



A DRUM writer meets the elusive Josiah Tongogara who was **TONGOGARA — THE FIRST G**

AT THE abortive Geneva talks on Zimbabwe in 1976, one man made a rare and surprising appearance. His very presence was almost enough to make the Smith delegation — who were not expecting him — turn around and walk away, on the grounds that they could not sit with "terrorists" at a conference table.

The surprise delegate was General Josiah Tongogara, the 36-year-old (at that time) commander and architect of Zanu's liberation army, ZANIA and a soldier with an awesome reputation in Salisbury. It was Tongogara who had physically led the first band of guerrillas across the Mozambique border and into Zimbabwe, according to Tongogara as early as 1970.

For the previous ten months he had been held in solitary confinement in a Zambian jail for his alleged part in the assassination of Zanu's chairman, Herbert Chitepo.

More important, he had rarely been seen since 1970, except by his own soldiers and the Zanu leadership. Reporters are not admitted to the camps in Mozambique, and even if you got close to him, Tongogara was not a man easily given to granting interviews. As the conference lurched on from breakdown to breakdown, I managed to talk to him, and what he said is published here for the first time.

For Tongogara, the ten years that he has been fighting in southern Africa — first for Frelimo in Mozambique, and then against Smith — have turned him into something of a mythical and mysterious

figure. He has acquired the image of the bandit hero — invisible, ubiquitous, unchallenged as the ablest soldier that the liberation struggle has produced — the image of General Giap in his early campaigns against the French in Vietnam, or of Che Guevara fighting Batista in the Sierra Maestre in Cuba.

Children are christened "Tongo," fashionably, in Zimbabwe nowadays, in honour of the man. Equally, they are threatened with his justice if they behave badly.

Trained by the Chinese in Tanzania and in Peking, Tongogara is thoroughly versed in their time-honoured methods. Their central lesson is that the protracted guerrilla war requires only time to wear down the enemy and to sap his morale. It may take 20 years, or 50, but if the people want it to work, it will succeed. And history, in the main, has proved the theory correct.

Geneva, in those weeks, was cold, grey and rainy. The Zanu delegation had moved, with most of the others, from the Intercontinental to a downtown budget hotel.

Tongogara, reunited with his beautiful wife, gave a fearsome impression at first. Tall, lanky, propelled by restless energy, moving with the agility of a basketball player, unable to sit still for long, his presence dominated every Zanu group you saw him with. His eyes darted about, eternally vigilant. He speaks with a lisp — so that "Zipa" becomes "Thzeepa" — makes eye contact only occasionally, when he fixes you with a hard, commanding stare. It

was clear that the iron had entered his soul during his Zambian prison term. Not a trace of bitterness showed on the surface, however. He was friendly, open, easily approachable.

He gave a stark account of his life. He left school in Zimbabwe in 1960 at the age of 19 (his age conceals the fact that he had only two years secondary education) and went straight into exile in Zambia where he joined UNIP — the party of Kenneth Kaunda. "In 1961 I joined ZAPU (Zimbabwe African Peoples Union — now Nkomo's party). We were instructed from Zimbabwe to form a district of Zapu in Zambia, and in that year I became chairman of the district." Zapu was banned. Tongogara remained chairman until 1963.

"I wanted to leave in '63 because I wanted to go to school. I felt that my studies had already been interrupted by politics and that I needed a further education. But they said that I must stay on; that if I left there would be a vacuum in Zambia. So I agreed, and I stayed."

Until this period, he had never contemplated taking up arms. But when Zanu started in 1963, Tongogara switched and became its first district chairman in Zambia, and in 1964 he was asked to form a provincial council in Zambia. That year the party began to plan military intervention in the liberation struggles in southern Africa. "They advised me to go and study," he said, "I had military training in East Africa in 1964. So in 1965, since I had completed my training and since I was one of the

the first man to lead a band of freedom fighters into Rhodesia. **UERRILLA INSIDE RHODESIA**

leading cadres, they asked me to remain in the camps as a commissar. Early in 1966 I went for specialisation to Peking, in the cause of leadership, and at the end of that year I returned to headquarters in Zambia."

At the age of 25, Tongogara was appointed Commander of ZANLA (the fighting wing of Zanu), in charge of intelligence and reconnaissance, and was posted to the Zimbabwe border. Zanu was undergoing an expansion programme at the time, and the chief architect of what was to become a new army was Tongogara.

Under his command Zanu expanded from a handful of men in 1970 — perhaps 30 in all — to 6,000 by March 1975. Zanu is usually thought not to have been in business until 1972, when the attacks on Rhodesia's borders began, directed by Tongogara, but he says: "We started in 1970, but we didn't want to publish this. It's up to the enemy to tell you when we started, then at least you can draw your own conclusions."

From 1967 to 1973, he was the top commander and Director of Operations, dealing with the front line. "I don't want to tell you how many times I have crossed the border," he said, "Smith is everywhere. Each trip you make, passing through the enemy, if you don't heighten your vigilance every time, you won't survive. I took the first group through Mozambique and across the border. The first object of war is to preserve yourself and then to destroy, capture and disarm the enemy. In the armed

struggle, you must define your line . . ."

In 1973, he was elected, at a party congress, to Chief of Defence, becoming the first guerrilla to achieve high political office in Zanu. This meant that he was also elected to Zanu's supreme council, the DARE.

But then came a serious split within Zanu ranks, which led to the assassination of Herbert Chitepo the Zanu chairman in Lusaka in March 1975. Chitepo's car was booby trapped, and exploded as he was driving away from his house. Tongogara was deeply involved in the split, and was arrested by the Zambians with the rest of the High Command. He was finally acquitted of the charge, along with Rugare Gumbo and others, in order to attend the Geneva conference, despite the fact that a commissions of enquiry, set up by Kaunda concluded that, "the whole evidence, both circumstantial as well as direct, with regard to the assassination of Chitepo, points inevitably and clearly to his colleagues in the DARE and the High Command."

Tongogara and five others were then mentioned as prime suspects.

And how, in solitary confinement, did he manage, as he obviously did, to construct ZIPA, the Zanu-Zapu army, now more or less defunct? "Well, you know, where there is a will, there is a way. They tried to make sure I was cut off from the outside world. But I wasn't kept uninformed."

We had less than half an hour of conversation. He spoke about Smith's raids into the Mozambique

camps: "He's too late. He should have hit us hard during the Caetano period. No, you cannot say the enemy is unfair. Whoever points the gun at you, you hit them. It's the same for us. We defined our enemy clearly at the start of the war. It's the one who points a gun at me, at my mother, at my aunt. If 2,000 point a gun at us, we wipe them out."

"The general strategy should be a protracted war, even if this is shorter than you may imagine. Victory comes as it comes. We will liberate Zimbabwe according to the pace of the revolution, not necessarily tomorrow, or even next year. Zipa is a people's army. We are determined to go in and take over and protect the people. How can you exclude Zipa and give independence?"

The Patriotic Front, formed around the time of Geneva, between the Mugabe/Tongogara Zanu and Nkomo's Zapu, is still holding together, despite endless predictions to the contrary. Nkomo has built up his own army, and both sides are united against the internal settlement and for a continuation of the war. At the time, Tongogara said — and it still holds good — "We've got to iron out the differences between Zanu and Zapu, now that we have a Patriotic Front, even if Zanu have their own feelings. When the party was formed in Zimbabwe, it was its duty to unite all the people. Zapu couldn't do without Zanu. So why wait for that occasion, for independence? Why don't we do it now before we get to Salisbury?"