

use. Clearly the aim was to launch similar attacks to those of 1988, earning similar wide support and recruitment, without bad international publicity and alienating whites, whom the ANC now recognized as potentially supportive. The new attacks needed better planning and training, and by the end of the year only about 210 attacks had taken place (partly because MK observed a short cease-fire that year to show the government that it could control its guerrillas if it were given reason to).

MK inside South Africa numbers a few hundred. Outside, 12 000 combatants are scattered in bases across Tanzania, Uganda and Ethiopia. Nevertheless, MK's influence has been disproportionate to its size - much of the militarization of white South Africa has been aimed against MK, at great cost to the economy, weakening apartheid.

Other forms of militarization are less politically useful. MK is a volunteer force, and incomparable with the SADF, but nevertheless it is an army which may have militaristic inputs to make on the ANC. More significantly it has contributed to a militarization of the ethos of the struggle.

Political heroes, icons and songs all take their tone from MK's battles. This may be inevitable in the low-level civil war which South Africa has endured since 1984. Nevertheless it is worth remembering that when we think about a 'military culture' we must not think only of white cadets, war toys and coffee table books, but of wooden rifles and bloodthirsty songs. When the war is over, not only will the soldiers of MK and the SADF need to be helped back into society, but the whole culture will have to be civilianised. Especially in Africa, democracy and militarism do not mix well.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT

LONGLIVE FLAT FEET : LONGLEAVE

Joseph K. is no dungbeetle. He is not related to Michael K., either. This year he is a happy student who carries his greatest asset around wherever he goes. Flat feet got him out of the army one day after reporting for a year's duty a month ago. Flat feet ran him home. And flat feet now walk him up to varsity every day.

This, and a good deal more, emerged from a telephonic interview with Joseph K. of Cape Town last week. He was one of many conscripts - allegedly as many as 2000 - sent home after reporting for military service because the SADF couldn't handle the size of the intake. And in a further twist, scores of hopefuls apparently applied to take the place of those discharged.

February 2 was to have been D-Day for Joseph K., and the start of eleven months at the tender mercies of the SADF. He says he duly reported to Youngsfield training base on the day. After undergoing a medical examination during which it was discovered that his feet reflected the geographical features of the Cape Flats to a remarkable degree, he was classified G5 (medically unfit), issued with his clearing-out certificate, and sent home the next day. The certificate made no mention of his medical classification, merely stating that he had satisfactorily completed his initial period of one year's military service on 2 February 1990. Until recently, conscripts with flat feet were classified G3, and kept on their military toes (or, as it happened more often, on their posteriors) for the full two-year period.

Joseph K. says dozens of others were also discharged from Youngsfield, some of them leading sportspeople with the most beautifully arched feet around. They were all apparently classified G5 or GT ('come back next time'). Similar scenes seem to have taken place in other parts of the country. At least 75 conscripts were allegedly discharged from the army base at Kimberley, at least one at Pretoria, while the naval base at Saldanha had to send home half the new intake because it couldn't cope with the numbers. Ag shame!

In an apparent move to exploit the reduced length of service, a long queue of volunteers was allegedly seen lining up at Youngsfield to take the place of those sent home. Joseph K. says he heard of cases where parents had employed lawyers to get their sons into the army while stocks lasted, so to speak. They must have feared that the system might at any time revert back to the bad old days of two years initial service, when boys were boys and the army was the bully of the subcontinent. Or were they fearing that conscription might soon expire completely?

Despite the bureaucratic bungling of an SADF administration that was obviously caught flat-footed by the cuts in military service, Joseph K. is not complaining. His final comment? 'The army ain't what it used to be.'