the ANC had become a timely mass-based organisation²¹. Whereas the reverse was happening in the NEUM, which was becoming more elitist and more removed from the everyday struggles of ordinary people²². The tide in the liberation movement had turned in favour of the ANC and against the NEUM. The very Marxist/Trotskyist ideas which James had embraced through his association in NEUM could no longer be reconciled with the direction of the organisation.



The early 1960s was a time of change, disenchantment, flux and disintegration for James.

In 1958 and 1959 James read for a Bachelor of Arts degree at UCT²³. In those two years he paid little attention to his academic work and just concentrated on his political involvement.

It was in 1960 that he started working as a storeman. Life at the point of production had a sobering effect on James. He was no longer a semi-intellectual who spoke on behalf of workers; he had become a worker. In the 1960s coloured matriculants did not have many employment opportunities²⁴.

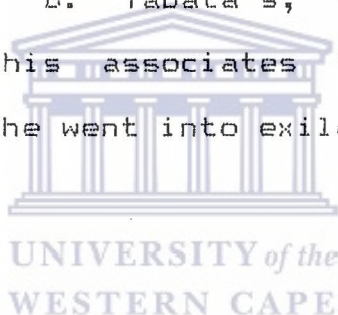
This was confirmed by a study of the social and economic position of coloureds undertaken in the 1960s. Part of the study investigated employment opportunities for coloured males. It was established that: 30.86 percent worked in agriculture; 16.84 percent worked in manufacturing; 11.14 percent worked in services; 10.7 percent worked in construction and 8.91 percent worked in commerce²⁵.

It is of interest to note that the research further concluded that the average coloured family earned about one-fifth to one-quarter the income of an average white family²⁶.

On the political front the NEUM alliance had split in 1959. From

then on the Anti-Cad and All African Convention [AAC] each followed separate paths. The division was preceded by arguments and squabbles of a theoretical nature. The controversy centred on Point 7 of the 10 Point Programme of the NEUM which demanded: Revision of the land question in accordance with the above. Point 6 demanded: Full equality of rights for all citizens without distinction of race, colour or sex⁶⁷.

Through circumstances James found himself in the Jaffe/Kies faction. Though as a young person he was rather impressed with Jaffe's radical-sounding interpretation of the land question as opposed to that of I. B. Tabata's, which sounded moderate⁶⁸. In 1959 Jaffe told his associates that he was leaving for Johannesburg. Instead he went into exile in England⁶⁹.



On 21 March 1960 the Pan Africanist Congress [PAC] held an anti-pass demonstration. Protesters at the police stations in Langa, Cape Town and Sharpeville, Vereeniging were fired at by police⁷⁰. Sixty nine people died, including eight women and ten children; 180 people were injured⁷¹.

James' hometown of Bokmakerie is at most four kilometres away from Langa, which was established in 1927⁷². At the time of the shooting, 25 000 people lived in Langa, the vast majority of which were migrant workers. These men had to live in single workers' blocks known as flats. That had "... little privacy, bleak surroundings and communal cooking and washing facilities"⁷³.

In the two weeks that followed 21 March 1960, the inhabitants of Langa and Nyanga refused to go to work, in protest against police brutality. The police harassed, hounded and shot at the people of Langa. By 2 April both townships were under siege - the police, navy and army units cordoned off the area⁷⁴.

It took the police four days of continuous brutality to break the strike. They used sticks, batons, traibars, guns and saracen armoured cars to comb the townships and force the men back to work⁷⁵.

While all this was happening the Anti-Cad did absolutely nothing.

The SACPO did not have a following amongst coloureds, the Anti-Cad did. James could not believe that these "Marxist revolutionaries" did not go to the aid of the inhabitants of Langa and Nyanga. According to James, had the Anti-Cad called on Coloureds to strike in solidarity with Africans it would have been successful. Not only did the Anti-Cad enjoy political stature amongst the coloureds, it enjoyed the necessary structure, resources and organisation⁹⁶. Instead the official response of the Anti-Cad leadership was to issue a pamphlet in which they called the PAC's anti-pass campaign "adventurism"⁹⁷. The leadership of the Anti-Cad were elitist elements who enjoyed labour preference in the Western Cape and most probably could not imagine the harshness of life for African migrant workers under the Pass Laws and Influx Control.

Instead James joined the SACPO members in drawing up a pamphlet which called for solidarity between Coloureds and Africans.⁹⁸

In the post-Sharpeville era a number of small splinter groups emerged. They consisted of disenchanted members of the NEUM. Among the coloured youth especially there was a grave acknowledgement of the nature of the NEUM leadership; its bankruptcy and inability to meet the political challenges of the day⁹⁹.

James became acquainted with members of SACPO including Alex and blanche Le Juma, Isaiah Steyn, Reggie September, Barney Desai, Achmat Osman and Mustapha Sathrodien, a brick-layer who later became an executive member of SACPO¹⁰⁰.

In the meanwhile, white South Africa had decided to become a Republic on 31 May, 1961. At an All-in-African-Conference held in Pietermaritzburg on 25 - 26th March 1961, a three-day strike was decided on to protest the proclamation of a republic. Representatives of 145 religious, social, cultural, sporting and political bodies made the decision. Nelson Mandela became the volunteer-in-Chief of the campaign. The objective of the protest was to demand a "sovereign national convention" which would draw up a non-racial and democratic constitution for all South Africans¹⁰¹.

James assisted the SACPO members in campaigning for Coloureds in the Western Cape to support the three-day mass action. SACPO's hard work was rewarded when large numbers of Coloured workers

supported the strike¹⁰². After this a period of lull and uncertainty ensued for James. He had not formally joined SACPO, and did not know if he could reconcile his Trotskyist ideas with membership of an organisation like SACPO¹⁰³. In retrospect, it could have been anti-Stalinist propaganda in the NEUM which caused this reaction in James¹⁰⁴.

In 1962 James visited Stanley Abrahamse's house in Woodstock. Basil February was also visiting Stanley. James and Basil became re-acquainted, having in the past just fleetingly seen each other. Basil was nineteen years old. He was a brilliant student and had matriculated in 1960 with five As. This was quite a feat for a coloured pupil in those days. In 1961 he registered at UCT's medical school but did not return in 1962.

When James arrived at Stanley's house that day Basil was reading a book on Lenin's life. Basil marvelled at the fact that Lenin had completed a four-year law degree in twelve months, and still managed to top the class. From that day onwards Basil and James became firm friends. They discovered that they had much in common as Basil was a member of the Cape Peninsula Students Union [CPSU], which was politically associated with NEUM. Basil started to work in 1962. Every weekend he and James would spend together, they loved going to "Congress parties"¹⁰⁵.

By 1963 James was convinced that the Congress Movement held the

only possible political future in their hands. Notwithstanding the fact that SACPO did not have much support among the coloureds. James officially joined SACPO. Basil scoffed at the idea of joining a "coloured organisation". Later, he too was convinced of the correctness of James' decision and joined SACPO¹⁰⁶.

By now it was no longer possible to organise oppressed people in the old ways. One could not hold meetings or distribute pamphlets. Political activists desperately needed to communicate with their constituencies. An alternative in the form of slogan-painting was found. James and Basil spearheaded a small slogan-painting campaign. Unfortunately both were caught in the act in Wynberg.

They were charged and released on bail. A few weeks went by before they were re-detained. Two of their accomplices, Neville Andrews and John Fischer were also detained and charged with slogan-painting. Basil, Neville and John received suspended sentences due to their youth. They also paid a fine and damages. James was still in detention. Hennie Ferrous, Cardiff Manie, James and a few others were charged with sabotage. This charge arose from a meeting the accused had attended in Mamre¹⁰⁷. The chief organiser had been Dennis Goldberg. At the same time that Hennie Ferrous, Cardiff Manie and James April were charged in Cape Town the Rivonia trial was underway. A Cyril Davids was

giving evidence against Dennis Goldberg in the Pretoria Supreme Court¹⁰⁹. The state hoped to transfer Cyril Davids to Cape Town to give evidence against James and co. Eventually all the accused received bail. Later still the charges against them were dropped. Yet the police were persistently harassing James and Basil. The threat of re-detention was constant. Whilst the Rivonia trial was underway in Pretoria, Cape Town saw the Yu Chi Chan Club on trial¹⁰⁷. The main accused was Neville Alexander, a protege of I. B. Tabata's. The other accused included Leslie, Dorothy and Elizabeth van der Heyden, three siblings. Basil February's sister Ursula was married to the accused Leslie van der Heyden.

James and Basil kept a low profile. They were virtually underground. The realisation dawned on them that they could no longer play a fruitful political role inside the country. For a few weeks they pondered the issue until a solution presented itself¹¹⁰.

In the meanwhile, after the arrests of the Rivonia trialists the responsibility of leadership was transferred to the exile mission of the ANC. This external leadership held a consultative meeting with representatives of the South African Indian Council [SAIC], the South African Communist Party [SACP], the Coloured People's Congress [CPC] and the South African Congress of Trade Unions [SACTU]¹¹¹.

One of the new tasks which emerged from the meeting in Dar-es-Salaam was to vigorously pursue the armed struggle¹¹². James and Basil were approached the night before new recruits were to leave Cape Town, to join the external mission. James and Basil decided to join the liberation movement in exile. James did not greet his family, neither did Basil greet the van der Heydens, at whose place he was staying in Athlone. Their main reason was not to jeopardise the safety of their families and friends with the knowledge of their doings and whereabouts.



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LIFE IN EXILE

In early January 1964 James and Basil travelled to Johannesburg. From there they continued on to Botswana. With the help of a guide they crossed the Botswana border on foot without any travel documents.

While in Botswana James and Basil learnt of the sentencing and conviction of the members of the Yu Chi Chan Club. Basil was extremely upset. This was the last straw. James and Basil finally decided that they wanted to join Umkonto we Sizwe and not to study overseas.

They then travelled to Dar-es-Salaam via Zambia. For a year they stayed at the ANC's training camp at Kongwa. All the inmates were confined to the training camp. South African spies and agents frequented the African countries, especially those giving sanction and protection to South African liberation movements.

In June 1965, James and Basil were transferred to Czechoslovakia where they stayed until May 1966. James met Darina, a Czechoslovakian architecture student with whom he fell in love. So besides his military training James spent time in her company.

The calibre of the military officials at the academy was high. They were all well versed in Marxist ideology, and saw themselves

as defenders of working class interests. Some of the officers were excellent philosophers and political writers. Basil was twenty two years old and impressed the Czechoslovakians with his knowledge of Marxist ideology¹¹³.

The period James and Basil spent in Czechoslovakia was a time of debate for that country's people. Everyone was discussing the ways in which socialism could be improved. From the lay person to within the hierarchy of the Communist Party there was a recognition of the need for change. It was acknowledged by all that power had to be decentralised and Czechoslovakian society restructured. It was this era of liberal thinking which later led to the 'Prague Spring' of 1968¹¹⁴.

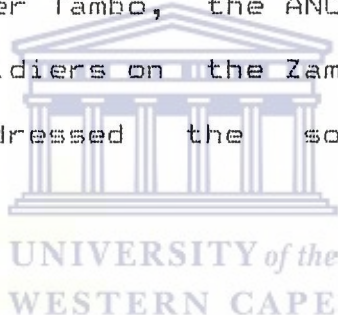
Soon it was May 1966, Basil and James had to return to Zambia. Darina gave James postcards and money for postage. She knew how frugally the MK people lived and wanted to be certain James would be able to keep in touch.

A year dragged on in the Zambian training camp. The soldiers were getting restless, tired of training with no possibility of combat. In July the news came that a joint ANC-ZAPU [Zimbabwe African People's Union] operation was to take place into Rhodesia [now Zimbabwe]¹¹⁵.

This joint action was premised on the understanding that the

Rhodesian and South African government were allies and the common enemy of all Africans. The plan was that the ANC guerillas would assist their comrades-in-arms to defeat the Rhodesian security forces and would then move further south into South Africa. James and Basil were appointed commanders of the Western Cape. They had orders to establish an ANC underground base which would include recruitment, gathering of information, sabotage acts and so on¹¹⁶.

The first detachment to cross the Zambezi was called the Lutuli Unit, named after the deceased ANC President-general, Chief Albert Lutuli. Oliver Tambo, the ANC president spend two days with the Umkonto soldiers on the Zambian bank of the Zambezi River. Tambo addressed the soldiers prior to their departure¹¹⁷.



The joint unit consisted of eighty men, including one Chris Hani, who would later become Chief of the MK staff. James was the Political Commissar¹¹⁸ of the unit and was responsible for the morale and well-being of the soldiers.

On 2 August 1967 the Lutuli Detachment crossed the river. First they had to contend with a deep gorge and sheer cliffs. They moved at night, at a slow pace, fearful of using any light in case they were spotted by enemy planes. Whilst they crossed the river in a boat, Basil said to James, "We're crossing the

Rubicon"¹¹⁹.

The unit marched a week before they reached the Wankie game reserve. During this time, Basil celebrated his 24th birthday on the 8 or 9 August 1967. At the town of Wankie they sent someone to buy supplies. As they progressed further into the game reserve there was only bush and animals. Poor maps and compasses did not help. The original unit split into two groups and later into further splinter groups. Food and water were in short supply. The guerillas marched for days without food¹²⁰.

When they did encounter the enemy on 13 August their spirits were high. They fought bravely and inflicted serious losses on the enemy¹²¹. The supplies of the retreating Rhodesian soldiers came in handy. In the meanwhile South Africa sent members of its Defence Force to assist the Smith regime fight the "terrorists".

By the end of the campaign some of the guerillas had died. Some were imprisoned¹²², and others including James, found themselves in Botswana where they were arrested for being in possession of illegal arms. This group of guerrillas were charged and sentenced to one year imprisonment. It was in Botswana that James first heard of Basil's death. He was shattered. Apparently Basil had broken away from his group, stolen a car and driven south. He was caught in a roadblock. A fight ensued between him and members of the Security Forces.

According to James, the Rhodesians spoke about Basil's bravery right until the end¹²³.

There exists no ANC documentation or assessment of Wankie. Norman Duka's account of what happened during Wankie is interesting and answers some questions¹²⁴. In some ways it counters the misinformation of published reports like A. J. Venters'¹²⁵ and H. R. Pike's¹²⁶. Whilst the fighting was continuing in Rhodesia, South African newspapers were giving incorrect reports which put the advancing guerrillas in a poor light¹²⁷.

In 1968 the Organisation for African Unity [OAU] intervened on behalf of the ANC-ZAPU inmates in the Botswana prison. After serving 10 months they were released. James and his fellow comrades flew back to Zambia¹²⁸.

After the campaign in Wankie, the ANC's international credibility had soared. The Palestinian Liberation Organisation [PLO] comrades welcomed the victory especially after their defeat during the Six-Day War¹²⁹ with Israel. They said that the bravery of the Wankie guerillas meant that oppressed people around the world could once again hold their heads high¹³⁰.

In 1969 the ANC held a conference at Morogorro, Tanzania. This was a historic meeting at which the membership of the ANC was officially opened to all non-Africans¹³¹.

The conference also served as a catharsis for the rank and file members of the organisation. Life in exile brought with it endemic problems which the ANC leadership was made aware of in no uncertain terms¹³².

For the guerrillas in the ANC's training camps the preparation for the conference required an assertion of their rights. Conflict arose between some of the hierarchy in the ANC and members of MK. The "powers that were" wanted to choose the armed wing's representatives to the conference. The guerrillas in MK objected to this undemocratic procedure. They refused to be seen as fighting machines incapable of making decisions. They insisted that they were the ones within the organisation who had to risk making the supreme sacrifice and this made them more than capable of choosing *their own* representatives. When the conflict came to a head the guerrillas threatened not to fight. Instead they said the leadership that wanted to make decisions on their behalf should go all the way and fight as well¹³³. The MK soldiers won the day. James was one of the soldiers elected to represent MK at the conference¹³⁴.

Soon after the conference James proceeded to the German

Democratic Republic (GDR), where he stayed for a year. He led a solitary life - he was under strict instructions not to mix with the local inhabitants. Joe Slovo, a member of the SACP, spent some time with James in the GDR. They became close friends during this time. Slovo gave James his final briefing before he left for South Africa. First James travelled through Europe, but not to London as Lodge alleged¹³⁵. From Italy he flew to Johannesburg. It was towards the end of 1970 that James moved to Durban.

By now James was feeling depressed. His morale was low. Seven years in exile: the training camps and Basil's death was taking its toll on him. In the GDR James had received a watch as a present from his training officers. The watch was unusual by South African standards. It attracted the attention of a man James had befriended in Chatsworth. He loaned the watch to the man who in turn showed it to a friend who was a police-reservist. This policeman fiddled with the watch and discovered a concealed microphone. James was arrested. The police did not know James' identity. Eventually James revealed himself to them.

At the trial James saw his father for the last time. Jacobus April II was 71 years old. His wife, Wilhemine had passed away in 1965, while James was in exile. The police would not allow Jacobus to visit his son during his trial. This was contrary to the visitation rights of awaiting trial prisoners.

On the day of his conviction James made a statement, a part of which has already been quoted. Here is a full version of the speech:

"Whenever people are in despair, they resort to violence. violence becomes an act of hope. History shows repeated examples of people struggling and fighting for freedom. Most people in the world today are struggling for freedom, and even in the most stable societies, there are strikes and violence. You must realize that these people will not tolerate *apartheid*.

The ANC is a great movement. It is the spirit of the African people. As long as you do not satisfy the aspirations of the African people you will never crush the ANC, in spite of the fascist Security Police.

When I returned to south Africa, I was tired and played out. This led to my capture. I wish to stress that it was this, and not the ingenuity of the Security Police, that led to my arrest.

During my interrogation by the Security Police, I was kept in solitary confinement and beaten up. Even though I answered many of their questions, there was nothing to please them. This once again proved to me that there are fascist thugs in the Security Police.

Solutions to South Africa's problems can truly be found, but only on a democratic basis, and not on a democracy imposed on a majority by a minority which has within it a secret Broederbond fascist society.

You whites must realize that eventually you will have to stay in South Africa. You may find that even South Africa will become too small for you. You will have a rough time for the next few years. The prospects for the ANC are too grim, but time is on our side, I guarantee it. change will take place in our favour, even if there is a world war.

The African people will be victors over the fascist south African Government. Inevitably, we shall overcome.

I did these things because I believed I was right. I am still prepared to face the consequences of my actions¹³⁴.

James served his fifteen-year sentence on Robben Island and become close friends with some of the inmates, including the Rivonia trialists, Kwedi Makilipi of the PAC, and Toivo ja Toivo of the South West African People's Organisation [SWAPO]. He prefers to tell his experiences of Wankie and Robben Island himself¹³⁷. James April was released on 10 May, 1986. He returned to Athlone after a twenty two year absence.




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CONCLUSION

James and Basil are but two examples of South Africans who sacrificed themselves in order to help free oppressed people.

One striking factor when assessing the lives of James and Basil is that they did not have a normal youth. Basil did not pursue his studies, James did not marry Darina in Czechoslovakia - although these were their dreams. Instead they both chose to serve a revolution they were committed to - that of bringing about a socialist society.

Basil still lives in the hearts of many people. For example, the UWC students have named one of their residences in his honour.



In 1987 one night James dreamt of Basil. In his dream he met Basil and they were overjoyed to see each other. Basil then told James that he had not really died in Rhodesia. He had got lost in the bush where he had lived for the past twenty years. He had decided to come home after all.

Maybe the dream was symbolic! It may be an indication that Basil would wish to be brought home. In the future, the February family may find it possible to locate Basil's remains and bring them to South Africa for a proper burial. The people of the Western Cape would certainly pay tribute to this brave young man

who made the supreme sacrifice.



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1. M. Benson (ed), The Sun shall Rise, International Defence and Aid Fund (IDAF), London, 1976, pp 55-56. This book has the fullest version of James April's speech from the dock. The speech is also partly quoted in the The ANC speaks: Documents of the African National Congress 1955-1976, London: Publicity and Information Bureau, 1977 (?).
2. James April only learnt in 1986 when applying for an identity document that his correct middle name was Henry and not Edward as he had assumed.
3. The Natal Mercury, 10 May 1971.
4. This was the classification used by the court to classify James April. Throughout the essay I will refrain from using inverted commas when using group classification. This does not mean an acceptance of these colour terms.
5. James Stuart, Stanley Moodley and Henry de Bruin are other examples of non-Africans who joined MK in the same period James and Basil did in 1964. At this point membership to MK was open to everyone, whereas membership of the ANC was only open to Africans. At the ANC conference in 1969 at Morogorro the organisation was officially opened to all people irrespective of colour.
6. This essay does not propose to tell the complete life story of Basil February. It will deal with a period which James and

Basil shared.

7. James April's family and friends were located in Cape Town. The Pietermaritzburg Supreme Court was about 1800 kilometres away from Cape Town. The impracticalities which the distance presented meant that any hopes by family members, friends or well-wishers to attend the court proceedings were rendered futile. However, some of James' friends in Cape Town raised money towards the cost of Helen and Jacobus April's trip to Pietermaritzburg.
8. Interview with James April, September 1990. This entire section is based on information James given to the author by James April. "The man with a thousand wounds" is the name James gave to this witness, who tried to impress the court with the number and extent of the injuries he suffered during the Wankie Campaign.
9. James appeared in front of Justice Kennedy who was commonly called "the hanging judge" because he had allegedly sent so many people to the gallows.
10. Isaac Balie, "Genadendal: an historical outline", Cape Town: South African Library, 1987 (a pamphlet).
11. Nosipho Majeke, The role of the Missionaries in Conquest, Johannesburg: Society of Young Africa, 1952. p.1.
12. R. Hull, Southern Africa: civilisations in turmoil, United

States of America: New York University Press, 1981 p.27.

13. ibid. p.28.

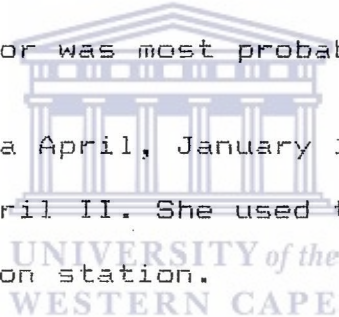
14. See Mnguni, Three hundred years, Cape Town: APDUSA, 1952 (1988 reprint) p. 12 Chapter 1 has more details on the Khoi-Khoi way of life.

15. I. Balie, op. cit.

16. ibid.

17. ibid. April is a typical slave name. It was common practice for a slave to be named after the month in which he was born. James April's ancestor was most probably a slave.

18. Interview with Jacoba April, January 1991. She is the eldest sister of Jacobus April II. She used the term skuilinq when describing the mission station.



19 I. Balie op. cit.

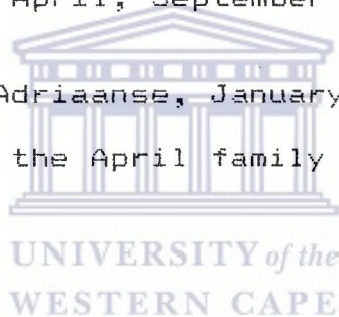
20. ibid.

21. Interview with Jacoba April, January 1991. This date she gave as an estimate.

22. Henrietta April (neè Adonis) is present on a photograph of primary-school teachers in Isaac Balie's, Die geskiedenis van

Genadendal 1738-1988, Cape Town: Perskor, 1986. p. 141.

23. Interview with Jacoba April, January 1991.
24. Interview with James April, September 1990.
25. J.W. Raum, The development of the Coloured Community under the influence of the missionaries of the Unitas Fratrum 1792-1892, Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 1953, Thesis (M.A.).
26. Interview with James April, September 1990.
27. Interview with Jacoba April, January 1991.
28. Interview with Monica Okkers (nee April), January 1991.
29. Interview with James April, September 1990.
30. Interview with Rose Adriaanse, January 1991. Rose grew up in Bokmakerie and knows the April family since the 1950's.
31. ibid.
32. Interview with Monica April, January 1991.
33. Interview with James April, September 1990.
34. According to Rose Adriaanse the majority of mothers in Bokmakerie were also housewives.
35. Interview with James April, September 1990.
36. ibid.



37. Interview with Monica Okkers (neè April), January 1991.
38. Interview with James April, September 1990.
39. ibid.
40. Although Jacobus was an atheist he was a religiously tolerant person. His daughter Helen, was allowed to arrange evangelist prayer meetings at the April home. Jacobus April later became a member of the Baptist Church in the 1970's.
41. Interview with James April, September 1990. These are the direct words James used in the interview.
42. Neither Monica Okkers (neè April), Jacoba April or James April could point to a possible source of Jacobus April's political and atheist ideas.
43. R.E. Van Der Ross, A political and social history of the Cape Coloured People 1880 - 1970. Bellville South: University of the Western Cape, 1973. p.955. Van Der Ross refers to the mass meetings held on the Grand Parade between 1935 - 1951. Although he does not specify under whose auspices the meetings were held. It is known that the CPISA, ANC and NEUM utilised the Grand Parade as a venue for mass meetings.
44. Doreen Musson, Johnny Gonas Voice of the Working Class, a political biography. Cape Town: Buchu, 1989 p. 37. Ms Musson refers to a court incident over which Judge Twentyman Jones presided. The judge seems to have been politically

conservative and could not possibly have offered any political insight to Jacobus April.

45. The New Encyclopaedia Britannica. Volume 2, Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc. 1986 p. 137. An international crisis arose in 1948 - 1949 and became known as the Berlin blockade and airlift. The Soviet Union wanted to force the Western powers to abandon their jurisdiction powers in West Berlin, post World War II.
46. Interview with James April, September 1990
47. ibid.
48. Gavin Lewis, Between the wire and the wall: a history of South African 'Coloured' politics. Cape Town: David Philip, 1987 p. 170
49. Interview with James April, September 1990. James described his perception of the economic status of Coloureds during his youth.
50. At the time both these schools were dominated by teachers who belonged to the TLSA.
51. Franklin Joshua remained the principal of Alexander Sinton until 1973 when he retired.
52. Interview with James, April 1990.
53. See Gavin Lewis (op.cit) for a full history of events leading

to the events leading to the establishment of a CAC.

54. Neville Alexander, Non-collaboration in the Western Cape 1943-1963 in The angry divide: social and economic history of the Western Cape, Wilmot J. James and Mary Simons (eds). Cape Town. David Philip, 1989 p. 184.
55. ibid. p. 183
56. ibid. p. 180. In its original formulation non-collaboration meant the refusal of oppressed people to work the instruments of their own oppression. In this paper the author examines the historical roots of the concept of non-collaboration.
57. ibid.
58. ibid. p. 181
59. Quisling was the name of a Norwegian collaborator during the Nazi-occupation of his country.
60. ibid. p. 183.
61. Gavin Lewis (op cit) p. 74.
62. ibid.
63. ibid. p. 196.
64. ibid. pp. 196-197.
65. Neville Alexander (op. cit.) p. 183.
66. Gavin Lewis (op cit) p. 221. The NEUM was launched in 1943 and



consisted of the Anti-Cad and the All-African Convention. Both parties accepted the 10 Point Programme of minimum demands.

67. Interview with James April+, September 1990.

68. Interview with James April, September 1990.

69. ibid.

70. According to James a number of SACFO members supported the call to boycott the elections and opposed the decision to support the COD's participation.

71. Neville Alexander op. cit p. 195.

72. Interview with James April, September 1990.

73. Ibid.

74. Ben Kies, The contribution of the Non-European people to world civilisation, Cape Town: TLSA, 1953.

75. Christopher Saunders, The making of the South African past: major historians on race and class, Cape Town: David Philip, 1988 p. 137.

76. Muguni, Three hundred years, Cape Town: APDUSA, 1952 (1988 reprint) Jaffe used the pseudonym of Muguni.

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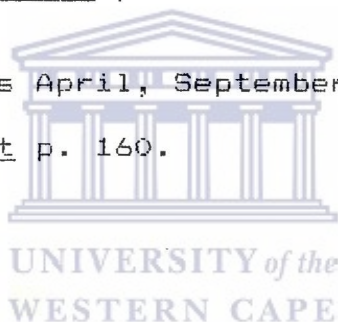
Dora Taylor used the pseudonym of Nosipho Majeke.

78. Neville Alexander op.cit. p. 180.
79. For example the History Honours course at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) does not deem it necessary to even mention these early works as part of South African historiography.
80. C. Saunders op.cit. p. 137.
81. See Tom Lodge, Black politics in South Africa since 1945, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986.
82. Neville Alexander op.cit. p. 187.
83. James completed the B.A. degree through the University of South Africa (UNISA) whilst serving his sentence on Robben Island.
84. Interview with James April, September 1990.
85. S.P. Cilliers Coloured people: education and status Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1971 p.12.
86. ibid. p. 10.
87. Elizabeth Böhmer, Left radical movements in South Africa and Namibia 1900 - 1981 Cape Town: South African Library, 1987 p. 924.
- See Gavin Lewis and Richard van der Ross op.cit. for further

details surrounding the split.

88. Interview with James April, September 1990.
89. ibid.
90. Francis Meli, A history of the ANC: South Africa belongs to us.
Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1988. p. 140.
91. Tom Lodge op.cit. p. 210.
92. ibid. p. 212.
93. ibid.
94. ibid. p. 223.
95. ibid.
96. Interview with James, September 1990.
97. The pamphlet issued by the NEUM was called "The PAC adventure
in retrospect"
98. Interview with James April, September 1990.
99. Interview with James April, September 1990.
100. ibid.
101. Francis Meli op.cit. p. 141.
102. Elizabeth Böhmer op.cit. p. 614.

103. ibid. Offers a short history of SACPO which was regarded as a Stalinist organisation by people in NEUM. This was a particularly NEUM prejudice.
104. Interview with James April, September 1990.
105. ibid.
106. ibid.
107. Henry R. Pike, A history of communism in South Africa. South Africa: Christian Mission International of South Africa, 1985 p. 363.
108. Francis Meli op.cit. p. 155.
109. Elizabeth Böhmer op.cit. p. 924.
110. Interview with James April, September 1990.
111. Francis Meli, op.cit p. 160.
112. ibid.
113. Interview with James April, September 1990.
114. The Turret Senior History Course, The Cold War in Europe Johannesburg: Sached, 1987. p. 35.
The uprising in Prague between 1967 and 1968 is referred to as the Prague Springtime. The main grievance was against a Stalinist-type of government.
115. Francis Meli op.cit. p. 162.



116. Interview with James April, September 1990.

117. ibid.

118. The political Commissar did not give military orders. His main task was to see that the unit kept within the framework of the ideology of the ANC. The political Commissar was usually chosen for his exemplary example.

119. Interview with James April, September 1990.

120. ibid.

121. ibid. James' brave fighting at Wankie is part of the MK legendary. However, he refused to divulge any information about his role at Wankie. He claims that others who were there can talk, it is not for him to do so.

122. The Cape Times, 28 August 1967. The headline reads: Tip-off trapped 100 terrorists. The article refers to one group that was trapped. That is one group of the 80 men in the unit. This was a gross exaggeration on the part of the reporter.

According to James some of these guerillas caught were sentenced to life in 1967 but only served time until 1979 on the eve of Zimbabwe's independence.

123. Interview with James April, September 1990.

124. Norman Duka, From shantytown to Forest.

This book is a biography of Norma Duka, an ANC participant in the Wankie Campaign. Included in the book are two other accounts by guerillas of their experiences during Wankie.

125. A.J. Venter, Coloured: A profile of 2 million South Africans.

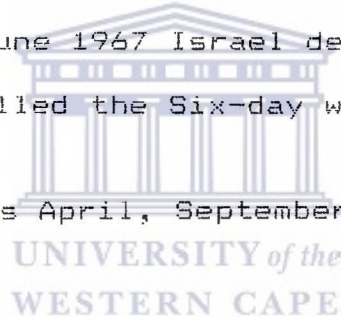
126. H.R. Pike op.cit.

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129. The Turret Senior History Course. The Cold War in Europe
op.cit. p. 35. In June 1967 Israel defeated Egypt, Syria and Jordan. This was called the Six-day war.

130. Interview with James April, September 1990



131. ibid.

132. ibid.

133. ibid.

134. ibid.

135. Lodge. T., op.cit., p. 371

136. Benson, M. op.cit. p. 55.56

137. James wants to tell his experience himself in his own words.

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