

## 31 ❁ Khongolo and Malula, inseparable friends

**T**wo boys were born in Madimbi in 1929 and 1930 and were friends for their entire lives.

Norbert Khongolo and Corneille Malula started school in Madimbi, but both left after first grade to continue studying at the Mukedi Mennonite mission. Both loved to lead singing in church. They were baptized together.

After their studies, they were assigned to teach in different villages, but the two friends continue to correspond frequently. They soon decided to leave teaching and go into business together. Thus they returned to their native village of Madimbi to start their new profession. One opened three shops; the other, two. This life together deepened their friendship even further.

In 1964, Pierre Mulele planted his rebel camp at Kifuza, a village situated six kilometers from the Mukedi mission station. Mulele and his partisans attacked neighboring villages, including the houses of the mission station. On June 19, 1965, the Congolese national army attacked the Mulele camp at Kifuza. Pierre Mulele fled with his second in command and took refuge along the Loange River, in the neighborhood of Madimbi.

From that post, Mulele and his group of rebels launched an assassination campaign against local leaders. A list of all the intellectuals and other well-known people in Madimbi was drawn up, and they were marked for arrest. The names of Norbert Khongolo and

Corneille Malula were on that list. The two friends, along with many others, were arrested and condemned to death.

During their separate interrogations, each of the two friends pleaded for the other to be freed and offered to be put to death himself. This went on for a long time. Neither pleaded for his own release, only for that of his friend. Both preferred to die if it meant preserving the life of his friend.

But these responses only made Mulele angry. "I'm sick of it," he said. "If the sky falls on me, so be it." He killed both of the men.

And thus one could say of these friends, they demonstrated true, inseparable love for each other.

Jackson Beleji