

The ANC's MK Special Ops Unit Material

Yunus Carrim Collection

What is this about?

The material in this collection was used put together a book, *Attacking the heart of Apartheid: The ANC's MK Special Operations Unit*, to be published in mid-July this year by Penguin Random House.

There were 103 interviews done with 48 cadres running into just over 162 hours of recordings.

The collection includes:

1. The interviews.
2. Truth and Reconciliation documents relevant to MK Special Operations Unit.
3. Other documents related to the Special Operations Unit.
4. Press clippings.
5. Photographs.

Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the ANC's military arm, was established in December 1961. It had many different units within geographically demarcated "machineries". MK's Special Operations Unit (Special Ops, as it became known) was formed in 1979 under the direct command of Oliver Tambo, ANC President, and Joe Slovo, senior ANC and SACP leader, with a special mandate from the ANC's National Executive Committee.

It was set up to carry out high-impact, high-visibility attacks against strategic economic and military targets. The aim was to undermine the economy, shake the morale of those supporting apartheid, inspire the masses, and bolster mass struggles. While operating within MK's framework, it had its own command structure led by Slovo and answerable directly to Tambo. The aim was for it to be mobile, bypass the usual MK bureaucratic processes and act faster. Also, to operate anywhere in the country and not be bound by geographical areas as the normal MK machineries were.

The Special Operations Unit (originally called the Solomon Mahlangu Unit) was an integral part of MK. And it has to be understood in the context of MK as a whole and the role of the armed struggle in the overall ANC-led national liberation struggle.

Apart from Special Ops, there were also other successful MK units, including the Transvaal Urban Machinery's G5 and other units, and other units elsewhere in the country. Special Ops was advantaged by the greater resources and attention it got from the ANC leadership, but its success was also due to several other reasons.

The ANC's armed struggle, it must be stressed, was one of four interdependent "pillars" of struggle that also included the crucial mass, underground and international dimensions. These four "pillars" constituted the ANC's strategy for national liberation. And Special Ops' role as part of MK has to be understood in this context.

Among the operations Special Ops carried out, were:

1. The coordinated 1980 Sasol operation.
2. The 1981 simultaneous attacks on power stations in the Eastern Transvaal.
3. The 1981 attack on Voortrekkerhoogte, the South African Defence Force's main military base.
4. The 1982 Koeberg operation.
5. The 1983 attack on the South African Air Force headquarters.
6. The 1986 rescue of the arrested Gordon Webster from Pietermaritzburg's Edendale Hospital.
7. The 1986 Durban Magoo's bar attack.
8. The 1987 Krugersdorp magistrate's court operation.
9. The 1987 attack at the Wits Command.
10. The 1988 Ellis Park bombing.
11. The 1988 attack on the Witbank security police office.

A fuller list of its operations is in Table 1.

Organisation of Material

The Special Ops material is organised as follows:

1. List of operations (Table 1)
2. List of operatives (Table 2)
3. List of interviews (Table 3)
4. Abbreviations (Table 4)
5. Glossary of Names (Table 5)
6. Interviews
7. Documents related to the context, aims, role, strategy, strengths, weaknesses and overall significance of Special Ops
8. Operations
 - a. TRC and other documents
 - b. Press clippings
9. Other relevant issues

Interviews

Clearly, Africans were the main victims of apartheid and played the main role in its overthrow. But people of all races took part in the armed struggle, including activists from other countries (internationalists).

Non-Africans were able to move within the country and outside without arousing suspicions in the way Africans would. Special Ops made very effective use of this. White women, whom the security forces least expected to be active in the armed struggle, were often drawn in. The relative ease of movement applied even more to internationalists, with their foreign passports.

Sadly, most of the key African operatives died in the struggle or since 1994. Some could not be traced. Many were only known by their MK names. Nobody, including those who worked with them, could provide their real names.

The majority of the members of Special Ops were certainly Africans. But because so many of them have died and some were not traceable, they could not be interviewed. So, the interviews are disproportionately with non-Africans. This obviously was not the intention. It does mean though that the interviews as a whole may offer a somewhat skewed account of Special Ops. But this is balanced by the roles of the operatives who died that are covered by the other interviewees and in the documents and press clippings in this collection.

The interviews carried out were recorded, edited and sent to the interviewees to correct in a back-and-forth process until they approved of them. This process was immensely time-consuming. But it has helped to ensure greater accuracy of their views and feelings. Some of the interviewees simply said they were fine with their interviews and didn't see the need to change them.

While there was a core of common questions asked, the interviews were free-flowing and wide-ranging and have been retained in the conversational style in which they took place, with a minimum of editing. Only where a sentence was not clear, was it corrected with the approval of the interviewee. In any case, English is not the main language of many of the interviewees.

Where there were different accounts in the interviews of the same event, and they could not be fact-checked, they were dropped or the differences mentioned.

In cases where there was more than one interview done with an interviewee, they were clustered together and presented as a single interview, unless this was too long, in which case they appear as two or more interviews.

Some of the interviews were not transcribed and do not appear in this collection.

The names of provinces and places generally used in the interviews are referred to as they were before 1994. For example, "Eastern Transvaal" instead of Mpumalanga.

Documents

The TRC documents, especially the amnesty hearings of the Special Ops operatives, cover several of the operations they took part in. So, some of these documents appear as "TRC documents dealing with Special Ops as a whole". Others appear under more than one specific operation.

Press Clippings

At times, there is more than one press clipping with the same heading. While there is an overlap of information in these cases, there is more information on some of them than others. This is because newspapers in those days came out with several editions at different times of the day – and they would, for example, be called "First edition", "Second edition", "Final", "Late Final", "Africa edition" and so on. All these editions were used in putting together the book.

General

The Special Ops material as a whole will be uploaded over the next few months. The initial focus will be on most of the press clippings and documents. The interviews will follow.

As new relevant material is traced, this will also be uploaded.

It is hoped that the material in this collection, as with other material already on South African History Online (SAHO), will stir an interest in Special Ops and MK generally and encourage people to write articles, papers, dissertations and books on this. *Attacking the heart of Apartheid: The ANC's MK Special Operations Unit* is merely an initial foray into Special Ops. There's certainly a lot more that can be said about it and MK as whole from many different angles. Hopefully, this will be done in future.

Appreciation is extended to South African History Online for carrying this material.

Table 1
Special Ops' Operations

	Operation	Date
1	Sasol 1 and Natref, Sasolburg	31 May 1980
2	Sasol 2, Secunda	1 June 1980
3	Arnot power station	21 July 1981
4	Camden power station	21 July 1981
5	Delmas substation	21 July 1981
6	SADF Voortrekkerhoogte military base, Pretoria	12 August 1981
7	Electricity substation, Evander	21 October 1981
8	Sasol 2, Secunda	21 October 1981
9	Transalloys power station, Witbank	23 October 1981
10	Koeberg nuclear power station, Cape Town	18 December 1982
11	Lawley railway line and substation, Johannesburg	December 1982
12	Magistrates' court, Johannesburg	31 December 1982
13	South African Air Force, Pretoria	20 May 1983
14	Department of Internal Affairs, Johannesburg	28 June 1983
15	Hillbrow synagogue, Johannesburg	6 August 1983
16	Ciskei consulate, Johannesburg	26 August 1983
17	Ciskei embassy, Pretoria	11 September 1983
18	Warmbaths civic centre	10 October 1983
19	Warmbaths fuel depot	10 October 1983
20	Department of Cooperation and Development, Johannesburg	7 December 1983
21	Department of Community Development, Johannesburg	12 December 1983
22	Department of Foreign Affairs, Johannesburg	15 December 1983
23	Mobil oil refinery, Durban	13 May 1984
24	Electricity pylon, Johannesburg	1984
25	Lawley railway line, Johannesburg	1984
26	SADF building in Anderson Street, Johannesburg	1984
27	SAP Soweto branch headquarters, Roodepoort	16 August (1984)
28	Department of Education and Training offices, Johannesburg	23 August 1984
29	Railway Police offices, Johannesburg	24 August 1984

30	Department of Internal Affairs building, Johannesburg	3 September 1984
31	Supreme Court, Johannesburg	5 September 1984
32	National Party offices, Kroonstad	4 March 1985
33	Water pipeline, Pretoria	1985
34	Langlaagte shunting yard, Johannesburg	1985
35	Anglo American/Anglo Vaal building, Johannesburg	30 April 1985
36	Chamber of Mines building, Marshalltown, Johannesburg	1985
37	Brakpan magistrates' court	15 May 1985
38	Brakpan civic centre	15 May 1985
39	Brakpan SAP dormitory	15 May 1985
40	SADF Medical Command, Hillbrow	28 May 1985
41	Southern Cross Fund office, Rissik Street, Johannesburg	30 May 1985
42	AECI offices, Carlton Centre Johannesburg	25 June 1985
43	Franwell building, President Street, Johannesburg	8 November 1985
44	Electrical substation, Bryanston, Johannesburg	Date unknown
45	Water pipeline, Johannesburg	Date unknown
46	House of Delegates offices, Lenasia	Date unknown
47	Electricity sub-station, Cato Manor	6 January 1986
48	Electricity sub-station in Chamberlain Road, Jacobs/Wentworth, Durban	9 January 1986
49	Electricity sub-station, Huntley's Hill, Westville, Durban	18 January 1986
50	Electricity pylon, Carrington Heights, Rosburgh, Durban	20 January 1986
51	Industrial water pipe, Lion Park, near Pietermaritzburg	1 February 1986
52	Police station, Umlazi, Durban	10 February 1986
53	Electricity sub-station, Umlaas Road, near Cato Ridge	Early 1986
54	Electricity sub-station, Springfield, Durban	12 February 1986
55	Cambridge police station, East London	19 February 1986
56	John Vorster police station, Johannesburg	4 March 1986
57	Hillbrow police station, Johannesburg	4 March 1986
58	Electricity sub-station, Assagay, Hammarsdale	12 March 1986
59	Electricity sub-station in Chamberlain Road, Jacobs/Wentworth, Durban	21 March 1986
60	Attack on house of Labour Party leader and SAP reservist Kelvin Leaf, Wentworth, Durban	8 April 1986
61	Attack on house of Labour Party leader and SAP reservist Peter Klein, Wentworth, Durban	1 May 1986
62	Rescue of Gordon Webster from Edendale Hospital, Pietermaritzburg	4 May 1986

63	Pine Parkade ('dummy bomb'), Durban	23 May 1986
64	Magoo's/Why Not bars, Durban	14 June 1986
65	Vegetable oil tank, Jacobs/Wentworth, Durban	21 June 1986
66	Limpet mine in trash can outside Copper Shop, Durban	21 June 1986
67	Industrial water supply pipe, Pinetown	30 June 1986
68	Wits Command, Johannesburg	30 July 1987
69	Krugersdorp magistrates' court and police station	16 March 1988
70	Police van, Diepkloof, Soweto	1988
71	Ellis Park stadium, Johannesburg	2 July 1988
72	Security police offices, Witbank	24 October 1988

Operations not fulfilled or abandoned

	Operation	Date
1	Umfolozi Bridge operation	1982
2	Upington Bridge	1982
3	Sasol, Secunda	1982
4	Sasol, Secunda	1983
5	Oil ship at Durban harbour	1984
6	Sasol, Secunda	1985
7	Waterkloof and Swartkop air bases, Pretoria	1985
8	Casspirs, Soweto	1988

Table 2
Special Ops Members
(in alphabetical order by surname)

	Names	MK Names
1	Greta Apelgren	
2	Jeannette Apelgren	
3	Nora Bogaert	
4	Clifford Brown	Alf Segale
5	Nazeem Cassiem	
6	Madala Chabedi	
7	Patrick Chamusso	
8	Anton Christopher	Sunil, Kali
9	Louise Colvin	
10	Klaas De Jonge	
11	Vuyisile de Vos	Abel
12	Antonio du Preez	
13	Lester Dumakude	Tommy Masinga, Chris
14	Heather Gray	
15	Hein Grosskopf	
16	Nicholas Heath	
17	David Hedges	
18	Aboobaker Ismail	Rashid
19	Mohamed Ismail	
20	Victor Kgaladi	Two Six
21	Tebogo Kgope	
22	Victor Khayiyana	
23	Welile Khumalo	
24	Matthew Lecordier	
25	Abraham Lentsoane	Titi Motsenang
26	Ramoepi Maboja	
27	Dudley Maifo	
28	Guy Malamba	Peter Radebe
29	Philemon Malefo	
30	Oscar Marleyn	
31	Joel Martins	Lele Semenya
32	Lux Marumo	
33	Ezekial Maseko	
34	Harold Matshididi	Malambo
35	Mpogi Matabane	Monare

36	Vuyisile Matroos	Johnny Mashigo
37	Mangaliso Matyobeni	
38	Velaphi Mbele	Vicks
39	Derrick McBride	
40	Robert McBride	
41	Aaron Mkhwanazi	Take Five
42	Johannes Mnisi	Victor Molefe
43	David Moisi	Lots, Shadow, Speech
44	Montso Mokgabudi	Obadi
45	Barney Molokoane	Buda, Mmutle, Ramanase
46	Bryce Motsamai	
47	Velaphi Msane	Faku Senzangakhona, Glen
48	Mzwakhe Mthwebana	
49	Bonnie Muller	
50	George Ndlovu	
51	George Nene	
52	Bheki Ngubane	
53	Peter Ngwenya	
54	Chris Nungu	George Douglas
55	Makwale Nyalunga	Mkhululi
56	Maria Overeem	Sonia
57	Hélène Passtoors	
58	Alan Pearce	
59	Phiwe	
60	Abraham Pule	
61	Ernest Pule	T-man, Themba, Vusi
62	Xolile Sam	Valdez, Mbatha, Thabang
63	Vincent Sekete	Sidney Sibepe
64	Iqbal Shaikh	
65	Marson Sharpley	
66	Aggie Shoke	Blueza
67	Freddie Shongwe	
68	George Sibanyoni	Tate
69	Teddy Sikhakhane	
70	Marion Sparg	
71	Sipho Thobela	Mabena
72	Guido Van Hecken	
73	Mandlenkosi Vilakazi	

74	Teddy Vilakazi	
75	Gordon Webster	
76	Edward Wethli	
77	Rodney Wilkinson	

Oliver Tambo and Joe Slovo were the original Special Ops overall commanders.

Only MK names known

1	Danny Boy
2	Chico
3	Cleopas
4	Cooper
5	Derrick
6	Desert
7	Jackie
8	Louis Rehmann (pyseudonym, as he doesn't want any acknowledgement)
9	Mandla
10	Matome
11	Mochudi
12	More
13	Pule (not Ernest or Abraham)
14	Scorpio
15	Solly Mayona
16	Zandi, Earl

This list of Special Ops members includes both the South African operatives and the internationalists (those from other countries).

This is a significant majority of the Special Ops members. A few may not have been traced. If any names surface in future, they will be added to this list. Also, they will be interviewed, if they agree to be.

As the operatives used more than one MK name, there may be an overlap in the case of one or two of the names listed. Even those who served in the same units didn't always know the many MK names others used or what their real names were. However, an exhaustive attempt was made to clarify names through the interviewees and other sources.

Table 3
Interviews
(in alphabetical order of surnames)

1	Muff Andersson	29 December 2019
2	Desi Angelis	17 July 2020
3	Greta Apelgren	28 August 2020
4	Jeannete Apelgren	17 December 2020
5	Nora Bogaert	06 December 2018 07 December 2018
6	Jeremy Brickhill	25 November 2021
7	Jackie Cahi	14 February 2022
8	Patrick Chamusso	11 April 2017 02 November 2018 09 September 2021 11 September 2021
9	Louise Colvin	05 July 2018
10	Klaas de Jonge	10 December 2016
11	Ebrahim Ismail Ebrahim	19 March 2019
12	Farouk Farista	06 September 2019 07 September 2019
13	Heather Gray	23 May 2019
14	Aboobaker Ismail (Rashid)	19 March 2016 09 July 2016 27 December 2016 02 January 2019 05 September 2022 16 November 2023

		30 January 2024 05 July 2024 17 July 2024 15 August 2024
15	Mohamed Ismail	25 April 2017 20 September 2018
16	Ronnie Kasrils	23 June 2016 29 September 2017
17	Victor Kgaladi	03 June 2020
18	Matthew Lecordier	24 December 2020 28 December 2020
19	Abraham Lentsoane	25 May 2020 28 August 2020
20	Jerome Maake	19 March 2019
21	Ramoepi Maboja (by email)	10 May 2022
22	Mac Maharaj	21 June 2016 11 July 2016 03 November 2019
23	Oscar Marleyn	29 December 2019
24	Lux Marumo	24 July 2018
25	Harold Matshididi	29 January 2024 26 July 2024 01 August 2024 11 December 2024
26	Mangaliso Matyobeni	28 May 2020 22 July 2020 21 February 2022 28 August 2024
27	Robert McBride	14 April 2020 15 April 2020 16 April 2020
28	David Moisi	06 February 2017 15 March 2018
29	George Nene	28 April 2017
30	Makwale Nyalunga	18 August 2018 16 June 2019

31	Siphiwe Nyanda (Gebuza)	25 April 2017
32	Maria Overeem	01 September 2023 31 October 2023
33	Hélène Passtoors	03 July 2017 11 July 2017 12 April 2022
34	Abraham Pule	30 May 2020
35	Ernest Pule	22 September 2017 24 July 2018 23 January 2019 10 February 2022 27 September 2023
36	Sue Rabkin	29 September 2017
37	Louis Rehmann	25 October 2023 30 October 2023
38	Riaz Saloojee	29 July 2020
39	Iqbal Shaikh	12 April 2017 23 January 2019 07 September 2022
40	Aggie Shoke	29 January 2024 26 July 2024 01 August 2024 11 December 2024
41	Sunny Singh	27 June 2019 15 September 2019
42	Marion Sparg	17 February 2021 31 October 2023
43	Mohammed Timol	15 September 2017
44	Adrian Turgel	23 November 2021
45	Guido Van Hecken	06 December 2018 07 December 2018
46	Edward Wethli	26 February 2022

		18 July 2022
47	Cathy Wilkinson	05 June 2019
48	Rodney Wilkinson	04 October 2018 05 October 2018 14 August 2019 11 October 2021 12 October 2021 06 November 2021 09 November 2021 16 November 2021 18 November 2021

There were many follow-up exchanges with some of the interviewees, especially Rashid, Ernest Pule, Mkhululi and Matyobeni, that have not been recorded.

There are interviews pending with Guy Malamba, Peter Ngwenya, Teddy Vilakazi, George Sibanyoni and Joel Martins.

Table 4

Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
APC	Area Political Committee
APLA	Azanian People's Liberation Army
AWB	Afrikaner Resistance Movement
AWOL	Absent Without Leave
BC	Black Consciousness
BCM	Black Consciousness Movement
CCB	Civil Cooperation Bureau
DLB	Dead Letter Box
DMV	Department of Military Veterans
EPG	Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group
FRELIMO	Mozambique Liberation Front
GDR	German Democratic Republic (East Germany)
HRC	Human Rights Committee
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
IRA	Irish Republican Army
MAGIC	Mozambique, Angola and Guiné Information Centre
MCW	Military Combat Work (Soviet term for clandestine work)
MJK	Mandla Judson Khuzwayo unit
MK	Umkhonto we Sizwe
MPLA	People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola
Natref	National Petroleum Refiners of South Africa
NDR	National Democratic Revolution
NEC	National Executive Committee of the ANC

NIA	National Intelligence Agency
NIC	Natal Indian Congress
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
PFP	Progressive Federal Party
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PMC	Politico-Military Council
PWV	Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging
RC	Revolutionary Council of the ANC
RENAMO	Mozambican National Resistance
RPG	rocket-propelled grenade launcher
RPMC	Regional Politico-Military Committee
SAAF	South African Air Force
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SACP	South African Communist Party
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADF	South African Defence Force
SANDF	South African National Defence Force
SAP	South African Police
SAPS	South African Police Service
SASM	South African Students' Movement
Sasol	South African Coal, Oil and Gas Corporation
SASRIA	South African Special Risks Insurance Association
SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organisation
TIC	Transvaal Indian Congress
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UDF	United Democratic Front
UN	United Nations
UNITA	National Union for the Total Independence of Angola
UWC	University of the Western Cape

WIP	Wentworth Improvement Project
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People’s Union
ZIPRA	Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army

Table 5

Glossary of Names

Steve Biko	Leader of the BCM, killed in detention
Pik Botha	Foreign Minister of Apartheid South Africa
P W Botha	President of Apartheid South Africa
Amil Cabral	Marxist leader of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde
Carimo	Mozambican panel beater assisting Special Ops to design and build dead letter boxes in vehicles
Yusuf Dadoo	SACP chairperson, TIC president and ANC leader
F W de Klerk	Last President of Apartheid South Africa
Frantz Fanon	Marxist from Martinique who joined the Algerian National Liberation Front
Che Guevara	Argentinian Marxist, leading participant in the Cuban Revolution
Louis le Grange	Law and Order Minister of apartheid South Africa
Moses Mabhida	General secretary of the SACP and ANC and MK leader
Andrew Masondo	MK, ANC and SANDF leader
John Nkadimeng	ANC and SACP leader and trade unionist
Thomas Nkobi	ANC Treasurer-General
Mzwai Piliso	ANC and MK leader
Adriaan Vlok	Law and Order Minister of Apartheid South Africa

