

Ossie Campbell — defender of the faith

By KIM JOHNSON

IN THAT first of his wonderful but lyrically inaccurate steelband calypsoes, Kitchener's "The Steelband" got one thing correct: "Well, the boom was beaten by Ossie/A foreman beater from Bar 20," sang Kitch

in 1945. "The vibration near break down a wall/An American say, 'Joe, don't stop it at all'."

"Ossie was one of the early boom-beaters in Casablanca and even before that in Bar 20," said Director of Culture Hollis Liverpool.

The Mighty

Chalkdust was explaining why he'd nominated Ossie Campbell for a Sunshine Award. And to Chalkie, Oswald Campbell was more important than a mere veteran beater of biscuit drums—he was a beater of men.

"Ossie was a defend-

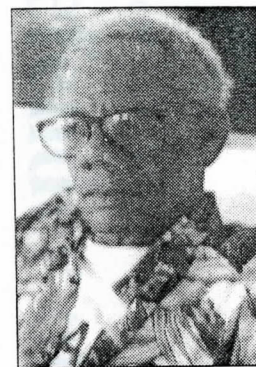
er of the faith," explained Chalkie. "He believed in the fellas right to play pan, he had the vision to see where it was going—he used to beat police. When police came to raid, Ossie was the man who used to defend them."

To see the thin, slow-

moving Campbell today, you wouldn't believe it but he was a feared man indeed. Or that the man whose memory is so sharp that Kitchener and the Roaring Lion would consult him about the lyrics of their own calypsoes.

Born in August,

1926, in Arima, Campbell moved to Gloucester Lodge Road, Gonzales as an infant. It was the right place and the right time, for just up the road lived his aunt Wilhemina Harriot—Tantie Willie to everyone—and her yard was the home of



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the Gonzales tamboo bamboo band whose members, known as the First Eleven, abandoned the bamboo in 1937 to knock their rhythms on scraps of a derelict car.

Campbell was too young for the First Eleven but he and his friends formed the Second Eleven which was the foundation of the famous Bar 20 in Bath Street, the steelband which challenged the police until its leading members were jailed and the rest scattered.

The younger ones took the pans and formed a little side called Strike Up The Band, captained by Daniel Barker. Campbell and Barker were so close that they became known as Tom and Dick—so that today, years after Barker has died, Campbell is still called "Tom". It was those two, along with men such as Kendolph Mason, Honore Agard and Ulric Miller who formed one of the greatest steelbands: Casablanca.

Blanca was great for music. Three Taspo players were originally from the band: Patsy Haynes, Philmore Davidson and Andrew de la Bastide. And there were others as good, such as Art de Couteau, Ethelbert "TB" Brown, Roland Paul and Cecil Osbourne. But the band was as famous for its warfare, and when Ossie Campbell, Daniel Barker, Raymond "One Man" Mark, James "Batman" Anderson, John "Pops" Smith and the other Blanca warriors went on the warpath, men quailed.

Indeed, Campbell would stop the bullies such as Stephen Nicholas from hitting the pannists who learnt too slowly, just as he tried to stop the youth from stealing. And when the teachers from the orphanage came to drag their charges back, Campbell would dissuade them.

By the early fifties, Campbell had been jailed three times for fighting; he'd begun to withdraw from the front line of the band. He took up a job at the Port and settled down to being merely a senior advisor to the band.