

Mandela in jail for 25 years

NELSON MANDELA was born into the Royal Tembu family in the Transkei on July 18, 1918.

He led a quiet life and attended the Healdtown Missionary School.

While other boys his age in the area stole pigs and roasted them in the mountains, Mandela was tending sheep and helping with the ploughing at his home near the Bashee River in the Transkei.

Mandela made up his mind at an early age that he wanted to be a lawyer. But becoming a lawyer was not so easy.

He had completed only two years of study for a BA degree at Fort Hare College when he was suspended for taking part in a boycott of the Student Representative Council which had been stripped of all its powers.

Mandela went to Johannesburg when the Chief warned him to stop his involvement in the boycott — he had also heard that the chief was planning a tribal marriage for him.

He found work as a mine policeman in Johannesburg; and, while looking for work as a clerk at the Native Affairs Department, he met a young Walter Sisulu.

Sisulu helped him to become an articled clerk with a Johannesburg law firm while he studied towards a BA degree by correspondence. He completed the degree in 1942 and went to study law at the University of the Witwatersrand.

ON Wednesday, South Africa's most famous political leader, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, had spent 25 years in prison.

But the African National Congress leader, who turned 69 last month, has not been quiet or totally out of sight. From his Pollsmoor prison cell he has continued to influence events in South Africa. Locally and internationally, mass campaigns for his release have gained momentum.

In August, 1985, thousands of people took to the streets in the Western Cape to demand Mandela's release in a demonstration that drew one of the biggest police and military responses of that year. He has constantly turned down offers by the State to release him on condition that he renounces violence.

The Release Mandela Campaign (RMC) has been formed as a national organisation to demand his release and that of other political prisoners. RYLAND FISHER looks at the man behind the legend.

Mandela became a member of the African National Congress Youth League and took the position of secretary in 1948.

In 1949, when the Youth League pushed through major changes in the ANC, Mandela, Sisulu and Oliver Tambo went on to the ANC national executive committee.

In 1950, Mandela became national president of the ANC Youth League.

In 1951, he set up a law practice in Johannesburg with Tambo and became Transvaal president of the ANC.

A year later he was Volunteer-in-Chief for the ANC's Defiance Campaign, which saw 10 000 volunteers defy apartheid laws and risk jail.

Mandela was arrested and given a nine-month suspended sentence. He was also banned for six months, the first of many restrictions on his freedom.

In 1956, Mandela was one of 155 people charged with treason. All the accused were eventually acquitted after a

marathon trial.

Even though Mandela was always in a prominent position in the Congress Movement since the 1949 congress, he stood out in 1961 and 1962, a period in which the ANC decided to abandon their non-violent strategy.

For many years before the sixties he was unable to play a full role because of banning orders and other restrictions. However, he had continued to work behind the scenes.

The Action Council called for a national convention and threatened a three-day stayaway from work as white South Africans prepared to celebrate the formation of the Republic of South Africa at the end of May 1961.

A warrant was issued for Mandela's arrest and for two months, he and Walter Sisulu toured the country secretly to organise the stayaway. He is believed to have visited opponents and supporters.

The government responded with all its might to the proposed stayaway.

Workers were warned they would be sacked and driven out of towns, and the police and army were mobilised. On May 29, 1961, thousands risked their jobs to support the stayaway.

In June 1961, Mandela and other leaders decided to form a sabotage group, Umkhonto weSizwe (Spear of the Nation). Its task was to sabotage selected installations. The first acts of sabotage took place on December 16, 1961, in Port Elizabeth and Johannesburg.

By that time, Mandela had slipped out of the country to tour most countries in Africa to speak to heads of state and to address the Pan African Freedom Movement Conference in Addis Ababa early in 1962.

He returned to South Africa and continued to work underground and became known as the Black Pimpernel. He was captured in August 1962, tried and sentenced to five years in prison for incitement and leaving the country illegally.

While he was serving his sentence on Robben Island, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki and other ANC leaders were captured at the Liliesleaf farm, near Rivonia on July 11, 1963. It is believed the farm was used as a base where sabotage acts were planned.

Rivonia trial

All nine arrested were held in solitary confinement for 88 days, and when the famous Rivonia trial opened in October 1963, Mandela was Accused Number One. The charge was sabotage and recruiting people for training.

International attention was focussed on the trial. The United Nations carried a resolution against South Africa with 106 votes to one.

Mandela's speech from the dock on April 20, 1964, related the history of the struggle in South Africa, the different methods used throughout the years and the disillusionment at not seeing any changes in South Africa.

On June 11, 1964, Mr Justice de Wet found that Mandela was the prime mover in the formation of Umkhonto weSizwe.

On June 12, he passed sentence. The judge found all but one of the accused, Lionel Bernstein, guilty of treason. However, the state had charged them with sabotage, so he could not impose the death sentence. He sentenced them to life imprisonment. None of the accused appealed.