

MK Special Operations Unit Project

Interviews

Aboobaker Ismail (Rashid)

19 March 2016 (Roodepoort), 9 July 2016 (Roodepoort), 27 December 2016 (Cape Town) and 2 January (2019)

Kindly note:

- 1. The main four of several interviews done between 2016 and 2024 with Rashid have been transcribed. These four interviews have been clustered into a single interview. These interviews took place on 19 March 2016, 9 July 2016, 27 December 2016 and 2 January 2019***
- 2. As these interviews are spread over nearly three years, there are some overlaps. At different times some similar questions were put to Rashid based on what other interviewees had said and further research done. These overlaps have been kept to a minimum and retained only where the responses at different times provide more insights and information.***
- 3. The interviews were not done in terms of a rigid format. They were carried out in a conversational, free-flowing style with many questions flowing out of the answers given by Rashid and the interview has been retained in this form.***
- 4. There are several quotations in the book that are not in these interviews as they are taken from interviews done during the writing of the book.***
- 5. To get a better sense of Rashid's views, it would be useful to read other interviews he has given over the years and the records of Truth and Reconciliation Amnesty hearings in which he participated. These documents are available on the internet.***
- 6. In this interview, MK and real names are used interchangeably. At times, both names are provided, at other times not, but if you need clarity, kindly refer to Table 2 – "List of Special Ops members" – where both real and MK names are mentioned. Victor Molefe was the MK name for Johannes Mnisi – both these names are used interchangeably. This is being mentioned as these two names of the same person appear often in this interview. There was also Victor Khayiyana – but when he is mentioned, his surname is included to distinguish him from Mnisi.***

Interviews 1 and 2

This is the first of several interviews obviously. The project doesn't just focus on the operations carried out but on the people who did them. Who were they? What motivated them? Various questions around that. Perhaps we should start with some details about your personal background, how you became politically aware, who influenced you and why you opted for the armed struggle in particular? You seem to have risen very fast in the

ranks of MK. Almost meteoric. You leave the country in 1976, get trained in the GDR (East Germany) in 1978, become an MK Instructor in the Funda camp in Angola that year, soon after you're the Chief Instructor in February 1979, Special Ops Commissar in late 1979, and Special Ops Commander in April 1983 until August 1987. Then you become Chief of Ordnance until 1994. What do you think might explain that? Of course, I know it's hard to speak of oneself – but there must be something about you, your character, personality, aptitude, commitment and whatever that must partly explain this.

It's hard to explain the personal and what led to what you say is a meteoric rise. Maybe I can talk a bit about what I think people may have sensed I was able to do. What I can mainly talk to though is what happened, what we wanted to achieve. And I think this all goes down to the history of MK – what it was able to achieve until that time, where we were at, and the kind of people that we had in MK and where we now wanted to take MK, the next steps. Personally, I don't think I had any special skills. I was just very driven, and that comes from way back when I was very young, wanting to be part of the liberation struggle and to do what I could, knowing that I wasn't physically a very strong person. There was some innate sense in me that one day I will go out and contribute to the struggle. How exactly that would be and when I couldn't say.

But it goes back to my early upbringing, and my political mentor really was my father. In 1961, we were given flags and sweets and other things at school to celebrate Republic Day. My father's response was that there was nothing to celebrate about Republic Day and he threw the flags and other stuff into the fire. He would also talk about communism and (SACP leader) Yusuf Dadoo.

I always felt that for as long as the scourge of apartheid existed, I wanted to be part of the struggle. I felt at some stage that I would rather die than not succeed. When I was young, I used to go to the mosque, and I often prayed that I would be given the opportunity to contribute. Over the years I have also felt that there was some force that protected me, I know it may sound strange, but it's always been with me, and it's also been in my gut. It's also like an instinct and a drive to achieve, to get things done, and to do this with others. Now, sometimes in the military environment you have a hard exterior, but deep down there's always this very human element of saying we are dealing with people, we are dealing with people's lives; it's not something that comes easy, but we need to harness the capability, the human creativeness inside of people.

If you want to go out and do whatever needs to be done, always respect human beings, human life, and I've often said to people that even with the enemy, at the end of the day, there's a human being there. It's a question of saying how do you get that person, on the other side, to think differently and understand that they're dealing with humans on this side, that no one person should be violating the rights of the others, and it's a question of how do we get to respect each other even if we're on opposite sides.

These are the forces that drove me. Why was it important? Because I felt that what was happening under apartheid was a clear violation of people's rights. There was often this feeling that when the time is right, I'll go and do things. Until it got to the point where after the uprisings in Soweto, I said we've got to make the conditions right, things just won't come right by themselves, and that is when I took the ultimate decision that I would go and do it and help make the conditions right.

But if we go back then to how I joined the struggle, firstly I think my political consciousness comes from my father, from the time when we were five, six onwards. I was already politically aware by the time I was interacting with the comrades at UDW (University of Durban-Westville), like Yunus Mohammed. He finally put me in touch with the underground movement, of an ANC front organisation, the Human Rights Committee. It is in the sense if we were to talk crudely of recruitment into the struggle. I had been involved in student issues from 1972, when we went on a boycott and then in 1974 you had the FRELIMO rally. There was a time that I was almost expelled from university with (Professor) Bhadra Ranchod threatening me, but I refused to give in and they let me off, but I've already spoken about this to others who've interviewed me. There was always this innate sense that you must serve with honesty and integrity, I'm very big on this. Emotionally, my whole life is dedicated to the struggle.

Is there a religious basis for this? You used to pray in mosque that you be given the space to contribute to the struggle, and you felt that you had some protector.

No, I'm just talking of my early period...

Okay, maybe not so much now, but when you first became politically aware...

Islam did influence me.

So why are you dismissing it?

No, I'm not dismissing it, but if you say to me: does it play a role directly in influencing and guiding your actions, then my answer is no. My political consciousness comes from many influences and I've said this elsewhere, it goes back also to asking questions about why are we living a different life to other people in the country? Why? As we were driving through Soweto, going to school, why were those people living in matchbox houses? Who made that decision and what gives them the right to? That is the essence of my growing political consciousness, seeing what's happening around me; not my religious beliefs. All people are born equal. You come into this world with nothing, you leave this world with nothing, and in that sense all people are equal. People will be judged by what they do in life, what they do for other people. I wasn't guided by religious thinking. My father was, like well, 'You guys must study, you must be a doctor.'

But your father went to the mosque regularly? Fridays certainly?

Fridays yes, but no, otherwise he didn't go to the mosque daily. In fact, we used to get the *Tablighies* (conservative Islamic group that reaches out to Muslims to be more pious) coming to the door, and he would sort of shoo them off. And even when I left the country there was this issue among some in the family about, okay, he's going to England and what's he going to eat there (a reference to access to *halal* or 'kosher' food that Muslims eat, pork and ham being forbidden). My father's attitude was, oh well, he'll eat whatever he has to eat. Religion was never imposed. We were brought up in a very tolerant kind of way. There was the question of the Bilal at the mosque (a Muezzin who calls Muslims to prayer). Here's a guy from Somalia who probably has no means to go home, and he's provided a space to live under the stairway leading to the upper floor of the mosque.

But wait a moment, I ask myself, wait, wait, we are Muslims, we are supposed to care for each other. How is it possible that they can make people live like that? I then said to my family, let us invite him home at Eid and during Ramadan and other times. We talked to him about his family, where they were, what they did and so on.

It was also a question of saying I want to fight for the freedom and equality of all people. Can we get to the point where we begin to interact with the ordinary African people of the country? Because apartheid forced it on us to live separate lives, but our family was able to live a slightly better quality of life. Yes, when my father came from India in 1933, they didn't have much to live on, but over the years they did well. When it came to African people, what opportunities did they have? Your sense of that discrimination was very much a motivating force. If you say that you believe in equality, you can't simply talk about it in the abstract. It's got to be lived values, lived beliefs. When you talk of equality, you must treat people equally, and you must be treated equally.

You went to madressa (Islamic school)?

Until about 13. When we started going to standard six, we travelled to Lenz (Lenasia) for school, by the time we got home it was three to half past three. We simply dropped out of going to madressa and that also ended the intensely religious phase while I was young.

When you were in MK did you go to mosque if there were opportunities?

Mostly not.

But you prayed now and then?

Occasionally, yes. But deep down, I used to say I don't need to. To me, belief is what is in you, in your heart. Maybe it was a sense of having moved away from religion but deep down, I always prayed. I always had a sense of a link between me and a Being, a God.

Would you describe yourself as a believer now?

Yes.

Your father comes to South Africa in 1933? That's late. Would you say you have any identity with India?

My father came here when he was six years old. No, I have no identity with that country. I felt it was very important that we not identify ourselves as Indians in the struggle. We were participating as individuals. In fact, I rejected anything that went in the direction of race to the point, where even at university, around 1974, there were people trying to get me into the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) and I said to them, I don't think that was the right way to go. Whilst I understood what they were trying to do and what they stood for, I felt that it was very important that we shed any notion of race. That we needed to move beyond that point.

Now to something else. In your Pdraig O'Malley interview (*The Heart of Hope*, The O'Malley Archives, Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2002-03) you say that you read books on Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, Vo Giap (a prominent military strategist of the Vietnamese liberation movement) and others and you became familiar with armed struggles while at school. It's unusual at that age. How did it come to be?

Yes, I was at school, maybe 14 or 15 years old. But I also grew up amongst friends and other people who were politically involved and remember the area that I grew up in was quite political. There was the bombing of the Vrededorp post office, one of the first acts of ANC sabotage. My cousin, Mohammed Mayet, was politically involved and used to produce pamphlets which he would give to us when we were little snots to distribute. We didn't know the details of what it was all about except that it was political. He was in the PAC (Pan Africanist Congress). Once, the police came around for him, and my mother and aunt helped to hide his typewriter and Roneo machine in the coal shed.

We also had access to a tape of Mandela's speech in court ('I am prepared to die', at the 1964 Rivonia trial). We listened to it; we spoke about it.

You told O'Malley that (ANC activist) Mosey Moola lived in Vrededorp, your area – did you have direct contact with him?

I didn't know him, but I had heard about him. We knew what was going on. My father often spoke to us about it.

Explain more specifically what made you read Che and Vo Giap at 14 or 15? How did you hear about Che Guevara?

I can't remember actually... but I think that these were books that my friends had access to and they were shared amongst us.

So where did you get these books from?

I had a group of friends...The book on Von Giap, I remember, I went to the Johannesburg library, in a section at the back where his and other political books were. They were banned and we were not supposed to read them. But the librarian there didn't seem to know, so she didn't stop me. I had seen a card reference for the book and went up to her and said that I could not find it on the shelf. She said, 'I'll get it for you', and I was able to borrow it for two weeks. Deep down you have this consciousness, you begin thinking about armed struggle.

At 14 or 15? If you're in the townships, given the circumstances, yes, maybe, but with your relatively better off circumstances, that's unusual, surely?

Look, I lived a political life. I came from a very political background even though my father wasn't directly involved. We were passing through Soweto daily, and the circumstances of African people were very visible. The matchbox houses. There was always the biting question why do we lead such different qualities of life? Apartheid affected our daily lives. We had to travel a long distance just to go to school.

Did your father nudge you into the struggle? Did he speak to you about the armed struggle?

No, he spoke about the struggle and influenced me but didn't direct me in that way. About the use of arms, he said there will come a time when all these weapons and things will mean nothing.

But why the interest in the armed struggle at 14?

Because I felt that, that was the way.

At 14?

Yes. Look, I can't say exactly at 14 but while I was in school and over the years. In 1971 Ahmed Timol was killed. I'm writing my matric exams. I go to the grounds where Helen Suzman and others address a protest meeting. Long before then, I had this feeling I must do something.

Taking up arms?

Yes. I always had this thing in me that I wanted to do something, and it goes back to that thinking that God must give me the opportunity to contribute. I can't recall that I knew about weaponry. We were very young when MK was launched. One of its first operations was at the post office nearby. We understood there was an armed struggle and often there were discussions around it.

So, you read Guevara and others. Could you have been drawn to the armed struggle partly because of its romantic appeal at the time?

One of my schoolmates was Kieran Parshotam, and his brothers were quite politically involved. His eldest brother was studying medicine at Wits and used to speak to us. Mazuz's brother, who was an engineer, and the elder brother was studying to become a doctor and he and Kieran's eldest brother, Direndra, were politically aware. Now that chap was detained around the time when Timol was detained.

You told O'Malley that the boys in your family were politically aware, but not your sisters. Was that all the boys? And none of your sisters?

Pretty much all the boys, yes, especially after my involvement. My elder brother was quite involved with political activities in Azaadville/Dobsonville. My second brother, Mohamed, I had recruited into the (Special Ops) Dolphin unit. My other brother, who is 10 years younger than I am, didn't directly get involved but was very politically aware. But if I were to ask anything of them that I wanted done, they would help. In about 1980, I got in touch with my family and they would come to see me in Swaziland from time to time.

Tell us a bit more about your UDW (University of Durban-Westville) days?

I was politically active at UDW. I also used to read a lot, banned books too. We used to get them from a bookshop in Grey Street. I finished my studies in 1974. I got good passes in school, especially in maths, mainly algebra. I couldn't get into medicine as there were restrictions on the number of Indian students, so I did a BSc with the hope of getting into medicine but then by the time I finished my final year at university I didn't want to be a doctor anymore. I had this feeling that by becoming a doctor I would be able to help individuals, but I had an innate sense of wanting to change society.

Back in Johannesburg you were active in the Human Rights Committee and got arrested on 10 December 1974 and were roughed up. You then decide to leave the country to join MK?...

I didn't leave immediately. I said I would go out of the country. I was deeply involved with Mohammed Timol, I was very close to the Naidoo's (Indres Naidoo and his family). I spend time with them almost every weekend. I saw Rookeya Saloojee, Babla's wife almost every other day (Babla Saloojee was killed in detention in 1963.) I told my parents that I got beaten up by the security police. I had a burst eardrum, cracked rib. My father said you must understand what you're dealing with.

I decided I will continue with the struggle no matter what. Quite often I'd come home hands full of glue from posting campaigns, dishing out leaflets and things. I used to dish out a lot of Human Rights Committee pamphlets. I decided to leave the

country as soon as the Soweto uprising started. I already took the decision that I'd leave in 1974 but then with the Soweto events I knew I just had to now do it.

What do you say to your family? That you're going to study in the UK?

I say to my father any day now I must go as we were expecting to be detained, and in fact on 16 June, one of the security cops comes to my brother's record shop and says, 'Where's your brother?' My brother says he's at work. They say, 'We're going to get you guys.' My brother contacted me and I didn't go back to the shop. Between us in the Human Rights Committee, we all felt that things were really hotting up. My father's attitude was going to prison is not going to help. I said to my father, I think I should go, the situation is becoming difficult, and he was only too pleased to get me out of the country. I said to him I'm going to study.

If he knew you were going to take part in the armed struggle, would he have dissuaded you?

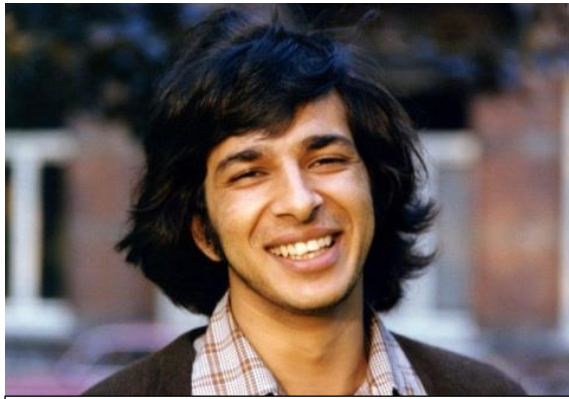
He would have tried. He often said to me, 'Do you understand the path you have chosen, what it'll lead to?' There was a very close bond between my father and I, and he would say, 'If you continue along the path that you're going, either you'll end up in prison or you'll be killed.' I said to him I'm going to study. By then I had no intention of doing so.

Let me tell you a strange anecdote. My father and mother had a spiritual guide who came to the house. My parents introduced us. He looks at my siblings, Shireen, Yusuf, Mohamed, Rashida, me and the youngest, Rashid Ahmed. He looks at me. He looks at my brother, Rashid Ahmed. But then he looks troubled, turns around and looks at me and says, 'But you are Rashid?' So, I was mistaken for Rashid even then. And this was long before I went into exile. Not that I believe in such things, but on the other hand, this is interesting...

You mean these sorts of unusual happenings?

Well, there were other instances. My mother dreaming that I came into the country at the time I was in Durban doing a reconnaissance of the Mobil Oil refinery. Then also one day there's a woman who used to fortune-tell with her tarot cards, years before I left the country and she says, 'You're going out of the country, you'll live in grave danger' and then clams up. She says 'no, sorry but I can't tell you more.' I tried to prompt her. It just looked very dark and grim and heavy. She just said 'look, let's just leave it here.' For what all that's worth (laughter). Partly you don't believe in it, she's talking nonsense, and partly where did this come from?

Okay, so you leave? What next?



Rashid, 1977

Well, I was turned away by immigration at the airport in London and was put onto the flight back to Johannesburg via Brussels – but then I decided not to take the connecting flight in Brussels. I could have got into medical school in Belgium once I got my refugee status there. But to get regularised, I began studying nursing as that could be useful in the struggle years. I studied nursing as I was inspired by Samora Machel who was a nurse before he joined the liberation struggle in Mozambique.

From there you get to London to negotiate to join MK for military training?...

Yes, I met Reg September and others, including Ronnie Kasrils and later Aziz (Pahad). My background speaks for itself because I was in the Human Rights Committee which was an underground structure of the ANC. I had the background of internal work, but I had to go through the usual security processes within the ANC. They then say to me, 'We don't want you hanging around London. We want you to go back to Belgium and will let you know when training has been arranged.' I asked about financial support and getting some additional means of living? 'So, you want to be a guerilla? Well, go and fend for yourself'. That was very instrumental to me because in later life it said to me don't wait for somebody to give you instructions, you do it for yourself, which is what I did.

So how did you get your MK name, Rashid'?

Before I leave for training Aziz says that in MK all members use pseudonyms. 'We have to give you a name'. I would say I came from Durban. How do you throw people off track, so that they don't know your past, who you are. I say okay, my name is Rashid. One of those things that came up very spontaneously. In a strange way, it provided protection for me. My younger brother is Rashid Ahmed. If the police came to our family home wanting to know where Rashid was, my family could always point to my brother and that would confuse them. And then the surname, Aziz says, 'Okay, Patel. There are so many of them that the police won't be able to trace you.'

I used many, many names. I had a briefcase full of passports and documents in these names. But within the ANC and MK I used Rashid constantly.

The Indian government helped the ANC with this. Did they give you these passports, or did you forge them?

No, several came from the Indian government directly. I had one with me, being born in the West Indies. Some I got from the Tamil Tigers (a movement of Tamils in Sri Lanka fighting for their independence). Some were forged. I also had South African passports with my photo forged by ANC comrades.

Did you have links with the Tamil Tigers?

Yes, I had a friend who joined our struggle who had links with the Tamil Tigers.

So, through the ANC in London, you go to East Germany for military training and join MK? What passport do you use?

My UN passport.

What happens in East Germany? How long were you there for?

I spent six months in East Germany in 1978. It was extremely intensive. We even sweated in the snow. When I went for training, there was this recognition that I came from a political background, so the decision was taken that instead of being sent to the camps in Angola first and then being sent off for training, I should go directly for foreign training. I get to the GDR (East Germany) for training, and the German instructors were quite impressed. My science background helped. In fact, the German General who was our instructor in engineering used the words "Ein von den beste kreften das sie habben"—one of the more capable people that the movement has.

What training?

We went through normal conventional training at a Junior Commander's level. It was formal training which would have put us into a position to become officers. Let's say a lieutenant's course, but it was very intense. They then took us through a specialised course in homemade weaponry. How to make explosives, how to make IEDs (improvised explosive devices). How to choose and attack strategic military targets? We used to go into tactical discussions. I would ask questions; I would say why don't you approach it like this? I would make suggestions? The instructors enjoyed the interactive questions and searching for different ways of doing things. In their report to the ANC, the instructors said that you're being...well, innovative...and capable.

How many were in your group?

Thirty. I wasn't sent to a small training unit. I was in a platoon setup. All South Africans at Teterow in north Germany. Part of the training was on strategic targets – refineries, road networks, telephone networks. What to target, what do you do, where do you go? What are the weak points? The instructors say how the ANC wants to utilise you is up to the ANC but for now the recommendation is that I should become an instructor. All the cadres that had been at the training camp had already done about two years training in the Angolan camps. That was the qualifying

requirement. But I managed in six months – from the beginning of '78 until June of '78 to get a thorough grounding. The Germans' analysis was that the ANC really needed to be able to grow its own cadres to train others properly. Not everybody could go to the Soviet Union or the GDR for training, and some of us could provide that kind of training in the ANC camps.

Can you say a bit more about your stay in the training camp in East Germany? What was a typical day?

We used to work hard, train hard, and get up early every morning. You woke up at 5:30 to 6am. Exercises, gym training, running, etc. You then did your ablutions. The day before, you would have prepared your uniform. The Germans would demand way beyond what the Soviets would. Everything had to be absolutely meticulous, and they drilled you until you met the right standards. They made sure everything was there, fully prepared, daily. They gave us a fantastic breakfast. Sometimes when you hear the stories now, of how tough living conditions were for ordinary people, well, they gave us the best of everything. They really were out there to impress us about the communist system, how it works. You also went to theoretical classes, and every day you carried out some field exercises. They really drilled you. Sometimes you had night training or political classes.

Did you experience the cultural life of East Germany? Go to music concerts or the theatre or such like?

No, we were confined to the training camp. The only people you interacted with were fellow South Africans, the German instructors and the women who looked after you – they did the laundry and dealt with the meals and so on.

Did you upgrade your technical skills over time?

Well, I read. Anything I could get my hands on. My scientific background helped, applying knowledge, thinking and finding out what's necessary. The rest of it was all training on the hoof, reading, studying.

Weren't more MK cadres trained in the Soviet Union than in East Germany?

Most of the people were trained in the Soviet Union. They were also taken on regular courses there.

Didn't you ask to be upgraded?

I had asked the instructors if we could go for advanced officer training but was told that that depended on the ANC and would be based on the needs of the movement. However, there was no time. I was thrown in at the deep end firstly with becoming an instructor and later in Special Ops. I had to be very practical. I had to say, listen I must get these guys here, to get this equipment there. Here's the target. How will I get into the target? Then I just applied my mind.

But isn't that unusual? You only had those six months' training and yet you played a major role very quickly?

Honestly, I just applied my mind. I said that we can do this, we have got to do A, B, C, D. I never allowed any operation to go forward unless I could see it in my mind's eye from A to Z. Anyway, when the 1978 GDR training was over, the decision was made that I should be among those to do the training in the camps in Angola. I became an instructor in 1978 and soon after Chief Instructor at Funda camp in February 1979.

Wasn't that a fast rise?

Well, others made that decision. I must say, from a personal perspective, there was no easy, quick ride. It was not because I was somebody's blue-eyed boy, it was purely because of hard work, and I had this attitude of, well, I would rather die than fail, and I applied that throughout the struggle, which is why when I think back about that period, I become quite emotional. In that role, my job was also to decide on who should go to the ZIPRA (Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army, the armed wing of ZAPU, Zimbabwe African People's Union) front. If I thought somebody was not ready yet, I wouldn't recommend him, and the Command structure would not send that person.

Don't the other comrades feel a certain resentment that you move up so quickly?

Not then. I never advertised the fact that I had a BSc degree. I got on well with them. I would work with people, talk to them. There are some people who, when it was convenient, because they didn't get certain positions, said I was being favoured. There was a resentment among some about what you say was a meteoric rise in MK. When I was put on the Command of Special Ops in 1979, Andrew Masondo, then National Commissar, said, 'I don't know why they put you there. They should be sending you into operations. Why are they putting you in Command? It showed how Indian comrades are given special treatment'. I decided to shut up. I didn't say to him I just came from inside the country where I did reconnaissance. I just said, I hear you, but this is the role I was given, and the decision was taken by JS (Slovo) and Obadi (real name: Montso Mokgabudi). Maybe you should raise it with them, and I left it at that. When I raised Masondo's comments with them, they basically laughed it off and said to just ignore it. I'm saying that it exists and doesn't exist, this resentment.

Anyway, I was an instructor, then Chief Instructor. I'm then tasked to train the Special Ops unit and to advise on how to carry out attacks on the refineries. What do you think will be the best weapons, etc? I said, let's look at the circumstances, the planning. We looked at various options, for example, you could fire an RPG rocket for 5-600 meters, maybe a bit more.

Were you a Marxist at the time or did you become a Communist Party member later?

I always believed in Communism from a young age. I was recruited into the Communist Party in the Funda Camp.

What drew you to Marxism?

In a strange way, Islam. To me Islam teaches egalitarianism.

When do you formally join the Communist party?

In 1978.

What was the role of Special Ops? And how effective do you think it was?

Special Ops was a success mainly because of the quality of the comrades – and some of these were young cadres just out from school and some were workers. Most of them were very dedicated, brave, raring to go. Also, the quality of the leadership, who were very inspiring, OR (Tambo), JS and others who brought out the best in these comrades. Then there was the thorough-going, detailed planning dedicated to ensuring that each of the operations was a success. And in the planning, thinking strategically and tactically about what we were trying to achieve, which became my main role.

It was armed propaganda. It was to show that the regime was not invincible and to inspire the masses of the people to act. We needed to get the broader masses of the people involved in the struggle, especially because there was such a lull in armed activities from about 1964 onwards. It was very difficult to get the armed struggle embedded in the people. In '77 and '78 there were a few skirmishes in the Western Transvaal and the operations of Sphiwe Nyanda's (MK name: Gebuza) G5 unit (which was part of the Transvaal Urban machinery).

We had to do much more. How are we going to achieve what was required? There was concern about how the enemy always got to know about what was going on in the ANC and MK? So, we had to have a unit that operated with the maximum secrecy and discipline with the best comrades we could find in the camps. So, we brought these different elements together – strong comrades prepared to do the most, a leadership that inspired them, good planning and other technical skills, operating with strict discipline and in secrecy, being part of an elite unit that answered to OR and JS and not the ordinary MK structures – and it was all this that made Special Ops a success.

What was important was that the cadres themselves asked for nothing. All they knew was that they had been well-trained and wanted to go in, and from the leadership they wanted to know what exactly was expected of them. We had to discuss when you get inside the country, this is what you need to do, this is how you conduct yourself. They'd been trained but now they needed to be clear about how to

translate that into actual operations. And once you were in position to take the cadres through and we discuss this is step one, step two, step three, they are all for it and they get the operation done, using their own initiatives.

Quite often, the approach was shaped by taking into account the cadre's own experiences and knowledge of the situation in the country. You would ask if you went in, what would you do? How would you survive? Where would you stay? So, you would build a picture of this. Then you would assist them to think about how they would carry out the operation to the best of their ability, adapting to the circumstances. And the cadres were just fantastic. It's amazing to think how they adapted to unforeseen circumstances.

Look at any of them, Mochudi, Solly Mayona, others – you know, youngsters who were raring to go. With that kind of dedication and commitment, all they wanted was Command. Once they had carried out these operations, they were fully inspired and they trusted us. That first operation of Sasol was what made Special Operations.

There needed to be trust between the cadres and the Command. Where does that trust come from? It's when you work with people, how you interact with people, how you talk to people. What you ask them to do, and they also look at you, as to your own behaviour. You have to be exemplary in yourself.

So, you need to have, firstly, proper leadership, you need to have trust with the cadres, and trust is built out of respect, out of care, out of making sure that those cadres feel that it is their interest that you have at heart. That you will go out of your way to make sure that they are safe at the end of an operation. Never have we planned an operation which was a suicide operation. We didn't believe in it. It has never been the ANC's belief, and with OR, he was at pains to insist no operation must be mounted unless in your planning you have looked at the safety of the cadres. OR would also check the facts of an operation. And if he felt unhappy about anything he would raise it and say 'go and pay attention to this, come back and report to me' on aspects etc. He was at pains to ensure that things didn't go wrong. In the ANC, in MK, there was also this notion amongst some cadres that they were being sold out in some of the other Commands, but they felt safe in Special Ops. They felt that there was a leadership in Special Ops that cared.

So, what were the elements? Proper leadership, trust amongst the cadres, and between the cadres and the leadership, and that was born out of meticulous planning. So that when you said to a cadre you go to such and such a point, he finds the DLBs (Dead Letter Boxes – a hiding place for materiel and/or secret communications in which there is no direct contact between those placing the materiel and those picking it up). That you provided the resources to them. That every little thing had been put in place. Yes, maybe I was overbearing and trying to get everything done properly, but we made sure we got everything in place.

Klaas (de Jonge) says to me, 'You were able to get people to do exactly what you wanted them to do'. I was so fortunate that I worked under Slovo, we clicked, and

we had such amazing synergy, and he was ready to delegate once he had trust in you.

How would you locate the role of Special Ops in the context of the armed struggle as a whole?

I'm not going to go too much into the theory. You are familiar with it. It's been covered a lot in many publications. I'll refer to it from time to time but it's better for me to talk more about the practical situations that we were in and how we dealt with them. As you know, the sabotage campaign of the ANC that started in '61 came to a lull in the mid-sixties. MK cadres were not coming into the country. People were stuck in the camps. This led to lots of frustration and problems after the Wankie Campaign – and this led to the Morogoro Conference in 1969. The ANC went through quite a turbulent time. After the Rivonia arrests, the political struggle inside the country died down. The apartheid state had managed to suppress the ANC and MK, and it is only with the resurgence of the political and union struggles in the early seventies that things began to change.

Then came the coup in Portugal and MPLA (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola) in Angola and FRELIMO (Mozambique Liberation Front) in Mozambique came to power. So, you had a reawakening inside the country, and people were beginning to organise themselves. Also, some of the ANC cadres who had been incarcerated on Robben Island were coming out, Indres Naidoo, Joe Gqabi and others, and they continued political work. We saw the steady re-emergence of political activity.

For the ANC, Mozambique and Angola being free was critical. The influence of the Soviet Union being the main backer of the armed struggles of the MPLA, FRELIMO and ANC was important. So, we were able to build camps in Angola and the Soviet Union delivered many of our arms there. In Mozambique, a year or two after liberation, they started to strongly support ZANU, pushing them into Zimbabwe. Militarily things started happening.

The ANC, over time, also managed to get an agreement with the FRELIMO government and support from it. The ANC always had an alliance with FRELIMO, the MPLA and the PAIGC (African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde). FRELIMO agreed to allow the ANC an office initially and over time the ANC began to build up some military presence in Mozambique, without FRELIMO granting military camps.

In Swaziland we also had King Sobhuza, who was very sympathetic and who, in fact, saw himself as an ANC member.

He was an ANC member in the 1950s, I think? But was he still a member?

Well, he saw himself that way. He was very close to the SACP General Secretary, Moses Mabhida, who had quite a lot of influence there, and through him we got

quite a lot done. Stan Mabizela was stationed there (Swaziland) and even Thabo Mbeki in the 1970's operated from there.

At that time, there wasn't a Military Headquarters per se. There was what was seen as an MK Command. The ANC had started moving inwards into South Africa with Swaziland being the conduit. There were Commands established in the country. The country was divided along the North and South roads. The road leading to Beit bridge. There was the Transvaal Urban machinery and the Eastern Transvaal Rural machinery operating out of Mozambique and Swaziland. There were also Commands operating in Natal, urban and rural. The ANC decided that the urban and rural areas should be divided because of the nature of the operations being different in these areas.

On the Western side, there were units operating from Lusaka into Botswana, again with the Botswana authorities closing one eye, basically allowing transit but with the understanding that if we were seen to be operating, they would have no option but to arrest people. This was to prevent the apartheid regime from striking at them.

The Cape areas were basically organised from Lesotho. Again, you had an urban-rural sort of divide. Chris Hani and Lambert Moloi operated from there, and they were sending people into the country.

On the Western Front, as we called it then, Joe Modise was in charge and on the Eastern front, JS was. So, JS was in charge of all the Commands that operated out of Maputo into Swaziland. Under them they had a very loose structure. Obadi, who later became Deputy Commander of Special Ops, was responsible for the selection of cadres and their preparation. He was responsible for deciding which cadres would be deployed there. He would then link with the Commanders. He would prepare documentation for them so that they would have a *dompas* or some other travel document which they would be able to use to get into Lusaka, and from Lusaka they would go to Botswana or be flown to Maputo. Later there were also direct flights going from Angola to Maputo.

The operations at that time were quite rudimentary. The biggest problem was getting weapons into the country. A lot of the weapons for the Western side were being smuggled in by vehicles that went from Lusaka into Botswana – but a lot of that was being dumped in arms caches in Botswana. There wasn't a coherent approach to getting the materiel into the country.

From the Western Front, the ANC was trying to send units into the country that would operate in the rural areas. This partly relates, I think, to Modise's role in the Wankie campaign and his belief that we had to win the support of the rural people and begin to operate. This raises the question about what happens first? Do you mobilise the people? Or do you carry out operations which in turn have the effect of mobilising the people?

The Western Front was successful in getting some units into the country, including one led by Barney Molokoane. There were one or two other units based in those areas. Their instruction initially was to try to mobilise people and win their support when they carried out operations. In terms of the classic guerrilla approach – the theory – this can't work in a terrain like South Africa. For example, in the Western Transvaal there are mainly scrub areas, in which it's not easy for guerrillas to set up a base. And, in fact, invariably, the people there were very suspicious when the units tried to carry out operations. This was around '78-'79. When the cadres tried to interact with the local people some of them reported them to the police and that led to skirmishes between our cadres and the SADF (South African Defence Force) and police. Some of our units were wiped out.

My memory is a bit vague on some of this. I know that Comrade OR, Modise and some of the other Commanders came to the camps and discussed these issues and explained that these are the kind of problems they were facing. Barney Molokoane's unit had money to survive, and they would go to rural shops to get food and other things, and people became suspicious about these people they didn't know and reported them to the police, and this led to clashes. There were also paid spies there reporting to the police.

Barney became a legend because of the skirmish between his unit and the Bophuthatswana Defence Force and the SADF troops and the way he fought there and made his way back across the border into Botswana. Some in his unit were killed or captured but most managed to get back to Botswana. Barney was injured in the process but still managed – he had flesh wounds – to make it. Shortly after getting treatment, he went back to the camps to train others in terms of experiences that their unit had. MK didn't have too many experienced Commanders on the ground at the time. Not to say that MK had not been involved in any guerrilla warfare battles. Many of them fought alongside ZIPRA, also by coming into Zimbabwe from the Botswana and Zambia fronts, fighting their way in... But you know a lot about that history. I'm just painting a quick picture of what was happening.

On the Eastern front the Natal rural cadres had been coming in. Of course, they had to be very cautious because in the rural areas Inkatha was dominant and they were in danger of being exposed.

Did they contact Dorothy Nyembe (who was imprisoned from 1969 to 1984 for MK activities)?

Yes. In fact, there was this comrade called Blackman who was in charge of the Natal Rural Command. He wanted me to join the Natal Command but then I got taken into Special Ops.

Can you say more about why Special Ops – and MK more generally – didn't go into South Africa directly from Mozambique but use Swaziland, Botswana and Lesotho to do so?

As I said, it was because of the agreement with FRELIMO – because of the attacks that were being mounted by the Boers on Mozambique – that we were not allowed to do so. Otherwise, that would've been open season for the Boers to directly create an incursion into Mozambique. So, the agreement with FRELIMO was that they would allow transit with the understanding very clearly from our side that we wouldn't go directly from Mozambique into South Africa but through Swaziland. The Mozambicans also said that they had shouldered the responsibility of supporting ZANLA and had paid a hefty price for this and felt that they could not take on further attacks from the South African side at the same time.

For the Transvaal Eastern rural areas, we had Comrade Robbie Moema, who later became a Major-General in the SANDF, and September (Glory Sedibe) operating. September ultimately went over to the enemy. And for the Transvaal Urban side we had Gebuza (Siphiwe Nyanda) as Commander. They carried out operations against police stations – Booyens, Moroka and others.

Also, an important influence on the way the ANC began to conduct the armed struggle at that time was that OR, JS and a few others had been to Vietnam to learn from their experience of their armed struggle.

The visit that led to the Green Book?

Yes, the Green Book arises from the notion of 'People's War' in the Vietnamese case. The Vietnamese situation was that they were largely a rural agrarian country at the time whereas South Africa is much more urbanized. The Vietnamese were able to dig tunnels from where they operated. From a practical perspective the G5 unit was also using such an approach trying to see if cadres could dig themselves into the ground. They knew that the enemy presence was all over.

But also, in some places people had organised themselves and whenever the police were coming in or carrying out any operations, they had a system of warning the community. This arose also out of the June 16 setup. So, units, amongst them Solly Shoke's, were basing inside the country and carrying out some operations against police stations – and this created an initial awakening among people that MK had a presence in the urban areas.

The notion that the ANC could carry out rural warfare was very limited. The Transvaal Rural machinery was not very successful. They managed to send cadres on the Eastern front, in the Sekhukhune area and in some others where they had some contact with some of the local traditional leaders. In fact, some of them, because they were known as ANC sympathisers, were driven into exile. So, there was a bit of success in getting some units inside, but they weren't very active. Modise and others wanted to carry out operations in terms of mine warfare, which I think, in the case of ZIPRA and ZANLA (Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army, armed wing of the Zimbabwe African National Union) the approach was quite successful. Land mines put in the border areas hampered the Rhodesian defence forces in their patrolling.

But, like in all classic guerrilla warfare situations, the big difficulty was how do you get past the immediate border areas and beyond by about 40 kilometres, which was more or less a *cordon sanitaire* that the military tried to control, and you had to get the cadres beyond that to be able to get inside. There were lots of roadblocks around the border areas. In the case of the rural machinery, they would use some of the legal internal support structures to collect units at the borders. Inside the country you also had Joe Gqabi and a few others supporting some of the cadres. He got released from the Island just before 1976, I think.

Tokyo Sekwale's unit was one of the cases where they'd come into the country, they were waiting for the vehicle to come to collect them, and they had a skirmish and were arrested. The ANC and MK realised that we needed to find a firm base amongst the people, where the cadres could survive. In the rural areas that was not easy because people were much more conservative and much more brutalised and they would not take in our cadres.

At that time there were really difficult conditions. At some point you realise you are not making the kind of breakthrough necessary. I often asked myself the question: why is it that you had the Transvaal Urban machinery that was beginning to make the breakthrough with Sphiwe Nyanda and them getting the stuff in? They had their own *modus operandi*. They were getting weapons in. They got some of the people into the townships. This whole notion of concealing weaponry in vehicles comes from saying this is do-able and at the time the regime didn't think MK had the capability.

The urban machineries realised that the support population was in the heart of the urban areas. Many of the cadres, when they first came in, would go to the mine hostels to try and get a feel of the local circumstances. Even though many of them were told don't go to your families, they would contact them but not stay there because they knew people would talk and the police would get to know. It was either with loose talk or deliberate pimping that the cadres would sometimes get arrested. And sometimes because of the bad behaviour of cadres. But there were a few successful operations that took place.

Cadres had found ways of operating in the urban areas which seemed to be reasonably successful. Many would dig holes and create shelters. I can't say how far we got or whether any of the cadres ever got into actual tunnel warfare. The theory was that eventually they would start tunnelling and be in a position to get into Soweto. If the enemy would close in on Soweto, they would get into the tunnels and be sheltered.

Was this influenced by the Vietnamese?

Yes, that was very much part of the Vietnamese thinking, and this is what MK wanted, but of course the Vietnamese had, over the years, developed an extensive network of tunnels, and so to some extent also did the Palestinians. In South Africa it never really took hold, but the cadres would dig themselves in, put some kind of

shelter over themselves and make it look like its scrap cars. They'd have a little dug-out hole, a concealed entrance.

Anyway, there were operations, some successful, some not, but there weren't enough. It was in that context that JS discussed with OR the need to establish a special MK unit that could take on the regime in a major way, carry out significant operations that would really inspire the people. The big issue was how do we get the message across to the people that the enemy is not invincible, that the people have everything to gain by being part of the liberation movement, and even if they weren't part of it, to at least support it, to provide safe havens, to provide a base. So, there were these debates within the ANC and MK.

There was also the focus on the political underground machinery being strengthened. Mac (Maharaj) was then the secretary of the political underground. He and other leaders were stressing the political mobilisation side of the struggle; they wanted that to be the main focus. They felt that the ANC at the time was too militaristic. On the other side you had JS and other leaders pushing the position that we needed to have military operations which would begin to engender support for the ANC. There were huge debates and finger-pointing about militarism and trying to find different ways of doing things. How do we make breakthroughs? How do we make sure that we intensify the struggle in the country?

The reality at that time was that we were still very dependent on cadres coming into the country for a short while, carrying out operations and then going back into the neighbouring countries. Getting weaponry into the country being the main problem. The urban machinery had found a way of smuggling weapons through the borders by concealing them in vehicles. Slovo put it to OR that the way we needed to make a breakthrough was to achieve something big and spectacular that would have the effect of mobilising people. Of course, there was the question of the theory and practice of this, of how political and armed struggles relate to each other. There wasn't complete agreement on this.

OR's initial response was that he needed time to consider this. He was also determined to get some kind of mandate from the ANC NEC because prior to that, I think, there had been major issues raised by the NEC about the failed *Okhela* operation (led by exiled poet Breyten Breytenbach to recruit White progressives in the country into the ANC). Some of these operations were not well-founded.

Did Tambo sanction that?

Yes. But then when Breytenbach got caught and the operation failed, Tambo was challenged by NEC members. He was very candid; he said he'd sanctioned *Okhela*. The ANC wanted to get back inside the country. But what do you do, how do you do it, with which elements? I heard that Tambo even offered to resign when some NEC members pushed him. But I don't know enough. The senior leaders still around can explain more to you. Because of the *Okhela* experience Tambo was much more careful about just giving the go-ahead for this new Special Ops Unit.

He then decided, yes, the Special Ops idea was well-founded. He took it to the NEC. Slovo was not part of the NEC at the time.

So, what was the NEC's response?

After some debate, Tambo got a mandate. He explained that the targets selected will only be known by a small Special Ops team. It seems he didn't say much. I don't know what the full debate was within the NEC.

Would the NEC actually get informed of a target beforehand? Surely not?

Nobody was told about the operational target or the timing of any operation. After the event some sort of report will be given to the NEC. So, there would be reports that go up to the NEC from time to time but there weren't many operations happening anyway. The specific operational details wouldn't go to the NEC. That was left to the Military Commands. So, for instance, the Transvaal Urban machinery wouldn't say we're going to hit these specific police stations, they would say police stations in general.

We owe Mozambique and Angola such a lot...

Absolutely, and that's why it's so critical that we acknowledge that without FRELIMO and MPLA we would not have been able to do what we did in the armed struggle. The Tanzanians were very, very careful about the extent to which we were allowed to prepare for MK operations from there. So was Zambia. They would not allow us camps, and that is why we were moving through with ZIPRA. The aim was that once we got closer to the South African border our cadres would then leave the ZIPRA comrades and be able to continue to South Africa. That was the theory. So it was, in a sense, a continuation of where the Wankie campaign had left off.

Mozambique basically let things flow, and that was at a time when they were facing a significant amount of pressure and attacks from the SADF and the Rhodesian Forces and growing RENAMO (Mozambican National Resistance) activity, which was sponsored through the SADF and the apartheid regime. (Alfonso Dhlakama (head of RENAMO) has today gone back into the bush in Mozambique...

The ANC itself had also taken a decision that it would fight alongside both liberation movements. So, it fought alongside ZIPRA, and in Angola the ANC had formed a front with MPLA and actively participated in the war against UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola). I mean the FNLA (National Liberation Front of Angola) was not a significant force and the MPLA managed to deal with them quite quickly, but because UNITA had the support of the South Africans it became quite a major battle. You should talk to Ronnie (Kasrils) about Cuito Cuanavale and the Cuban fighters there.

Incidentally, in our camps we had trainers from the Soviet Union, but they were there primarily as training advisors. None of them ever got directly involved in any

of our planning of operations, just to make it very clear. The Cubans also did some level of training, but most of the training in Angola was done by our own comrades and I was part of that. The camp that I operated in was at Funda which later moved to Caxito, which was seen more as a finishing school. So, the cadres I had to train had already been trained previously. The general rule in the ANC was that most cadres that had been sent abroad for training should have had two years of training before they were sent abroad for further or specialized training. We were also beginning to get seasoned fighters coming out of the war in Angola and out of our cooperation with ZIPRA. Some of them had been injured and came back to the camps and were deployed to help with the training.

Part of my training was on strategic targets in a developed economy. If you took down the oil refineries, military installations, power stations, roads and telephone networks, infrastructure, etc, you can cripple the state. So how do you go about doing this? What means are available to you? How best are you going to tackle this? I think the report-back given to the ANC after my training in the GDR was that I understood these things. My basic background was in science, so it was easier for me to get to grips with understanding and applying the issues.

Slovo was the overall Commander of Special Ops answering to OR and Obadi was like his Deputy or Chief of Staff who had to see that everything got done. In the course of 1979, Obadi comes to the Funda camp and has a discussion with me, and says, 'I'm going to tell you something that's highly sensitive'. There's been a Special Operations Command formed and he's going to select a number of cadres who he'll bring to me for training. I'm not to discuss the target, but he says 'I'll tell you what the target is so you can focus exactly on what needs to be done. Train these people, tell us who are the best cadres, and they will go for this operation'. He tells me that the targets are oil refineries. I don't discuss it with anybody. I get on with the job.

I also got told that Barney will be part of the unit and would also assist with the training. He had just come back to the camps after getting medical treatment for his injuries in the skirmish with the security forces inside the country in the Rustenburg area. Of course, he was seen as a hero, so everybody loved him. Barney was the kind of person who was very effusive, very outgoing, talked incessantly, and played the guitar. Basically, we were told that between us we had to train the unit. Great, we got down to it. We formed an approach. We took the unit out of the ordinary training camp into a special base because part of the idea also was that they needed to be able to survive under extremely difficult circumstances. They had to be able to survive on one meal a day, if need be. The operatives had to be able to strike targets with different ranges of weapons during daytime and at night and to be able to manoeuvre through the night to reach safer destinations after an operation. We had to toughen the comrades up and that is what we set about doing.

There was a lot of the basic physical training and endurance training – Barney led the charge on that. Physically, I was not that strong a person, but I participated in all the activities. I did everything with the unit constantly. It wasn't as if you sat there and saw the guys being trained. You trained with them; you worked with

them because they had to see that the Commanders are part of that whole process.

We trained them in the use of RPGs (rocket-propelled grenades) because these could strike at the fractionating towers of oil refineries, and the use of explosives, heavy weapons, incendiary bullets from machine guns and so on. So, there was an all-round training programme over a period. Knowing specifically what the target was helpful to me in determining how best to train the unit. Even Barney wasn't told what the target was and if Obadi ever told him, I'm not aware of this. Towards the end of '79, Obadi came back to the camp. I told him that we had basically completed the training. He then came back to the camp with Joe Slovo.

It's the first time I met Slovo. I gave them my report and the recommendations of which of the cadres I thought were the most competent and capable. We also looked at the geographical areas from which the cadres came and Obadi had kept that in mind when he had selected the cadres. So, we said, okay, if there was someone from the Vaal area, we need to have that person sent to a particular target, but again, we had to check if that cadre could carry out the operation. So, we selected the units. Slovo gave everybody a pep talk, and he said, 'Okay chaps, you're going off to Maputo, and these are the rules when you get there.' Basically, 'You go into a house, you'll be confined there, no moving around, that's where you'll stay.'

How many comrades were there?

Fifteen – but three didn't go into the country.

And right at the end I was told 'Rashid – and you are too. You've got five minutes to prepare yourself to leave.' So off we went, and I must say, that was the first time I had this tension. I'm going in too. Anyway, I prepared myself. Put everything together, handed in uniforms, weapons and things. We were taken to Luanda and the following day to Maputo. We get taken to this house belonging to the Transvaal Rural machinery. We get told, right guys, these are the rules. 'We know that you guys are in your own unit, we don't know what you're doing, we don't talk to each other about our operations, but you do your thing. Everybody lives together; everybody gets their turns for cooking.' There was a routine. If you're the cook for the day, you cook, you clean up and attend to what you must.

Obadi was also transferred to Maputo. He also joins us at the house even though he was like the Chief of Staff or Deputy to Joe Slovo. The pecking order other was that Barney was appointed as Field Commander and I as the Commissar and we were to see to the requirements of the cadres. You had to make sure there was food and other necessities.

I was told I'm going into the country to do reconnaissance on the Mobile Oil Refinery in Durban. Obadi also asked me to brief the cadres going to do the reconnaissance at Sasol I and Natref and at Sasol II. I had to brief the reconnaissance units separately. Barney and David Moisi would go to the Vaal area

to do the reconnaissance on Sasol 1. Victor Khayiyana – who had not been through the training – Mochudi and another comrade would do the reconnaissance around Sasol 2. I brief them on what they have to look for, knowing that it's a coordinated operation – but you don't say anything to them at this stage. You say this is what they are expected to do from an operational perspective. I produce sketches and plans of the refineries and say we have to look at ways of getting into the plant.

Barney and David Moisi ran into difficulties. Moisi was very well known in the Vaal area due to his previous political background, and he was spotted by people who knew him, so they had to withdraw. They came back, and Moisi was then sent to do the reconnaissance with the other cadres of Sasol 2, and Barney went in with another comrade for Sasol 1. Barney often showed bravado. Barney, being who he is, also sometimes doesn't behave according to the rules. A Transvaal Urban machinery G5 operation takes place at the Booyens police station. He goes to this area the next morning to see what was happening. But of course, there could have been turncoats (Askaris) there who could have spotted him. What do you say to the guy when he comes back? You know, you shouldn't be doing these kinds of things because you could easily have been arrested. But at the same time, you have people that have the will, the drive, the energy to achieve.

I always felt that if you wanted to move amongst the people, you shouldn't carry weapons, unless you were fighting. Go without pistols. In fact, many of the cadres used to complain about that, but we said, guys, think about it, you can run into difficulty because you're carrying a pistol, not because you're going to fight.

I gave my report on the Mobil Oil refinery to JS and Obadi and say yes, we can carry out the operation, but the problem is that it's surrounded by houses, and if we have a vapour cloud burst, we could kill civilians. It was decided by them not to carry out the operation, and I then am told that I will join Slovo and Obadi as part of the command of Special Operations.

JS, Obadi and I later discussed the choice of weapons, considering heavy machine guns with armour-piercing incendiary bullets but they're extremely large, and would be difficult to get into the country. We also considered the use of RPGs, but both options raised the question of the get-away as immediately after firing at the target the enemy forces could be able to trace you. After some discussion it was felt that the best way would be to be able to get into the plant place charges with timing devices and then leave sufficient time to withdraw. So, this led to the idea of a limpet mine, which fulfilled these requirements. If you can infiltrate the cadres into the plant, we can get the limpet mines onto the fractionating tower – then the job's done. Of course, the big issue that we were always facing was that if the fractionating plant explodes there's the release of a gas cloud and it will destroy everything around it for a few kilometers, including people.

The reconnaissance report from Barney, who went to Sasol 1, was very positive. In fact, the Natref and the Sasol 1 refinery were adjacent to each other. The Sasol 2 refinery was in the final stages of being completed and we weren't too sure it was

fully operational, but we decided we should still carry out the operation in the hope that there was fuel inside. At the same time, we would also send in comrade Phiwe to carry out a small attack – to hit at the Fluor (Sasol's US managing contractor) office in Rosebank.

We had to prepare the materiel. It looked quite easy to get into the plants. All of them, because they were so big, the reconnaissance showed that workers cut holes in the fences to get in and out. The people that were responsible for security paid very little attention to this. They knew the workers didn't want to walk through the main gates all the time because it could mean quite a lot of extra walking.

We prepared the equipment. We decided to use limpet mines and based on my training, I proposed that we add thermite to them. When thermite ignites it burns at about 2000 degrees. Sasol's fractionating towers are made of thick steel. Thermite-charged limpet mines would blow a hole in the steel, and the thermite would ignite the fuel inside. We prepared the limpets and then got them properly wrapped. Obadi then got Siphwe Nyanda's units to infiltrate them into the country for the Sasol 1 and Natref operation. They cached it close to a township under an old wreck of a car. The cadres going to Sasol 2 would take their materiel with them when they went across the fence.

Victor Khayiyana and another comrade went in first and bought two vehicles. The plan was they would come back to the border area, to the south of Swaziland, to pick up the other cadres who would jump over the border fence into South Africa. A lot of that is also recorded in the stories that Esther (Waugh) wrote. (*Sunday Independent*, 17 December 1995, 24 December 1995, 31 December 1995 and 14 January 1996)

Then, on the way, one of the vehicles overturned, but the cadres decided that there was no way they were going to turn back. They were using dirt roads, the back roads, not the main roads. All the cadres then got into the other car and those in the Sasol 1 and Natref units were dropped off at the train station.

The cadres had been told in their briefings that they had to abide by the date and the time to hit their targets – but without any of them being told that the others were also going to hit their targets at the same time. But then because they were being infiltrated at the same time, both units realised that they were going to different destinations but towards targets that would be hit at the same time. I think comrades invariably would talk to each other, but what was critical from a Command perspective was if an operation was carried out too early or too late, it would alert the authorities to the threat, so there were very clear instructions that they had to carry out the attack on a specific night and at a specific time. The aim was to carry out the operation on night of 31 May because it was the Boers' Republic Day celebration and after a day of festivities, they were more likely to be more relaxed.

Obadi and I were in Swaziland when the units went in and then on the night of the operation, we went to the border area to collect the Sasol 2 cadres that were coming back across the fence. They'd loosened the border fence and drove their car across.

Because of the long distance from Sasol 1, the cadres would stay inside the country for a while. They stayed in Soweto amongst friends, family or in hostels. In those days the hostels weren't that hostile, in fact they were quite friendly areas. Many of the cadres, when they first came into the country, survived in the hostels, pretending to be seeking jobs.



Sasol operation, 31 May 1980

At Sasol 1, one of the comrades had to fire on a security guard, who was injured, but there were no other problems. We suffered no casualties of any kind, and all the comrades made it back safely. You know, JS was so absorbed in this operation he was standing on his balcony in Maputo, hoping that he could see the smoke from the flames of Sasol 2 burning. He said he couldn't sleep that night.

But surely, he couldn't see the smoke from the flames?

(Laughter)... Of course not. But, of course, that was Joe!...

Well, I suppose it shows his loyalty to the comrades sent inside? And his anxieties about the operation being successful maybe?

Ja...It was wonderful once the comrades all came back from being inside the country. They met with OR and there was a great deal of enthusiasm. OR was full of praise. They briefed him on the details. What they'd done. He was amazed, awestruck, at the fact that the cadres had continued with the operations even after one of the cars overturned. Of course, afterwards he took it up with the Command to ask where the reserve vehicles were. He was always concerned about the safety of the comrades. He stressed that we had to look out for the safety of the operatives. We said in future we would have back-up vehicles. That was his instruction – you make sure there were always reserves.

But the operations also showed the will of the cadres and their enthusiasm. I think this was the first operation that really caught the imagination of the people inside the country, and that's what was so fantastic about it. The country, literally, was aflame – and there was no way the regime could hide this. I think the operation had succeeded in doing what JS wanted.

While Sasol 1, Natref and Sasol 2 were hit, the limpet mines at the offices of Fluor, the American company building Sasol 2, were defused as they were discovered.

After that we had to wait a few weeks. Of course, there had to be a report back to the NEC and OR was very clear that until he got the green light for Special Operations to continue, we just had to stand by and wait. In the meantime, the regime was going ballistic about it. They started sending out reconnaissance missions and we heard from our intelligence people that they were trying to get information on which unit was responsible for the operation and what had happened.

The success of the Sasol operation meant that NEC agreed that Special Ops should continue to exist. It meant that we could go to OR, say to him we are planning the following operations, we need the following things. OR would ask for the figures. He would call (Thomas) Nkobi in, the Treasurer-General, and say to him give them this. Of course, Nkobi would mumble and grumble but at the end of the day they knew, you give it to Special Ops, they produce results. It was the comrades, their willingness to give everything to achieve their objectives.

Apart from the time you come into the country for the reconnaissance of the Mobil Oil refinery in Durban in 1979, you don't seem to have come into the country again. How did you feel about organising to send comrades in with the risk that they could be imprisoned or even killed? Did comrades not complain about this?

I should have been more active and involved inside the country. But it was the nature of the struggle. There was a time when I would say to JS, look I can go in and lead the operation. He said, no, no, you're needed here, you have too much information, you are the key planner, we need you to continue with this. You need to be able to prepare the cadres. I used to often feel that I wanted to be with the units and share their difficulties. There was a time I used to go to the borders and some of the comrades said to me, 'You know, Chief, you hamper our operations because Africans can move around the border more easily here, we look like the people here. But when you are there, people want to know who's this *Mzungu*? So, we don't want you to come to the border area with us, let us go alone into the country.'

It was extremely difficult to get across the Swaziland-South Africa borders. I had a very difficult experience, coming into the country the first time when I was going to do the reconnaissance for the Mobil Refinery. You begin to get to a point where you say to yourself consciously, how do I slot myself into this? When I came into the country, I had to brief all the cadres about what they had to do, but somehow, I was expected to be a unit of my own and brief the others. I wasn't part of the Command then. You get across the border and look for a taxi in the border area. A taxi guy said, 'There are always roadblocks and I can take any of your guys, but if they ask me what are you doing with this Indian guy, what am I going to say?' So, the guy said, 'Sorry, I can't help you.' There were people that were sympathetic and knew that there were guerillas coming across and they would assist. Equally the enemy

also realised that that was our *modus operandi*. So, they started buying taxis for enemy agents and planting informers in the border areas. Some of these taxi guys made money and cadres were taken straight to the police. Comrade David Moisi and the others were arrested this way (see interview with David Moisi).

I thought maybe I should contact some of the people inside the country that I knew to come to Swaziland and take me across. Before I could do that one night, our chaps said to me, 'We are going to go now'. So, they took me across the border and their contacts on the South African side were not there. We had to find one of these people in the border areas who could help. We even went to a shop that belonged to someone that I had known at university, the Mansoor family. But when I said I'm just asking questions, I was told, 'I know who you guys are.' He told us there's a patrol coming through here every so often. I then asked him if he would assist me, and he said he didn't want to get involved.

For African comrades it was a lot easier. They could blend into the population. It was daylight when we reached the border area inside South Africa, so we – comrade Duke, who was responsible for crossing comrades into the country, and comrade Mathieu from the Transvaal Urban machinery – couldn't go back across the border into Swaziland. We had no choice but to take a taxi. One of the taxi operators agreed to take us to Nelspruit. We got into the taxi and as fate would have it, there was no roadblock, so I was able to get to Nelspruit and from there we got on a train to Johannesburg.

But even crossing the Mozambique-Swaziland border wasn't easy, not just for me, but cadres in general. We had this case where the first time we cross into Swaziland at the end of 1979 on our way for the reconnaissance of the Sasol and Mobil refineries we ran into a Swazi roadblock and were arrested and deported back to Maputo after a week. The regime was putting a lot more pressure on the Swazis because they believed that they were allowing the ANC to operate through Swaziland. So, at times the Swazi Defence force was deployed in the border areas to try to prevent ANC cadres from getting in. And we knew nothing about the border areas in the early days. We are being supported by the chap that used to take people across the border who was from the Transvaal Rural machinery – his name was Casper, and he later defected and went over to the enemy and became an *Askari*.

Normally, we would cross around sunset, and the vehicle collecting us would either come near the border or if there were patrols, deeper inside. If there were patrols, you had to walk through the night until you got beyond the patrols. So as things happened, we got across the border, but there were patrols and we ran into the difficulty of getting past the patrol. We did, but at some point, I think a soldier that was on duty – I can't quite recall what exactly happened – asked us to come out of the vehicle and challenged us.

We all make a run for it – but there's a river on the one side, a military camp on the other side and there's a bridge. We run to the river – and it's quite deep – and most of us can't swim! A big unit of the Swazi Defence Force starts searching the area and slowly they round up all the chaps, so we're all arrested.

We got taken to the police station. Of course, most of the chaps used to smoke. Now they needed access to cigarettes and food. Absolutely poor food in the police station. It was pap (mealie-meal porridge) with a very thin liquid gravy, with maybe a few onions floating in it. The police would search us, but they were friendly and not very thorough.

When they took us to the police station, I'd got cigarettes from the guys. I had a jacket with lots of zips. I shoved things away, including money. Every day we would get searched. This policeman was not too keen on his job, and he couldn't be bothered to do a thorough job. We'd all be lined up and told you're going to be searched. I'd say, okay, I'm coming, take my jacket off, put it on a chair or whatever and go and get searched. I didn't smoke, so I had cigarettes for all the chaps.

Every day we would say to the policeman, we want to get our own food, so he'd go across the road to the café. He'd always say, 'So where's the money?' We'd say you've got our money, and he'd say 'No, not that money, it's recorded, I can't use that money.' I would invariably take out money and give it to the guy. Then he would say 'But where did you get this money from? We searched you yesterday.' But, you know, our cadres also had this rapport with the policeman, who wasn't so concerned about us. They would talk to him in siSwati and the guy would say, 'Ja, you guys from South Africa, you're not real Swazis.' Our cadres would ask him things like which river do you drink from? Because that would place you in the area you come from. It was quite an experience. So, every day I would take out a note and he would buy food. Of course, you have to eat, you can't survive on those poor prison rations. Eventually we got taken to trial.

And then you were fined? And deported to Maputo?

What happened to us showed once again the difficulties of not having a classic guerrilla war terrain. Our country was too economically developed. The units were forced to operate based on crossing the borders, finding a base, carrying out an operation and leaving the country again. And if you use Mao's saying that we should be like fish in water – the water was really to be found in Soweto, in other built-up urban areas. That's where the cadres could survive and even though some of the units were trying this tunnel warfare approach, ultimately, they were dependent on being where there was an urban population that was supportive of the ANC and willing to become part of the struggle. So, this moving in and out of the country to carry out armed activities was not what happens in classic guerrilla warfare.

After we were back in Maputo, we decided to go back to Swaziland and from there into South Africa. Barney and David went to the Vaal area. The other comrades

went on to Sasol 2 in the Eastern Transvaal. As I said, in my case, getting across the border into South Africa became quite a difficult issue – but it worked out.

When you were in Durban doing the reconnaissance were you in disguise?

I used to keep a beard. Then I would shave it. I had spent three weeks overlooking this entire plant (Mobil Oil refinery), looking at what the activities were day and night.

Where were you viewing it from? Where were you staying?

On a hill overlooking the entire plant. I stayed at a woman's place that used to take in students.

You were posing as a student?

I said to her that I was studying medicine. To cover that, every morning I used to go off as if I was going to Medical School.

How did you move around?

I walked or used public transport when I had to move around.

Did the IRA (Irish Republican Army) help with the reconnaissance of Sasol? That's what (Kader) Asmal said in his autobiography?

Yes, in fact, some of the early reconnaissance for these missions was done by IRA cadres. They'd driven around the plants and given reports to JS in the early phases of the formation of Special Ops. By the time we came to Mozambique, this was history. They had confirmed that it was possible to carry out these operations.

Were the Special Ops comrades trained by the IRA at all? Did the IRA play a part in the training of any other MK comrades?

No, not Special Ops comrades, but maybe other MK comrades, those in London. But that would be, I think, in terms of assistance with building some of the devices for armed struggle, timing devices, electronic devices. But no direct training of MK as such. I knew about the IRA cadres helping with reconnaissance. In subsequent years I went to Dublin to go meet with the IRA guys, but somehow there was a miscommunication. Louise (Asmal) was supposed to put us in touch with them. The chap who was doing the linking misunderstood, so he was looking for Kader, and he didn't give the code word to Louise. So, Louise didn't understand that these were the guys, and I was just told, be there, you're going in for training – but it didn't happen... This training was in electronics and the ways in which these specialist devices could be used.

You don't think you were making yourselves more vulnerable with IRA links? For example, the British security agencies and others in the Western world kept them under close surveillance...

No, look, they were quite sophisticated in the way they operated and they were quite secure. The fact is that some of their people had been into South Africa to do some of the initial reconnaissance and there was no come back, nobody knew. One of the interesting things also is that we had a big file on the Mobile refinery...It should be somewhere in the archives, and that file came from a nephew of (ANC veteran) Frene Ginwala. He was a chemical engineer – Rustomjee. All I was told is that we had a complete file. My job was made easy. All I had to do was confirm what was on the file. Every single bit of the plant was recorded on it.

When we looked at the Sasol operation, once again the issue came up that we move from the outside into the country, then back outside. The comrades were saying why can't we be based inside the country and carry out the operations? Why do we always have to cross the borders? The question constantly comes up, and I think it's the problem that plagued the ANC and MK for all the years. A lot of this has been recorded in interviews with comrades. I think many of the cadres were heroic. To say never mind the car accident, we're going ahead with the operation. Any other unit would have said we've got a long distance to go to the targets and how are we going to get back across the border? But they went ahead and carried out the operations and were successful. It shows also that with courage and with the right leadership what could be achieved. What's also very interesting is that we spent, in all, with the final accounting about R12 500 on the operations. I am trying to locate these records.

You actually kept them?

I know people say I was tough on others. But that may be because I wanted to stick to the rules. It's not wrong to be a disciplinarian in the armed struggle. The cadres said to me you must be the only Commissar or Commander that does such detailed accounting, that asks for the change after an operation. I said, listen this is people's money, we have to account for it.

Adding thermite – a mixture of iron, oxide and aluminum that when ignited burns at a very high temperature – to the limpet mines, was this an original idea or was it done in other circumstances?

No, it was part of my training in the GDR. It was my job to determine what weapons we used, how we prepared them.

You drew on your brief East German training?

Yes, that training is what prepared me for my role in planning the operations of Special Ops. It was invaluable.

To something else. Basically, there were three separate units, if you include Phiwe as one. They were all brought together. They were often briefed together. They stayed in the same house. If somebody in one of the units was arrested and interrogated, wouldn't that have made the others vulnerable to arrest? Or even having to forego hitting the other two targets?

The units were never briefed jointly. Each unit was briefed separately. MK's Special Ops never had the kinds of facilities and backups that armed forces in conventional armies have access to in terms of vehicles, weaponry, infiltration means, extraction means, medical support, etc. We were a guerilla unit with special tasks and perhaps access to a bit more money equivalent to the tasks and targets.

Ideally, we should have kept the units completely separate. Even move them into Maputo separately. They should have had no contact with each other – but that's all theory and wisdom that we couldn't afford. The ANC never had that kind of resource. I mean, if you look at what we had to do with in the first place – we didn't even have a residence of our own in Maputo. We shared a residence with another Command, and we had to keep secret from that Command what we were doing. Also, we were initially given a temporary mandate so there were limited resources. Ideally, one needed to have the kind of resources to operate totally separately so that you don't get a mix or contamination between one unit and another. But on the other hand, being together gave the comrades a feeling of community, of solidarity, of wanting to achieve. Otherwise, comrades would often misbehave. You have guerrillas, youngsters, sitting around in houses with their girlfriends. Being together helped the Special Ops units to be disciplined. But, of course, if we had the resources, we'd have kept the units apart.

Then on Victor Khayiyana. He joins you without the training the others went through. Why was that? Was that not a bad decision?

You need to know a bit about the background of Victor Khayiyana. He was basically a dagga smuggler, a criminal who had been in prison. The Boers recruited him in prison to go out of the country and assassinate some of the leaders of the ANC. When the Boers made him this offer, he saw it as an opportunity to get away from them. He took their pistol, came across the border, went to the ANC, met with Stanley Mabizela, and said, look, this is my background, this is who I am. Here's the weapon I was told to come and kill you with. Yes, I may be all these things, but I believe in the ANC. I want to join you guys. I'll carry out any operations you people give me.

Subsequently he carried out a number of attacks against *impimpis* and people that had sold out the ANC. He knew the border areas like the back of his hand, and he was a very useful asset. We took him on; we didn't cast any aspersions on anybody. We didn't tell him you're a criminal. People have their backgrounds and what have you, for various reasons. Basically, we were told here's a comrade you have to work with and could be useful. You have discussions, you try to find out

where he is at and what he can do. Apartheid bred all kinds of people who learnt the art of survival, and it is these cadres who were the most resourceful.

I would sit across the table and see how I felt about someone and my gut feeling would prevail. JS had said, 'Well, here's someone who could be very useful to us.' Of course, JS had the authority and the power to say to any of the units and Commands these things. They reported to him on the Eastern front anyway. He could say, 'Take this chap under your Command.' Khayiyana fell under Solly Simelane who was responsible for the Icing Unit – they took out individuals who betrayed the movement. JS said we should use him for some operation or the other. He came across us. He had received some rudimentary training. Very smart guy, very capable, very determined. In fact, he opened avenues for operations to us to get across the border quickly, knowing the back routes, and those were the things that we used very fruitfully over the years.

Well, in many armed struggles there were comrades with criminal backgrounds. I think that was the case in South America, some in the Black Power Movement in the US, maybe in the Palestinian struggle and in other cases... Where is Khayiyana now?

He died in combat with Barney and Vincent Sekete after they tried to hit Sasol in 1985.

What went wrong in the third operation – the Fluor office in Rosebank?

The limpet mines were put outside the office. It was meant to be symbolic. A warning against foreign investors that were building the Sasol plants. Perhaps Phiwe did not check that the battery connection for the timer was secure. I'm not certain why the device failed to detonate.

You said the Sasol 1 Unit stayed in the country after the operation because of the long distance to the border. But some of them, you said, stayed with family and friends. Wouldn't that have made them vulnerable? What if they told a family member or friend about the operation?

I think there was such a lot of excitement among some of them, they probably would have. Would anyone of them admit that to me? No. None of them ever would. They would say, of course comrade, we wouldn't do anything like that... Those were difficult times and they understood that they could not discuss what they were there for before the operation with anybody outside of their unit. The reality is that the operations were not compromised then or even in the future for this reason.

I'm not sure I've got this right, but it seems that people in Maputo knew who some of the members of the units who carried out the Sasol operation were.

That was after the successful carrying out of the operations. They were walking in air. We didn't even stop them. You know the guys were so full of themselves. They were so pleased and proud! ANC members in Maputo knew who the cadres of Special Ops were.

Do you know how the security police traced the comrades who were responsible?

There's an interesting story about this. The chap that I spoke about earlier that took us across the border from Mozambique to Swaziland – Casper. He would take us on foot. He was under the Transvaal Rural Command. He had about the time of the Sasol operation gone across to the enemy; he basically disappeared. I think he just lost faith in the ANC and went and handed himself over to the Boers. What information he gave to the state, we don't know, and did he ever tell the Boers that there was this unit that was in the country, we don't know. Despite his disappearance at the time the operation was not compromised.

But he still wouldn't have been able to identify the individuals, would he? You were all under pseudonyms?

Yes, but he knew what we looked like and I think the *Askaris* would basically be part of those identifying some of the comrades. But, of course, he wouldn't know where the comrades were going to. So, you see this is where it comes back to that earlier question you asked. Here were people operating under the same roof, living under the same conditions. Here's someone that goes across to the enemy, around the time of the Sasol operation. But by then we had already built up a bit of an infrastructure of our own, so we were able to move across the border ourselves and weren't dependent on him. So, he might not have known at the time that the unit had moved into the country. Sometimes it was just luck or faith or I don't know what.

The Intelligence chaps, Peter Boroko, Willie Williams and others often came to me and said, 'Hey, the information we have is that these chaps know where you guys are staying and they're coming for you.' You see, once again, one must start thinking about one's own shortcomings. Did we then as Commanders go to the higher ups and, say, speak to the Mozambican authorities to find us a different place to stay. It's only after the Matola attacks that we asked for those resources. Before that we didn't really believe that the enemy would carry out cross-border raids or attacks, daring to come into Mozambique.

But wasn't that predictable?

You know, even with hindsight, not! It was not predictable. I've often looked at this kind of issue, and you start by saying, what is your responsibility as a Commander? Command carries enormous responsibility. You always have responsibility for the safety of your cadres. We, the sub-Commanders – Obadi and I – lived with those cadres in those houses. But after the attack it was the surviving members of the unit who requested JS to separate the command members from the unit and to live

elsewhere. I think on Matola there's a lot of information in the public domain... I don't know if I need to say anything more...

Is it true that the ANC's Military Intelligence unit raised the issue of a possible raid on the very afternoon that the Matola attack occurred?

No, it wasn't Military Intelligence, it was ANC Intelligence because at the time MI didn't exist. However, I was not in Maputo at the time as I had been instructed by JS to resolve a disciplinary matter in Swaziland. So, I'm not certain that the afternoon before the attack there was yet another alert.

But did the ANC's intelligence division inform the ANC?

No, look, ever since we hit Sasol there used to be periodic reports from Willie Williams, Peter Boroko and occasionally from Timol. Whenever we asked for more weapons or alternative resources, they shrugged their shoulders. We cannot blame them. The reality is the ANC had very limited access to other housing and weapons etc.

This is what Timol says, 'Regarding the 1981 Matola attack we had a source within the SB (Security Branch), a black guy from the Eastern Transvaal... He used to go to the Nelspruit and Ermelo SB offices and socialise and drink with the Black security police there ... he told us it seems that the SBs are planning an operation against the ANC in Maputo'.

I didn't know who the sources were. I knew they had someone there who seemed quite reliable and Williams and Timol used to come quite often and say they really want to hit you. And that JS is enemy number one, I was enemy number two. And they would say, 'They really want to take you out'. So, I would ask them what they were doing about protecting us? They'd say 'We've got to have resources'. We had worked out an approach where we used to say to the cadres that wherever you can, disperse at night and come back in the morning. So, some of them who had girlfriends would stay there, but others would stay in the ANC house because they had nowhere else to go to.

Timol said it was hard to tell how substantial they were?

Yes. They were not certain about the information they got from their source.

There was a Special Ops comrade, Ghost, that was kidnapped at Matola?

Yes. He was taken by the invading forces.

What became of him?

We don't know. I mean he was taken by the Boers and whether he collaborated with them, we don't know. To this day he's just disappeared.

Do you know his proper name?

No, and he was not involved in any of the operations. He was on standby.

Was he just there at the same house?

Yes, he was part of Special Ops...We didn't deploy him for some reason or other. There was another guy that was also taken, a guy that came from Natal by the name of Douglas Ndongeni.

Where's he?

We heard later that he became an *Askari*, but subsequently that he'd been killed by the regime. That was the fate of Askaris that the regime felt they no longer trusted.

So you stayed at the Matola house too...

Yes. All of us stayed there. And, in fact, we were so lucky that Mabena (real name: Siphon Thobela) fought off the enemy because we had a briefcase with a lot of the plans for the next operations upstairs in the house and that got saved. Mabena was shot in his stomach...

Obadi had gone to Luanda to select a new batch of cadres. He was supposed to be coming back. There was a comrade in Swaziland that we wanted to use as an operative that was misbehaving. His mother lived in Swaziland where he grew up. We had planned for him to become part of the support unit in Swaziland, but he was then said to have started threatening his mother when he got drunk. JS came to me and said, 'You need to go and sort this out'. I said to JS, look, we are due to go to Swaziland in the next day or two, let Obadi come back, we'll have our meeting, and then I will go and deal with this matter, JS said, 'No, you'll go today'. So, I went off to deal with this matter. I met with the comrade and later that afternoon, when we went to one of the safe houses, I learned that the ANC had been attacked in Matola. That the main attack by the regime was on our residence, the so-called Terror-Nest and that many of our cadres had been killed and that Obadi was among those who was badly wounded. He died shortly after that in hospital.

Obadi's death seemed to be quite a setback for Special Ops?

Yes. It was such a sad and tragic loss! JS trusted him a lot. Whatever instructions Obadi was given, he got done immediately. No long meetings. JS was very firm. He delegated and had a good sense of what people were capable of. Without Obadi I had to keep things together and really burnt myself out. If we had been able to continue being partners, we would have achieved so much more. One of Special Ops' weaknesses was that I was alone in terms of implementation. We couldn't find another commander who was as innovative, go-getting, enterprising. If he'd been alive, he would have been in the top echelons of the ANC today. He was very dedicated, very capable.

How many other Sasol operatives died in Matola?

Two were taken alive by the enemy, we don't know what happened to them.

Even up to now?

Yes. They could be dead. Most likely dead. Apart from Ghost, there was Sandile, who was earmarked for the Durban refinery operation, which we didn't carry out.

The Presidency gave national honours to the Sasol comrades for their contribution to the struggle. Wouldn't they have tried to trace Ghost and Sandile?

Well, Sandile didn't take part in any Sasol operation. I don't know what happened to Ghost. The strange thing is that nobody has ever asked me about them. The Presidency took the decision to give these awards. They didn't even talk to me.

But you're the only former Commander left...

Yes, but nobody talks to me and everybody knows about my presence. Do they want to know about Special Ops cadres? You just heard about these awards. And then they give Hélène (Passtoors) an award, but what about Klaas (de Jonge)? I've spoken to Ronnie (Kasrils) about this.

I read that the South African intelligence services believed that the Sasol operation had been inspired by a similar operation by ZIPRA in 1979...

Not true.

Why do you say that?

Because I don't think that in all my interactions with JS this ever came up. If I remember correctly, ZIPRA had fired on fuel storage depots in Harare with incendiary bullets. It was one of the options that we looked at because if you had armour incendiary bullets it would also cause damage – and the incendiary is very similar to the thermite. But we were not motivated by the ZIPRA example.

What lessons did you learn from the Sasol operation that you infused into your later operations?

That we could get into the various plants, the strategic targets, and carry out these operations successfully, provided we moved quickly. We knew that there was a small window of opportunity that would arise before the enemy started building up countermeasures. They would invariably do that. That having someone like Victor (Khayiyana) to move across the border opened an entire new avenue in terms of planning and what the scope of operational work could be. Also, it was very useful and important to get the weapons in, have everything ready for the cadres, so that all they had to do when they went in was unearth and unwrap it, and it was all

clean and ready for action, and then move into action. An important lesson was also the need to have reserve arrangements in case something went wrong, like the accident in the Sasol operation. That's something that, as I said, OR insisted on, and on an escape plan. No jihadi thinking.

I like that, 'no jihadi thinking'...

Well, in those days the measure of a successful operation was how many cadres returned safely to base.

I'm done with Sasol for now. Let's move to the attacks on the power stations...

So, we get the mandate from the NEC to continue with Special Operations. Not a limited mandate, but a full mandate to continue indefinitely with the understanding that we have access to special resources. Whatever little funding MK had, always had to be parcelled out amongst the different Commands. In our case we needed resources not in little drips and drabs but in a lump sum. OR's instructions to the TG (Treasurer General) Nkobi was that if these chaps want something you give it to them. There's nothing like success to get people to cooperate. You carry out a successful operation like this, and resources become available.

Immediately we started with a plan to carry out the next operation. JS said we needed to start carrying out attacks against power stations. We decided to send a unit in. After the Sasol operation, Obadi raised the need to establish units inside the country that could ferry weapons and people. So instead of just trying to rely on sympathisers, we wanted to embed a unit inside the country just as the Transvaal Command had managed to do. He came up with two chaps that were quite good drivers. This was the next unit we tried to establish and at the same time send in a reconnaissance unit to Cape Town to reconnoitre the refinery there. And this is where we faced our first casualty. We sent in a unit of four comrades. Moisi, Edward Mbundu, Edward Khumalo and Norman Yengeni.

I mentioned this earlier – the taxi guy drove them straight to the police station. They got a lot of information out of this arrest. Moisi was very severely tortured when they discovered he was part of Sasol (see interview with David Moisi). These comrades came from the same place in Maputo. I know what you're going to ask: why did you not move them to other bases after the operation? Again, it's the question of resources at the time that dictated.

Well, that's an obvious question to ask. I was going to...Your answer is also predictable, understandable...

But there's also the question – will the enemy really come across into Mozambique? Maybe we were also naïve, we never really believed that it was going to happen.

Back to the power stations operation...

It was called *Operation Blackout*. We needed to cripple the economy. If we could take out three or four power stations, we'd put the enemy under severe economic pressure as there was a limit to their power generation capacity. They couldn't replace it. Ideally, I suggested to JS maybe we should plan an even bigger operation. Maybe five or six of these targets at once and this will really break down the power grid and the economy is totally dependent on that. And he said, 'Yes, I hear you and you're right, but with every other operation you add on, each operation by itself multiplies, quadruples your problems. So, we need to be able to keep focused, keep it small and get the job done, and it's something that we must learn'. He explained that if you have to get eight cadres in, getting twelve cadres in is so much more difficult, it's not just about four more, it's double your total, and this is where one needs to look at the right means with the right capabilities. And the right capability is to be able to target something clearly and succeed. And even then, things could go wrong, and you always depend on your people on the ground and their ability to adapt and innovate.

Anyway, we decided we'd carry out the attack against Arnot and Camden power stations and the Delmas sub-station. Basically, once the reconnaissance had been done and we had the vehicles, we were able to get the cadres in. The one difference in this case was we'd asked two internationalists – (British) David Hedges and (Belgian) Guido van Hecken – to buy two cars for this operation. They brought them to Swaziland. The drivers took the vehicles in through the border gate. We made false documents for them. The other cadres jumped over the border fence at night, and the drivers picked them up on the South African side and drove to the power plants and back the same night. They hit all three targets. Basically, the cadres entered the country, placed the charges, withdrew to Swaziland and were back in Mozambique within twenty-four hours. This was certainly seen as a feat in detailed planning. The enemy was once again taken totally by surprise!



Camden power station, Operation Blackout, 21 July 1981

It sounds very simple but again it was a question of getting the weapons into Swaziland, moving them across the border into South Africa, briefing the cadres, preparing them for what needs to be done and fulfilling the operation. Conditions were quite tight for the comrades often in Swaziland – in a small apartment we would have 10

to 12 people at a time. You had to tell everybody to keep low, watch TV, and sleep. You have to leave a lot of food and simply not allow people to go out. Generally, cadres were very well behaved, very disciplined.

What was the practical effect of the attacks on the power stations? How much of the area fell into darkness? For how long?

Immediately not all that much, because they had a lot of reserve electricity capacity. There were blackouts from time to time, especially in the winter months. This is where it comes back to the debate of whether we should have hit more? But by then the enemy had also started realising what our modus operandi was and started taking countermeasures. They also introduced the National Key Points Act, where every strategic site had to take measures to protect against MK attacks. They had special measures in terms of which they could call upon the military to support them in the event of any attack and the person responsible for each of those plants had to take steps to secure the plants. In the case of Sasol, they put up a cordon of about four kilometers initially, and after subsequent attacks they moved it to 11 kilometers because that was beyond the range of the weapons that we were using.

How many times did Special Ops attack power stations in a coordinated way?

We had one shot at it. Thereafter, there were attacks on electric sub-stations.

Why not more power stations?

The plan was that *Operation Blackout* would have a two-phased approach. First, to hit the major Eastern Transvaal power stations – *Operation Blackout I* – and, later, the transformer substations all over the country and the electrical pylon grid that distributes power nationally – *Operation Blackout II*.

But after the first phase we had the casualties. Mnisi was arrested and Chris (Nungu) and George (Ndlovu) were killed at the border. Eskom improved security and carried out regular patrols and they put up electrified fencing. But with Mnisi's arrest, *Operation Blackout* was exposed. However, we did hit Koeberg and several transformers through units of Special Ops.

We had mapped – in fact I've got the map, the original drawings – all the lines. We knew the number of lines. Guido (Van Hecken), Ed (Wethli) and Helena Dolny went in to do the reconnaissance and we looked at all the points where the lines crossed the main road. Our original plan was to prepare packages per pylon, send the cadres in and take all the hi-tension – 400kilowatts – pylons down in one go. The approach was that units would have gone to different points, calculated the times at which they arrive there, then hit them all, the whole electricity system would collapse, and the country would go into darkness.

At the time I had gone to Swaziland with the unit. Chris (Nungu) was in Mbabane and George Ndlovu came to the Swazi-Mozambique border to collect the unit and was with me in the car. We were waiting for the second vehicle to come but it never arrived. Anyway, whilst we were waiting, we saw a Swazi security patrol coming to the pick-up point and George immediately starts the car and drives off. The patrol started chasing us and fired on our vehicle. Three of four comrades who were sitting in the back seat were injured. The other comrades who were outside

the vehicle waiting for the second car made a run for it and later crossed back to Mozambique.

Mnisi was the main cadre involved in carrying out the 1981 power stations attacks. He left his Makarov with a friend of his (Philemon Malefo), who had helped them with the operation, when he returned to Maputo. But this friend and his wife had a domestic dispute and he beat her up. She goes to the police. In typical police fashion they sent her packing, saying, listen, we're not interested in your stories. She goes back to the house. He hears that she's been to the police, and then he really beats her up. She afterwards takes the magazine of the Makarov to the police station and says to the police, you think I'm lying, look at this! When the police saw the Makarov magazine they rounded Philemon up, turned him, and he then led Mnisi into a trap in which he was arrested when he went back into the country.

Mnisi was forced to contact Chris (Nungu) and George (Ndlovu) and said he needed to meet them at the Swaziland border.

Anyway, we (Chris, George and I) went to the border to meet up with Mnisi. He said there was a set time we'd meet and there was communication between George and Mnisi about this. George doesn't pick up any of the alert signals that Mnisi sent that he'd been arrested. Mnisi later told us that he did put the alert signal out. Whether that's true or not, we don't know.

How do you do that over the phone?

You use certain code words.

Do you use a book as a base for the code?

No, it was much more basic. If I were to say to you 'Hey Yunus, how's it?' And if I then talk to you about your mum, it would mean everything is fine or if I said my son isn't feeling too well, it would mean something else. To any person listening to it, it had to sound like an ordinary conversation. In those days it was through public telephones using language that had been agreed upon between the internal operative and the comrades who kept in touch with them telephonically.

The person you phone on the other end would be on a personal landline number or a public phone?

Well, that person must work out what they've got on the other side. We discouraged people using their own lines where they were staying. We operated with some disadvantages – but today you wouldn't survive if you were using all these electronic means. The enemy would know exactly who you are, where you are, what you're doing.

So Mnisi's arrest was a setback for *Operation Blackout*...

Mnisi is by background a safe cracker. I'm trying to give a sense of the kind of people that were in Special Ops. Daredevils, people that are streetwise. Most of the guys were smart but willing and wanting to have a go at the enemy, knowing that it could cost them their lives. That was an important ingredient because if you don't have the daredevil spirit in you, and are not prepared for the sacrifice, you don't make it. So, you must be internally driven, you must have willpower, you must have the guts to really go out and confront the enemy. The reality is there are fears and many cadres succumb to the fear. I can tell you every time you cross that border, that knot is there because there's the tension of something going wrong. We had some more mature cadres like Victor Molefe (real name: Johannes Mnisi), Victor Khayiyana and Zandi.

Anyway, Victor (Mnisi) gets caught by the Boers, they turn him with a gun at his head. So that night Chris, George and I went to the border in a car rented by my girlfriend. It wasn't the usual vehicle that the chaps were using in Swaziland. We go there; we don't find Victor. We come back. I'm staying at my girlfriend's place. I said to the chaps, look, you guys can take the car, and see you tomorrow morning to discuss how to proceed.

The cadres go off – and here came the first breakdown of one of the cardinal rules. George was being a bit lazy and didn't always use a public phone. He had given to Victor – because Victor had been a successful operative – the telephone number of the place he was staying at because it was convenient. Victor calls up and says, 'Hey, where were you? You know, I was there (at the border), and you guys weren't there.' George tells him that we were there, but we came back and explained that it was a rented car. These cadres were so excited about hearing from him that they say we're on our way, we're coming to fetch you. So off they went. They didn't come back to me to say they're going to the border. They then get ambushed. All the next day, I sat at my girlfriend's place, waiting, with the understanding that they were going to contact me there.

Were they killed?

Yes, but I just want to get you to understand the human side of what happened. I'm sitting there twiddling my thumbs...Where the hell are these guys? At about midday I decided to go and look for them. I go to where George's girlfriend works. I don't see her. I go back to my place. At around 4 'o clock my girlfriend comes back. I say to her I don't know where these other guys are. She says, 'You don't know, do you? They are dead!' Just like that! I mean you're sitting there all day wondering what's going on. Next thing you get told they're dead. She said 'I've not been at work all day. I got picked up by the police because the vehicle that I rented for you chaps was traced at the border, burnt out, with two bodies in there and the bodies are believed to be these two guys.' Oh shit! The blood drains out of your face. Then she said, 'They know you are here!' When I went out earlier, I felt that there were some funny movements around her apartment, it felt very strange but I didn't pay enough attention to it.

What do I do now? Go to the cupboard, take my pistol, get my money. I didn't take my bag, nothing. Kiss her goodbye and I walk out saying I'll move to a safe house. She does not know where I'm going to. I go off to Manzini, and I've got to collect myself. I get to this safe house; I get hold of the other person that George used to work with and say this is what's going on. I then start getting frantic messages from JS. Listen whatever you do, you need to come back. Mac was in Swaziland at the time. I discuss it with him. I told him there are all these cadres there and that there's weapons and equipment there for an operation. So, we put a team together to get the weapons out of the house and the cadres are sent across the border back to Mozambique. Now we had to find out how did these cadres get killed. In the meantime, I'm getting all these frantic calls to 'return to Mozambique immediately'. But I'm saying until I clean up, no return. Okay, I'm coming. I get hold of the other George (Nene) that worked with us as part of the front unit, we take all the materiel out, pack it into trunks, and take it to a safe storage place. We kept it in one of those little storerooms that was behind a parking place that belonged to a friend of George Nene's. So, he helped me clear up everything.

I got across the border back to Maputo and explained to JS what happened. We get some information from Timol and others in ANC Intelligence that this is what happened – and that's where the story comes out that the enemy had turned Victor. This led to the death of the cadres (Chris Nungu and George Ndlovu). I would have been in that vehicle. It's one of those very difficult moments that you're confronted with. So, what do you do, how do you pick up the pieces and then move on? We realised *Operation Blackout II* was blown. Of course, the extent to which the enemy can take measures to protect every pylon is debatable – but they were now alert to our plans. So, we decided not to go forward with *Operation Blackout II* at that point.

Somebody described *Operation Blackout* as probably the most detailed and intricately planned attack that had been undertaken by Special Ops. Would you agree?

Yes. We had detailed mapping of where the high-tension lines cross the major highways.

So why didn't you attempt it later, say two three years later?

The issue is getting a large, coordinated unit into the country all at once, getting them to the points where they place the charges and then withdraw safely. Operating from Botswana just didn't offer the same possibility. Having the right internal resources was also an issue. However, in a way we did carry the operation further because I mean that was the thinking behind some of the operations that were carried out by Robert McBride and them also. I also mentioned Koeberg just now as well.

What happened to Victor? Where did he go?

He becomes an *Askari*. He goes to Vlakplaas. His brother was also arrested earlier and was also at Vlakplaas. After some time, I get a message from a comrade – and he assures me that this comes through a safe channel – that Victor is sending me a message which says this is what happened, but he wants to come back to the ANC. 'Would you accept me back? I'll come and work for you guys, I'll do whatever you ask. What happened was not intended but I had a gun to my head – they said work with us! But will you take me back?' My attitude to that was – deny the enemy access to an individual; if we can win back one individual, it's one less for the other side.

So, I talk to JS about it and say look, this is what's coming back. I think we should agree to it and whether we honour it or not doesn't matter as long as he's not in the enemy's hands. Let him come back. We'll hand him over to *Imbokodo* (the ANC's security arm). After that it's up to the ANC to determine which way it goes. They've worked there; they've seen the enemy's operations. We send a message to him and his brother – they can come back. They were sent out on operations for the enemy, but they were also given free time. That's when they made a run for it. My feeling was, what did we have to lose? Nothing. Victor had not asked for a single penny, nothing from me. The return message to him was: You make it back on your own resources, your own steam. You come back. We'll talk. You know the rules, you come back, you go to the ANC. I said come back, I'll stand by the understanding that something went wrong in the communication chain, we've got to fix it.

Within a few weeks, Victor made his own way to Maputo. The one day I get there, 'Chief, go into that room, there's your man.' I sit down with the chap, say to Victor okay, talk. He says, 'Hey man!' – and, you know, that was his style of talking, he had a very easy, likeable way of getting on. 'Commandir,' he'd say, 'this is my story.' He said this is what happened. 'The wife sold this guy out. This guy sold me out. I sold you comrades out. I'm sorry, but I'm here, I'm prepared to do whatever you want. I understood from the message you sent, that you won't kill me, but anyway I throw myself at your mercy.'

Imbokodo did the interrogation, he told them all the stories, gave them the low-down on Vlakplaas – who was there, who was working for the enemy, etc. At Vlakplaas if they thought you'd outlived your usefulness, they'd kill you. Victor said, 'We saw this thing was going on and we weren't going to stay there with these guys, we were going to run for it and the only home we know is the ANC, so we came back to you.' Our security guys told us you need to decide which way you want to go forward. We decided that Victor had to vindicate himself. So, we told him this and that we'll let him carry out an operation that can really hit back at the enemy – and his role in the Church Street Air Force HQ attack flows from that.

JS and I discussed it, and we said, okay, we got to watch the guy very carefully. JS said be very careful, the guy never knows where you stay. I said I'm looking after myself. We've got to prepare an operation in which he takes part. Once again, it was one of those situations – you sit across a guy, and you ask yourself: honest or not? You have to trust your gut. You have a rapport with someone, or you don't.

Either it works or it doesn't. I don't trust easily but I also don't just distrust on a whim, because there are some people who might have not done anything wrong. It's just sometimes that the chemistry doesn't work. So, I said to him, okay, this is what we do. We worked out a plan. We'd ask him to pull off an operation or become part of planning an operation that he can never walk away from. So that if he ever goes back to the Boers, they will kill him for it. So that's where his role in Church Street comes in.

What happened to Victor's brother?

After the interrogation by Imbokodo and cross-checking his story with Victor's, Victor's brother was given the opportunity to go back to his previous unit, working on "icing" operations.

We're going to come to the Church Street operation later. About Mnisi, of course, he could have been a double agent? But he may just have come back because only the ANC could provide him some security against possibly being killed by the security police once they'd made use of him? So, there may be regret, contrition on his part, but partly it may also be self-preservation, survival?...

Survival par excellence!...

For now, I'm done with the 1981 attacks on the power stations. Let's move to Voortrekkehoogte which comes very shortly after...So what happened? ...

Again, it was one of those very difficult operations. Our aim was to hit at the heart of the military establishment. Not so much to take out an X number of soldiers or whatever, but to show the country and the world that we have the ability to strike at the enemy in the heart of their military establishment. Okay, it can be seen as unjustified bravado or whatever, but this is what the thinking was. Guido and David (Hedges) did the reconnaissance – just to get a sense of what was going on there, the location, the buildings, what areas we could operate from.

There were a 'Bonnie' and 'Clyde' who helped out? A British couple – Nicholas Heath and Bonnie Muller...

They were part of Voortrekkerhoogte operation, but Bonnie and Clyde don't know Guido and David.

The role of internationalists in Special Ops is interesting. How were they recruited? Who recruited them? The different roles they played? Where are they now? Many questions arise. Maybe we can come back to these issues later? Ronnie (Kasrils) says that one of your strengths was your ability to recruit internationalists. He says they liked working with you because you were very clear about what you wanted them to do, very precise...

Well, I pulled no punches. There are a lot more internationalists. There's a guy who contacted me recently. He says, 'You remember me? I used to be one of the chaps that used to do work with you'. He's from Holland. There were about 12 or so internationalists who did work with Special Ops and I'm talking about actual hard work. Can I just put this to you? You see, one of the issues was how do we use apartheid against the enemy? I remember once talking to the Cuban Generals about one of those sea-going operations and I said what we're looking at is how to use internationalists to carry weapons across. We're not asking them to carry out the operations. Some of them actually offered. We said – you are of greater value to us just getting the stuff in. Once the weapons were in, the cadres in the units could hit the targets. So, this is what we were asking people to do, and the Boers were just blindsided.

If you were White then you're one of us, felt the apartheid state, unless you were Joe Slovo. But there was only one Joe Slovo, and he was the enemy of the state. They felt that all the other Whites were on their side, so we operated on that basis. Now Bonnie and Clyde were not intellectuals; they were ordinary workers. In fact, after this operation they went to work as waiters in Switzerland. They had been recruited by some of JS's contacts in London to help with the operation. We had this network. In the Netherlands we had Connie Braam constantly looking out for people and she would often send people to Mac or Ronnie or me. We had other people in other parts of the world and then we had White people locally. Sometimes we used to come across people in other Commands and we poached them.

Hélène and Klaas?

We stole them from other Commands. When you talk with Sue (Rabkin) about them, she always says Hélène and Klaas were actually recruited by the Political Machinery...

And you stole them?

Yes, so we stole them. I used to tell her, it's not me, it's JS so you can fight with him. I was told, here are people you work with, explain what you need from them and find out what they're prepared to do. Others would say, 'Ja, you can get people to do things that most other people can't do'. Well, I tell them exactly what they're in for and if they get caught, they're going down for very long. With Bonnie and Clyde, we said to them, go in, find a smallholding and get the weapons in. You keep it there and then we'll send the cadres to the place. Before the cadres come in, you leave, keep the equipment and the vehicle there, and that's it – and the rest of it is recorded. They were an amazing couple. I think the biggest success – and it shows how easy it is to overcome security, yet how difficult.

They drove a vehicle from Swaziland into the country, carrying that huge Grad-P (a 122 mm rocket launcher) in a hidden compartment in a F250 Ford bakkie – and it broke down at the border...and you had this diminutive woman driving a vehicle,

whose pedal she could barely reach...and they had to push the van to get it going again...The guy couldn't drive, which is again one of those hair-raising problems. The cover the couple used to hire the smallholding was that the guy had a breakdown and was recovering and she was looking after him. They were on a holiday...What is remarkable about this operation is firstly the difficulties that we had packing the Grad-P in – and that was partly the issue of whether you had shells inside the barrel or not because I'd miscalculated. When I did the calculations, I didn't count the bits that were sticking out of the barrel so every time I modelled it – and I had built little models – it was out; there were boxes that were mounted onto the bottom of the van. A Mozambican panel beater – Carimo, used to build these compartments for us under our guidance.

Did you speak Portuguese or any indigenous language?

Between JS and my broken Portuguese and Carimo's broken English, we would tell the guy do this and do that. I built the model and said to him this is what I want you to build and exactly in this proportion. So, he would say 'not bigger or not smaller?' No, no exactly in this proportion. Later I said now you've got to find the ways, the brackets and things to build it into the vehicle. And it took us three nights to get that whole thing right just because we had to get all the shells in. Carimo came to live in South Africa after 1994, but he had a stroke. I used to assist him financially but then I lost contact with him.

Did Carimo actually know what his work was being used for?

Absolutely yes. He initially started doing some work for Gebuza but with time Special Ops became his main client.

And was he a comrade?

Then you must define comrade. We paid him for the job, he was sympathetic, he knew what he was doing it for, but at the same time I don't think he ever thought that there would be repercussions for him. We also didn't let others know about him. He was one of the chaps that originally was discovered by Gebuza.

So, he did work not just for Special Ops?

He did work for Gebuza as well.

Anyway, for three nights we worked on the vehicles making all that racket – and then the Mozambican security came around after receiving some complaints from the neighbours. The man in charge said he wanted to see what we were doing. I said, no, I can't show you. I took out my ANC card and said that they must first check with the Mozambican Security Minister, Jacinto Veloso, before they can do anything. And I talk about the bonds between the ANC and FRELIMO in the liberation struggle. The man questioning me then says, 'Well, what kind of a freedom fighter are you if you're making so much noise here that the residents are complaining about something funny going on' (laughter)? He relents and they lifted

the cordon around the area that they had put in place. I then decided that we're not going to continue working there and immediately moved into Fatima Mendoza's place and we finished the packing there.

You were pretty quick on your feet there with SNASP?

Oh yes. Sometimes I sit back and think hell I've slowed down a lot since. But at the time I had all the confidence, and I had met with the Mozambican Security Minister previously together with Joe Slovo. This was sometime after the Matola attack, when they had given us another residence to house our operatives.

Nadja Manghezi (*The Maputo Connection*, Jacana, 2009) captured this incident very well...

Yes.

I got Barney to work with me to load the weapons and after two nights he was complaining, he said he hadn't slept. But he didn't do much else during the day. I thought Barney, you are supposed to be the great guerrilla leader and you're complaining of being tired, but I do this work on a continuous basis. I, however, never said that to him. It's amazing what will can do; well, necessity. I knew I had a deadline. As far as Barney was concerned his job was to get inside the country and execute the operation, the rest was my responsibility. His attitude was I'm just helping you put this together; but I said, well, you need to know exactly which bolt to undo in which order so that you can get this thing out safely and not damage the thing.

I remember though we had finished packing the vehicle and I then parked it in one of the side streets where Ed (Wethli) was supposed to collect it. The next morning, something made me go and check this again. I know you're going to ask what it is that made you go and check? But that's me. I had to go and check. I got there and I saw that one of the screws wasn't holding properly, and there was FRELIMO security standing there, guarding one of these Minister's houses. I saw a bit of plastic sticking out, a dead giveaway. It's going to show that there's a box there. I got under the vehicle, and I unscrewed the thing and put my hands in, pushed all these things in, tightened it again properly and then it was ready to go.

I then said to JS I'm dog-tired, I just need one more day's rest. Can we ask Ed to meet with these people and say to them I'll come the following day? He said, 'No comrade, you've got an appointment, you must go. I'll do all the things you are supposed to have done'. Trust JS not to do that (laughter)! He promptly went off to phone Timol and said here's a list of things that Rashid wants you to do. Get this done and tell me when you're done. JS is one of these guys that can delegate. Who's going to say no to JS? JS got it done. He comes to me in the afternoon and says, 'Okay, how are you feeling?'. I said to him that I'm still very tired, but he says, 'Anyway you freshen up, eat well and then you'll be ready to walk through the night.'

On the Friday night I walked across the (Mozambique-Swaziland) border for twelve hours. I was so damn tired. I had a guide who kept telling me, 'Come on comrade, you're going to miss the contact who's collecting us.' I said listen I'm too damn tired. 'Okay,' he'd say, 'I can let you sit for five minutes.' Eventually we got there. I got to see Bonnie and Clyde and afterwards they said to me after their return, 'You were talking very slowly but I don't think you realised this'. But I was able to do the briefing and only then did I get to sleep.

They had already rented the smallholding that the cadres would operate from. The way they got across the border, it's like luck favoured us (laughter), what else can I say? People see the funny side of it. When they got to the border the vehicle wouldn't start again after they'd done the immigration check. So, the border police had to help them push-start it. I mean of all the things that can go wrong! How many things are you meant to think of beforehand! Anyway, when they had to go through the border gates, the police don't check the vehicle as they'd just helped to push start it again...They waved 'bye-bye' and Bonnie and Clyde go off without the vehicle being checked...

Didn't the security guys feel that the vehicle was heavy?

It's a heavy vehicle anyway and the internationalists had some of their camping gear and other equipment...



A Grad-P rocket launcher

Tell us a bit about the Grad-P used in the Voortrekkerhoogte operation...

You can see photographs of the Grad-P on the internet...The barrel is 2.54 meters long. Just the warhead was 45 kilograms. The motor was enormous. It has a range of 11,4 kilometers. As I said, the Boers later extended the outer perimeter fence at Sasol beyond 11

kilometers to avoid it being hit by a Grad-P. Anyway, we got Barney into the country. The one thing about him is that he had confidence about crossing borders. If you say to him, listen, Barney you've got to go across, he's ever ready to go. In fact, at some point I tried to draft Barney in as part of the planning Command. He was just not interested. He said to me, 'Listen, I'm not interested, I'm a field Commander. Give me a job to do, what I want is to mess the Boers and I want to be there in the field. I'm not interested in planning; no that's for you guys.' Barney went in and then the British couple left the small holding but before we sent the rest of the unit in. They were really, outstanding comrades, people that you absolutely felt confidence in. The chaps get in and carry out the operation.

But you know these guys were great – Sibepi (real name: Vincent Seketi) Johnny (real name: Vuyisile Matroos), Vicks (real name: Velaphi Mbele), Johannes Mnisi

(Victor). Vicks was the guy that I sent back to the camps for disciplinary violations, saying it would be good for you. When you come back, you'll be sobered up. Johnny died in combat (in Durban in May 1984 as part of the Clifford Brown unit). And Sibepi died in combat (in November 1985) with Barney and Victor (Khayiyana).

On the appointed night the cadres were supposed to go to the firing point. Barney and Sibepi did all the calculations. I'm not an artillery man; Barney was trained in that. We knew where they were going to fire from – but that's on a map. Now they had to verify that. They were walking to the firing point when they come across this policeman, who said 'Hey, what are you doing?' So, Johannes Mnisi, being one of these *skelms*, these streetwise guys, said, 'Ja man, we just busy stealing these pipes.' So, they gave the cop R20 and they were allowed to walk away. They decided to abort the operation that night.

Come the next morning, here I am in Maputo trying to recover from being so damn tired, and JS comes to me and says, 'I've been listening to the news all the time since early this morning and I don't hear anything.' Yes, okay, we don't know what's happening, maybe it'll come out later in the day or maybe something went wrong. As this wasn't an operation coordinated with others, they were supposed to carry it out at their convenience, with no definite time set. But for all that day, we had a very antsy JS pacing the floor, smoking his cigars. 'Well, was everything taken care of?' Look, I knew they got in safely and up to the last communication, everything was fine... In command you must have confidence in your commanders on the ground. Ultimately, they've got to make their own decisions and adapt plans.'

JS called around the next morning and said to me, 'You know, they made it sound like they were four piffy little blasts. So now he was upset that they were not reporting it fully. I said, oh well, that's interesting. So, the first report was that there were four explosions. Okay, did they say anything else? No news of arrests, all we were hearing was that there were ongoing security operations. When the cadres came back to Maputo, they briefed us. The night after they bumped into the policeman, they decided they couldn't carry out the operation walking to the launch site because the equipment was extremely heavy, and they didn't want to risk running into anybody else. So, the following night they loaded the equipment onto Victor's friend's (Philemon Malefo's) van. The guy that was arrested later after he had assaulted his wife. At the firing site the cadres off-loaded the vehicle and started setting up their operation. Victor's friend, Philemon parked nearby.

They loaded and launched the first rocket. It makes a hell of a roar because it's 60 kilograms of propellant and so it's really like a rocket. So, people in that area come out to look. They're asking what's going on? The cadres are running back and forth and everybody's taking their positions. They ignore the people. Some people come and lean on the van. They think it's an SADF drill. But the driver, Philemon, sees what's going on and gets scared he would be identified as part of the group and might then get arrested and then decides to drive off. The cadres are busy firing off the rockets. They then fold the equipment. Now they look around and see, oh hell, there's no getaway vehicle... and here are all these people looking on...Barney

says to Victor what can we do? Victor knows the area. Victor says okay, maybe we can go and steal a vehicle. So, they go into Laudium. There was this young guy who just wouldn't give up his car. You know, these days when somebody points a gun at you, you jump out...Barney fires, injures him, tries to pull him out of the vehicle but the youngster just would not budge. They then leave the vehicle and move off.

Why?...

The young guy then has got the hooter going off. The family comes out. Victor (Mnisi) and Barney do a runner. They then go back and join the other cadres. Barney decides that Victor should go and find his friend, the driver of the van (Malefo). And the rest of them would return to the smallholding and fight to the death. Barney tells us this in a very Barney kind of way – with all the bravado – but he would have, if I know Barney. The cadres abandoned the Grad-P. They make it back to their base with their aKs and other weapons. They bolt themselves in, awaiting the security forces. They take positions around the windows, and they wait for the final onslaught. For the next three days they stayed put. The SADF and the police, with police dogs, are on a search operation, and what is amazing is that they come close to the gate – but decide that there's no one there.

Our guys had kept the place in darkness. There were helicopters covering the area for three days. Eventually the search peters out. Things quieten down. Victor's also monitoring the news. He then decides to come to the smallholding. Barney is at the window, he sees Victor coming. Barney says later, "Ja, ja, I saw him coming, but I wanted to see if he was coming with a tail, and if there's enemy behind him, the first guy I was going take out was him and then the enemy." Anyway, says Barney, I saw him come up to the house, didn't see anybody else. So, Barney went to the door, yanked it open, grabbed him and pulled him in.



Voortrekkerhoogte
operation, 12 August 1981

Victor walks in, closes the door. Victor says okay, how are you guys? They decide. Victor's going to come back with his friend (Malefo) there that night. The cadres should get ready and they would move into Mamelodi at Victor's friend's house. And that's indeed what they do. When the cadres left the smallholding, they didn't clean up and Barney accidentally left his pistol behind. What the cadres did was put mattresses down and re-arranged the furniture so that they'd pick up the slightest noise. They slept with their rifles, facing the windows, ready to take the enemy on. Barney and them stayed with Victor's friend and after a few weeks when things had died down, they all come back safely to Maputo. We all got together in Maputo, including JS and OR. This is what's amazing about OR – he made the time to come and meet with the cadres, to thank them for pulling these operations off. He was able to stand up and say the ANC has been put firmly on the map of

South Africa. Yes, we would face many difficulties, but our future was secure. You must look at OR's speeches at that time. You can find them in *OR Tambo Speaks* (Heinemann, 1987).

What made Barney think that the police would trace them to this particular smallholding?

No, look, Barney was under no illusion that the security forces would use all kinds of means to try to track them down. As it turned out, they didn't.

The day before the Voortrekkerhoogte operation, at Joe Gqabi's funeral on 11 August 1981, Tambo said something like yesterday was Matola, today it is Harare, and tomorrow it will be Voortrekkerhoogte. Did this not alert the police that there might be an attack on Voortrekkerhoogte?

It so happened that the operation was supposed to have taken place the day before. Remember, the cadres loaded the stuff up and were walking to the firing point when they were confronted by a policeman whom they gave R20 to put him off them? Tambo knew the date of the operation, and when he said that he probably meant that it should've happened already and he probably forgot that it hadn't happened as yet but on the other hand it also shows how well informed he was. And the Boers, I don't think they ever, in their wildest imagination, thought we would've struck Voortrekkerhoogte!

How is it that it doesn't strike any of the White neighbours that there are many African people on the smallholding, but you don't see any Whites...

The rule was that once the cadres were in the smallholding, they were not allowed out. Barney's cover was to do a bit of gardening. Anyway, the landlord of the smallholding rings the house and never gets a response and eventually wonders what's going on. So, he comes to the place at the weekend after Barney and the unit leave. He does not find the tenants and then goes into the house; it is in an absolute mess. He finds the pistol and contacts the police. Then the story is blasted in the media. It becomes a big story.

So, besides the pistol that the landlord found there, what were other telltale signs that made him suspicious?

He called the police and the police called the security police in, and then they released the details to the press. They couldn't arrest the cadres, but they needed to show that they had the situation under control. On the one hand the police are saying, look at how useless they were because they didn't hit any significant targets. On the other hand, the people celebrated because here was the glorious MK taking on the Boers and hitting Voortrekkerhoogte right in the heart of the military machine. And what do you think the reaction was in the camps? It was absolutely positive. If we are already hitting Voortrekkerhoogte, we are going home tomorrow – that's how they felt. They said we're sure the Commanders will come

call for us to all go to the front. And of course, nobody wants to go to join any other Command, they all want Special Ops.

So Special Ops' credibility zooms?

Yes. Absolutely. You've hit Sasol, the power stations and Voortrekkehoogte, the main SADF military base...

All this within 15 months?

Yes.

So, at the camps people are very excited?

At the camps people are overjoyed. In Soweto and everywhere else, from all the reports we were able to get. I mean the people were in such jubilation. This is our glorious people's army, MK. From there on I don't think the PAC (Pan Africanist Congress) or anybody else stood a chance. Who else comes into the heart of apartheid South Africa, hits at Voortrekkerhoogte – and in quick succession after two other major operations? I think by then Special Ops was cemented in the minds of everybody. At that time, we still had the RC, the Revolutionary Council. Mac was always saying to us that we were militarists, that we should first be doing political mobilisation. But the RC gave him a mandate to carry out a military operation against new recruits.

You're talking about the *Green Vegetables* project?

Yes. And with *Green Vegetables*, he wanted me to be part of his Command.

And there was Ronnie who was doing Intelligence – he sent his own unit into the country – Damian de Lange and other comrades.

Some final questions for now about the Voortrekkerhoogte operation. Did Bonnie and Clyde leave the country immediately before Barney came to the smallholding?

They left the country after Barney was in but before the rest of the unit came in. They wanted to see a bit of Mozambique, so I went took them on a tour of Southern Mozambique. They wanted to also go all the way North but because of the war in Mozambique we couldn't do that.

Next thing. So, JS comes to you. He's anxious about the operation. But you come across as calm. Were you genuinely relaxed about it or were you trying to hide your concerns?

No, look, we had agreed upon the date, but JS came to me and said something went wrong, why has this happened? I said, look, this was the agreement, if something had gone wrong then I said to him all you have to do is wait. I mean if

they were arrested then we'll hear. What else can you say, what else can you do? We're sitting out there in Maputo; there's nothing we can do. He says to me, 'You're sure you've got the date right?'. I said, look, in the final briefing, that was the agreement – and indeed they just got delayed by a day.

So, here's a very experienced leader, an icon, and he's anxious – and you're calming him down. Normally it would be the other way round, it would be the senior comrade doing what you, the junior, did....

We must understand that JS wanted results. No, what we were doing was having a discussion, having a chat, sort of saying this is what we are doing, these are the issues. Of course, he's asking me because I was the last person to have seen the unit. 'Well, was everything taken care of?' he wanted to know. Then I said to him, look, everything was fine. We got them across the border. I knew they got in safely because we had all the communication and up to the last communication everything was fine. Then he understood. 'I know that but you just want the reassurance.' So, I was pleased and relieved. And of course, then the big problem was it was made to sound like four little blasts. I said, well, they make it sound so little but it's not. I said to him these things are big explosives.

So, what was the extent of damage to Voortrekkerhoogte? Did the regime suppress this?

Yes. The regime consistently underplayed the extent of the damage. It's part of their psychological warfare. They also had to reassure their white electorate.

But how could they suppress something like this?

The problem was this was the heart of the military infrastructure, so they determined what they showed to the press or not. And they could determine if they didn't want to let anybody in and they didn't on the first day or two. It's only afterwards they said, well, you see that there was this black worker and she was injured because of the blast, but there was always the tone of how irresponsible we were, using large calibre artillery weapons in a built-up area...

Where there specific parts of Voortrekkerhoogte the cadres were supposed to hit?

We wanted them to hit the commanding officers' offices or officers' mess or any area where there was a concentration of troops – but with a Grad-P it was very difficult to pinpoint precise targets. But that we hit Voortrekkerhoogte at all was a huge success...These were 45 kilograms each of high explosives in metal casings. These were anti-personnel weapons. So of course, it was in the regime's interest not to try to blow everything up and sort of say it was such a big operation or whatever. So yes, there were a few of those things that did go off.

You'd attacked oil refineries, power stations and a major military base. Key strategic targets. Did you plan these operations in this particular

sequence? If so, why? And what lessons did you draw from these operations?

We did Sasol because of the importance of fuel to the economy. The power stations were very clearly economic – how do you bring the economy to its knees? We needed to continuously chip away at the block. If we keep cutting the power and fuel supplies, eventually we would get the enemy's economy down to its knees.

JS said very clearly that we've got to show them that we are not only carrying out sabotage operations, but we can also easily tackle military installations – so Voortrekkerhoogte. We recognised that we could not take on the SADF in a full confrontational operation. That would be suicidal – and we were never into suicidal operations. Our aim was to make a psychological impact. Here we are taking on the enemy at its heart, its biggest military base, so we demonstrated our capability in the capital of the country – Pretoria.

Maybe it portrayed MK – and it did – as bigger than it was, as being much more competent and capable than we were. But it's what we wanted because our main aim was to impact on our people. This is armed propaganda. We needed more people to join the struggle. We needed to get the people to believe in the ANC and MK. And this goes back to the question of the role of the Political and the Military and the interaction between them. I'm very firmly of the belief that you can't say the one precedes the other, the one leads into the other. The fact that a liberation movement can survive is not sufficient. For a liberation movement to be successful we must be seen to be succeeding, to be able to tackle the enemy.

If you look at the Cuban revolution, in crossing with the Granma, they started with 82 cadres, they ended off with 12 survivors, but from that point on they can grow, but that's because they began to engage the enemy politically and militarily. But they have ideal conditions for guerrilla struggle. And there are various theories and debates about this.

In our case I think there were many other operations beginning to take place and there was this healthy competition beginning between the different Commands – Gebuza and others. 'Okay guys,' Gebuza will say to me, 'Ja, Rashid, when are we hitting the next one, you know, we've got to go for it'. What Gebuza was asking is how soon do we see another major operation. As Commanders we understood that we should maintain the momentum and element of surprise. After the Sasol operation, Gebuza said to me 'we're going to do something bigger. Just wait and see ...' It's all for the struggle. We used to sit around, laugh and joke about it, but at the same time we really saw to it that we supported each other. When we needed help, when we needed quick support, they would give it. If they needed quick support, we would give it to them. So, there was that healthy competitiveness but a very comradely spirit where each one understood that their success meant the success of their fellow Commands as well. And in fact, closest to Special Ops was indeed Sipiwe's units.

Do you want to add anything about the lessons learned from the three operations overall?

Generally, I thought we were very successful. But I started saying to JS that we couldn't sustain cross-border operations. The enemy by then had almost a permanent cordon around the border areas. I was firmly of the view that we needed to get units based inside the country, entrenched; that we had to have elements of the Commands inside the country. The discussions were, yes, true, but do we have the necessary conditions for us to be able to survive inside the country and be able to operate. Quite often we depended on internationalists. What is the most important thing at this stage? What is balance? Do you need to be based inside the country, but you then need to have proper communications. You're in the belly of the beast – and how well can you operate? Also, if you're going inside and sitting in your room and doing nothing then what's the point? That would be mountain toppism – sitting on the top of the mountain, doing nothing...

You need to also act and test your ability to survive inside through action because then you build a stronger organisation. The problem is also you can act and, in the process, you get smashed – but that's the nature of the struggle.

You're not going to have any struggle without casualties. I gave enormous support to *Vula*, getting weapons and so on. I thought that they needed to have engaged the enemy more.

With the Broederstroom Operation coordinated by Ronnie Kasrils, OR called me and said that Damian de Lange's unit lost a lot of equipment that was taken by the enemy after their arrest. 'Rashid, you're Chief of Ordnance, explain how these people have so much equipment, and we have such difficulty getting equipment for cadres usually.' So, I said I had discussed this with Ronnie and told him that it was important that they use the weapons and the equipment that they have inside the country and then we could supply more. But Comrade Ronnie insisted on getting all this weaponry and he went to JM (Joe Modise) and said that I'm being difficult. I said to JM, MK Commander, that we have all these difficulties getting things in, why should we give them more equipment? He said, 'Rashid, this man is not going stop.' He said it in a comradely, relaxed way. He said, 'Man, look, just give it to him. Just get him off our backs. Let's see what he can do, so that tomorrow when something goes wrong, he can't say it's because we have made the decision not to give him the equipment.' I said, okay, and gave it. But OR then said to me, 'Rashid, remember, I put you in charge of Ordnance and you have an original mandate. You are not just a subordinate to JM. You're the one in charge of all the equipment – and you make the decisions with regards to who gets weaponry and whether they use it and care for it properly.'

When *Vula* went down, the police took a lot of equipment – and at enormous cost. If you thought Special Ops was given lots of money, *Vula* was given pots of money, of resources. JS supported this. I didn't have a problem, but we also needed to always ensure that resources were used well and plans implemented. When I talk

of mountain toppism I'm not being over critical. I'm just saying for any liberation movement it's critical that they use meagre resources properly.

I can't recall that I've come across this term, mountain toppism before...

It's in some of the classics on guerrilla warfare. It's not my term.

Okay. Let's move on to Patrick Chamusso's October 1981 Sasol operation.

Well, with Chamusso it was purely a question of here was someone who had worked in Sasol and came to us after he was wrongly accused of being involved in the attack there. His story is well documented so there's no need for me to say much. When he first saw Joe Slovo, he wanted to run away. This is what Slovo said to me; that when he went to see Chamusso because he was told here's someone of interest, Chamusso saw him as a Boer. He wanted to run away – and he was told, no, no this is Joe Slovo. He didn't have the foggiest idea of who Slovo was. And you know JS had this way of telling a story! And he says, 'Man, all this guy wanted was to kick the Boers in the balls.' He says, 'I think we've got real potential with this chap, we've just got to think of how we can put this into operation.' So, JS said 'Go and speak to him and see what you can come up with.' I then went off with another cadre to meet him. We asked him what does he know about Sasol, how he would get in, what goes on inside the place? All this time we're looking at how to destroy this place. Having worked inside, how best would he be able to get in? He said he knows some areas where there were pipes and there was enough of an opening where people could crawl through into the plant.

But he says some time had lapsed since the 1980 operation, so he doesn't know what has been happening since then. What we knew was that the enemy had already started creating more barriers around these major strategic sites. We asked him if he's prepared to go back? And then invariably came the question of what if he's an enemy agent? Anyway, we thought we should put a unit with him. He said no, no, no, he thinks he can do this by himself. He knows the areas; he knows how to move around, if we can just get him back into the country and give him some training, he'll be able to do it.

We sent him off to Angola for a quick course in sabotage, mainly the use of limpet mines. Got him trained within a month or two. We then went through the whole process of getting him down to Swaziland and invariably the question was: how do we get the weapons in. If he's going by himself, we need to get him through the border. He also spoke siSwati quite well.

I spoke to the chaps that were based there and they said they would be able to organise him a Swazi passport because some of our comrades had contacts that worked in the Swazi Home Affairs Department and who we could buy passports through. We got him a passport. We got the vehicle, packed stuff in it and sent him through the border.

Limpet mines?

Yes.

What else?

We gave him a pistol, but we said no rifles, etc. because he wasn't going for that kind of operation. He was going to crawl through into the plant and use the limpet mines. He would have needed much more thorough training if he were to use explosives and RPGs (rocket propelled grenades) or anything like that. It was out of the question. But he was trained in the use of an AK and the like as well. He also had knowledge of the power stations and so we asked him to carry out operations against Sasol and some power stations.

With hindsight, I must say that perhaps we didn't train him well enough to also understand what responses he would face from the regime. And when an attack took place, the regime tended to create a cordon around the areas and search vehicles, etc. until the arrests. That usually happened for a few days. The problem was that he was so enthusiastic that he carried out one operation after the other.

Subsequently when he came out of Robben Island, we asked him what happened? He said he couldn't get through crawling into the target because they had built some spikes around the pipe areas, which were not there previously. There was a pipe for water and another for fuel. He said he was trying to save limpets, so he put one limpet on a pipe, but it was the water pipe. He didn't know which one was which.

In some interviews he said he decided to hit the water pipe and not the fuel pipe, but his instructions were to put the limpet on the fuel pipe. But here's someone who was incredibly brave, willing to go in on his own. The extent of the effort that we had to put into this operation was quite limited. Since we were able to get him a passport, he was able to drive through the borders.

Chamusso went on from Sasol to hit power stations immediately after. He didn't wait until he saw that they'd removed the roadblocks before he continued to operate. Normally the regime would keep the roadblocks up for two or three days after an operation, then call them off. But because Chamusso was hitting power stations immediately after Sasol they also kept the roadblocks going. Here was someone who really felt he had an axe to grind, he wanted to go in and strike at the regime, and we afforded him the opportunity.

After the operations, when he came across a roadblock he turned away and was chased by the police and his car went off the road. He ran away though he was shot. But he left his pistol and passport in the cubbyhole. That's an absolute no, no. Documents must be kept close to yourself. The police followed him and arrested him.

He didn't bring Sasol down, but it was spectacular what he was able to do even in the short time that he was able to operate. If we had sent a unit to accompany him, it would have involved a lot more preparation. But when you have somebody

operating on their own, you can't be sure where things could go. Maybe you should ask him whether he just wanted to carry out this operation and then feel he'd done his bit and get away, or would he have stayed in MK? Why did he just continue to hit one target after the other? We're sitting outside monitoring the news and you ask yourself, well, does he have a base within that area?

He was also someone that was quite coy. You could never pin him down because when you asked him, have you got somewhere to stay, do you have resources? 'No, I've got it all.' You never pushed cadres because if something went wrong then they would say you wanted to know everything – and what did you do with the information. So, if he says he can operate and survive inside the country, you allow it.

Coming back to the issue of being based inside the country. Here's someone who comes to us from amongst the people, and it raises the question: do you let him simply go in and carry out operations or do you ask him to go in and mobilise people and set up a unit inside first. You go for a slower, more thorough process. But in the end, we decided to let him go in on his own and carry out the operation – because we weren't sure of the story he gave us and we could only test him by him carrying out an operation...

As I said, I think there were deficiencies in his training. But, you see, you can't always anticipate what's in a person's mind and the problem with someone like him was that he showed almost no fear. 'Just give me my stuff. I want to kick the Boers in the balls.' I'd never anticipated that that he was going to just go for the operations in such rapid succession.

Partly you didn't need reconnaissance because he came from there?...

No, he was trained in terms of checking the situation out. He did some reconnaissance before he went and placed the limpets. He was trained to do reconnaissance. After having a discussion with him about how he's going to operate, what's he going to do, etc, we felt he was fine.

What car did he have?

We bought a car in Swaziland, sent him through as though he was a Swazi national and he was told to change number plates inside the country and he was fine with doing that. Whether he did that or not, I don't know. After he and the others came off Robben Island, we never had a proper detailed debrief of any of the cadres who were arrested. We simply assumed that what came out in the court records sufficed.

What was the actual effect of the bombing?

His target was the fractionating tower if you can get deep into the plant and if you can't, hit the fuel pipeline that went from the refinery into the storage tank farms.

When it came to the transformer substations, put it on the transformers and he was quite successful in doing that.

He comes across as remarkable guy...

He was a spectacular guy. I agree with you.

I was told that JS nicknamed Chamusso 'Hotstuff' because he hit power stations around the Sasol operation. That so?

We all felt that way. And we hoped he'd slow down because we were noting these attacks and he could get caught, as happened at that roadblock. That he was called 'Hotstuff' happened right at the outset. JS came up with that because he said, well, Chamusso is 'hot stuff'.

When the 1980 SASOL operation took place, the regime felt that it couldn't have been done by South Africans, MK would never have that capacity. Then later they moved to saying maybe there was someone within the plant that assisted MK units to carry out these operations. Then they decided it must be Chamusso and they arrested him. He told Slovo that they tortured him with electrodes on his penis, and that led to him to say that all he wanted was to kick the Boers in the balls because this is what they did to him.

Because the Boers beat him up for nothing, he decides to do something for MK. He doesn't go from South Africa through Swaziland but comes directly into Mozambique. The FRELIMO border authorities arrested him, and he's put in Machava prison. The Mozambique authorities then notified the ANC about him. The ANC security people then got him out of prison and put him into the reception house. Because they found his story so interesting, they put it to JS that here's a guy you'd be interested in.

But he's also given to embroidering his story and when you speak to him, you'll see. But he's really an amazing guy.

I was told that Chamusso hit several targets one after the other, but he says he did only two apart from Sasol.

The briefing was to go and do Sasol and after that carry out a few other operations over a number of weeks. But here's a guy, he's trained quickly and he's got this idea that I'm going to hit the Boers. We had no further contact with him once he went in. He was supposed to wait for things to settle down. He doesn't do that. He's over-enthusiastic. He just goes one after the other. The immediate instruction to all cadres is you pull off an operation, you lie low. When things ease up, you move into your next operation.

When you sent him into the country, did you tell him that he should come back within a certain number of days?

No, no. Once a cadre gets sent in, it's left to him to carry out the operation, assess the situation on the ground and come back. We were never prescriptive to say you must come back within an X number of days. If it had been a reconnaissance mission, we would say you must come back within a certain period. But here again, nobody prescribes to you how long your reconnaissance should take. I mean when I went in to do the reconnaissance at the Mobil refinery, I stayed inside for three weeks.

It's said that you were suspicious of him? That he may be a spy? That true?

No, I wouldn't even have dreamed of sending him in nor would I have thought of attaching any cadre to him. Look, his story is highly unusual, but it's been explained. JS and I discussed the matter, and we agreed that we should send him. In fact, I'm a bit surprised that he's saying that.

To what extent were his operations successful do you think?

Very.

Why do you say that?

Because he hit large transformer substations. He had worked in some of the substations. So, he was able to get access to them easily. Cut his way in and place charges there.

So, it was a big loss that he unfortunately got arrested...

Yes.

It took three days before they got to him?

Maybe a few more days...

And he was shot in the leg?

Yes, I think. He ran till he couldn't anymore.

Did Shawn Slovo interview you to put the script together for the movie on Chamusso (*Catch a fire*, 2006, Directed by Phillip Noyce)?

Yes.

So, what did you think of it?

I think it's exaggerated...

But it wasn't presented as an art film, it was for a Hollywood audience, so it had to be embellished?

Yes, you know, for Hollywood purposes...

But at its core, it's a wonderful story.

Oh, yes.

Interview 3

In the last two interviews we got to Chamusso's October 1981 Sasol Secunda operation. Let's move to the next operation – Koeberg in December 1982...

Mac and I used to spend a lot of time together; we were personal friends; I used to sit with him until the wee hours of the morning; in fact, I got ulcers from drinking whiskey with Mac...

As explained in the previous interviews, the success of Special Operations was its ability to carry out the operation with detailed, thorough-going planning. With Chamusso, we didn't pay that much attention to this, we thought this was a quick win kind of situation. Let's see what comes of it. Rodney (Wilkinson) was different. He had been part of a Left crowd, came out of the country, was in touch with Jeremy and Joan Brickhill who were part of the political structures and political underground machinery operating from Harare. And they referred Rodney to Mac, who had an initial discussion with him and thought, hell, you know, very interesting guy. Now comes the critical question: who within the ANC would be able to take this and bring it to fruition. And Mac immediately came to the conclusion: Special Operations and Joe Slovo.

Mac spoke with JS and he said to me, 'Look, here's a huge possibility'. Of course, the first question was: is this chap willing to go back in or are we just going to get information from him? And JS said he didn't know and that I should go to Harare to find out. My problem was travel documents because the Zimbabweans were very difficult at that time. You needed to get a visa. You needed to have reasonable travel documents. So, Rodney had to come and see me in Swaziland. (Mohammed) Timol was going to Harare. We asked him to get in touch with Rodney and arrange for him to meet me in Swaziland.

I got Rodney to tell me his story. Of course, we had the file on Koeberg, which is what he'd given to Mac. I asked him what he's willing to do. Do you have the possibility to go back in? Are you willing to do so? What's the situation around the plant like as it's being built? So, I get him to describe the situation to me. And we then put options to him. So he says, yes, well, okay he's willing to do the operation, if that's what we want. Of course, he's got to talk to his partner, Heather (Gray)

about it. So, we then agree that firstly he needs to go get a job again at Koeberg. After that he needs to come back to Swaziland to meet with me.

In our meetings in Swaziland, he describes exactly what he can and can't do. We also take him through some training in Swaziland, but because it's a time-critical approach, we send him back and provide him the wherewithal, including the money to go into South Africa. And when he comes back, he must tell us what stuff he can get into the plant. Given the limited training, he can't be expected to use explosives, detonators, etc so we've got to come up with something that is quite packaged. He had previous military training with the SADF, so when it comes to use of pistols, he's done that.

And we train him right there in the hotel room. So, we met a number of times, and I read the file that he gave us to try to identify the areas that he has access to. He describes this to me, to determine where to place the charges. At a critical time, he sent a message to say his contract is going to be terminated so it ups the ante. We've got to act quickly. Where we were thinking of getting small bits of explosives made up, packages, etc, the option now became, since he had only a few weeks left there, limpet mines.

So, the next time he comes to Swaziland, we need to finalise the plans. We must already have the materiel inside the country. We then speak to one of our internationalists in Maputo and suggest to him that we needed to get things inside the country in a hurry. He's able to take a day or two of leave, but he can't get it all the way through to Cape Town. So, we say, okay then, how far can you go? Well, he says somewhere in the Free State (see interview with Louis Rehmann). We packed the limpets and the pistol into Guido Van Hecken's vehicle that we were using.

I used to live with Guido, and he used to pack the stuff with me in cars for the internationalists to take into the country. So, the chap (Rehmann) goes into the country and comes back with a sketch of the DLB. The following weekend I meet with Rodney, give him the sketch, say to him this is what is available and then comes the question of how exactly does he take it into Koeberg. We'd always been talking about how big a package and whether he's going to put it in his hand or his boots. We were thinking of plastic explosives and stuff because that's the best option, but of course there are always dogs, security checks, etc.

Rodney said there was a hole in one of the areas and he'd get the stuff in through there, go through the security check, go back there, pick up the stuff and then find a place in the complex where he'd store the stuff. He had to do that within the next few weeks. He had to try to hit the reactor casing, the shell, with limpets. Of course, we couldn't get enough explosives to be able to crack the casing. It would have been impossible, but we decided on the electrical connections and stuff that he needed to go for and any of the cabling. It was to try to delay the start up at Koeberg as much as possible. By then he no longer had access to the space within the reactor. That was already closed off.

He had the support of Heather. Of course, there was always the issue of his drinking but that goes together with the tension. Heather was quite instrumental in also keeping Rodney on the straight and narrow. The support Heather gave was quite important. In terms of the escape plan, the idea was that he would, on the last day of his contract, place all the charges. The aim was a twelve-hour time delay, so he was trained on the right time delay mechanism. By then Heather would already have left. She went back to Zimbabwe and later flew over to Maputo. And he flew from Cape Town to Joburg, after he'd placed the charges, and then he got his sister to drive him to the border. We discussed how he could cross the fence. He did – then he cycled his way to Mbabane.

Bicycle?

It was a folding bicycle. So, he crossed the border with it. He cycled his way into Swaziland and later flew to Maputo.

Anything else you want to say on Koeberg?

Well, Rodney described the situation in Koeberg and what areas he had access to, and I advised him on what to do based on what he told me he could do. My role was mainly to deal with the details of how the operation should be carried out based on the information provided by Rodney. I would say, for example, can you get there? How would you get to this and what about the security checks? The reactor area was extremely secure so all we could do was look at all the conduits where they had the cables going into the reactor areas.

How would you train him in a hotel room?

We'd walk into a hotel usually with a bag. The hotels were also being monitored. The guy you are training had to check into the hotel. You then have to quietly get into his hotel room, having pre-arranged knocking codes. You'll knock X number of times. The cadres that supported me in the process would not be told the name of the person you're meeting or the room number. But they would leave me there and I would then take the stuff. And the arrangement was that I should be collected at a particular time.

So all the costs of Rodney coming in and out, the ANC covered?

Absolutely. You raise this question of costs, I think this is one of the things that also comes up regularly and there are those who say Special Operations had enormous resources. It didn't. We had limited resources, but we were so cautious with the monies... JS would go to OR, sometimes I would speak to OR myself and would tell him this is what the operation is, this is how much we need. He would always ask about the retreat plan, how you're going to get cadres out, what is the safety plan, that was always the highest priority. So, we had to assure the President yes, we can get the cadres out. Yes, something could go wrong, but we'd planned for everything foreseeable. Despite this, the best laid plans can go wrong, or you miss an important

detail. The way I operated was to be able to picture what the operative had to do in my mind's eye from start to finish.

Weren't you vulnerable in these hotels?

I took precautions. Also, when I travelled out, I would avoid people seeing me leave. By the time people realised I was missing, I'd already have been away for a few days. In Swaziland or Maputo people always talk if they didn't see you after a few days. What's happened to him? I never stayed for more than about a week or so in any of the frontline areas before pulling back. Usually, I'd plan it in such a way that I'd go in, do the business I had to and then pull back. I crossed the borders illegally or travelled on false passports with different names and I would have a legend. I had an Indian passport and two Sri Lankan passports. I also had South African passports under different names. Once I flew into Swaziland and presented a South African passport and the immigration official went to the back somewhere to check it out. And I was like, oh shit, I'm in trouble. So, I went into the toilet, and I tore notes I had into bits and flushed it down the toilet. But when I came back the official said, 'Thank you very much, have a good journey' and let me through...

So that wasn't anything after all?

I mean why he went to go and check I don't know. I remember the name on that passport – Patrick Benjamin Abrahams.

You don't look like a Patrick Benjamin Abrahams.

Yes, that was part of the problem. But I've always looked very innocent when travelling. I dressed the part and was always clean shaven and carried university documents as part of my legend, my cover story.

Was the Koeberg operation linked in any way to an ANC anti-nuclear policy?

No. The ANC policy was on nuclear weapons, not electricity. Post-apartheid I was the Chief of Policy and Planning in the Defence Department, and we always maintained the posture of no nuclear weapons or nuclear platforms in South Africa. After my leaving the Department, Terror Lekota (Minister of Defence) finally relented to the American pressure to allow some nuclear ships into South African ports. But if it were up to me, I would not have allowed it. Not that it was my decision to make, ultimately the political authority would have decided, but my position was always no nuclear weapons.

In the Koeberg case, here was a reactor in an advance stage of being built. We were given the information. We had an operative who was willing to go in. We had to carry out the operation before the reactor became active.

According to the information in the public domain, Rodney wasn't expecting to be asked to carry out the operation himself. He thought an

MK comrade would do it. You're saying though that he immediately agreed to do it?

Maybe I've simplified it. He and Heather had come out. As far as they were concerned, they wanted to put this behind them. They just wanted to hand in the information and the files. And the question I asked JS was: what's he prepared to do? Am I just going to talk to him for information purposes? You could see JS' eyes light up. Is he prepared to go in? 'Well, we don't know, but you go and check with him.'

I put it to Rodney that the easiest way of doing this operation would be for him to go back to Koeberg and carry it out. I said that you can go back in and be our source of information and we will then get a unit in. But the value of an operative on the inside is just so much greater. If we have someone who can go in, that's better than any unit that has to cut through a fence. There's all the vulnerability that goes with that, and there was a limited period of time to prepare a unit to go in. There were concentric rings of security. Now with someone who's working there, they don't get checked thoroughly. You know what he said to me? 'You make it sound so simple'. I mean JS said this to me, that you have a way of talking to people. I mean you simplify things, but you take people through exactly in detail. And create the picture. Because to me what was always critical is to be able to describe anything, I must be able to see it almost as a movie in my own mind.

But you are also trying to see how far, to what extent you can push the person, push the boundaries. When I spoke to him the first time, he said, 'Look, okay, I'll go in but then let me talk to Heather'. And what we were told was that Heather was the stronger person. And Heather says, okay, we can do it. The message that came back is, yes... And I said to him look if it cannot be, it cannot be, but let's see, let's push the limit. And in all the cadres of Special Operations invariably there's that spirit of the daredevil in that they'll go in and carry out the operation. That's something that's very critical.

This keeps coming up, that it took a daredevil type of person to join Special Ops and MK...

Leadership, planning and the indomitable spirit of the individual, the type of person who believes in the cause.

Isn't it surprising that Rodney got a job in Koeberg? When he was in the SADF, he takes an armoured truck, gets drunk, and smashes the truck. The guy's living in a commune, he's a hippie, he's anti-nuclear. Didn't they vet him?

In a sense, the intelligence of the regime was very poor. Their Intelligence Services didn't seem to share information.

Well, they certainly weren't as clued up as we used to think...

They didn't knit things together. They didn't expect that we would carry out several of these operations. The entire mind-set of the regime was always that any threat to them is going to come from across the border, because that is the classical thinking. That's why we had to get cadres based inside the country to tackle the regime from within. And you didn't have to mobilise an entire area to be able to carry out an operation. In fact, in Soweto people sometimes didn't even know that they were supporting or harbouring guerillas. Or sometimes they had some kind of inkling because these guys are here with some funny stories or whatever.

The setup within the country was such that you go into the hostels, young people are constantly looking for work. So, we exploited those kinds of things. In a sense we turned apartheid against them because we said we need Whites looking like tourists to bring materiel in, as I've said.

Isn't it also that the regime didn't expect you to be so sophisticated as to attack Koeberg? Isn't that partly it? A racist theory that blacks, Africans mainly, are just stupid....

That's part of it. Something that comes out in Madiba's thinking constantly, is that you've got to understand the make-up of the enemy; this is how they think, and you must think how you get around it? Sometimes it's about chance, it's luck. If an African person goes through a border, there's more checking. Indian people who went back and forth, they're always coming up for a nice time. That's how we met up with and managed our relations with many of the operatives. For Whites, things were also easier. With the Dolphin unit, the first weapons that we got for them, they took in themselves. We didn't have to go in and cache the stuff for them. All we needed to do was adapt the vehicle that they used.

At the end of the day, you had to keep things as simple as possible. If we can do this and get away with it, then let's do it. If I didn't have to wear a disguise why should I wear a disguise, because disguises themselves could alert the other side. If you behave simply, you've got your heart in your mouth, but at the same time you've got your story and you present yourself to them, you walk through. You go into a hotel, blend in with the crowd. You look at when there are busy times, and in those days the security officials were quite lax in hotels.

It comes up every now and then in these interviews that it certainly seems that the South African security police were not as effective as we used to think; they were not anywhere as powerful as Mossad. And, on the other hand, Special Ops seems to have been very tactically flexible and creative...

Yes. We had to be. And we had to learn from our mistakes. I mean, the first time I got across the fence from Mozambique into Swaziland, we were arrested. So then, you must look at how that happened. What were the pitfalls? Do the analysis. How do you get around it? Here's an obstacle, how do you get past it? Can I do this? Can I do that? JS initially introduces the option of making use of internationalists. You have to work out how do you use apartheid against the regime? How does the

regime see foreigners? So, you test it. You put it to the operatives this is what you need to do. We're going to take you through your paces. We'll give you the vehicle with the compartment (DLB) in, but without anything in it and let's see what checking they do at the border. If they don't do any checking, you say okay, now we're going to put stuff in. That also builds confidence with the operative.

What do I say to Rodney? I say this is the size of a limpet; this is its shape. You've seen it and I'm not bringing it again to your hotel room. Then we said okay, here's a Gin bottle. Now you practise. Put this in your plastic bag and see how you get it up to your room? So, if someone catches you in Koeberg, well, you're a *dopper* (drinker). You're smuggling a bit of booze in because you need to have a dop now and again. We tried practising that. He said he was so nervous about it...

I explain you must have a legend, a story to cover what you're doing to avoid any suspicions. The fancy term is MCW (Military Combat Work). We would discuss his responses in different situations if he's asked by a security official or anybody else in Koeberg what he was doing. Every time I posed these questions, 'No, I'll find a way around it'. And the problem is that you can't keep an operative doing this for too long before he becomes a nervous wreck. You've got to be able to say, okay, let's go for it. The pressure that came was that his contract was going to come to an end and we had to move quickly.

That pushed him?

It pushed him and us. We had to finalise his use of limpet mines, know how to set the timer and for how long. He had to set the charges before he gets out of the plant, and he must be well away from the area because they would throw a cordon around it. So, he must be practical, be systematic.

Rodney had to first get the stuff from the cache that had been created in the country and transport it back to Cape Town. We had discussed how he was going to move it and conceal it in the vehicle. So that was quite an operation, that he and Heather had to drive out with all this stuff.

To come back to your question of the regime not knowing everything, they didn't imagine that we would find all these different ways of doing operations. But I also suspect that we were always asking ourselves how we can find the best way in. Because what is there to it? Yes, I can come with a brazen way to do an operation the way the Yankees do it. We didn't have the means and resources for those kinds of things. We had to find the cadre who had the will to say, okay, we can sneak in this.

We had to understand what the Boers were thinking. Also, in the negotiations for a new defence force for the democracy, we also had to be practical and realistic around that. We could stand on our high horses and jump up and down. I mean did we have the wherewithal and enough weapons to say no we don't want to use the R5 rifles anymore? Are we going to scrap all the rifles and buy new rifles for everybody. We had the military bases; do you scrap all of those? And sometimes

you went for the simplicity. We even were pushed to say let's just change the uniform, change the insignia. The old guard started arguing with us that can't we keep this insignia and the Air Force as these are quite old? So what? Do we care? What we want is the rebranding. So, I came up with this idea of the 'South African National Defence Force'. 'National' in the sense that it belongs to all of us. As far as they were concerned, they had their term 'SADF' and we had our 'national' in there, so that was the compromise.

But that was negotiations. By then the mind-sets from both sides was that we've got to find solutions. How do you get around this obstacle? Ultimately what is your objective in an operational sense?

We didn't have a kind of adventurous confrontation with the SADF in the struggle. We understood that we didn't have the means, the wherewithal, nor was it ANC policy to throw cadres into a kind of battle in which they'd be killed. The safety of those cadres always was emphasised. And I must emphasise this, we were simply not allowed, and correctly so, to attack civilian targets. We were dead set against that. Sometimes cadres suggested it, and we immediately said no, absolutely not. You dare not go into it. You cannot attack a school. That is not who we are.

About Koeberg again, the limpet mines explode over about a 24-hour period. This is what was said: 'Four explosions occurred in approximately twenty-four period on the 18th and 19th December. The last was the 19th of December at 02:53 in the morning.' So, after the first explosion occurs didn't the security police scour the place for other limpet mines?

But it also shows how vast the area was. This is precisely where the practical issues come in. So, you have the discussion. Okay, Rodney what is the timeframe within which you can place things? From the time you place the first limpet you need to be out within X period. Your getaway time starts when you place and you pull the pin on the first limpet. He subsequently told me, that the last one he actually gave himself more time. He said he'd placed this particular colour and delay times on the limpets. I said it's a bit long, but he said he just wanted to be sure. I mean it was symbolic in a sense. We were sending a message to say here's one more of your strategic targets that we can take out. Armed propaganda! Psychological warfare.

We did consider whether we should cut some of the fences just to give the impression that the operation was carried out from outside. But now imagine, you place all the charges, and the guy goes to cut the fence for the decoy, and he gets caught doing that. Then we decided once Rodney placed the charges, he should get the hell out of there. As long as the first few limpets go off, we were fine.

It's interesting that Ian McCrae, the Eskom CEO, said that 'their investigations also showed possible links to the German terror group, the Baader-Meinhof Gang.' The writer notes that, 'This link could not be confirmed'.

You see, once again, there was all this speculation about the nature of the operation, and who carried it out, and they couldn't believe it was South Africans. In a sense that also shows the level of sophistication. It was simple – but sophisticated.

Did Renfrew Christie, who worked with the ANC, have any say on the Koeberg operation? And Dietrich Gerhardt? ...

Dieter not. He was a GDR or Soviet Agent. I think Ronnie spoke to Dieter subsequently. Renfrew had done some work on nuclear issues, not certain what exactly, but he didn't have a direct link to the Koeberg operation.

How did Christie get caught?

I don't know. I mean, I've never really gone into the detail of the work he'd done.

In a book on the history of the plant a former executive, Paul Seamark, is quoted as saying, '...we knew the ANC would not target Koeberg once nuclear fuel was there and that they would try to attack at a time which would ensure the least loss of life. We even pinpointed 16 December 1982, which was a public holiday as the likely date. 'Any substance to this?

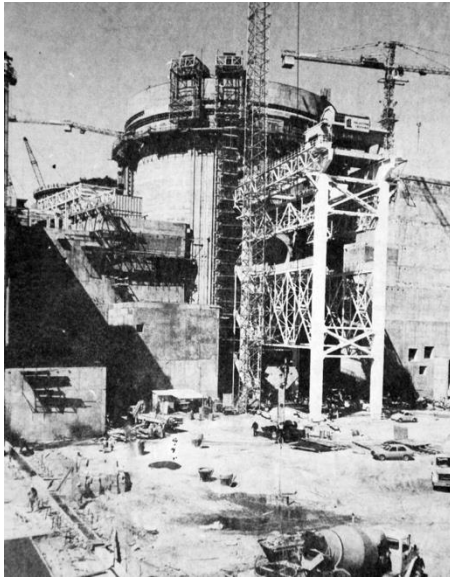
He's talking after the event. They were getting to the point where they were going to make the plant live. So, our target dates had to be brought forward. They had already increased security. But did they identify it as a target? I don't think so. The date was based mainly on the fact that Rodney's job was coming to an end. However, I do not think that the ANC would take the chance of carrying out an attack on the reactor area if it were already on stream.

What do you see as the significance of the Koeberg operation?

I think it was a tremendous coup for us. That we could penetrate a major state institution once again showed the weakness of the regime. We showed that they didn't have the foggiest idea of where the ANC could get to and when and how. It also showed that the ANC was everywhere within the country. Remember in the Cape there weren't all that many operations taking place.

Let me quote what journalist Jack McKinney had to say, "For sheer improbability, this December 1982 caper topped even the surprise Israeli air strike against the Osirak nuclear reactor in Iraq six months earlier. Like the raid on Osirak, the sapping of the Koeberg nuclear plant near Cape Town was deftly timed to avoid any danger of radioactive fallout. The surgical efficiency of the operation proved so embarrassing to the white minority regime, security sources claimed it had to be done by an 'outside' team of professional saboteurs..." A Centre for Public Integrity writer said "in what was arguably one of the most ambitious and successful terror attacks against a nuclear facility anywhere, the ANC made a mockery of atomic security to pull out one of the most dramatic coups of the apartheid struggle, blowing up Koeberg"...

Yes, this was a major operation.



Koeberg operation, 18-19
December 1982

Why did you call the Koeberg attack Operation Mac? Wasn't that a bit crude? If it was being monitored, wouldn't it have unduly alerted the security police?

JS and I decided this...well, because Mac was always very critical of military operations (laughter). But it also was a recognition of his contribution to the operation.

But he doesn't relent from those criticisms of the military struggle...

No, I know that...

Look, we had all these healthy ongoing debates about the right strategy and tactics and who should do what, knowing that we were all working

towards a common goal. And in a sense, it also made us feel that even though people were always having a go at us, it was a recognition of the capability of Special Operations, its planning, because if you ask Mac – I can't speak for him – he'd recognise that we had the ability, that he didn't think there was any other unit that he would have trusted as much. Also knowing that we would take due care of the operatives.

Now to the Church Street South African Air Force bombing. Why this operation and what happened?

As I explained earlier, when we considered strategic targets, we also included personnel. And the view was that we needed to also take out enemy personnel in a big way. Not just a few as the enemy would be able to hide this, because every now and then there were attacks against policemen. Invariably, the enemy downplayed the attacks on enemy personnel and would say a policeman was killed or injured without explaining the context. What we were looking at was how do we also show the people that we are not only hitting certain targets but also enemy personnel directly.

The enemy had positioned many military headquarters inside civilian areas, which is contrary to the Geneva Convention. In attacking these targets, we had to also be careful that we didn't injure civilians. The ANC accepted that should some civilians get caught in the crossfire and inadvertently be injured or killed, not that we deliberately targeted them, they would be casualties of war. We also had remote triggering devices for car bombs as they were then and once these became available, we also said where exactly could we find targets with a large concentration of enemy personnel. This was looked at over a period of time and

then we decided to attack the Air Force Headquarters, because from the reconnaissance reports that we were given by the operatives, there was a very high concentration of military personnel around that area. Especially just around four thirty pm when they went off duty and they would be waiting for a bus. So that is what we thought we'd begin with.

And again, we looked at what was the most effective means of carrying out such an attack. If we were to go for an explosive device, what is the easiest means of getting it there? I know much has been made of the danger of car bombs and it's a dirty word and I think in my TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission) submission I talked a bit about it. But a car bomb was a means of delivery on this target, we decided. So, we designed a vehicle which was stolen, and (Belgian) Hêlène (Passtoors) drove it into the country, but she didn't know what the target was. She was the internationalist doing work for the ANC who was available at the time. We had our ways of being able to identify the vehicle and knowing where to collect it.

We had explained to the operatives how to set the triggering device up, and what to do with regards to the detonators. Whilst it was in transport, the detonators were kept separately from the explosives. They were standard large explosives of a particular type. And what the operatives had to then do was put the detonators into each of these blocks of explosives, link the triggering device with the electrical connection into the device and set it off. The instruction was that it should be detonated at four thirty pm.

They would have driven the vehicle around and looked for the ideal parking space. I think it was just after quarter past four, about twenty past four, that they were setting the thing. But with the triggering devices, there may have been a fault which we didn't pick up during the testing phases. And as they switched the trigger it went off prematurely. The aim was for it to have gone off a few minutes later when there was an even larger concentration of Air Force personnel.

You asked why the Air Force target? Because it was an enlarged concentration of enemy personnel. And again, we wanted to show the people and get the message to the regime that we can strike at them at any point in time and that they were vulnerable. That it wasn't just inanimate objects that were the targets. But we were very careful in the target selection. It had to be military personnel or enemy personnel, preferably, which this matched the requirements for. I think a lot of the operational detail is captured in various articles and in the TRC. We had named it *Operation Ruth First* because she'd been assassinated by the regime recently.

I must say that a decision like this operation doesn't come easy. Even though you know that it's part of the struggle, some people get killed and injured, it always gets to you. And I'm still fighting it many years later. Just knowing that this is the kind of operation that gets carried out. But it's very difficult knowing that you're taking life. But knowing also that the other side is ruthless and the extent to which they are prepared to go. So, this approach of a car bomb was the most effective way that we had to be able to take out the enemy in this context.

I think this operation also broadened the imagination of the other Commands. Later there were also car bomb attacks at the Magistrate's Court in Johannesburg and elsewhere.

Why did you come so late to using a car bomb?

The limpet mines were fine before, but this operation required this. And the triggering devices became more accessible in the early 1980s. Also, we had to test these devices and guard against them being triggered at the wrong time. But then too, with this operation, there was interference with the signals on this device because it was around the Air Force Headquarters and other security buildings. We had extensive preparations and our tests went very well.

How would you test a car bomb without drawing attention? Even if you went to a rural area?...

It was in Mozambique. You would see the globe light up to let you know the thing has triggered. So instead of using detonators, you use a globe.

Did you have to get any special training yourself?

Only insofar as how the device worked.

Was this the first car bomb operation in our country?

Yes.

Would that explain maybe why the device triggered off about ten minutes earlier than it was meant to?...

Prematurely, yes. And Freddie Shongwe and Ezekial Maseko, the operatives, were, unfortunately, killed.

How do you respond to the claim by the apartheid security police that Special Ops chose to use Shongwe and Maseko because they were criminals and dispensable, that they were effectively sent to their deaths, that maybe the intention was that they wouldn't come out of this operation alive?

Absolutely not true.

Were Freddie Shongwe and Ezekial Maseko genuine MK operatives?

Yes, they were recruited by Johannes Mnisi, and I've said to you previously, yes, there were comrades with a criminal background...Mnisi, Khayiyana, others came from such backgrounds. Now, you need these people.

So, you deny what the security police claim?

Absolutely and we would never want to get rid of any comrade even if they had a criminal background in such a way. Here are people that were prepared to serve the struggle. They saw themselves as cadres of the ANC, and who says criminals cannot be used? The enemy regime used criminals. Victor Khayiyana himself was recruited by the enemy. From his criminal past he was taken out of prison and sent to kill Stanley Mabizela and other ANC leaders, as I said in a previous interview.

R3000 was found in Maseko's clothes after the bombing. The police claimed that he and Shongwe were paid to carry out the operation, implying they weren't genuine operatives, but hired hands...

No, these were operational funds and the money would be for that, also if they would have to withdraw or if suspicion fell on them and they needed funds for any particular reason. They also had instructions as to how to withdraw and how to get in touch with the ANC should they have to withdraw. But here again, these are operatives based in South Africa. Yes, rudimentarily trained, quickly, but the thinking was to get to the point of increasingly using people based inside the country. They come from the Pretoria area. They know the set-up there. You can't just take comrades from anywhere and put them into a particular area, they need to know the local conditions, the operating conditions. Here were guys who were able to use their garage to do the preparations for the operation. They were trained to use the device even though we're not absolutely sure what went wrong.

The car gets brought in on the 19th; the operation takes place on the 20th. Wasn't that rather quick? Didn't they need more time to prepare? Or was it planned that way?

We said to them that they had to keep the car under protected conditions. We couldn't have it hanging around and someone does something wrong. Where do you store the thing? It was a stolen vehicle. But we didn't set a time when they must carry out the operation. That was a decision left to them, as long as it was carried out when there was a high concentration of military personnel then. This was identified as around 4:30 pm.

It was stolen a good year ahead of time? You used it for other activities?

Yes...There were criminals who worked sympathetically with the ANC, and this is one of the cars we kept, and then over a period of time we adapted it. This vehicle was reserved for such an operation.

You've said that after Johannes Mnisi came back to Special Ops after his arrest, you'd ask him to get involved in an operation so that if he ever went back to the security police, they'd never forgive him and do away with him. Did you have the Church Street operation in mind before Victor came back or after?

We were looking at these kinds of operations anyway; it was a question of timing. Victor came back at the time we were looking into this option. In discussions with JS, we thought about Victor doing the operation. Our Security people said he seems genuine, he's remorseful about the damage that his arrest had caused. We didn't tell them what kind of target, we just said we wanted to give him an operation that will give him an opportunity to vindicate himself. And Victor agreed, and then he spoke about these operatives inside the country that were his friends who were sympathetic to the struggle. And he recruited and organised them to carry out the operation.

Did Hêlène not know at all what the target of the car bomb was?

No, she took the car in. If cadres had to park a car somewhere and leave it there with certain identifying marks or signals, that's what they did. They were never told the target. Target selection was not their responsibility. In fact, I think, Hêlène, after her arrest, took on far too much responsibility for something she had no knowledge of.

Hêlène says that when she and (Dutch internationalist) Klaas (de Jonge) did the reconnaissance of the Air Force Headquarters, they suggested that it not be targeted.

Victor's (Mnisi's) friends did the reconnaissance. Klaas and Hêlène were looking at generalised targets. We never told them what the target was going to be. So, they were sent to Voortrekkerhoogte. They went to other places. We were looking at places where there would be high concentrations of military personnel. They would've then reported on any.

She says that they did the reconnaissance of several possible military targets.

Yes.

They said Slovo and Tambo said no to their proposal to attack the Voortrekker Museum.

Voortrekker Monument – but that's different. The Voortrekker Monument was a very specific operation and Klaas said to us he could carry that out by himself in a jiffy because there was absolutely no security around the monument. You could walk there at night. But we said no.

What they're saying is they carried out reconnaissance on several targets, one of which was the Church Street South African Air Force office and proposed that it's not doable because of the civilian casualties. Why would they not do a reconnaissance of that if you asked them to consider military targets?

Let me just put it on record and say that we had very specific information from the cadres that carried out the operation that military personnel would wait in a queue for their military bus to collect them at 4:30 pm – and that's where the concentration of military personnel comes in. Hélène and Klaas had no pre-knowledge of what the target was going to be.

She didn't say they had pre-knowledge...

Hélène brought the car in which had the bomb because she was available at the time. She had to park the vehicle at a particular point and had to leave.

She says, and to some extent Klaas agrees, that they were not asked to do the Air Force Headquarters specifically but military targets generally. But they did a recon of the Air Force HQ, among others.

I'm telling you how we operated. I have no problem with the operation that was carried out. What I'm saying to you is the way we operated is that we'd send somebody in to do the reconnaissance. We never told them what the specific target would be. After the event they would put it together. Hélène was also told make sure that you brake in good time, that nobody smashes into you from the side and so on. But what I'm saying to you is that Hélène and Klaas mustn't take responsibility for things that were not their responsibility to take. She was told you drive this car and these are your instructions; you take it and leave it at a particular place.

Why ask her to leave the car in Mamelodi? As a White, she'd stand out and could have been vulnerable? Why not ask her to leave the car somewhere in the city, where people of different racial backgrounds would be?

I discussed the issue with Victor (Mnisi) – the cadres carrying out the operation could be stopped on their way from the city to the township – and we had to avoid that at all costs. So, we asked Hélène to leave the car where these guys could access it easily. I didn't know Pretoria. Victor knew it as he came from there and he made the proposals on the drop-off point and other logistics. But maybe I wasn't paying enough attention to the details.

When I asked Hélène whether dropping off the car at Mamelodi didn't make her vulnerable, she was very relaxed about it, saying that they'd got used to taking risks. In Swaziland, she said, 'I was in tricky situations where unexpected things happened and I had to get away myself, so I didn't think the Mamelodi arrangements were that abnormal'.

I can't recall all that happened. As I remember it, the cadres wanted the car dropped off at a particular place in Mamelodi. I would've asked Hélène if she was fine with that and of course Hélène, you know, in her ever-exuberant way, would have said no, don't worry I'll sort myself out. But on that one I don't need people to be fair to me because we all make mistakes...

You know, searching the depths of my memory, my recollection is that the intention was that Hélène would have first rented a car to leave at Mamelodi Station. Of course, she would still face the dilemma of how to get away from there immediately after that, but she said that she'd find a way. What wasn't expected was that she'd try to take a train from Mamelodi Station which is only used by blacks.

Hélène says she and Klaas met Tambo through JS to discuss her concerns about the loss of civilian lives in the Air Force bombing. And Tambo explained it was unfortunate but sometimes these deaths are unavoidable, collateral outcomes in a war situation. The ANC had raised publicly that the apartheid government needed to move these military outfits out of civilian areas.

I think at the time when that discussion with Tambo took place, I was probably not there, but on some other mission somewhere.

Did you have a fall-out with Hélène because of an interview she gave to an Afrikaner journalist in which she expressed concerns about the use of a car bomb in the operation? You were furious with her about this?

I don't know why she says I was furious with her. She confuses her different roles, what her position was in this operation. She says both that it was a very positive operation, also because of the SADF attack in Maputo, and that that she was unhappy about it. These issues really played on her mind. If you go and look at my TRC records, I have explained clearly what happened there, and why we had to do it the way we did. And we accepted that the collateral damage and civilian casualties was regrettable, but the ANC policy not to attack civilians and the regime should not have put their military offices in civilian areas in terms of the Geneva Convention.

You met Neville Clarence, who lost his sight in the Church Street bombing? Was this your or his initiative?

He initiated it. I'd given my testimony and he was present during the hearings, and he said that he wanted to know more, who it was that had given the instructions and so on. He said that he recognised that this was part of the struggle. So, I said fine. We had nothing to hide. The testimony was all given at the TRC. To me it was, here's someone who was injured as a result of an operation carried out by operatives under my command and let's hear what he has to say. In fact, I think most people were surprised.

I think this was a very good gesture...

Yes. And the whole reconciliation aspect to it. Because he wasn't vindictive, unlike the other officers, who during the hearings stood up and said my family or someone else was affected by this blast. But here was someone who chose to work in the Air Force head office because he didn't think that they would be vulnerable as long the war was taking place in the rural areas. And to me, that showed that you were a soldier, but you didn't think you should be injured. But our view was that the enemy

also had to bleed. All the way through until those operations, it was always us, Black people that bled. And even if it was the other side, it was Black policemen that were injured. How do we ensure that White soldiers paid the price? When it came down to it, most of them didn't have the guts. When they started bleeding, we realised that they wanted to hold on to power without making the necessary sacrifices that we made.



Rashid meets Neville Clarence at the TRC

Over now to the Wits Command operation. Why did you go for that target and what happened?

Well, we had Hein Grosskopf. You know his background. He also gave testimony in the TRC. We have this discussion with him about operations that we want to carry out and what he knows. And this target came out as a result of a discussion with him because he knew it. And what we were really trying to do was something a bit more elaborate. The concept was to try to use a car bomb, but at the same time to get it rammed into the Wits Command building by steering the car

remotely. You set it in a way to get the steering wheel to grip, then pick up speed, and get the car to hit the building targeted. Of course, that technically became a very difficult thing to do.

But Hein was one of these people that kept thinking about it and coming up with, 'Okay, so I think I can do this and that'. The enemy had also taken decisions not to allow parking outside any of these command centres. They were all red zones. So, the challenge we had is how do we get to the target? The aim was to target enemy personnel, and the target selection was done jointly with him. He, I must say, was very alive to the issues, quite adventurous, sharp, but when I say adventurous, I mean it in a positive way. Very dedicated to saying how exactly we deal with the enemy. Someone who had indicated that he understood very well that the enemy was absolutely vicious and brutal. I'm talking about what the White soldiers were doing in the townships. And he felt strongly that hitting Wits Command was something that he really wanted to do.

Here you have a young White person on whom suspicion will not easily fall. So, he's able to get around. He did the reconnaissance. We spoke endlessly about how he's going to do the operation, how he's going to get the vehicle manoeuvred and deal with the target itself. Extremely difficult conditions. You start looking at the cunning, the tenacity of the individual and the extent to which he's prepared to go. But he also understood very clearly that, and this was emphasised repeatedly, no operation is successful unless the operatives can get away. We always planned for that. If there's the slightest danger to the operatives, and that applied to Shongwe and Maseko as well, then we wouldn't proceed. We accepted that, yes, sometimes there will be casualties but those would not be of our own cadres.

The details of the operation are in the public domain, so I won't go into that here.

Colin Martin de Souza says he also did reconnaissance for the Wits Command operation, and he applied for amnesty for this. Was he involved?

No. We were surprised when he applied for amnesty and kept asking where does he come from? In fact, the lawyer who represented him also represented various people from the apartheid regime. I don't know de Souza at all.

Maybe he was in another MK unit?

No, Colin Martin de Souza was never a member of the ANC. We were quite shocked that he applied for amnesty and we kept saying look where does this guy come from? But he kept saying he was a member of the C whatever Unit. Now that is an indication that he came from the other side, that the people that were controlling them were in fact the enemy. And they were using a false flag operation posing as the ANC. I don't know him at all. We don't know who the hell he is.

Maybe at the time we were so caught up in our own testimony we didn't stand up and challenge someone like that, but he was not Special Ops. Absolutely not.

The Wits Command operation took place in July 1987. Were you still the Commander of Special Ops then?

At the time the operation was carried out I was still the Commander of Special Ops. I led Hein Grosskopf through all the processes for that operation. When he returned, he was taken into the newly formed Special Operations Command because of his planning ability and creativity, his thinking in different ways. I became the Chief of Ordnance in August 1987.

He was quite creative in carrying out the operation. And he thought through all the details. For example, in the TRC hearing he says, 'In order to create initial confusion about my identity, I wore a thick grey padded jacket and over this a white laboratory or medical coat. I intended to focus the attention of witnesses on easily identifiable items which, if I removed them, could create enough uncertainty to make my escape.'

Yes. We had long discussions with him around that. And the question was also let's talk about your escape. He said, well, there's this laboratory in the vicinity, this is what I will do, this is how I'm going to act. He needed those critical few minutes to be able to get away to melt into the crowds.

He was going to do a further operation, but then it's reported that you warned him that he can't go back into the country because he'd been exposed. How did you know that? Was it because (Minister of Law and Order) Adrian Vlok identified him in the media...

Yes, there were bits of information that were beginning to come out because they were looking for a White guy. I think somewhere amongst the people he might have been with, something might have been said inadvertently... and then his name was published...Our intelligence people were also keeping track and there was information that we were getting.

Anyway, we heard that there were suspicions that the operative was the grandson of a prominent judge and from a particular background and we then said, well, this looks far too close for comfort. I discussed it with him and took the decision that he should not go back into the country.

What operations did you have in mind for him?

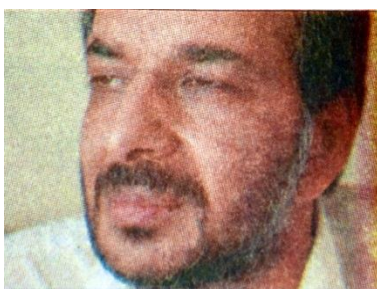
The idea was that he would carry out a number of operations like the Wits Command one and he would eventually base inside the country.

Why did you agree to him working alone instead of as part of a unit?

He was asked: do you need back-up in terms of the operation and support? He said he would carry out everything on his own. Very confident. There was the motorbike, which he was given because he wanted to use it to get to the border to get in and out after the operation. His evidence in the TRC covers it all very well. A mixed unit could also be difficult to keep long term unless there are specially prepared conditions and legends worked out, etc.

Grosskopf said that the arms, ammunition and explosives not needed for the Wits Command attack were cached in the vicinity of Emmarentia Dam on or about 24 July 1987. He conveyed these details to his superiors in MK upon his return from South Africa. So, what happened to those arms?

Well, all the arms that were cached were made known to the Defence Force after 27 April 1994, in terms of the negotiated settlement.



Rashid, earlier years

Now to the Dolphin Unit. Will you tell us about it? Was it, strictly speaking, a Special Ops unit because they seemed to be focusing on routine MK activities? It's the only unit you continue to remain Commander of even when you moved to Ordnance. Why was that? Why did it not fall under the new Commander of Special Ops?

Well, the Dolphin Unit carried out the Roodepoort Security Police Headquarters operation. There was a car bomb attack on the Krugersdorp police station and magistrates' court. They were also seen as a very successful unit. I discussed it with JS. I said I'm moving out of Special Operations and initially the thinking was that perhaps I should continue to be the supervisor, the overseer of Special Ops. And then there was a view that they needed to operate on their own because it was too much in the mould of JS and me.

But I think Chris Hani was also quite keen to get in on these kinds of operations and a decision was then taken that they should report to him. By then, I think Special Ops itself had also lost some of its lustre. With time, kind of operations it carried out had reduced somewhat. It was also the difficulty of cross-border operations, getting weapons in and so on.

I was moved out of Special Ops because of the problems that MK faced in getting weapons into the country. And there was a view that I'd been successful in getting weapons into the country, getting cadres in, understanding the operations terrain, and with the death of Cassius Make, they needed someone who could dedicatedly concentrate on getting weapons into the country. JS discussed this with OR and the decision was made that I should succeed Make in Military Headquarters. I then spoke to JS about the Dolphin Unit and knowing the background, there was this thinking that Dolphin could become very useful in beginning to build up large scale cachets inside the country. This is what we needed to do. You can't continuously send in a small amount and use it. To put it differently, you needed a bulk delivery system, which could then be broken up into smaller cachets that can be given to various units around the country.

By then Ordnance had a number of operatives. Some White South African cadres were also involved with Muff Anderson (based in Botswana and Zimbabwe). Some were operating in the Cape Town area. They would keep the weapons for a while and then try to create the DLBs or longer-term stashes. We also had the means to get much larger quantities of weapons into the country and this is where the Overland Operation (The Secret Safari, <http://youtu.be/foqURw31gmc>) came in. But that operation was not being used as efficiently and as effectively as it could be. The original idea for that came out of a discussion between JS and me, but because I was in Special Ops, JS had that placed under Ordnance and the Commands were set up. Rodney Wilkinson in London then got the vehicle built, and they had a special team that did the support end. Rodney didn't send stuff in. When I became Chief of Ordnance, I said, okay, I need to know what all the operations that people were carrying out were, what was Ordnance's capabilities, and I quickly realised that the capabilities were very few. At the pace that Ordnance was working it would probably not get much in.

They used to fill these quite large boxes, but with only a few items. It was a pistol, a few limpets, a few grenades. And then they would put in the Styrofoam to keep it stable. We were spending a fortune on this operation. We were subsidising these travels for the tourists. We needed to maximise what we delivered. If you had such large boxes and you filled them to capacity, it would be too hard to handle. So, comrade Benno Smith and I redesigned and made the boxes smaller. We customised the size. Previously each box had to fit into a particular slot because there were idiosyncrasies in terms of the way it was built. It wasn't accurately built. I said let us standardise the system to improve the turnover and get more materiel in.

And then you needed an improved mechanism to receive the materiel. The Safari Truck guys didn't have enough time; it was a short turnaround time. They basically delivered the materiel to somebody and then went on with their journey and onto

their next trip. So, we needed operatives who would receive the materiel, store it and unpack it because we couldn't pack those boxes into DLBs as they would be a dead giveaway if the enemy found them. They had to be unpacked, and the materiel dug into the ground and sketches made and sent back to us. We needed a unit that can do this for us. I spoke to JS about it and said here are these guys, the Dolphin Unit, who had carried out various operations very successfully – and that we should use them more effectively given our needs. We agreed that it was more important at that stage to be able to arm more units inside the country. So yes, the Dolphin Unit remained under my Command, but I don't have any regrets around it. They continued to operate successfully and expanded MK's operational capacity. In fact, a lot of the weapons that were needed for the SDUs (Self Defence Units) in later years came from them, from the stashes that we were able to create because of their ability to store them once we got them in.

Apart from suggestions that the Dolphin Unit should not have been in Special Ops, it's been said that you should not have Commanded the Unit as Mohamed Ismail, your brother, was in it? What's your response to this?

Well firstly, there was my brother, but Iqbal and I also grew up together, we were neighbours, we lived in the same complex in Vrededorp. They were not spared in terms of operational activity. They never got any special treatment or positions or anything arising from their work. Further, many of the people within MK who had brothers or relatives, especially in senior positions, were given cushioned jobs. That was not the case here. Secondly, they were used effectively in operations. But it also became a very natural way of operating. I used to see my parents occasionally when they came to Swaziland to see me, and I would have a chat on the side with my brother or Iqbal. Nobody ever realised what was going on. My mother eventually did because she said she realised at some point when they were carrying out operations that my brother would then be peering out of the windows and was always very nervous. But those things happen.

Nothing special was offered to him and in terms of commanding we just wanted to get the job done. And they understood it fully. Did people know that they were related to me when they were carrying out all these operations? No. So it's with hindsight that people said, well, this should never have happened. Look, I know that there have been various Commands that had family members. I made it clear right at the outset to JS who the guys were, and JS said, 'You know, you always speak to me about these chaps, recruit them and get on with it,' which is what I did. So, I'm personally quite surprised that it comes up. And all that crap that Indians were spared and weren't being put into operations and were given special positions, this gives a lie to that. And when you look at the kind of operations that they carried out, they weren't only ordinary pot-boiling operations. But also, should one put a unit which you've got a good working relationship with under some other Command? And what if they don't get dealt with in a particular way? I dealt with every single unit in a particular way, making sure that they have all their needs met and the ability to operate and carry out the operations successfully.

But if you look at the Dolphin's 35 or so operations wouldn't very few, strictly speaking, qualify as Special Operations targets?

Would you say the same about the McBride Operations? Special Operations was successful in its large-scale operations, and it carried out more of what you'd call ordinary, or in the parlance of MK potboiling, operations than any of the other units. Examine the records and see how many operations were carried out. People have a particular problem with Special Operations after the event and some people even said no, no, why is Rashid giving evidence in the TRC for all of MK. That's what some cadres have said. Do I have to apologise for being successful in fighting the struggle? In co-ordinating and directing cadres to do what was necessary?

And I'm saying that sorry guys, we've got the wrong end of the stick. We should be asking ourselves why the others weren't as successful or if they had been doing what was necessary. It would have placed less of a burden on Special Ops. Because there was a time when the word was we've got to up the ante. This was way back in 1985, long before even *Vula*. I remember having a discussion with Mac and JS and they said that the pressure is beginning to build up for the ANC to negotiate. We need to be in the strongest position we can be in, to be able to strengthen our hand in the negotiations.

The important thing is that the Dolphin Unit was able to operate very effectively and efficiently and survived through all their operational activities and was never uncovered. If you look at the nature of their targets, they were not always minor sabotage operations and were also selected for their political significance. One must examine if the other Commands were effective and fulfilled their mandates of carrying the struggle forward in the areas under their Command.

So, Mohamed drifts away from the Dolphin Unit in 1985, he said in the TRC, to be more active in the mass structures? His words: 'I worked with Shaik till about 1985 and then he felt that he could manage on his own, and that I had other – above board political activities and things, and he would go along himself. I then totally dissociated as Dolphin, but I did not take part in any activities after that, 1985, after the 13 incidents which were mentioned.'

Yes. What had happened is Iqbal had much more time. My brother was also with the business. Iqbal had said at the time that he had the time to be able to do much more, but he needed financial support, which is what was given to him. So, we paid more of his costs.

A sort of allowance?

He was given some allowance, but he was told to keep his cover in terms of that by continuing in the take-away business. But my brother continued to work with him, just not as actively or to the same extent as he'd done before.

Iqbal said that he and Mohamed worked jointly until 1985 and he then continued with further operations on his own.

Yes, but it's like what I've already said, that it was because he had more time.

According to Iqbal's testimony at the TRC he approached Mohamed to say he wants to get in touch with MK and could Mohamed help? And that's how Iqbal connected with you?

When I was meeting with the family in Swaziland, I took Mohamed aside and said who are you close to, who are you working with? He said he's doing some work with the TIC (Transvaal Indian Congress). He said Iqbal's been asking him about MK. So, I said why don't you guys form a unit, talk to him about it? And I think Iqbal's TRC testimony comes from that. They were all being pushed to go beyond the legal political structures inside the country to consider taking part in the armed struggle.

I recruit my brother first, but I say to him because he's my brother, I won't make him unit Commander. Also, I knew Iqbal was a bit more of a daring kind of person.

Why were they so successful? About 35 operations, unscathed?

They were careful, meticulous. They went through the processes. I gave them initial training in a hotel room, and subsequently they also went to the GDR for training.

Both of them went to the GDR?

Both.

How long did they go for?

I think about six to eight weeks.

And what was the training on?

Well, general underground work, survival, MCW, weapons and explosives training. We'd arranged it that they would go to London and Aziz would sort out things from there.

Why would you train so much in the GDR rather than the Soviet Union? Was the GDR specialising in urban guerilla warfare?

Yes. They in a sense moulded the training besides giving you normal training. That was the normal training I went through and then I had the additional training as a specialist. There were also underground cadres who came out for specific training. The Soviets didn't get involved in that kind of training. They took in large groups and gave them regular officer training as Sergeants and later as Officers and then sent the cadres back after nine months.

The security police were presumably not aware of you because otherwise they'd have monitored Mohamed?

Even though my older brother Yusuf was detained during the State of Emergency, they didn't draw the connections. It was a question of their record-keeping. As explained, I was arrested in December 1974 by the Security Police. But I was quite amazed that they then didn't follow through and ask the question what happened to this guy that was part of the Human Rights Committee. I had left a few months before Mohamed Timol and others were detained. Timol was taken into custody and then he left the country after that. Indres also left around that time as well. Because I'd adopted the name Rashid – and my younger brother is, as I said, actually called Rashid Ahmed – that may have helped to create a bit of a smokescreen.

About the Dolphin operation at the Temple of Israel Synagogue, I know the President of the country was going to speak there but do you think that it was appropriate to attack a place of worship? And would the target qualify in terms of a Special Ops operation?

The operatives inside the country were given the mandate to select the targets. The President was going to speak there. And not only there, but there was also that Warmbaths operation that they carried out where there was a similar presence of the President. So, they would be very clued up as to what might be a good target. It was time to show the regime up. That despite all the cordons, we could go through with operations. It was a bit of this daring-do kind of thing: well, we can, and we will. And we'll expose the regime. So that was how it was. It was not specifically because it was a synagogue but the fact that this is where the apartheid President was going to appear.

Now to the Gordon Webster-Robert McBride Unit. To what extent did they fit into Special Ops' mandate? Many of their operations seemed to be routine MK activities.

Again, here was the issue, was Gordon exposed inside the country? Could he go back and operate inside? Many of the African comrades invariably came out of the schools' protests and the Security Police networks could work out that a particular person had disappeared.

Gordon Webster comes out. We were looking for people with potential whom we could send back quickly. So, whenever someone interesting comes up, our Security guys would call me and say, 'Look into him to see if you can make use of him in Special Ops'. Mnisi was also involved here and felt we could send Gordon back into the country. We speak to JS about it. Here's someone from Wentworth in Durban, where there's the refinery and substations. I met with Webster and asked him what he's prepared to do, how would he survive, the usual kind of questions. He says I'm prepared to go in. We send him to Angola for training.

We give the instruction – train this guy quickly, two or three months, send him back to us. We work up a legend for him to say what he's been doing if he ever gets asked. We ask him: have you got people that you can survive with? 'Yes, I know friends,' he says. He goes in, and reports back, and we're in business.

Technically, Webster should've been passed on to Natal Command. But the ANC Security sent him to us because of their confidence in us. Gordon comes out again and we set up a communication system. They need weapons in; they've got cadres that can do operations. We didn't know about Robert and that his father had a panel beaters workshop. Robert also comes out.

We discuss with Gordon and Robert, if you were to do this, how would you do it? What can you do? Have you the support base? The more the operatives can do themselves the less we have to do. It's again a question of capability. So, we give them the weapons. They even come with a caravan. I can't remember whether we helped doctor it or they did the compartments themselves, and the caravan is beautiful. You can create so many compartments. The unit takes all the materiel. They're able to get themselves in and out of the country without any help from us. We talk about what kind of targets. Refineries, sub-stations? Yes, we can do this and that. Willing to do everything. Fantastic.

Initially it was very strictly controlled. You go for this sub-station. You go for that sub-station. We had the maps to guide us. They pulled one or two operations off. They also showed their mettle. These guys, they take the limpet mine and put glue on it so the police can't unscrew and defuse it easily. They also decided in one operation to set one charge off and then you have a second charge that they set with a slightly longer time, and the second charge goes off when the police come in to investigate after the first charge went off. They did that themselves. They had the creativity; they were very smart. We saw how they were operating as a self-sustaining unit. We give the equipment, we give materiel, money, and they carried out operations. And these were the kinds of targets that we were talking about.

But with time, we left the target selection to them. The amount of time and effort that we put in was very minimal. The results were spectacular. A lot of Commands had problems, with enemy agents, infiltration and so on. Our attitude was if Webster and McBride are successful in doing their operations, let them get on with it. It's only the nitpickers who then focus on, well, this unit should belong here and that one there. My attitude to it was, let's just get it done. My attitude was: hit the enemy as hard as you can. Give them no respite.

In fact, the Natal Command often got praised for the number of operations there, and we would laugh about this and say, you see, they're claiming what didn't really belong to them. Robert and Gordon and them came back with a report – they kept a slip of every single operation they carried out, newspaper cuttings of exactly what they did. They showed their ability to act on their own. And when Gordon was arrested, Robert went out and pulled off Gordon's rescue. Robert, Derrick and the others involved in the rescue are heroes of the struggle and held in high regard in MK and ANC ranks. And at the time of his arrest, we were considering pulling

Robert out. We said shouldn't you leave? Aren't you too well-known? Maybe the police know about you? No, he'll survive, he says. But, with hindsight, maybe we should have said that he'd outlived his operational usefulness. But he would always say, 'It's okay, I'll go and carry out one more operation' or 'Let me do this one and then I'll consider leaving'.

He was 23 at the time of his arrest.

Yes. I looked at all the records on what they'd carried out, how they carried it out, and so on. They were very successful.

McBride seemed to recruit too many people, too easily? Your view?

They recruited lots of people and they never told us about them. I was quite surprised when we went to the TRC that we had so many other comrades in that unit. They in a sense applied their own 'need to know'!

Why did the McBride unit attack Fairvale School? What was the political basis for that?

They were given the autonomy to select their targets. I don't think that was an attack on the school simply because it was a school. I can't remember right now why they did it.

Let's get to the Magoo's Bar operation. Did you agree with it?

Robert had given me a report saying that that is where members of the enemy security forces, police and intelligence got together for drinks. I had no doubt that Robert did proper reconnaissance. That there were enemy intelligence people that went to Magoos. And the cadres were targeting security personnel. That it didn't quite turn out like that, that the casualties didn't quite reflect that, is rather unfortunate. I have absolutely no doubt that Robert could not have done it any other way because he was very specifically trained.

If I'm correct, the ANC's second overall submission to the TRC suggested that the Magoo's Bar bombing was the result of faulty intelligence gathered by McBride's unit?...

It may be assumed to be such. That depended on Robert and them. They didn't specifically tell us that this is the target we're going to hit, and this is a bar. Their instruction was to hit enemy personnel, and they said yes. We also didn't want to call comrade Robert willy-nilly every time out of the country and get them to say what they were doing or planning to. And I had sufficient confidence in them. The way in which they carried out operations was meticulous. So, I had absolutely no reason to doubt that if they said they were carrying out an attack against enemy personnel then that is indeed what it was. And the ANC sort of accepted that maybe it was faulty intelligence. But maybe they overheard people talking and they understood them to be intelligence personnel. I can't say for sure. But you put it to

Robert, and he will tell you he's certain of his facts and I have absolutely no reason to doubt him. He took responsibility for it and again I say I had no reason to doubt his word.

Interview 4

In this interview, there'll be a wide range of questions cutting across various operations and other issues. These questions flow from further research since the last interview and more interviews done with Special Ops cadres and others. Let's start with this. There were several operations that Special Ops planned that didn't work out. Will you tell us why?

There was a whole raft of operations that we'd intended carrying out which never really came to fruition. Sometimes operatives were arrested or killed, sometimes even just after crossing the border, sometimes at an enemy roadblock. We wanted to hit the Upington bridge, the Umfolozi bridge, and a military plane taking soldiers and materiel in support of the Boers' war efforts in Namibia and so on. With the Umfolozi bridge, the weapons were taken in but the units got arrested before we tried to get them in on two occasions. You need to also investigate the operation we planned on the oil tanker shipping terminal in Durban and the shootout after the unit attacked the Mobil refinery. Those guys were trained to put limpet mines on ships as they were off-loading oil coming in. But that didn't happen.

A bit more on the Umfolozi bridge?

Well, we tried twice. The first time the comrades got from Mozambique into Swaziland during the day and they went to the area where they normally used the taxis to get away from the border area further into the country, but they were ambushed and got involved in a shootout. The cadres had very small pistols and unfortunately, they perished.

Do you know their names?

There was Derek and Danny Boy. They were the second wave of some of the people that we brought in.

The first wave we sent in from Swaziland and then subsequently we tried again because we thought maybe this time let's try the Lesotho route. So, I went with the cadres down to Lesotho. But I didn't know the guys that were operating from there. We were given somebody who was supposed to assist us. You know, I never really felt very comfortable with him, but I mean I didn't know the set up. When it came to border crossings, I was very dependent on the cadres that operated in those areas. I had extreme difficulty operating in the border areas. At some point, as I said in a previous interview, T-man (real name: Ernest Pule) and company would say 'No Chief, you know what, you've become a hindrance because then we have to explain

who you are, what you're doing in the border areas. So, we would prefer you to just stay back and we'll take the cadres in.'

As for the Upington bridge, is it true that the operation failed because the device that was used was either malfunctioning or the comrades didn't know how to use it?

The aim was to cut across the bridge at an angle, with two thirds of the bridge on one side and when the train was going to cross, its weight would also help to bring the bridge down. I think the comrades didn't fully understand how to use the thing. They lay the charges on the line. They were then supposed to also create a back-up so that if anything goes wrong there's a second trigger mechanism. They didn't do that. They threw all the excess equipment, the back-up stuff, into the river. When they came back, I asked them why didn't you just go back and put the back-ups on? No, well, they'd gotten rid of that, the trigger mechanism.

This is where it comes to the question of technical training, ability, because the guys would be, okay, we've got to do this, we've laid it out, now we've got to go. Within minutes, of course, the enemy tended to deploy around an operation. They would start cordoning off roads and start searching. The cadres withdrew, but then it doesn't go off... The cadres were taught how to create back-ups but perhaps it was too strenuous under operational circumstances or they didn't remember that. So, they set the electrical systems up and then they got rid of all the other materiel.

I asked, well, why didn't you just wait for the next train to come and set the thing off? Their response was: 'We didn't think of it at the time as we just wanted to get away in case somebody saw us.' So, there are all these operational uncertainties and the like as well. And the thinking amongst them was we've got the bulk of the equipment in a DLB so we should send a unit back. And we then tried – but there were two units that, unfortunately, perished going through Lesotho. We were trying to get one unit back to the Upington area and the other to the Umfolozi area. With the cadres that went through Lesotho I think there was an informer who gave them away and I got word that they were hunting for me, so I had to just lie low.

Isn't it a pity that these operations didn't take place because they would have been quite powerful?

Yes absolutely. Very powerful. It's so unfortunate they didn't take place. And the timing was perfect because it was leading up to the Namibian negotiations period and we really wanted to show the Boers that they couldn't go on; they must give way to SWAPO (South West African Peoples' Organisation).

The other disappointment was with the operation that Lux Marumo was leading. They were meant to use an anti-aircraft missile to hit a military plane. The difficulty was getting the stuff in through the traditional way – because it's very sensitive to heat. Normally we tended to mount these things at the bottom of a vehicle, but you couldn't do it in this case – and we couldn't find an alternative way in time.

That's the operation for which Klaas and H       also did reconnaissance?

Yes. We thought Lux and them had the kind of facilities inside the country to establish themselves. We managed to get the materiel for the aircraft attack through from Mozambique to Swaziland, but Nkomati disturbed that.

Later, when we had re-established ourselves in Botswana, we thought we could get Lux and the other comrades to cross the border with it – but then there was this woman that was one of T-man's contacts who turned out to be an enemy agent and sold them out, leading to several arrests.

Who were the people that were involved in the Uppington bridge attempt?

Khayiyana, Zandi, Dudley and Monare.

You said when you did a reconnaissance of the Mobil Oil Refinery that the operation was not doable because of the negative consequences it would have for the nearby residents. But Clifford Brown and other comrades were sent in to do the operation later. What made it now doable?

Clifford Brown and his unit were sent in to carry out the operation against fuel tanker ships. When they could not procure the diving equipment and they were just waiting inside the country they asked to start carrying out other operations. With the refineries we originally were aiming at the fractionating towers. All the reading and background checks we did made it clear that if the fractionating towers went down there would be a vapour cloud explosion. The oil separates at a high temperature and there is also production of gas, and it could drift and devastate an area of two or three kilometers around it, if it explodes and an entire area could be destroyed. But when the cadres hit Sasol in 1980, they hit the tank farms and there was an explosion and a ball of flame, but not this huge explosion like you would get with a fractionating tower. With the fractionating tower at Sasol, we asked the comrades when they returned, why didn't you hit them? They said, 'Man, there was too much activity around it. There are workers there constantly. You don't want someone to stop you – then you have to shoot the guy or run away'. When the tank farms were hit, the fuel was ignited and the burning process began – but because the tanks are contained inside a well, this contained the fuel gushing out of the tanks. Also, the fuel burns immediately and there isn't that much of a vapour cloud created. So, we learnt from experience.

Cliffy and them said they wanted to hit the Mobil refinery. But that was not their primary target. They were trained to be frogmen to put charges on an oil tanker ship and the pipes so that when it was pumping oil or fuel, the ship and the line leading into the refinery would be destroyed. There was extensive reconnaissance and research done on shipping. For Blacks to buy the diving equipment in South Africa, would have raised suspicions. If we had White comrades, it might have been easier to buy the equipment, and they would've looked less suspicious diving into the sea. We were making plans to get the operatives the diving equipment or send internationalists to buy it for them. But unfortunately, that didn't work out.

So, we had to send them materiel to hit the oil refinery. The explosives for this were taken in by Klaas on his own, not with Hélène. But Clifford and them said they couldn't find it. They said when they got to where the DLB was, they found lots of dirt bags there. Klaas hadn't dug deep enough so a lot of the topsoil had washed away because there were heavy rains. Klaas had put all the stuff into dirt bags.

If the dirt bags were lying there why didn't somebody else discover them and open them?

Because it was in one of these remote areas. It wasn't quite on the dunes; it was lying there in an area where people normally dump things.

Tell us a bit more about why the Clifford Brown unit moved away from their main target to the refinery?

They had a problem getting the diving equipment. We thought instead of sending the tanks and other equipment from outside, the comrades must get them inside. But they had been trained in the GDR for this operation, and they were not familiar with the diving equipment in the country. As I said about the GDR, the guys there were much more amenable to training people specifically for an operation whereas the Soviets focused more on general training. This operation was meant to be a complement to the first Sasol operation aimed at a major economic target – the country's oil and fuel supplies.

At that time, we'd also adopted the attitude that we didn't necessarily need to go into all this meticulous planning and in a sense sometimes that's where mistakes were made by units on the ground. Or maybe we'd taken our eye off the ball and if we had been more supportive, like say with Lux's unit, and had first created a base from which they could operate, they might have been more successful. Sometimes cadres would say they're able to do certain things – and we said, okay, why not let them do what they can? But maybe we should have questioned them more and checked more carefully what was workable.

Cliffy and the cadres did hit the refinery but during the getaway, they saw a police car. From what I understand from newspaper reports, they opened fire on this police car. But we don't know the exact circumstances – there was a skirmish, a shoot-out and our guys, unfortunately, died. There were four cadres killed.

Hélène said she used to do analyses of newspapers and magazines like Paratus, the official magazine of the SADF. She recalls that there was something in a local newspaper about an attempt on the Umfolozi bridge.

No, I think the police eventually found the cache because there were floods in the area and the stuff was in the foothills along the river.

The reconnaissance for the oil pumping stations was done. But was the operation not carried out or only partially?

Yes, a lot of the reconnaissance was done on the pipeline from Durban to Johannesburg. We wanted to bring down the two pipelines that transported oil and refined fuel at the same time so that there would be a crisis in the delivery of fuel in the reef, which is the heart of the economy. The issue with regards to the pipelines was I think that some of the cadres that we were trying to get in also ran into a SADF cordon. The security forces were continuously searching vehicles and when the cadres went in, they were involved in a skirmish.

More units were sent in but never returned to Maputo. We later learnt that some pump stations were hit but were not reported on at the time. Sadly, none of the cadres for that operation survived and because of the remoteness of the area, the enemy was able to cover up what happened.

Phiwe also went into Northern Natal to deal with the northernmost pipelines and just disappeared. We don't know what happened to him.

Just disappeared?

Yes, strange. He had managed to survive the Matola attack because he ran away in all the confusion. We don't know what the actual events were that night because the comrades were all lined up against the wall and killed, but Phiwe managed to escape.

Unlike the regional and other MK machineries, Special Ops was meant to focus on national targets – but did you recruit comrades taking into account their capacity to be mobile in the country or in a province as a whole?

Yes. We always tried to draw in cadres that were familiar with the area in which the target was but quite often we would rely on one or two comrades from the operational area and others were added on. If you send a cadre to Durban – even if he is Zulu-speaking – who doesn't know the first thing about the city center or Durban station and doesn't know from the moment he gets there what he's going to do, you could have problems.

A comrade interviewed said that one of the difficulties with the 1976 generation was that most of them hadn't been outside the townships they'd lived in. For example, if they were from a particular area in Mamelodi, they didn't know other areas of Mamelodi, let alone other townships around Pretoria like Soshanguve or Atteridgeville and still less did they know the city areas or suburbs of Pretoria, and this was a handicap in deploying them effectively. Your views on that?

Here you are talking of school children with little or no external influence. Even though some of them were older because of the educational system, they came out of narrow enclaves. So, they only knew the areas that they came from. So, if they came from Soweto, they knew only a bit of Soweto. This is where the cultural or

tribal issues also came in. This is where people like me – more travelled, a bit older, a bit more mature, who'd read more, had more and different experiences of life – came into our roles. I mean, some of '76 youth were in standard eight to matric and they went out to go and fight. How do you take these youth through the process and train them to become underground guerrillas? It takes time. We had to pair them up with older cadres who had more experience in life.

Why were you not involved in any way with the November 1985 attempt on Sasol, after which Barney, Victor Khayiyana and Vincent Sekete were killed in a shootout with the security forces?

I was in Lusaka then because we had to leave Mozambique after the Nkomati Accord. Slovo had taken the decision that Barney and his unit had the autonomy to continue to operate from Swaziland and report to him directly. I don't think Slovo paid much direct attention to the details of planning for Special Ops anymore. Basically, he gave Barney resources, and they would do their thing.

They no longer continued to report to me. The guys that remained in Mozambique were Timol, Sunny (Singh) and others. Slovo was also in Lusaka. I had no direct command over that operation because Barney was given the independence by Slovo to continue with more operations on Sasol. I felt that there was an over-focus by Barney on Sasol. His whole life was absorbed in trying to bring Sasol down.

It's always bothered me that there's something not quite right about what happened in that shootout when he was killed. How they went in, were operating and the exact timing of it.

Len Rasegatlé, who was in G5 survived from the early '80s to '89 until he emerged from the underground. Did he have anything to do with Special Ops?

No, he was quite pally with Gebuza and Obadi, but he was essentially part of the G5 unit.

Was the Ahmed Kathrada unit linked in any way to Special Ops? They were connected to Hassen Ebrahim in Botswana.

No. Hassen and I became friends when I first went to Botswana and I met him through Rahim Khan, who I knew from the time when he used to visit Indres and them before going into exile.

But was Hassen involved with Special Ops?

No, he would sort of support us but was not involved in Special Ops.

As a whole, how many of the targets that a reconnaissance was done on led to operations being carried out on them?

Most, depending on the nature of the operation. Reconnaissance is essential as every cadre was told. It was part of your infantry training. You have to understand what the local conditions on the ground are. In fact, in some cases double reconnaissance was carried out. Often the initial reconnaissance period was done by internationalists and after that the cadres who were to carry out the operation went in to do reconnaissance to confirm what it is that they were going to do – and only then would we go into the final operational plan.

To get back to the *Green Book* within which context the role of Special Ops must be located. This was raised in the first interview. To take some issues further. I'm told it was rejected by many NEC members because of the structure it proposed, which seemed to them to be taking power away from the NEC and giving it to another organ that would in effect override the NEC? So, NEC members felt that their positions were being undermined. Do you know anything about that?

Well, look, I don't know if there would have been a structure proposed that would undermine the ANC NEC – because the ANC's approach was very much always that the Political rules over the Military. All the structures were created like that. After the restructuring, it was the NEC, PMC (Politico-Military Council) – which replaced the Revolutionary Council – and the Military Headquarters. I think where there was resentment and a bit of unhappiness where people felt that JS was too influential with OR, and this partly became an anti-communist thing, and OR had previously supported *Operation Okhela* and that was a bit of a botch-up. And now with the creation of Special Ops, once again the NEC was asked to give a mandate for it to be excluded from being told about operations.

One of those whom I interviewed said that Special Ops paid lip service to Politics being in command of the Military...

We never rejected the notion of Politics being in command.

I was told Special Ops was too militaristic. When this issue was raised with Special Ops' leaders you would say 'what politics, we are political'?

Well, I can guess who's been saying that to you. But look, first and foremost the creation of Special Operations was in the context of special circumstances. And we've covered that in detail. And nobody has ever put it to me that we pooh-poohed political control. Basically, we were told OR had a mandate from the NEC and based on that, we fulfilled our mandate and obligations. That's what we did. Some of the battles that were going on within the NEC were not relevant to our view that the Military, including Special Ops, was subordinate to the Political.

Overall, what do you think were some of Special Ops key strengths and weaknesses?

I would say the strengths were leadership, detailed Command planning, trust of the cadres, the will of the cadres to carry operations out, the success itself of

carrying out operations – because it feeds and encourages cadres to say we must fulfil the commands and instructions.

Weaknesses? I think the biggest issue was crossing the borders; the vulnerability of getting people in; meeting people at the borders; pulling them out; and over time it was becoming much more difficult. There was concentration or a focus of the enemy on us, but we tried to cover ourselves and we didn't behave irresponsibly. I think some of the other Commands were much more visible in Swaziland and other places. And I think the enemy had their hands full looking at them – and that gave us space to quietly continue moving in.

Getting weapons in was always difficult. And we were very dependent on the internationalists. We had to get the right people. I was a bit surprised that the Boers didn't look at some of these people carefully as there was always intelligence sharing between the regime and the intelligence services of some of the neighbouring countries.

Some of the people that we recruited were known communists in their countries, especially those working in Mozambique. The internationalists were based mainly in Mozambique, very few in Swaziland. I don't think they believed Whites would support the armed struggle, especially those from other countries, or even Whites from our country. So, they became very valuable in getting arms across.

You're dealing with the challenges you overcame. But what were some of the weaknesses you weren't able to overcome?

Well, cadres go inside, they have to survive. Do they have the means to? And not in all cases can you prepare a base like we did for Voortrekkerhoogte. Big costly exercise. Long term planning. Communications would again be an area of weakness. Even in Johannes Mnisi's case, he says he signalled to George in code over the phone that he was arrested but George didn't pick that up – and then came that disaster (George Ndlovu and Chris Nungu being killed). You depended totally on what you were told by that cadre at that time. The same happened to Sydney Ramaselele. He's one of the operatives that we sent inside. He doesn't feature very prominently. Comes from Eastern Transvaal. He goes in and after a while his uncle who happens to be a policeman sells him out and takes him over to the police. Again, because of the communication difficulties, the guys outside don't pick up that he's signalling that he's been arrested.

He manages to convince the Boers that he'd work for them and says he'd come to me and arrange for a unit to be sent in with equipment, and the police could arrest them. He comes out of the country and tells me what happened. He said he's prepared to go back and work with them as a double or a triple agent and he had ideas about how this could be managed.

I was very tempted to go for it. I asked *Imbokodo* to check him out. But they couldn't make a final decision on him.

So, what happened to him?

We couldn't send him back as no decision was made about him until it didn't seem right any longer and he remained in exile.

Doing what?

If we could get him to eventually get explosives into Vlakplaas and blow it up whilst their commanders and the Askari's are inside. My thoughts were of using a radio-triggering device.

Well, he didn't cause losses. I think we lost out because here's a guy who says I'm prepared to go back, work with the *Askaris*, be seen to be doing things for them but I'll never sell anybody out. I'll bide my time until the right moment and then I'll hit them. It could take a year. It could take longer. My attitude is let's go for it, guys, but I'm not a free agent, I have to abide by the rules of the organisation.

Of course, a major issue for Special Ops, MK and the ANC was the relationship between the mass and armed struggles. How do you respond to those who say that while Special Ops did great work against formidable odds, you were a special elite task force whose role boosted people's morale and inspired them and to some extent mobilised them, but you did not have a material effect on the mass struggles. Let me read to you what Rocky Williams writes about the weaknesses of Special Ops: '...criticisms of its operations from the 'left', however, maintained that spectacular military operations of the Voortrekkerhoogte type were no substitute for the task of rooting the military underground in the local population. There were definite reasons for a shift to the special operations-type activities, however, and this was reflected in the fact that Special Operations, initially under the command of the late Joe Slovo, was placed under the direct command of the President of the ANC, Oliver Reginald Tambo, with the Commander of MK, Commander Joe Modise, retaining only nominal oversight over this division.'

He goes on to say: 'It was felt that a dedicated Special Operations Division was required for two reasons. The first reason was to provide MK with a proven military capability that would allow it to operate deep within South African territory and provide demonstrable support to the unfolding mass resistance within the country. This was not intended to be a substitute for the building of a robust military capability within the country (a longer-term project) but was intended to keep the 'pot boiling' whilst the process of consolidating the internal political and military underground progressed. The second was the fact that a degree of unease existed amongst some senior members of the ANC as to the viability of informing the ANC's National Executive Committee (NEC) of the details of highly sensitive operations. It was felt that the process of securing NEC approval for all major operations could compromise these very operations if such information was either advertently or

inadvertently leaked and, it was accordingly argued, a much tighter chain of command and control over such operations was required. Tambo accordingly retained control over Special Operations and basically kept both the ANC's NEC and the commander of MK 'within the loop' to the extent that this did not violate the military principles of surprise and security.'

And he says: The effects of this strategy were twofold. On the one hand, it resulted in a situation where the Special Operations Division, due to its profile, responsibilities and capabilities, began to assume a much greater responsibility for the conduct of internal military operations than it should have done. On the other, the preferential location of the Special Operations Division under the command of Tambo created a degree of resentment and mistrust amongst MK rank-and-file and strained relations between the division and the army commander, Joe Modise – a phenomenon not unusual within those armed forces, be they irregular or regular, that maintain specialist special operations capabilities.'

The most important factor that Rocky Williams is not addressing is that of armed propaganda. The effect of hitting at the enemy where the enemy is not able to hide the operational capacity of Special Ops and MK and the effect that this has on our own people in order to mobilise them to become part of the organisation and awaken them from the dormant position that the people were in at the time. The visit to Vietnam had highlighted the need to draw the ordinary people into the struggle, to support the struggle generally and to draw them into the armed struggle. If one looks at the effect that the attack on Sasol had on the masses of the people who visibly saw the enemy's infrastructure burning – it re-ignited the flame of resistance amongst them. The operations showed that the enemy is not invincible. It also raised questions for the White populace as to the reassurance that they were given by the regime that they had broken the back of the ANC and MK.

Considering what I've just said, some of the other issues raised require quite a detailed response. Briefly, in a sense some of what Rocky says is true and a valid criticism, but at the same time we were starting to have internally based units. For example, Gordon Webster and Robert McBride. As I said, the ANC security people referred Gordon Webster to us. They said, look here's an interesting young guy. We interviewed the guy, had a discussion with JS – and the attitude was what does it take in terms of effort to get this guy going? Not a huge amount. Webster says he has access to people inside the country and can form a unit. We say, okay, let's get this guy in and see what he can do. If he succeeds, we've achieved something. If he doesn't, the effort that is put in is not all that great. But we were also looking at the longer-term benefits. We needed structures based inside the country. We asked Webster to hit power stations or transformer sub-stations.

Quite often it depended on the cadre – what do you know and what are you prepared to do with what resources? What do you need to survive? How vulnerable

are you? Here was a young guy almost nobody knew had come out. He was freshly out and we sent him for quick training and sent him back in.

Take the Dolphin Unit. You know that there were personal relations, involved – my brother was in it. You get the unit to operate. What does it take us? Almost nothing. The unit could travel out. We prepare a vehicle for them. They take their own weapons in, they carry out operations, small operations initially, and then over time we take them to larger operations – and they're successful and were never arrested. Weren't these internal operations? And the term that Rocky uses 'internal military operations', it raises the issue that Special Ops always intended to have internal units – but that wasn't easy.

And yes, we carried out small operations too. Pot-boiling operations, as they're called. In between our big operations. How do we keep the struggle going? You have to have continuous operations to keep MK alive in the minds of the people and to keep the enemy busy.

If you have a unit like the Dolphin unit that is well based inside and can survive over the long term, they can carry out big and small operations. And if we can successfully handle them without it detracting too much from our own mandate, why not do it? These were the kinds of practical issues that came up constantly. What is there we can do? Is there a hard and fast distinction between one and the other? Also, we go back to that question: how long can you continue to operate in this cross-border manner, recruit internationalists, send units in with all the difficulties that it entailed in carrying out the operations?

On the other hand, that needed to be done as well. So yes, there's a lot more that can be said – and we can site actual examples of this. And this wasn't the only unit. If you took (Hein) Grosskopf. We sent him in from outside but in the long term what was the thinking behind it? Get people to begin to base inside the country. We sent Marion Sparg in. Had she succeeded in staying in and surviving, we had intended to begin to build a unit around her and steer it towards bigger operations. What defines a special operation is the strategic target that you hit. But at the same time, as was said, you've got to chip away at the block. The question you asked earlier – so why didn't you continue hitting at the power stations and infrastructure? Yes, hitting big power stations at the same time is a Special Ops operation, but you can have a unit of one hitting a pylon or several pylons every week. Would that be a Special Ops operation or a potboiling one?

I'm just tossing things around. We recognised that there were criticisms that we were supposed to hit major strategic targets, but we were carrying out these small operations as well. Just because we have the ability to also do it? Nothing stops you from doing these routine operations – we threw it back at them. If it's so easy for us, it should even be easier for you because that's your main mandate. It isn't our main mandate. I'm giving you a sense of the debates taking place within MK and the ANC...

Rocky's not accepting some things. He says most military forces have a Special Ops unit. We were not constituted or trained in the way of classic forces so we shouldn't go there...But again, it takes a special calibre of person to be part of a Special Ops unit. About the resentment and mistrust he refers to, I don't know if this was meant to be in the rank and file towards leadership. I say no, in fact, there was a huge amount of trust between cadres and the Command of Special Ops...

No, he's referring to different Commands of MK...

I think there was a bit of resentment. It came more from other Commands to different degrees at different times about the resources we were given. But, of course, sometimes it would be exaggerated because they thought we are getting a whole lot more resources than we did...but then we weren't wasteful of it. At the same time, they were very complimentary about the fact that we carried out the operations. But, yes, there was a bit of resentment. And when they talk of preferential treatment, perhaps they should define what that was in terms of.

Yes, we got access to resources. The rest of it is what we did ourselves, the way we operated, the way we led. It was all up to us. Tambo didn't tell us how to operate or what we had to do. He simply made sure that we got the resources that we needed, subject to us explaining to them what we wanted. And maybe I should add this, I remember the one time I submitted the plan of Special Operations to MK headquarters and said we needed certain resources. So, the comrades said to me, 'No, you can't have all that.' So, I said okay, if you tell me what I can have, you tell me of this list of operations what you want me to cut. Now the comrades found that an extremely arrogant response. I thought: you want me to carry out operations, you want me to maintain the full list but you want to cut my budget. How do I do that?

And this was a senior comrade. And he felt deeply offended. I mean I was being very realistic and honest about it. They had to give resources appropriate to what we do, then check whether we carry those things out. OR made that very clear to us. There are no unlimited resources, but we will give you resources related to what you can carry out. There are so many ways of answering what Rocky says...

Yes, I think from JM's (Modise's) perspective there was a bit of resentment. You know, the good things were not brushing off onto him. But at the same time, he was very pleased that at least we were able to carry these operations off, and in fact JS told me that the one person he actually kept informed of the operational plans was JM, not after the execution but prior to, and none of those things leaked. So, though there have been criticisms of JM and question marks about him – I've never had that difficulty nor did JS. You know, JS said this man is the army Commander. My instruction was don't talk to anybody. 'If anybody asks you anything you say, listen, I'm under instructions to refer everybody to me, but if JM talks to you, explain to him. But don't go into too much detail...'

Did JM actually ask you now and then what was going on? Did he prod you a bit?

He would talk to me but he would never directly say come and tell me what you chaps were planning or whatever. Sometimes, in a general way he would say, 'Hey, Rashid man, what are you guys up to? When can we expect something?' Don't worry Commander, it's coming soon, I would say. JM was smart enough not to push you.

Again, I think Rocky makes too much of the terms 'resentment' and 'mistrust' that he uses... I think the rank and file all wanted to be part of Special Ops. We sadly had to say to them, there's no way we can accommodate all of you in Special Ops because we just don't have the capacity to plan for everybody. But we also had the responsibility to encourage people to work with their Commands and trust them.

The mistrust, I think, Rocky is talking about – because I remember having discussions with him about it – is more between cadres and their Commands, not towards Special Ops, but more within them. Maybe it was about why they were not carrying out their operations?

Special Operations units were given preferential treatment but they also had to hit very special targets – that's the nature of these operations. The only units in Special Ops that continued to operate are the ones that succeeded in their operations. Otherwise, they got closed down. Special Operations was there for specific targets and sometimes units were created for a particular operation and then they were disbanded and cadres go back to their normal tasks until they were brought together just to focus on a specific target.

But was it a major issue? Yes and no. I think cadres outside Special Ops would like to have been in a position of saying yes, we too could hit these strategic targets. And if they could not do that then of course there is this kind of resentment. And even now I know, for instance – a few years ago they created a Medals Committee and they were talking about giving medals, and they said they wanted to start at the general level and talk about how they can give medals to everyone – and then they said they didn't have enough resources.

And I said, guys, what is important is to give medals to the people that really carried out operations and were given a mandate and task and fulfilled that and acted in a heroic way. Of course, comrades then come back and say, 'Ja, you see, you are talking about Special Ops'. And I said: so, why not? These are the people that gave up their lives. They did what they had to do. This is where the problem of the ANC is – because they then say, 'okay let's spread this, give everybody an MK medal' – and I'm saying not everybody was a hero. You are diluting the value of the medal.

Rocky refers to criticisms of the Left that the Voortrekkerhoogte and other operations could not substitute for the rooting of the military underground in the local population. I agree totally. It was not a substitute. It was never meant to be. It was meant to, in fact, support the other MK units, and Special Ops itself over time recognised that it needed to be rooted among the people.

So, I agree with him – but again in a nuanced way. Rocky talks about Joe Modise's lack of oversight of Special Ops being a problem. Initially, JM had no oversight of Special Ops, but over time Special Ops was located under the Military Headquarters with JS being there – and he had oversight over me as Commander. When the MK Command was properly constituted, JS was Chief of Staff. I then reported to JS, no longer directly to the President, so that mandate changed. Maybe we never quite clarified that, but in that sense, JM had direct responsibility as Commander. And JS never had difficulty reporting to JM or having a friendly discussion with him.

The context in which Special Ops was formed must be considered. What I said in the first interview provides a response to Rocky. Let me repeat some of that. Special Ops was created in order to deal with large-scale military targets. MK was largely operating based on cross-border operations. The other kind of operations were coming from the Western Front and from the Maputo area where cadres were going into the rural areas, but this wasn't really taking off because of the problems that we had of the lack of a firm political base inside the country. And herein lies a problem – because any guerilla struggle, any liberation movement, needs to be based inside the country, needs to be able to operate among the people.

The problem in South Africa is that the terrain conditions never allowed for that. In fact, there are no ideal conditions for guerrillas to operate within. If you look at African liberation struggles you had large bush areas, forests, mountains. In South Africa those conditions didn't exist. And most guerrilla armies operate within a rural setting. In South Africa this was not the case. To compound the problem attempts being made to embed within the rural population failed. As explained, there was a lack of local support and suspicions of the people about our cadres. There was inadequate political preparation. There's also the issue of enemy infiltration in the rural areas and putting fear into the people. The *izinduna* and other traditional leaders were coopted by the state on whom they were dependent.

And in the '70s the ANC, to an extent, was seen as bit of a spent force because there was very little going on militarily. Politically we had the re-awakening from 1972-73 onwards, with the labour struggles, but it was still an emerging struggle. Taking all this into account, how exactly do you operate? Can you embed yourself amongst the people? This is a question that was raised repeatedly and everybody understood that in order to succeed, to put it in nutshell, you've got to be like a fish in water. The areas where we could operate was within the townships, around the cities, where you had the greatest political awareness amongst ordinary people and even then, it wasn't an awareness where people would openly welcome the ANC, without the enemy being alerted to it.

Too few people were involved in the struggle until 1976. Yes, there were structures like the Human Rights Committee, which was part of the ANC underground, but they basically were there to keep things alive. You had people coming in from London and other places to carry out leaflet bombs. There was also complacency amongst the regime believing that they were entrenched. Even though there were changes in the neighbouring countries of Mozambique, Swaziland and so on, the regime felt

that they had a sufficient buffer to be able to hold off any guerrilla force that may operate from the border areas.

The cross-border operations led to a number of casualties, with that *cordon sanitaire* of about 40 kilometers I spoke about.

We needed to raise the level of awareness, the consciousness amongst the people and this is where Special Operations came in. We said let's create something where we can build consciousness amongst ordinary people and make them see that the enemy is not invincible, and to win their imagination and support.

Special Ops success led, to a degree, to changing of the situation in the country. Within a short space of time, we carried out a number of bold strikes. That made people start seeing themselves as being part of the ANC. Now Rocky and others say Special Ops' operations detracted from mass struggles – my view is that it's not one or the other. We all recognised that we needed to be based within the country to grow. But the nature of Special Operations was also such that you needed to have special planning, special equipment, so we needed to get cadres going back and forth. For Rocky to say that Special Ops wasn't rooted among the people is a misunderstanding of our role. About pot-boiling operations that we carried out, where the opportunities arose and we could carry out certain operations we did. Whether they were large or small, they all went into building up the capacity of MK. Also, in a sense, Special Operations spurred the other commands to also rise to the challenges...

So, I don't think it's fair to say that Special Operations detracted from the mass struggles. Maybe we should just look at the terminology that's being used. He says that spectacular military operations like Voortrekkerhoogte were not a substitute for rooting the military underground in the population. Fair point, we're not saying that the criticism is not valid – but this was recognised at all times. Those operations were not meant to be a substitute. And the ANC was very conscious of the need to do something about this, and it started doing so, and this is where *Operation Vula* comes in. It was recognised that we needed to get operations based amongst the people, create a greater link between the Political and the Military structures within the country.

Part of the problem is also that once you begin to create those kinds of structures, you also need to make sure that they're able to carry out operations. And part of my criticism of *Vula*, as I said earlier, was that they were successful in creating the political structures inside the country; they were sending military cadres to join them or training people within the country – but were they able to carry out operations? Because it's through carrying out operations also that you need to ensure that your structures survived – because if they're not tested in that way, the first time you carry out an operation and you suffer casualties, your structures collapse. So, it's not an easy thing. And these are valid criticisms from Rocky, but it's also that you must look at the situation within the country where the ANC was then, what we were able to do and to be very practical.

As to Rocky's questions about the command structure, why it was organised in that way, the fact that it reported only to OR – there were other reasons for that, which we've covered already...

Yes, quite extensively...

Special Ops was never meant to be a substitute for normal MK operations but to bolster the struggle to a new level.

Most guerrilla struggles operate from a rural base or border areas because they have their bases in neighbouring countries and then work their way towards the center. In South Africa, in a sense, what we were able to do was to get to where we had the support – and this was amongst the more awakened working class within the townships – and from there we were able to move. In fact, with the Transvaal Urban Command and the Natal Urban Command with cadres being rooted amongst the people, some of the townships eventually became no-go zones. We were also able to create units which had hand grenades which cadres would toss onto Caspers in the night, and where the enemy also feared going into those townships.

So, in South Africa we were able to create a new type of guerrilla warfare working from within the center of the country outwards, trying to move the struggle into the White areas. And I think that was quite successful. In fact, the Boers came up with the concept of area warfare for areas where they could not move around freely. They wanted to contain the struggles in these areas. It took an enormous amount on their part to try to do so. There were major political gains also being made by the people. The youth, the unions and others made a big impact. This and the military struggle created a crisis for the regime.

I think a lot of the criticism of MK is not well-founded. These people don't understand the nature of guerrilla warfare, what we were trying to do, and, at the end of the day, it was clear that the struggle was a political struggle, not a military struggle. People say, oh, but you know, these were just one-armed bandits, they had no little or no effect. They don't understand or don't want to understand – and simply say, oh, well, you know, look at MK, how ineffective it was against the SADF, if it weren't for De Klerk and the changes that he brought about, the ANC would never have succeeded. But they don't see how poorly armed people took on the might of the state.

By the late '80s there were discussions about armed insurrection. And we got there in just over 10 years from when we had rudimentary units carrying out cross-border operations...

But, with Howard Barrell (*MK: The ANC's armed struggle*, Penguin, 1990) and others, I would also raise the question: what were the options? And do they think things would simply have changed? The problem is they see MK outside of the political struggles and try to isolate it. This is exactly what many of the people in the western countries would say. They would paint MK as terrorists separate from the

people. So, you ask yourself: do these comrades have a proper understanding of the liberation struggle?

On the issue of Special Ops getting better resources, T-man says there were tensions about this...

I know what the question is and I can tell you this has always been the charge. We had to budget. You see in a lopsided way I was renowned for asking people for change. Remember, I even said to the Sasol comrades when they came back, how did you spend your money. If there was no emergency, give the emergency funds back. And as comrades will always do, they will say, no we spent so much and they will always keep a bit back – but then you're not going to beat someone up and say look you're not giving me all the money. At any rate the guys fulfilled their operations.

The reality of it is that we were quite meticulous. Every single cent had to be accounted for. I knew that sometimes our cadres would have retained a bit of that money and so bloody what? The operational expenses they could keep but if there was no emergency it's better they returned that money. The issue on a more global level was that we had limited resources.

About the claim that Special Ops got a whole lot more money and could command more resources? That we had was access to the President. We reported directly to him so if we said this is what we're doing, these are the operations we are planning, this is what we need – and they knew we were very meticulous about this – they gave it to us. We always gave people emergency funds, but we accounted for those funds because people had to bring it back and, yes, sometimes they sort of overspent. I mean, there were different circumstances...

That we probably had slightly greater access to resources, yes, but we also carried out bigger operations, more directed, etc.

You present a positive picture of Gebuza saying you're doing all these operations but we're going to do better. But wasn't there also any irritation, maybe resentment even, from other Commands that Special Ops was seen as an elite force, and that you were getting extra resources because JS had a direct line to OR. But the rest of the Commands were battling for resources?

No, no, the Commands were basically given what they asked for and what they needed. It's not as if they were deprived or that we were being given resources at their cost. They got what they wanted. We got it in a concentrated form. They would get it spread over a period of time as resources came into the ANC's Treasury. The TG would then dole it out, so yes, to an extent there was that, but never to the point of creating hostilities, because at the end of the day we delivered, and everybody recognised that.

T-man used to say that we always had this attitude of accounting and accountability in terms of the operational results. We would not deprive cadres of anything that they needed, but we expected results. Talking about the analysis of whether there were conditions that were right for armed insurrection or not, Ruth (First) used to challenge us. Sue (Rabkin) said that she discussed it afterwards with Ruth and she said no, she just wanted to rev us up to make sure that we got things right in the armed struggle. I used to love Ruth. I tell you, I learnt such a lot from her, and I mean imagine having her as your mentor – Joe in the military and the struggle situation and Ruth on the political side. Man, I tell you it was phenomenal.

As a response to your question, you also need to understand that whatever the differences between the Commands, we also worked together. As explained, for the Sasol operation Siphwe's unit brought the materiel in. Other Commands came to me about how to prepare the thermite for limpet mines and other issues. We worked very well supporting each other. Some units worked better and achieved more targets, which was great. We all wanted to nail the Boers as soon as possible.

Some clarity on the Special Ops Command. T-man was an instructor when you were Chief Instructor in the camp?

That's correct.

After Obadi was killed you drew him into Special Ops?

When I got to Funda, the first person I thought we should recruit to Special Operations was T-man – he was thorough, dedicated and meticulous. He used to be an instructor in MCW.

After Obadi's death it took about six months to find someone suitable to replace him. Then JS brought in Chris Nungu (MK name: George Douglas) to replace Obadi. But Obadi was like a Deputy Commander. It was never a very clear title with Chris. I remained Commissar. But then Chris was, unfortunately, killed by the Boers with George Ndlovu in Swaziland, as explained.

Then JS was Special Ops Commander, you second in Command and T-man the Commander in Botswana. He was effectively the third in Command in Special Ops. Would that be accurate?

Not quite. T-man and Lester Dumakude were part of the unit that played the key role as the comrades in the Frontline areas – they were getting cadres into the country and maintaining communications with them.

Initially T-man was the only Front Commander, but he couldn't manage on his own in Swaziland and that's when you sent Lester – Tommy Masinga, as he was known – to join him?

Yes. T-man said he needed another comrade and suggested Tommy – so I interviewed him and thought perfect, he'll be fine.

And they then recruited Teddy Sikakana from Natal and others?

Yes. Teddy used to live in Swaziland and knew it quite well.

Apart from T-man and Lester and their group, we also continued to send in arms through others, including internationalists. Also, we were beginning to set up units inside the country.

Lester succeeds you as Commander?

Later, I recommended Lester because he seemed so dedicated and raring to get things done.

We started these interviews with a focus on your background – why and how you became politically aware, and so on. It was explained that this project doesn't seek to just focus on the operations carried out but on the people who carried them out. Who were they? What were they like? What motivated them? And we come back to the personal again now and take things further. So, when you're in Angola, did your family know? Did you have any contact with them?

I don't communicate with them at all. I disappeared once I went for training in the GDR.

Aren't they worried?

Yes, they are but this was the fate of so many comrades whose families didn't know where they were.

So, what do they do?

Earlier, they got hold of my friend, Yakub Omar, and they asked him to try to find me while he's in London and he asked around. People from the London office later told me that we heard that there was some guy asking questions about you and that they stonewalled. In 1980, after SASOL, I do contact my family.

How do you communicate with them?

I'm in Swaziland. I picked up the phone and called the shop and talked to my father. I say, look I'm here. There's this unspoken communication. You'll find me at this place at this time. So already by then instinctively, they understand there are issues here, the danger. When they came to Swaziland, my mother says in Gujarati 'I had a dream that you came into the country'. It's true, at the time that she said she had the dream, I was in Durban on that reconnaissance mission at the Mobil Refinery.

Did they ask what exactly you were doing in exile?

I said to them then, look, I'm deeply involved in the armed struggle and will not discuss any of the details.

And their reaction?

We know what you do. It's a good cause.

So, they were prepared to give you up? Meaning you might die?

They accepted it.

Not the response of typical lower middle class Indian parents of the time?

Well, they said you have our full support. All we ask you is to be careful. That's all. Whenever you need anything, we are there for you. Money? If I were to say to them, I want A, B, C, D, they would bring it.

There was a story in the *Sunday Times* media about a key ANC operative, Rashid, a Carlos the Jackal-type figure, operating in Southern Africa whom the police were searching for...

Yes, but they didn't know who that was. They didn't know it was me. The enemy didn't know who I was until the day when I came back into the country. Hani and others said to me, 'Do not come in, we need you in Lusaka as the safety backup in case things go wrong'. Eventually, when they weren't sending me communications and I was getting frustrated, I came into the country.

It's odd that the police weren't able to trace you...

Because they're bloody useless. Part of it was they were looking for a Rashid, but they had a picture of Barry Gilder. Farouk (Mohammed Timol) and them would often pass information to me. They would say, 'The Boers are confusing you with Barry Gilder'.

So, wasn't Barry Gilder vulnerable?

They were never very sure...

Sometimes our intelligence structures were also weak, and I often said to our *Imbokodo* comrades, you know what, you and the Boers deserve each other.



Rashid exposed,
Sunday Times, 26
August 1984

Your quick rise in MK may have to do with your own strengths, but it may also have to do with how relatively disorganised and ineffective MK was from the mid-sixties until after the 1976 uprisings? That at the time you moved in, MK was just beginning to revive and so you had this space, this niche, as it were, that meant you could be effective?

You see, it goes back to what kind of people were in MK and the ANC. Remember we come from a background where many of our people were not well educated, and if there were people that were well educated, they were doctors and what have you, and most of them then lived a different lifestyle. They wouldn't necessarily go into MK, and Mbeki and them would always be amongst the elite. But for ordinary cadres, and this is where this whole question of elitism arises, for them this was often a big issue in MK. Where cadres felt that certain people were given special privileges, and how they were treated was not right. Later in life, there was also this issue, well the Indians and the Whites are getting different treatment from the others. That's been an ongoing problem. Who do you associate with? Who are your friends?

Yes, I'm aware. Of course, there were also issues around ethnicity, around what is more commonly referred to as tribal tensions. We'd heard about this inside the country. But these tensions are understandable, even maybe inevitable. This is an ongoing issue that the movement has to address and overcome over time. But what you've said prompts me to return to your contact with your family while in exile. So how often do you see them since first making contact with them in Swaziland?

At least maybe two or three times a year, in Swaziland or Botswana.

So, didn't you have a better-off life because of your access to them? You spoke earlier of them bringing food and money to you. Didn't that arouse a measure of resentment from other MK comrades, particularly African comrades who wouldn't easily have access to family and such material support? You did get a stipend from the ANC? Was that higher because you were a Commissar and Commander?

I got the same stipend as others did. In fact, if you talk of an egalitarian situation, we had that in exile. Everybody got 14 kwachas per person for their vegetables. What we called rations were the same. You were given, per week, a kilogram of meat, thanks to the Swedes who often gave the ANC cash for humanitarian purposes, not for the struggle. You were given food, so there was food, water, etc, and you were given the same per person. Education was paid for by the central collective of the ANC. And that's why part of the grievances of many of the comrades was that in exile we all got the same. When you come back inside the country everyone is thrown off balance. Yes, you got your allowance, but then some of us came in and were working at the ANC head office. Many of the other comrades

didn't get positions there, it wasn't possible, and over a period of time people had to start fending for themselves. They had to go back to earning a living, and the gripes of many of the comrades come from that. But in exile you couldn't get a more egalitarian situation. If you were a family of five – parents, three children, you were given full ration for five people. Each adult was given, each child was given.

But weren't those in the Lusaka HQ of the ANC and at missions elsewhere in the world given more, especially the leadership who travelled, for better clothes and the like?

I had a few gripes about some of these things. There was a time when I discovered that the officials got handsome travel allowances. When I had to send cadres into the country, I didn't have that much money, we gave them a very small amount. Enough for them to live on, travel, and a bit of safety money in case they ran into trouble, but they were expected to bring back what wasn't used. Even if they did run into difficulties they had to come back and account for what they had spent. They said 'No, but you are the only Commander that demands that we give money back'. I said this is struggle money and you see this is where it goes back to being a hard person. To me it was like this is where integrity and honesty come in. This is struggle money.

The entire first Special Ops operations against Sasol cost us R12 500. I used to be bloody hard-arsed. Used to be tight with money. Cadres were told, this is your travel money, this is your contingency fund. All the contingency funds were collected back.

Maybe that's understandable, but isn't it also cruel? After all, these comrades were prepared to give up their lives, at the very least risk long terms of imprisonment, and it's hardly as if they were living it up in the camps in exile?

Yes, these were people that were prepared to give their lives. But they understood that that money would then go back for the next operation. You see, there was trust within Special Ops that we built up, and that trust was very important. I must say, you know, I believe that there were Commanders in the other units who took money out of the operating fund for themselves and that is where the problem was.

In her book, *The Maputo Connection*, Nadja Manghezi refers to you being called in to intervene when two comrades took more than their share of meat rations from the fridge in the house of a Mozambican comrade – and you sent them off to the camps in Angola.

Yes. I'm telling you what my philosophy is. You put down a set of rules, you expect people to abide by it. I'm saying to you, yes, I used to be a bloody hard-arsed Commander or Commissar. In Special Ops you abided by those rules.

But then Special Ops was made up of a sort of elite maybe, who could be held up to a higher standard of discipline, which may be too much to

expect from many other MK cadres. Don't you think you were expecting too much?

We made those cadres understand that we expected the highest of them. That was the reason we succeeded. Whilst others were still faffing around and while the Boers were too busy chasing them – they kept the Boers busy – we went in, and we hit them where it hurt. It went back to, again, the way we used to motivate our cadres. Once in Lusaka, the military headquarters had a meeting and whatever their deliberations, they then sent JS, then MK Chief of Staff, and Cassius Make, the Chief of Ordinance to come and talk to me. Their missive was that they wanted me to brief all the cadres going in for operations, to motivate people, to do exactly what was necessary.

You mean Slovo and Make come to you? But weren't you relatively junior in MK, certainly to them?

It was 1984-85. What exactly are you asking of me? They said, 'We want you to be the person responsible for briefing MK units that are going into the country' – because they were of the view that I had a way of motivating people when I gave them their briefing because of the meticulous way in which I would plan the operations. But briefings and motivations come out of showing the cadres that when they go in, you cared for them, that everything will be there, and those cadres in turn, no matter what the difficulty, even when a car capsizes, they will say no, no we don't want to turn back. This is our operation, we've always been clamouring to do it, we want to go forward – and that's what drove them.

I said that becomes an almost impossible task because, one, I have to be part of and know every single operation, and two, I don't think it's physically and humanly possible for one individual to brief every single unit. Because it's not only the briefing, but also the follow-up, it's making sure that everything is sent into the country, that it's at the point where it's got to be received, that you check that the communication with the cadres is done properly, that the cadres are infiltrated properly. I said to them I am not Chief of Operations. Cde Lambert Moloi is. Even if I was Chief of Operations, it's not possible to do it. I said I could work with other Commanders who give briefings to their units and explain what I do and they could see what's useful.

To something else now. You spoke to O'Malley about the security police agent Keith McKenzie and it came up in the TRC too. You want to say anything here about this?

McKenzie came to us through Johannes Mnisi. He's passed on. He had contacts with some old guy that normally used to bring people out. My gut feeling was that that old man wasn't above board. At any rate, McKenzie said he was prepared to work with us and as usual we were always looking for opportunities to get weapons in. We asked him to bring his vehicle. We did the doctoring. We sent him in with stuff and we continued to operate with him.

He would bring back the sketches of where he put the stuff. Invariably when those sketches came back, they were in strange places – that ordinary people wouldn't have access to, or they could have been observed and so on. We said there's something wrong with this. But we weren't being sharp enough to say there's a problem with McKenzie.

We had sent a unit in to hit a military plane. But we couldn't get the weapons in for this. Those comrades in the country wanted to do another operation in the meanwhile. So, we gave them one of this guy's sketches. The Commander of that unit, Lux Marumo, was a specialist in anti-aircraft weapons. He unearthed the DLB and found that the fuses of the limpet mines were tampered with and when he pulled the pin, it blew up in his hand and mangled his finger. He later came out and we examined this and realised that the limpet mines were sabotaged. Maybe at that time I wasn't meticulous enough in tracking the materiel. We were constantly doing investigations and at the same time you want the operations to keep going. Anyway, we started becoming suspicious. There was this growing unease, a gut feeling of a problem.

Anyway, I was in Gaborone. Helena, JS's wife, had asked me to buy a car for her. I had given her my contact number in Botswana. I was staying with Sri Lankans, supporters of the Tamil Tigers. One morning I got this call. It's Helena. I tell her about the car that I am recommending. Then she says, 'The "timer" wants to talk to you'. We used to call JS the timer. I had told him before about our suspicions about McKenzie. Trying to talk in code over the phone, he says that chap is working for the other side. But without saying it so directly. He says be very careful and don't meet with him. I went to lie down on the bed and thought about it. What the hell is he alluding to?

I had asked for names and he said, 'Sorry, we don't have names', and he then describes the circumstances under which this suspect had met with me. One of the things that I used to be quite meticulous about is that I never held a glass carelessly. If someone gave me a glass, I held it in a particular way to avoid leaving prints. I was very conscious about these kinds of things. I think about it and there's only one guy. If a guy gave you a can, you walk away with it. You don't leave it, but you never let the other guy know. JS said, 'The guy gave you a drink, and they are trying to get your fingerprints, so I then recalled that I'd met McKenzie in this particular circumstance at some point because we were trying to recruit some new people. Aha!

I then discussed it with T-man and Chris (Lester Dumakude). Chris passed on. He was a Brigadier General in the Defence Force. T-man is still around, he's very critical to the Special Ops story. We discuss this information and I say that we've always had our suspicions about this guy, we need to pull him in. He's supposed to come and see us that very weekend and so we said, let's try to postpone it by a week. We work out a plan. When McKenzie came, our guys would go to his hotel, and he'd hand the vehicle over. They'd load it and take it back. This time the cadres would take him off immediately somewhere else. They told him that I wanted to meet him but that I was on my way from Lusaka.

We gave our plan a code name. I can't remember what we called it. We were going to take the guy across to Zambia. I then get a message saying the President wants to see me – and I think what the hell's going on now? I go back to Lusaka, and I see JZ (Jacob Zuma, who at the time was Head of Intelligence). He says, 'Chief, this is the information that we have'. So, I say, I need a name. 'Sorry, no name. We just know this is the operative's number. The ANC Intelligence's information operative had seen the file, but the names were always filed separately. That's what the Boers did.

I say to JZ, I need a name, Chief. He was head of intelligence at the time. He says, 'Sorry Chief, can't help. This is it. You've got work with it.' So, I don't say to JZ we've already worked out a plan. We think we know who it is.

Next day OR calls for me. He tells me the same information, and he then says to me: 'Look Rashid, we are dealing with an enemy agent, confirmed. You do what you have to do.'

The next weekend when the guy comes, T-man and Lester don't allow him to go back to his hotel as he normally would. The cadres say they're bringing him to me and drive past Francistown to the north of Botswana. They make him nice and drunk. And take him across the border to Lusaka and we then hand him over to *Imbokodo*. I go to Zuma and say here's your man. He says, 'Okay, I'm sending you a team'. I said to Victor (Mnisi), this is how we're going to crack him. Typical good cop, bad cop. And we crack the guy. But he didn't give us all the information about the enemy's intentions at the time and unfortunately Botswana citizens got killed because of this traitor not giving us all the information at that time.

That was the innocent woman and her child, Botswana nationals, when the bomb hidden in the Kombi brought by McKenzie explodes outside their house?

Yes.

Was the aim to detonate the bomb when all you comrades were in the Kombi?

The enemy assumed we would all be together. The enemy wanted to get me and the rest of the Command.

In one of the interviews you gave, you seemed to have said that Slovo mentioned something about you leaving your fingerprints on a glass.

No, what Slovo was alluding to is my using a glass and leaving it behind. The way he spoke is what triggered me to identify and say – that's the man, that's the traitor.

The McKenzie story is covered in several places, including the TRC hearings.

The apartheid police tried to make out that McKenzie was dead. The painful thing is that people like him – after we came back from exile – still expected to be treated like comrades. When he saw me at the ANC offices he said, 'Hey man, Chief...' I asked what the hell are you doing here, you're an enemy agent? I did it in front of many cadres. 'Hey Chief, I am going to report you to the leadership,' he said. I said, come, I'll take you to them (laughter).

Do you know of other cases of the apartheid security forces targeting you?

Many times, when we were in Swaziland. Once I was in a flat. We'd sent a unit in. They were taken to the border and as they were going in, they were arrested. We didn't know that. I went to the house where the cadres were staying, and I found it in total turmoil. I immediately realised that something's gone wrong. I went back to the place that I was staying in with my girlfriend. That evening the Swazis blocked off the place looking for somebody. This was a flat overlooking a main street. Looking down, we saw all these Swazi security cops running around. The police had found a hot car in the street. These hot cars, the ANC used to buy for R1500 from criminals who steal them. I had one of them. The police impounded it and they were looking for Rashid.

Then the story comes out in Swaziland that there was an ANC unit arrested in South Africa. It was one of our units. Immediately we went to the house where the cadres had lived and where there was this materiel and moved it.

Amongst the Swazi security police, we also had sources who would tell the ANC what was going on. Later that day the police came to my girlfriend's apartment. I stayed dead still. They knocked and knocked – and finally left. I then went to another Swazi national who used to help, who lived in the same building, and said to him that I needed to get out of this building without being seen. He said I should jump from the first floor, over a wall and get out that way, and helped me do so.

Also, once we were at the border. Mnisi had been arrested. We didn't know that. The cadres had come to fetch us, but we were waiting for a second vehicle to collect the rest of the comrades. And we realised that there's a bit of unusual activity going on. Suddenly the Swazi police and Defence Force started surrounding us and we drove off with them chasing us. We drove into the sugarcane fields. They fired at the vehicle, and a number of our comrades were injured. I also got shrapnel wounds.

We ended up in a game park, and we walked through for the day.

Then there was the incident we spoke about already when Chris (Nungu) and George (Ndlovu) got killed on the border. I was supposed to have gone with them.

So, it was luck and fate that you weren't hit?

I could have been in Matola, I could have been in so many other situations. What we knew through our ANC intelligence people is that the Boers had this attitude – Slovo and Rashid, take them out on sight.

They could have done you guys in if they wanted to, surely?

If we had the kind of enemy like you have in the US forces or others, they could have taken us out very, very easily. There was no superman element on our part. We had to adapt and live according to the situation. We used to live with the cadres in Matola.

But in other struggles the security forces just bumped revolutionaries off? The apartheid regime did that – but why didn't it do that more often? They could easily have assassinated OR, Nzo, JS, Modise, Chris Hani and other leaders? Could it be that they were at least a bit restrained partly because of the international campaign against apartheid, because it would be Whites assassinating Blacks in the interests of a despised racist regime? Maybe also there were limits to assassinating ANC leaders in the frontline states because of concerns not to alienate those countries too much?

They believed that they were invincible, they thought, you know, we're riffraff, you can't take MK seriously. But they also liked to have this facade of a democracy of a kind and showing the world that they were an enlightened society, so they weren't ruthless in the sense of the Latin American dictatorships. Yes, there were some of these assassinations, but I think they didn't have enough of those kinds of people on their side willing to take the risk. Yes, there were the Eugene de Kocks and others who were saying they wanted to track us down. But then they needed proper intelligence, etc.

One of these generals during the (post-apartheid) negotiations sits across from me and says, 'But sir, didn't we want to take you out?' Now what do you say to someone like that? So, I said, probably – but you know how bloody useless you were. I said your intelligence was shoddy. I mean, we didn't go out of our way to really cover our tracks in Zambia. But when you were in some of the closer frontline states, then, yes, you had to be a bit more cautious.

I think also that on the one hand the enemy had such disdain for the ANC, and, on the other hand, they really saw that it was a real threat, and they didn't know how to bring these two opposite views together. Also, because if they said here was an enemy that posed a real threat, they would scare their own people, so they tried to always downplay the risk they faced and say how useless the ANC was. And they started believing in their own propaganda.

They tried to use their big military to scare everybody. It's like using a rock to hit a fly and by the time you lift that rock the fly has moved. I think if we realised how disorganised and weak they were, we would have gone for them much faster and much harder. When I used to have discussions with these generals during the transition, I realised that they were useless.

Were there moments in your MK years that you were scared?

Firstly, I must say, I never had a moment of doubt about what we did, about the justness of our cause. Even today, despite where the country is, I believe we can turn it around. But the apartheid regime had to be undone. I had not the slightest doubt, and I am proud to have been part of that struggle, to have had the opportunity to serve my people.

But didn't you have any fears about your life? Anxieties?

When we talk about fear, it's an ever-constant thing that's there with you. You know constantly the enemy can be onto you when you let down your guard, and there's a tension that builds up within you. For years I have always lived with knots in my shoulders and neck. I had knots in my chest. Sometimes it's like you want to bring it out and get rid of something that's tightening in there. It feels almost like you've got asthma. But all the time you say to yourself that this is something you've got to do. Yes, it's difficult, yes, it's tough, but...it was a question of how do you overcome that fear; how do you control the tension?

I was young. I was full of energy. Even though I was at times bone weary and extremely tired, I really pushed myself. I drove myself. To me the objectives outweighed any personal considerations, perhaps to the detriment of myself, my family. There are times when you sort of say to yourself, oh shit, what have I got myself into? But there was also this thing that you made a pledge, and, you see, my MK oath was very dear to me, I held it close to my heart that I would serve until the day I die.

There were times when I crossed the borders three or four times a week, many times on my own. But you must have control and somehow you find a way of dealing with your anxieties. I would always prepare myself well. Whichever persona or identity passport I was using, I would study the details – your date of birth, where you came from, what your legend was. In underground work that's what you prepare yourself for – what to say if you are challenged about what you are doing. You have a cover story.

You must control yourself. You know that this is what you want to achieve and all your thinking and energy are put into how to do it. Concentrate on that and control the fear element in moving forward – but it takes its toll. You get ulcers. And deep down, the biggest fear is of being arrested and tortured because I knew they wouldn't spare me. Maybe it's better to be killed rather than be arrested and tortured because you never know whether you might break, and my greatest fear was revealing information about the struggle or any individual. No other person should suffer because of me. But the fear was there even in your resting times. You always must be alert. I mean there are times when I have lain awake, and even to

this day if there's a soft rustling sound, your second sense wakes you up; it's always like this with an unusual movement or sound. You are conditioned to it.

To turn now to something else. You and other Special Ops comrades become quite prominent in the TRC amnesty hearings. At times it seemed as if you were speaking for the ANC as a whole. Anyway, why is it that you didn't get enough support from the ANC. It seemed almost as if you were alone in the TRC hearings?

I found that shocking. The lack of support, yes, from the leadership, other than Mac and Ronnie and maybe a few others. Nobody bothered to come. Generally, it almost felt like these Special Ops operations were conducted as grey operations, according to the classification that the Boers would like to give them, and in a sense, it almost felt like the ANC leaders were separating themselves from us. I think some of the leaders moved to play up to Western forces, and others tried to make out that the armed struggle had no role or a minimal role. They are so wrong, because at times we were able to show up that the enemy was weak.

Did you feel a sense of betrayal?

People have said that. My approach to it was that I was there, I had to go through with the TRC process. I had to do it with the comrades; I had to be a Commander. I couldn't start complaining about the leadership. We'd committed ourselves to the TRC process and I convinced the Special Ops cadres that we're going to take part in it. I didn't want to look back and say well who's with me and who's not. We were always careful in how we carried out the armed struggle. Unfortunately, there were casualties, but we never deliberately or maliciously went out to target civilians. People would privately come up to me and say, you know, we are so proud about what you did at the TRC – but why did these cadres not come there too?



Rashid with Adv Wim
Trengove at the TRC

Do you feel you've been sufficiently acknowledged for your role in the struggle?

Well, people have also asked me, why have you never been honoured, you've never asked for anything? I've always said that I didn't join the struggle for recognition, to get anything out of it. I joined the struggle for what I believed in and the rightness of the struggle and even today that's where I'm at. And I have said to people always I don't need anybody's

medals because I hang my medals around my heart.

You see, every person needs to be able to look at him or herself in the mirror and know that what he or she has done has been done with integrity and if it was done with an honest and pure intention and that they'd served to the best of their

abilities. I'd like to think that's the case with me and therefore I don't need a medal. But my question is: when will they give recognition to all those Special Ops and other cadres and the families of those who died? That's what I've been fighting for.

I'd love to talk about every comrade I got to know. What they represented, how they operated, what they really wanted, and what I felt was their driving force, their commitment. We have got to value that. Maybe it would be nice to be able to stand up in front and say I received a medal, but why give me a medal? What about all those other cadres?

Those cadres that laid down their lives, honour them! Then we can talk about me...

I've learnt one thing as a Commander, it's your job, it's your duty. I provided the leadership. Delivered the goods. At the end of the day, what happens? Every one of those people was given an award. Not me. But you see leadership needs to answer those questions when do you think people have done their jobs and when have they gone beyond the call? And in our struggle how far did you have to go as a Commander to prove yourself, to do what you had to do? And my answer to that is you had to go to the ultimate and beyond to provide leadership, to provide guidance, because of what we had to achieve, you had to be an example. And I think, yes, in a way we achieved that. Sadly today, I think those achievements have been betrayed but that's a different matter.

What disturbs me is that today there are many that are prepared to say that MK was these one-armed bandits, and that MK was useless and it didn't achieve anything and we could have done without the armed struggle. As I said earlier, my reply is that we would not have gotten to a tenth of the road if we had not embarked on the armed struggle and if we had not showed the enemy up.

I think the leadership needs to understand that this is one of the things that pains many of the MK people, that people went out, they disrupted their lives, and the leaders never adequately said to cadres we respect and value the contributions that you made. And even if there were cadres that simply sat in the camps, they were a threat to the other side. The leadership, in a sad sense, got so caught up with governing, with concerns about being Ministers and occupying key positions in the state that they began to see the armed struggle as a distraction from their work.

You were moved to Chief of Ordnance in the MK Military HQ in August 1987. What happens after you leave Special Ops?

Well, Chris – Lester Dumakude – took over, and the question of who you appoint as Commander may be relevant. I believed that we needed to give ordinary cadres the opportunity to be leaders as well. But maybe sometimes this is simplistic because there are other characteristics and capabilities that you also need to look at in leadership. To be a leader you have to be able to plan. Chris and others were fantastic operatives in the front line, they were invaluable. We would not have done much without people like him. Then comes the question: who do you appoint as Commander? Do you take another intellectual and simply appoint a highflyer or an

operative who's good on the ground. And this is something that's difficult. I was always critical of the leadership that chose intellectuals, all these smart, clever educated Commanders. But some of them turned out to be enemy agents, some of them haven't always performed, some of them were not always so honest.

By the time Lester became Commander, the ANC no longer put such a lot of emphasis on Special Ops. I know if you talk to some other people they'll say to you, when JS was there, he was able to get resources and so it was easier during my period in Special Ops. Some people sometimes said JS used me – but he didn't. I did what I had to do, and I worked very closely with him. The important thing is we worked as a team and were able to set targets and achieve them.

I thought Lester would be a good Commander because he was doing the work on the ground. But you can only see how a cadre Commands when he is in that position. Once I moved to military headquarters, I was told you will not continue to control Special Ops. Special Ops started reporting to Chris Hani. Partly I'm disappointed and partly I think it's good to have fresh leadership.

On the issue of soft targets, Chris Hani and Steve Tshwete – they were very loose about target selection. I have some reservations about the Ellis Park operation that Special Ops carried out. I was very upset about that. They didn't tell me about it and they went for it. I asked what are you doing? I spoke to Hein Grosskopf, T-man and Lester. Grosskopf was now part of the Special Ops Command. He joined Victor (Mnisi), Lester and T-man on the new Command.

In the interview with O'Malley, Mac suggested that you were sympathetic to these attacks on soft targets, but you said you disagreed altogether with this?

Of course, I was never sympathetic to that, and I have already explained that to O'Malley and in the TRC and elsewhere.

You told O'Malley that Mac was confusing this with other differences you had with *Operation Vula*?

I was critical about *Vula* at times. They were getting lots of money, but they delivered little. Where were the results? I spoke about mountain-toppism – yes, you can build up a nice big structure, but when you pull from the bottom, it all collapses. If you put structures in place, you must test them in continuous operations. You have to achieve short-term, immediate results to be able to convince the people to continue to participate. At the same time, you have to start building capacity to survive. It's not an either-or situation. You must do both. The ANC often swung from one mode to the other, so they had these 'pot-boiling operations'...

Circumstances had changed dramatically from the time when you could carry out a cross-border operation. Increasingly the border areas were being sealed. The enemy had realised what our modus operandi was. Barney (Molokoane) and others were killed because they continuously used the same modus operandi. The Boers realised

this is what these guys are doing. So, the moment the Grad-P shells are fired off in an attack, the Boers sealed the borders, and our guys went smack right into their hands. Barney was an extremely brave person, but bravery is not the sole answer. The way to beat the enemy is being smart, looking at the enemy, knowing what they're doing, and working around that, not simply saying, come hell or high water I'm just going to run into a brick wall.

You seemed to have had a very close relationship with JS. He seemed to have stimulated you a lot and maybe you him?

Yes, we worked very closely with each other as a team. He had a lot of confidence in the way we operated and was willing to delegate authority to me. But there was also Ruth. She prodded him a lot, challenged him. And, man, she could really do that! I remember that she tackled me on a paper that I did on armed insurrection, and did she go for me (laughter)!

If you were to speak to Sue or some of the other people, JS used to be very fond of me. JS and I became very close. We would meet up often. He'd visit at night; we'd have a chat. In the morning we would formalise what we discussed and take decisions. For example, we needed to get stuff into the country. How exactly do we do that?

We had to take the terrain into account. My job was to get these cadres to a particular point. What's the fastest and most practical way of getting them there? Are cadres able to move with the weapons on them? They would never be able to do that, not in South Africa, not with the terrain conditions that we have. Yes, you can carry one or two weapons and get away with it, but you are taking a bloody chance. We understood very early on that we needed to get a separate unit to transport materiel. Everybody wanted a pistol. But we said you get searched, you are going to be asked for your pass. You are going to run into trouble if you have a weapon on you. So, there are times when we insist that cadres do not travel with weapons.

Were there capable Commanders that could really get the job done? There were gripes at times from the cadres who went in. They said that some of the Commanders don't care, because they are not going into the situation, they are sitting comfortably outside, whilst the cadres were sent in and were treated as cannon fodder.

Wally Mbhele did a profile of you in the Mail & Guardian on 8 May 1998, 'Rasheed (sic), The Clean Bomber' after you first appeared before the TRC Amnesty Committee. He refers to you as 'an intensely private person'. Your response.

I'll tell you where I think that comes from. When people initially meet me – and this has been said elsewhere too – they have this sense that I'm intensely reserved, quiet. When they get to know me better, they begin to see the side of me that comes out and they have a different appreciation of me. But I'm also the kind of

person that doesn't have much time for petty things. You start talking about pots and pans, it's unimportant. What I want to talk about is the kind of things that we are talking about, intellectual, political issues.

Except in a relationship these other things are important and can't be reduced in significance...

Maybe I don't have enough of an appreciation of that. You see I don't like talking ill of people. If I say something about a person, it must be positive. If I say anything negative then I must have evidence of that, otherwise I believe I have no grounds for doing that. And that's why I believe in talking about political issues. I believe we need to be fair; we need to give other people a chance to talk, and if people are talking about little things I don't necessarily always engage. So, people say you are extremely reserved. I was told I am aloof, I'm reserved, I don't listen – but I do listen though I don't always engage. And maybe I don't adequately say to people let's talk about these other issues.

Most of the cadres at that time were school leavers, I was a bit older, better educated. One of the cadres said to me, 'In the camps we used to hear about this Rashid...but, you know, when I came here and I saw you, I thought this guy is just a little older than I am. I thought I would find this old, hard man that is so demanding that if you made a mistake, he crapped you out and shat on everybody from a dizzy height'. Yes, I was often hard on people but later in life and with time, I think I softened a bit, but people always felt I was extremely demanding and harsh, but to me it was, I'm doing it because I feel the need to achieve and I am also very demanding of myself.

My entire philosophy in life was that you've got to achieve, you set yourself a target, you keep going at it and you never give up until you hit it. Was I a disciplinarian? Yes. Did I demand things of people? Yes. Did I live by those examples? I'd like to think so. Were we able to provide the kind of leadership? Having someone like JS, with that aura and what he represented, was very important and critical to us.

Over the years I've come to the conclusion that maybe I'm a bit too harsh and brutal – but then I'm that with myself too. Maybe I expect too much of people around me. I've realised late in life that I don't have to be, I need to cut people more slack. I'm not using this as an excuse, but I was never cut any slack. I was thrown in at the deep end, at a very young age, given a command and responsibility way beyond where I was at, and I had to survive.

Mbhele says that the Sunday Times described you as a 'Carlos the Jackal' sort of person. Muff Anderson, is quoted as, among other things, describing you as 'always meticulous', 'a good strategist with incredible attention to detail', 'highly talented'. She says too that you are 'a very liberated man' and women who worked with you were given equal status with their male counterparts. Your response?

Well, I've always treated women as equals. Gays too. Whatever walk of life and wherever people come from, there's an individual there that we need to look at how we can enhance and get the best out of. I believe that in the struggle that is what I always aimed for. And if anybody stepped forward, I always asked, do you understand what you are letting yourself in for? They also needed to understand that I was very hard and demanding. I think it's very important to understand that the situation moulds a person as much as a person moulds the situation. And given the circumstances we were in, we had to behave in a certain way. Whether it was always right is questionable. With hindsight, yes, I could have behaved differently. But overall, I don't believe that I was unfair or unreasonable. It was necessary to be demanding of people because at the end of the day you have to achieve the objectives – and to me achieving the objective was crucial...

Now it says in this article that you would take very long in the shower? What's this about? Why is it an issue here?

Yes, maybe even today I take long in the shower (laughs). In Angola, we washed in the river, so we had a whole big bath...I never once got any cadre to serve me or bring me anything. Many Commanders did that. My attitude was, you want something, go and do it yourself.

The article also describes you as 'short tempered' and single-minded at times' and that you often got into trouble with comrades, 'sometimes resulting in physical exchanges of blows'. Your response?

Bullshit. I never had. The only time was when one of the cadres gave me a punch. He'd received a letter. The *Imbokodo* guys always opened all letters and read them. They did this quite visibly. This guy's letter was delivered to him. I didn't even know he'd received a letter. The next thing, 'Ja, you Commanders, you open our letters.' His wife was doing her own thing, and he was upset and angry about this. And before I knew it, he punched me.

Did you hit him back?

No. He was quite a big guy. He was part of the first Special Ops operation, and this happened before it.

Did you make up?

I took it up with JS. I had absolutely nothing to do with opening any cadres' letters ever. I wouldn't do it. JS said, 'What do you want to do? Charge him?' Which I could have done and gone through a messy process. I understood where the guy came from. I said to him, when he calmed down, that *Imbokodo* opened your letter. I had nothing to do with it. He was then asked to apologise. Which he did – and that was the end of the story.

I bear no grudges. Never have. Never will. Do I tell people exactly what the situation is? I believe you have a duty and a responsibility to tell it like it is. If people did wrong, I would tell them 1, 2, 3, 4 and, yes, sometimes people say it's the way I

dress people down. But when you say to them this is wrong, this is what the consequences will be, people feel small because you tell them exactly what the issues and implications are. But they say that's being abrasive and abrupt and short-tempered and... I'm not short-tempered.

That's what they seem to think...

People make those claims and many people who meet me say that's not the person they see. You see, it's because when people do wrong, it's their defensiveness which leads to those allegations.

You don't see yourself like that?

No.

On to another issue. When you were in Angola, you were a member of the SACP?

We had Party units and I became part of the Party organisers in the camp. In Mozambique I was part of the unit with Ruth First, Sue Rabkin and Obadi. Later, I was put onto the regional committee of the Party. In Zambia I had a similar position.

You were at the SACP's first Congress after 1990 as part of an MK delegation... But you've left the SACP. Why?

I was feeling quite ill on the first day of the Congress and then didn't go back. I continued being a Party member but then I began to see that the Party was going in the wrong direction. I believe it started adopting a populist agenda. I gave my Party membership dues to an organizer, and she didn't come back to me with my membership card. And I said to myself, Is this the type of organization the SACP is?

Maybe it was wrong to let my membership lapse like that but there are also other issues. I was disillusioned with what happened in the Soviet Union. The leadership there had held onto power because of fear and elitism and favouritism. Sadly, that's what led to the demise of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union). It was very sad because, at heart, I still believe in Communist ideals. Today the SACP, I believe, is totally off the rails. Anyway, when I became part of the SANDF, I couldn't belong to any political party. If you're in the army, you must serve the nation, no longer just the ANC and party-political partisanship should not play any role in the military. MKMVA (MK Military Veterans' Association and the SANDF are in a rather sad situation today.

What do you mean that the Communist Party has become populist?

The Party began recruiting everybody. It was becoming a mass party, trying to show that it had numbers. It was no longer a vanguard party. There were no standards set for what was expected of Communists. We got so caught up in the euphoria of 1994 and the Party stopped being a lodestar giving direction to the movement. I'm not blaming the Party because I think it's the ANC itself that failed. I always believed that the Party needed to continue to play a leading and guiding role. This didn't

mean Party leaders shouldn't hold positions in government, etc. The foundation of many of the ills that we see today goes back to when we took our eye off the ball of serving the people. What I'm saying may not necessarily apply to the Party but I'm talking of the movement as a whole.

Were the majority of Special Ops SACP members?

No. We were very careful about that. We didn't want the Boers and the media to say that it's this little Party that was swaying the ANC.

Why did you leave the SANDF?

Joe Modise once said to me, 'Why don't you want to be in command of the SANDF?' Also, I didn't want to be in military per se, but I believe very strongly that the military must be under the control of political forces. I was instrumental in working on the establishment of the Defence Secretariat. I worked hard on this, and I was supposed to have become the Deputy Secretary for Defence and then for whatever reason they put somebody else in that position, which he didn't deserve.

Siphiwe and I were at the Defence Command Council and in a discussion, he said that I wanted to become the Secretary of Defense and to have all the power. I thought that was an extremely personalised attack when what we were trying to deal with was setting up structures in the defence of democracy. Siphiwe believed that we should set up those structures when Meiring was the Chief of the SANDF but that was not necessary when he was.

But it's constitutionally required. You must have one.

Yes. This is how many of the comrades think, sadly. It's what led me to leave the Defence environment. Tito (Mboweni) offered me a job at the Reserve Bank. Many people asked why I left. I said for personal reasons, but I just found it untenable that the leadership would appoint people who were not necessarily competent – but because of race issues. The rot in the ANC had started even then where there were political machinations to bring in people that were seen as favourites to posts they were not necessarily qualified for.

Of course, many people would say why didn't you stand up and fight? I said, look, you can stand up and fight the Boers but not when former MK comrades are fighting among themselves for positions and power. I can't fight when it's so individualised, and personalised. In the most difficult times when the ANC needed people to really come forward, they came to people like me and said we want you to go forward. But when it came to saying let's appoint the people who deserve to be, then it didn't apply.

So, what was your position in the SANDF?

I became a major general. Many thought that I should have pushed for a more senior position. This is where JM let us down. They used the argument of age and years of service. I was young, not yet 40 in 1994. The Boers – Meiring and others –

had really pushed to say it took many years in the SADF before a person even becomes a major general. They were pushing for me to become Colonel and we argued very strongly against that. I pushed for people like Siphiwe and Lambert Moloi to become Lieutenant-Generals. Of course, JM had no problem in pushing for Lambert Moloi, but when it came to Siphiwe, he didn't want to.

Why?

Again, this argument of age. He thought that only the first generation of MK cadres should be lieutenant-generals and so on.

How long were you in the SANDF?

I served for about a year and a bit, but by then my heart was all set on political oversight over the military. Frankly, all those years and the kinds of decisions that I had to make had taken their toll. Many people wanted me to go into the operations division of the SANDF, but I felt my time in uniform had come and gone. I wanted to be in the Secretariat. Then I became Chief of Policy and Planning of the Department of Defence.

Are you sufficiently stimulated in your current job as a security consultant to banks in Europe? How are you keeping in touch with South Africa?

Frankly, my heart has always been in the struggle, my heart is in wanting to battle for the people and I'm so out of it, I bleed all the time. I would be prepared to give up a highly paid job serving the people. I want to serve and do something that's meaningful. I dedicated my life to the struggle, and I believe it would be a betrayal of the people not to continue and deliver, and it pains me all the time. I'm so distant from it, but at the same time I don't believe I have all the answers. I would love to help overcome the challenges.

If you knew when you were involved in MK Special Ops where the ANC and country would be now, would you still have done what you did?

I had dedicated my life to fighting against the racist, fascist apartheid regime. I stand for equality and freedom of all people in life. We are all created as equals and not until we respect that every person has a right to freedom and justice and a fair opportunity in life will there be peace in the world. I believe that we should continue to strive to improve the lives of all, especially the poor, the downtrodden...

I am pleased that I was able to overcome the fear and developed the courage to stand by my convictions that I too had to do my bit to fight the oppression and play a meaningful role in the struggle. My inspiration came from Mandela's speech at the Rivonia Trial. The sense of honesty and integrity, the sincerity and urgency of his tone truly inspired me at an early age. I have absolutely no regrets about being part of the fight against the fascist regime in our country.

One must strive to uphold the ideals of freedom and democracy continuously. I had no doubts about fighting for freedom then and even now. Whilst it is especially painful now to see where the country is at, you cannot look back and say I would not have fought against the injustice of apartheid. The challenge we now face is how do we wrest the country back from the greed and avarice that has overcome us? How do we go back to installing a leadership that is true to the aspirations of all our people and that believes in the Freedom Charter that says that the country belongs to all who live in it, based on the will of all the people. We need to get back to the ideals of creating a more equitable society. We need to elect leaders who are true to the ideals of improving the lives of all people.

At present the country seems to have been captured by people who live in greed and avarice, saying that they did not struggle to be poor. Well, the people don't want to live in poverty and hunger either. We should all go back to the ideals of Mandela and Tambo and Slovo and the countless others that gave up their lives to bring about freedom and democracy. We need to honour the very many comrades who were prepared to give up their lives fighting the repression and injustice of apartheid. We need to empower the youth to take up the torch of freedom and justice for all and continue the battle and to make a better life for all.