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MK Special Operations Unit Project

Interviews

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Tzaneen

Let's start, Comrade Iqbal, by asking a bit about your personal life and your family background.

I was born and raised in Vrededorp, which we affectionately called Fietas. Our extended family was a typical apolitical, middle class family. Growing up in Fietas one was exposed to Apartheid legislation and an Apartheid environment. In very few suburbs were the visible signs and invisible boundaries so deeply drawn in the sand as in Fietas.

There was White Pageview and then there was the non-White – as we used to say, then – Vrededorp. 11th street was the invisible boundary. One dare not cross this parallel grid of narrow streets, the subs-divisions were notable. In just 15 bustling streets of check-by-jowl, semi-detached homes, the full spectrum of ethnic, regional and class differences that characterized non-Whites, as we were called, was present.

11th to 14th streets were dominated by Muslim and, to a lesser extent, Hindu traders, with the exception of one Chinese family.

14th to 22nd streets were more reflective of not only the non-White characterisation, but also middle class and working class families. Here too, there was the presence of a lone Chinese family.

22nd to 26th streets, Coloureds, Malays, Indians and a smattering of Africans shared the downtown area.

As kids, we subconsciously absorbed this multi-culturalism. As we grew into teenage years, we were fully aware of this kaleidoscope but never allowed it to set us apart, instead we embraced it, given the strong community spirit. A far cry from today's segregated suburbs.

I was about seven when my Dad died. We were four semi-orphaned boys, aged two to ten. My mom remarried about six years later. This period of having no father in the household encouraged us to be undisciplined and rebellious, in time to come.

Mom remarried to Ismail Randera, who operated the local dairy. Incidentally, he too had four semi-orphaned children when his wife died. They grew up and lived independently from us.

We operated a profitable, door-to-door, milk delivery business in a neighbouring blue collar suburb of White Pageview and Hofmeyer. At 14 or so I began fulfilling my chores in the dairy and milk delivery round.

Perhaps, this milk delivery period in my teenage years was core to my political consciousness in years to come. However, this period does not minimise the impact of a seminal childhood episode – the killing in detention of Ahmed Timol (ANC and SACP underground activist) – nor does it ignore the day-to-day life experiences on a young mind in an Apartheid ghetto. On the contrary, all these collective experiences enhanced my consciousness and developed a burning desire in me to challenge the status quo in adulthood.

Our extended family of that period was, as I said, typical of an apolitical trading family. When all the clan gathered at granny's kitchen table, political conversations were subdued and avoided at most times. If a topic had political undertones, the elders would shrug it off, citing how important the family business was and almost always referred to the horrors and atrocities that could befall us if the Blacks took over! The Durban 1949 riots, where Indians were attacked by Blacks inevitably came up, and was followed by the Uganda story where Amin expelled the Indians.

At Grandpa's two busy dress shops, where most of the uncles and a few aunts worked, and where we kids came daily to greet our parents after school, young and old knew very well to greet any White customer as *Goeie môre, Baas* ('Good morning, Boss') or *Miesies* (Madam) and never to take offence at the Ja, coolie (a derogatory term for Indians) reply.

At age eight, I worked weekends at one of the shops and manned the dress rails on the pavement - outside, we were well trained to draw the Black Mamas away from entering the main entrance and entice them to the rails of reject and redundant garments. We were even better versed never to entertain a Mama's request to try on a garment in the Whites-only dressing room. Talking of which, not even aunts or Indian staff members dare to try on clothes during trading hours, especially in the presence of *Miesies*.

My family or I did not suffer like the Timols, for example, with Ahmed being killed and Mohammed being forced to go into exile. Nothing more or less than the racial abuse and segregated practices that all of the community shared. But with Ahmed Timol being killed in detention, we shared a community experience, and, for me, it was a seminal moment. I was consciously and subconsciously instilled with a deep fear for the security apparatus but simultaneously a strong hatred for them.

As a child I couldn't comprehend entirely the situation, and even more was oblivious to the broader political background, but nothing could rob us of sharing some of the emotions the elders displayed and although only ten, I understood clearly not to talk against the *Boere* (in political idiom it refers to White South Africans, particularly Afrikaners).

Also, the image of this White lady, Helen Suzman, delivering an emotional tribute at a Timol Memorial was the first of other optics that were to come, like that of Helen Joseph's rousing speech during the later student boycotts and then awareness of high-profile names like Joe Slovo – and this helped shape my political ideology, steering me away from Black Consciousness to Congress politics.

Being in my early teens it was customary to help a bit in the family business, although my older step brother, Naziem, put in the bulk of the effort. The chores were sometimes after school when customers would flock to the store and the dairy required milk deliveries door-to-door. This placed me in direct contact with Whites from poorer households and in streets where 'Non-Whites' would not easily venture.

Invariably, every time I reached the front gate, the incessant barking of dogs would begin, followed by little White kids bleating *Ma, die melkkoelie is hier* ('Mum, the milk-coolie is here'). The demarcation was clear as to how far in from the gate one should stand. Through the streets, White teens would hurl racial abuse at us and our Black workers

Naziem and I often complained to Papa as to why we should address these dirty bare-footed, little White kids as *Klein Baas* (Small Boss) or *Klein Miesies* ('Young Madam), whilst they called us Coolie, Papa would simply urge us to ignore them and pacify us by reminding us how important White customers were.

After some four years NCD (National Co-operative Dairies), the sole supplier, arbitrarily and with scant prior notice informed Papa that the delivery round was to end in a week or two. Clover Dairies had acquired all distribution and

delivery rights. This struck a massive blow to our, until then, small but viable business. You could notice Papa's despair in the week that followed. At 16, I could not comprehend the dynamics of the matter nor shoulder the gloom Papa faced, except to say I felt an anger and sense of unfairness as to why we were treated with such poor regard. Also, I could palpably feel the hopelessness of the situation as Papa resigned himself to it, rather than object and instead try to save the other counter trade half of the business. Today I can articulate the advantages Apartheid legislation gave White business corporates, I can unravel the heavy hand monopoly capital wielded. Legal recourse against such giants was a vague idea back then.

By 16, you should have been near finishing high school. By the standards of my peers who were well behaved and studious, I should have been in standard nine. However, as a frequent truant, I flunked standard nine and dropped out. Like other dropouts of the time, I found a low-level admin job.

The strata that were oppressed varied, with Indians least repressed, Coloureds a notch more repressed, and Blacks bore the brunt. Historically there were strong political overtones in Fietas. Prominent Congress activities. However, within my immediate family and peers, there was little that could engender genuine non-racial ideas with a one person, one vote aim. From earlier childhood experiences you would recall some vivid negative memories of racial interaction.

Let me pick out strands that formed a thread that later in life became a part of my political approach. At 14 onwards, we not only outgrew our tiny home, we outgrew our small suburb. In the house four growing brothers muscled for more bed and poster space. At 15 onwards, there were football fights and skirmishes on Queens Park ground, it was no longer exciting to simply watch from the sidelines, we were grappling in the dust. By now fear of White and Coloured bullies began to diminish and was replaced by belligerence and bravado. John Wayne movies lost appeal, we sat mesmerized by watching *Deep Throat* illegally. By now internal hormonal and adrenalin changes were being pitted against external existential changes.

Also, the stray black sheep from different streets formed a flock of about a dozen, at the 15th street corner café. Such a group of rebels only meant mischief and delinquency – drinking beer on weekends and harassing helpless young migrant Black men was a pastime. By now we aspired for the likes of an Alfa Giulietta but desired even more 'Kwaai Jewish'. And Pringle, Crocket and Jones, Monatic and Arnold Palmer amongst others were the brands of choice, and deep within our two pleat gabardine pockets was our weapon of choice, the Okapi knife.

By 18, the Soweto uprising erupted, the images of White policeman enforcing petty apartheid was now magnified by the images of the might of the apartheid state's security apparatus. I felt a palpable sympathy for Black scholars, especially because of the extreme response of the state. Heated arguments and ignorant discussions ensued among the flock. This time I really was the black sheep. Bigger friends didn't care about the destruction of the 'darkies'. I involuntarily and inarticulately attempted to contrast the 'darkies' position with our own. Almost always I was angrily rebuked and diminished and told to see the light!

But within the street gang came a guy, about six or seven years older, who was now cooling off, Taggy Pather. An ex-teacher and a guy with a reputation for being a toughie, but he brought an intellectual side to the gang. We all knew of Taggy's reputation, but Taggy by now was no more the guy he was, and he was rather looking at these youngsters and trying to give us some direction. Through some informal conversations he dealt with our existential situation, religion, politics especially. Why are we moving out of here (Vrededorp)? He alerted me that it's wrong to have to be moved out.

I mention Taggy because already I could see the formative stages of my political awareness and I knew the rest of the group wasn't listening. Not even his adventurous two-year India travels could hold the attention of most for long. Not me – I was all ears on his world outlook and especially our place in the apartheid system.

I started engaging in some conversations with Taggy, and he spoke the language I understood. He didn't speak intellectually. He spoke street language and I understood that and I could articulate this later. That was about the time that forced removals really set in. Fietas was being bulldozed; and technically speaking, my first act of sabotage was with Taggy Pather.

He said 'the only way is we must challenge the Boere, and who's with me?' And being always the smallest but quickest to raise my hands, 'I'll go with you tonight'. I was scared as hell. We went in the dark of the night. We tried to burn the bulldozer. It was parked in one of the broken buildings in Vrededorp. It was a bulldozer of the contractors that were used by the Community Development Department to bulldoze our buildings. So, we said we must burn this thing so it can't break more buildings. But we didn't succeed. We didn't understand that diesel doesn't burn so well.

As Fietas emptied and reached a ghost status, confusion reigned in my mind. Now that the colors of my childhood had all but faded I began seeing things in Black and White. Removed from the gang, I yearned to matriculate. A benevolent Aunt, sensing my desire and trusting my potential, took me away to

Durban to fulfil this. This was a crucial intervention.

Once, it was just after *Fajr* (the early morning prayer of Muslims), I went back to the street corner, it was very symbolic for me, I still go there, corner of Seventeenth Street where the gang was. It was a nice quiet day in Fietas, early morning sunrise. And I knew that the important bus comes by about eight in the morning. And I just made a decision, no, I'm going to my granny's house - a benevolent aunt used to urge me, 'Come boy, finish your matric, and come with me to Durban'. The best decision I made. Went to granny that day. Bibi Kalla was there. I was expelled. She took me to Durban. We walked around for maybe three to four weeks looking for a school that would admit me.

We tried all the easier schools to get to, but I couldn't get in. I'd been expelled and nobody would want me, and, as life had it, I got into Gandhi Desai. A school of note. It was normally only for the affluent.

I lived with my aunt in Overport. I did my matric two years later than all other kids. It was the best thing. Matric instilled much self-confidence in me. It also gave me the opportunity to better understand classic literature and world history. I was inspired by Charles Dickens *A Tale of Two Cities*. Only now I could see it clearer. I ceased being only consumed by the Black-White divide and began to also acknowledge class, capital and bourgeois elements. World War 2 no longer appeared so heroic, and the concept of imperialism alerted me to the mine dump we once played on.

I was in this prestigious school, Ketso Gordhan (later an ANC activist) and the likes of him were my peers.

I passed matric by doing one or two classes on my own. I'm very proud of that; there was no teacher for me. It showed my aunt's influence. I was determined to finish so I crammed five years of high school into one year. What Algebra I didn't know in standard seven, I crammed into matric. I self-learned. I did biology and history on my own. I wasn't shy to ask about reproduction, women's fertility in the biology class. I was asking questions, I was older than the other kids.

History, I did on my own. The teacher refused to believe that I could write on the history of the French Revolution. And I think I could see that I can articulate things better. The maths teacher, Mr Maistry, because he came from a political background in Tongaat, said 'you've got a good mind, you're an intelligent boy, and I hope you pursue your dreams'. He was very encouraging to me.

So, I left Gandhi Desai with all that support from teachers, good words from my aunt. I went off and I passed matric, I felt great. I could tell my Fietas gang. They were happy for me passing matric, because nobody went beyond standard eight at the time.

I left the comfort of my aunt's residence that year as school broke up. I thanked them. I'm still very grateful to them for what they did. And I came back to Lens, and obviously now I wanted to go to the Technicon. And my aunt said 'come back to Durban boy, you know the place'. I said yes. And I heeded that call. I came to ML Sultan Technical College but I made the wrong choice, I did chemical technology. It wasn't for me. I should've gone into horticulture. Maybe I should've gone into catering or something. I love food, nature and stuff. But you know the thinking at that time, everybody wants to do something in a laboratory or something financial.

But then immediately coming to ML Sultan in Durban, I'm a more mature guy. I can stay at hostel; I'm not under Bibi Kalla's wraps. It was lekker freedom. Hostel posed a whole different set of questions. Hostel brought out a lot again because we came as middle-class guys. Interestingly enough, a Mr Dasoo at the time was the warden with a conservative background. We used to call people like him Stooges. He and I were at loggerheads from day one. I just found myself again in a very conflictual situation with authority.

So, I took up the cause of the students from about the first week. The food was terrible. We called a meeting, and something was happening to me, I don't know what, but I've always got a big mouth and I was much braver now and my English was better. So I wrote to Dasoo and the food situation improved.

And now the lines were clear again. The apartheid lines and all the demarcations I'd seen before in Fietas were extended now to where middle-class Muslim and Hindi-speaking Hindu boys were in, let's say, in the first wing, the nice part, and in another row were your *Appies* (Tamil-speaking Hindus) we used to call them, from Newcastle and elsewhere. Your Eskom guys – 99%, they were Tamils, working class. They came there obviously to do their apprenticeships, but this type of separation caused antagonism and animosity.

And, of course, we were dead scared of these guys till about the third or fourth week when everyone was bullied, and I stood up for the whole group. I challenged the main guy to a fight, with my Fietas bravado. Everybody was quiet in the hallway. I said I'll take you on, I come from Fietas, you know, and after that he began calling me Fietas (laughter). So, I think, just the confidence alone made the guy back down.

So, I realised then, I must reach across the line. We went to them and shook hands and said let's forget things now. I said why don't we sit at the same table today. And never in the history of ML Sultan till I came, did people eat together.

But now the aggressive navy cadets made the once aggressive apprenticeship students look harmless. Again, naval cadets were largely from working class Tamil families. This stand-off was markedly different to the one we had had with the Eskom apprentices. This time round it was not class or cultural difference but political differences that were foremost because the navy cadets were very supportive of the apartheid government.

After considerable persuasion, over a few weeks I managed to get a large section of the naval cadets to attend a student meeting. It was groundbreaking and fulfilling. We did not intend for them to join us in our campaign for reform but at least to listen to our call. They wanted us to understand their plight.

I steered away from an academic approach using my Fietas street-wise skills to talk a language that all groups understood. Rather than isolate groups through high aspirational ideas, I chose to engage on common grassroots issues, reminding them of our common DNA and our rich cultural heritage. In the process I was also going through a cleansing of learned and inherited prejudices.

I am not aware of any *Fietasian* who does not reminisce or eulogise this unique suburb. My political awareness has strong roots in my Fietas upbringing. All five fingers are not the same, but they always stay on the same hand. Overall, peers and elders, almost everyone, disliked apartheid but in main, frankly speaking, Indians opposed or resisted apartheid conveniently, with much self-interest.

In 1980 came the student boycotts. We could hear the sounds next door at the ML Sultan from Gandhi Desai school. We'd go home, we'd see older students being politically active.

So, when I got into college, I knew what was happening. And I somehow attended a meeting and just got into it. It was very low key and very lethargic. So, I rose then very rapidly in the ranks. Within a month or two, I was a student leader at ML Sultan and I headed most of the delegations.

I found myself propelled into a student leader position. A voice emerged from within me that was until then unknown, even I was surprised! Not yet being fully cognisant of or able to articulate what all my grievances were, I did in any

case become much more aware of key aspects of the apartheid machinery, not in its entirety, but certainly in regard to discriminatory practices that affected my life up to that stage, for example, the Group Areas Act, separate development and unequal education.

I was streetwise and I used the correct words and language and approach and I didn't want to make it highly political, I reduced it to their real issues, and I asked where are you going after this, do you think you're going to get the same job as a White person? And I managed to energise the students.

So, from that lethargic first and second meeting, the audience grew much bigger. ML Sultan was now ready to say we have a representative delegation. I was spearheading that delegation to UDW or Medical School or at any other institution. So, it was a very important part in my year and now I could articulate politically where I'm starting to go. That I want to challenge the current establishment on education and other matters. It's very spontaneous obviously, and they called me on stage one day amongst other student leaders from other places.

My turn came up. Everything's very tense, Special Branch is there. What do you students actually want to change, asked a parent? And I don't realise that I had this in me to say – but we want to change the entire system, the political, economic and social, or else there's no change. Obviously only applause from the students, parents are not happy. Fatima Meer's brother, Farouk, he came and said to the parents we're sorry that the younger students are not answering questions. He had to now pacify the parents.

The NIC (Natal Indian Congress) had to cooperate with students. Remember we were building this whole broader thing now, they had to come in to work with the student body – we drew them in. That's when I started learning a bit about the NIC. In about June that year as the boycott was tapering off, we made a decision that we're not getting much further, and there was a unanimous decision, let's go back to college. It's fine, we've achieved what we set out to, we raised consciousness, etc. That was about June, my education was over by then. I had no interest in furthering my studies in chemical technology. I hated the course I did.

By midyear 1981, after much student activism, education was last on my emotional agenda. I made a conscious decision to join MK. Unable to find any credible ANC recruiters in Durban and also apprehensive of strangers in political circles, I made the decision to return to Joburg and confide in a trusted childhood friend, Chacha (Mohamed Ismail, brother of Special Ops Commander, Aboobaker Ismail, MK name: Rashid). Chacha and I last saw each other over two years before I approached him. However, we were friends from

childhood.

I have to go a little back, there was another subconscious seed planted when we played as kids. My brother and I and Chacha and his brother, who's Baker (Rashid) played very intensely as kids. Cowboys and crooks. Hide and seek. Whatever it took. We were neighbours, living next door to each other, very good family friends.

It happened that these two brothers, Haffejees, who are otherwise known as the Ismails, were a few years older than us two brothers, but yet we had a good understanding, and no peer kind or age discrimination or them bullying us. Now that you've seen Rashid and Chacha, you can see the personalities. They somehow had some political inkling of what's happening and we used to talk in hushed tones. We wouldn't understand what they were telling us.

But now and then, say, for example, when the ice cream 'boy' is coming down the road with all that noise, they would in hushed tones mutter to us things like that Mandela is in prison and other political stuff. And we used to carry on playing, we don't know why these guys are talking this stuff. But it became relevant later.

I'm looking for direction and I'm remembering the childhood conversations and I knew that Mohamed Ismail – Chacha – was involved politically somehow, but I don't know where his brother is because we all knew he's gone to Ireland. But I'll go and see Chacha. I forgot about Rashid, I haven't seen him for ten years. I'm going to ask Chacha about him.

So, all this time this contact with Chacha, the families utterly secretive that Rashid is in exile. My mum, everyone, gives salaams to Aboobaker (Rashid), we all think he's studying, '*InshaAllah* he passes', they say, 'and he'll come home a doctor'. 'Ya, *InshaAllah*, you know'. Hiding things from us. So, I go to Chacha at his record shop, about a week after I arrived back in Joburg. Now he questions me about, 'like how come you are political, man, you mustn't, it's not good for you'. He's sussing (checking) me out. But he could sense that this is not the same Igs (Iqbal) that he knew. I'm much more mature. I know a little more, and I articulate it.

But I also recall a memorable incident that alerted me that he was someone who could assist me to reach MK. It was a social trip we made to Nelspruit in December 1977. I completely didn't know who the two people we gave a lift to from Nelspruit to the Swaziland border were. I only discovered from press reports months later. It happened to be Joe Gqabi and somebody called Mashinini. But it was only Gqabi who was mentioned in the article accompanied by a picture. This was around mid-78, some 5 months or so after my

encounter.

At the time I didn't bother to question Chacha who these guys were or why we giving strangers a lift. Only after the press article did I let him know that I was aware that Joe Gqabi was one of the guys we gave a lift to. He just laughed and replied that unfortunately he could not reveal details at the time. I could tell from that incident that Chacha was involved in some clandestine work or had some relevant contacts. Years later Chacha revealed that Indres Naidoo had requested that he assist with Gqabi who was on his way to meet the exile leadership. His subsequent high-profile murder when he was ANC rep in Zimbabwe is well known.

A second incident convinced me that Chacha was definitely not revealing much to me. This took place about three years after the Gqabi incident when he assisted Mohammed Timol to get to the border and slip into exile. Again, he merely asked me to accompany him and a friend to Swaziland, with no details. Once again, press reports alerted me to who the friend was.

As explained, as kids, we two sets of brothers, Imtiaz and I, and Chacha and Baker, were not only neighbours but playmates. As we grew into teens and our contact thinned out, Chacha and I still kept in overall contact.

While sizing me up he advised that it was best to get hands-on into community politics and perhaps some leads would follow up from there. He indicated he knew just the people appropriate for me to meet and serve a term of apprenticeship with, like other young aspiring activists, so I too graduated from the (ANC veteran, MK combatant and former Robben Islander, most of whose family were involved in the struggle over decades) Indres Naidoo household. The warmth of Prema and Kamla's home gave much comfort to this over-eager young man.

So, I entered the Naidoo household like many other youngsters. The warmth, the level of conversation just drew me in. Now I'm listening to Ismail Vadi and Valli Moosa talking. I don't understand everything. Prema speaks very nicely. He spoke a bit at my level. I got thrown in and somehow, I attended more meetings.

But the immediate community issue at the time was the Lenasia Bus Boycott. I entered that meeting only to find things in disarray. There was bickering and it broke down between BC (Black Consciousness) guys who I knew, Enver Randera, my step cuzzie (cousin), and Feizel Mamdoo, Monty Narsoo, Valli and them on the other side. I couldn't understand why these guys were fighting. Then I was told by Mamdoo and them, no, man, you see those guys, they do things the wrong way. You come home, we're having a party tonight, Mamdoo

says, you come to us. I was torn between these two ideologies.

I found myself again a day or two later in Prema's household and something told me I think I'm more aligned to this Congress kind of politics but I had to be clear we're not doing this as Indians. 'No,' Prema says, 'it's a broader struggle,' etc. 'We're not fighting for Indian rights.' I say, okay, we're fighting for all. We're Blacks. Okay, good. I also know White people are good. I remember Helen Suzman. I said they could be good. We can fight.

But before this, I was gravitating towards Steve Biko, Black Consciousness, it was at my own level, its militancy was correct for the person I was. But the pragmatism of Ahmed Kathrada, Joe Slovo, ja, you guys are right. Okay, so I gravitated to the Congress way.

It wasn't too long, the anti-SAIC (South African Indian Council – the "stooge" powerless apartheid body meant to represent Indian South Africans) came on. I won't say the most lethargic meetings, but not the most energised. In a way, I cut my political teeth in the Anti-SAIC political campaign. An intense year and half of all-round civic activism ensued. I attended many meetings. Valli was there always, Ismail Vadi too.

I recruited a Fietas group, about sixteen, eighteen youngsters. I spoke their language. We formed a formidable Extension 8 wing of a branch with the ex-Fietas crowd. We swelled the ranks of the Anti-SAIC. I said, guys we need to do things a little different, okay, they said, 'what do you suggest?' Let's go do it this way, not the normal pamphlets, let's go house to house. In conjunction with the rest of what was happening next to me, the Lenasia branch did very well in the Anti-SAIC campaign, conscientising people. Definitely the community heeded the calls.

Although I was part of the Anti-SAIC movement, I was not a TIC (Transvaal Indian Congress) member as such. I still didn't like part of it. I still felt no, it's not for me, that's for the older guys. It was those kind of TIC meetings championing the cause of the Anti-, and that's where Ram Saloojee and Doctor Jassat would give boring speeches. I already knew I'm out of here. Let me do a bit more though. We went through the Wilson Roundtrees' Boycott.

We ran a marvellous Anti-SAIC campaign. Once again, let's do things differently. We want to raise money, let's have a concert. First time we had a concert. We had to speak the young people's language. And we raised money. And the group Joy came with Paradise Road. It was a hit. Krish Naidoo was there. We raised R4000. We went to the Zoo Lake. We had some innovative fundraising. It was fun, everybody enjoyed it. We kept people's attention. Obviously, my attention was there, it was good for me, but I realised I wanted

to do more. Chacha, I'm tired of this. 'No, no carry on with a few more of these things. Carry on, you're doing well', he says.

The problem was now I was taken very seriously by elder guys, Valli and them. You know, they started residents' committees. Valli Moosa, myself, Feizel Mamdoo were key. I'm now a junior rising in the ranks. They asked that I take over the residents' committees of Lenasia and they're stepping back. It was quite a task to be dealing with older people, parents, but it just came about the time where I'm really feeling that this mass politics is not for me, and I'm again quietly talking to Chacha. I want to go to the next level. And he promised me I will one day, 'but not now. I know a guy', he says. I know he knows maybe Joe Gqabi's connections, some I'm thinking we're going to go join.

Now I had to step out of mass politics because I'm serious about MK so there had to be a time for demobilisation. It wasn't easy. You don't just withdraw into the underground suddenly, you have to phase out of mass politics. Knowing that the Security Branch would go first for activists who've been around, who are not there suddenly when things get hot.

So what's my legend, what's my story, why am I stepping out, such a vociferous, vocal guy, so passionate, so committed? How do you do that in a month and leave? You're elevated to quite a leadership level. Why would I spurn that opportunity, my friends also asked me? What do I do? I just did what I knew in Fietas. I turned things around. I became not interested. Talking at the *shebeens* for the local guys because I knew that part of life as well.

So much so, that one day we were drinking, a few street guys, and we formed a road block, it was a perfect thing that happened. It happened to be the road Prema was using. So, the guys say, 'hey. that's the ANC guy you know'. Prema was upset when he saw me. Okay open for him guys, let him go, I said. It was perfect. Prema decided I was a lost cause. I needed that for my cover.

And that was where the conditions were correct for me. I articulated all this to Chacha. I was more than happy about all this. One or two other guys, Prema told them he's worried about me. He asked, 'do you know why he's become like that, he's got so good potential?' So, we prepared, Chacha and I, the conditions for me to join MK. Maybe I did it too radically the wrong way, but I just got my Fietas enjoyment back, a bit of it.

But I kept my focus after that. The conditions were correct and Chacha said 'our meeting is on, we're going out'. I was very excited to finally know a year after knocking on his door. I had also asked one or two other guys, who were from the Technicon. When they said they don't really know, I said I'm also not interested because of the danger that existed at that time. I felt silly asking

one of the student leaders at ML Sultan. So a month or so later I told him that I'm now going in a different direction, man, I don't want to connect with the ANC, it's not good for my family. Just to get the heat off in case – because we thought these security guys were omnipotent. They knew every conversation – but I learnt after '85 they didn't. So, conditions were ready, we were ready to go to Swaziland for a meeting.

What exactly drew you to the armed struggle? You talk about the boredom of the sedate, staid Ram Salojees and Essop Jassats; it's too much of talk. But you were also active in the mass struggles which needed to be bolstered, and you were playing some sort of leadership role, even if not in the first tier. Do you want to say more about why you went into the armed struggle?

It was evolving. It's those childhood seeds that all came to play. I'd seen the utter repression. We felt first hand doors being kicked in for our maids' passes, etc. We witnessed the Immorality Act, how they beat guys up. The forced removals. That first act that Taggy and I did. I just abhorred what was happening.

So, later in life I found myself in this situation that I'm quite politically active and am involved in mass things, but at the same time there's a lot happening in the country. We're hearing about armed struggle. There's something more than just mass politics happening, and mass politics didn't appeal to me, and state repression was getting worse. The might of the Afrikaner state was being used. It's the police, the army, and we were quite a defenceless people.

So, I mustered all my streetwise experience and my other inherent courage and fighting ability. And I said if I could I could get into MK, I could contribute more. You see, you must also know that I worked on a mass level with very close friends and today I can tell them, they all feel they contributed, but I think it was a convenient contribution. It was convenient to be in mass politics and not choose the armed struggle because that was a harder option. And I don't want to use her name now, but one comrade told me then that we all contributing.

I say ja, we do, but where's our contribution required right now? There's enough of us forming these committees and going on. There aren't enough of us to support our Black cadres. That is where I felt I should be.

I knew that I had special advantages that would help me to take part in the armed struggle, but didn't know how special they were until I met Rashid. So, I didn't want Black cadres to be fighting on their own. But now remember, I was also schooled about Ché Guevara (a Marxist leader of the Cuban revolution,

originally from Argentina) and them. I had a romantic idea. I didn't want to get into MK to plant bombs. No, no, I thought I'm going to the bush. I wanted to fight in the bush. I wanted to fight Defence Force soldiers, hand to hand combat. I couldn't just hear of Black guys doing that.

So, the reality is when we did have this discussion with Rashid, it's true you can do that, he said. You'll stand out. You are required elsewhere, but you'll be doing serious stuff. I never got into it because of Rashid, I got into it for myself, but when I met Rashid and at this critical meeting with him, it was when I made the necessary decision on the type of actions. Otherwise, I was heading for the bush, I thought.

But we knew that only Black guys could swell the ranks of MK in the bush fighting RENAMO (Western and apartheid supported Mozambique National Resistance), UNITA (Western and apartheid supported National Union for the Total Independence of Angola). Am I right? By this time my anger was against all reactionary movements and I'm obviously evolving and becoming a broad communist. I'm looking up to the Soviet Union and I know the support is there and the arms are there and I'm feeling the confidence I'll have with guns to fight with. So, that's why I joined the armed struggle.

I'm urging Mohamed Ismail, Chacha, because I can trust him. Remember all our childhood games and all the other little things. And he's telling me he's got contacts. He's also right for change. He was waiting for the correct guy to come. And whenever we played games, him and I were on the one side, and my brother Imtiaz and Rashid the other side. We had that a long time ago. So, it was easy for the two of us. We could trust each other with our lives. And he was also ready now. But while he's ready, we don't know this unknown quantity. I don't know. And he sets up this meeting in Swaziland.

Before we get there, some clarity. You said earlier you'd decided during your student activism at ML Sultan to join MK? Why the sudden decision while there? You had just begun to be politically active?

Honestly, I too asked myself that in the early years of my MK activity. I had almost two years of civic activism which was enough time to change my decision to join MK. The fun of activist parties, the hot tea at Kamala Naidoo's served on dull nights, and the feeling of being the first non-White, as it were, teller to be promoted at SA Perm (a building society, later a bank), made me doubt my decision at times to join MK.

In Lenasia it was an ideal opportunity to rather than join MK build a political activist career. I rose in the ranks, I brought a lot of value in terms of

innovation and recruits to the various campaigns. But being in Lenasia convinced me to aspire even more to exit public political activities and make my contribution through elsewhere. The heightened political climate in 1981-82 fueled my burning desire to join MK and at times I became impatient with Chacha. He should be able to attest to that. I self-debated and had no outside persuasion or advice.

But I think having been recruited, the more convinced I became and the less regret I had. I admit now that with the cloak and dagger operations having begun, there was also a sense of adventure I experienced. However, the realities spread quickly and negated any romance to being in MK.

So, you go to Swaziland with Chacha?

The meeting is to go see Rashid to take his Mum and Dad because it was their once-a-year meeting to see their son. They were irritated with Mohamed – ‘how could you takes Igs with us? You know that nobody must know that we’re going to see Baker?’ Mohamed said, no, I need Igs, I want him to go with us for the company. They don’t know Igs is going to get recruited. I don’t know they’re going to go see their son. Khatija Bhai (Mohamed and Rashid’s mother) wasn’t happy. But they know me very well. I was in their household all the time. So, they reluctantly accepted that I’m going to Swaziland. I also acted like a big child.

Do you think Rashid’s parents were sympathetic or opposed to what he was doing or just reconciled to it?

Reconciled. Not with the dangers, they were not happy with that, but I know something he said at the TRC about his childhood that when they gave us those spaza chocolate medals to commemorate Republic Day, and he took them home, his father told him not to eat them but throw them away. His father was politically aware, but he wasn’t politically active.

So, what happens in Swaziland?

More than a year since my first approach to Chacha, he informed me to prepare for a weekend trip to Swaziland, contact had been made, and the target date was 12 September ‘81.*

As explained, his parents and him were planning their visit to see Baker in Swaziland which they did now and then. Further behind the scene, Baker and Chacha were deliberating on how best to simultaneously include me on this visit since no non-family member was aware of Baker’s position or ever visited him in Swaziland. Chacha played both his parents and me. He convinced them that

I would be a good decoy for them on the trip and he needed me to divert attention. At the same time, he convinced me it was a good idea.

Now was this ultimate meeting I'm waiting for. He said to his parents when we got to Swaziland, I'm taking Igs for a drive, you guys rest.

Remember I had no idea Rashid was going to be our MK contact. With the stage set and the reality now heavily weighing down on me of my pending contact with an MK Commander and the questions he might ask me, anxious thoughts I had suppressed were coming to the fore. I was ever more aware of news reports on MK casualties over the 1980-82 period. State propaganda was rife with reports of successes in catching MK operatives or killing them in shoot-outs.

What also came out is the levels of indiscipline and mistakes by MK operatives, with open shebeen talk and so on, and this fuelled my anxiety on the imperative of being commanded by a credible MK person. It was blind faith that I entrusted Chacha to ensure our safe recruitment.

And we get to the Matenga Falls. It's tense, but I'm trusting Chacha to make the right judgement. I'm expecting a Black ANC comrade. I see a car pull up, Mohamed says the guy is here. To my utter surprise, this guy's Rashid, he's taller now; it's your broer, man, what's going on, I say. So, it was a shock. I was totally unaware we were meeting Baker about MK recruitment.

Remember, I last heard of him when he ostensibly left for Ireland. I was very much relying on Chacha for a safe contact. I was anxious and surprised and confused to see Baker alighting from a car and walking towards us with that unmistakable relaxed style of his.

Chacha chuckled at my confusion and mumbling, but the mood quickly settled. Any chance of a long embrace or any enthusiastic chatter was almost immediately halted by Baker's tone and behavior. This was not the teenager I knew, it was a grown man immediately issuing instructions. I sensed it wise to be quiet and allow Chacha and him to negotiate us away from there to a hotel room.

On the way, it was easy to understand why the return to the hotel was long-winded, with a few diversions. The atmosphere was created by Baker's relaxed but constant vigilance and his reticence alerted me of the potential dangers in neighbouring countries, but more especially the manner of how things would be from then on.

Immediately the hotel room door shut, there were instructions to run a tap,

switch on the television and sit away from the window. One could sense the experience and professionalism throughout the encounter. I picked up some common-sense ways necessary for secret work. As soon as the pleasantries and embraces ended, the troika, one rooted in the playful Fietas streets, was in the making. Life's unseen twists and turns converged, bringing the three of us, separated once on home ground, now together on foreign soil. This time not to reminisce about the past, but to build the future.

Baker said that he would directly be commanding us and this was a great comfort. I was all ears and could give the matter all my attention without fear or distraction. Of course, Chacha was a bit more relaxed but also seemed pensive now that he was formally to join MK and not be on the periphery any longer.

But obviously at the first meeting I wasn't sure what we going to do. We had our weekend of political education. There was an evaluation by Baker of my request to join MK and a one-on-one ensued, covering all aspects of my political activities, level of maturity, habits, friends, social life, relationships and abilities. Why are you joining, he asked me? There was a good basis for me and, as you said, you also know the guy, he talks very methodically. He was very composed and very impartial.

No longer were we playing cowboys and crooks. The game to be played was deadly. His professionalism and clarity of thought nurturing the novice I was, was most comforting.

I knew I'm in good hands and now I was even more committed. Firstly, my mind was more open to listen. I was more adaptable on what I would be able to do in MK. I wanted something out of the process. I wanted to join. Mohamed Ismail found the right guy to join with now, he was doing ANC work without a title or voluntarily for so long. And now here was Igs who wanted to get into MK.

Rashid maybe sensed – obviously he wouldn't have known what this opportunity would definitely become – but he must have thought you, Igs I can trust. While I'm all comfortable, my prayers are answered, here's a guy I could come back to Swaziland for without doubts and suspicions. Rashid must have also thought the same – here's his brother and this childhood friend, we won't turn against him. It must have given him comfort.

My original notion of being recruited for bush warfare was rapidly dispelled by the need for urban warfare and the role Baker envisaged for us as a unit linked to his command network. After the follow-up meeting at which we would be formally inducted into MK there would be no turning back.

We then discussed that Chacha and I would form an MK unit and how best to arrange our family and friendships around this. We were to withdraw from all overt political activities and begin constructing a legend not only for this purpose but for future trips as well.

'You will go home, come back, we won't stay longer now,' he said. Mom and Dad are waiting. 'I need to go see them. You must start preparing.'
So once again, more demobilising, more managed delinquency to distract people from thinking you're still in politics. The next meeting was scheduled for us. That was the end of that visit.



Iqbal Shaikh passport photo, 1980s, Supplied

Were you giving yourself a 'legend'?

Yes, retreating. Showing I'm not interested. Going away on a holiday. Not attending important political meetings. Friends and family are wondering, how come?

Yes, Ismail Vadi later told me that you just suddenly disappeared and they thought you just opted out. They thought you went to Durban.

So, it worked right.

He only discovered, he said to me that you were in MK, when you appeared at the TRC. He was very surprised, more so with Chacha.

Chacha was told the same things - start debriefing, start demobilising, withdraw. That's what we did for five months. In those five months Chacha and me, were obviously now meeting more regularly. What's our next plan? Now Chacha also doesn't know much but we discuss what we should do, what targets we should start with. It was exciting. We couldn't wait to get back to Swaziland.

We met again on 21 February 1982, about 5 months after our first visit. We were formally sworn in as MK members and established lines of communications, phone numbers, etc. I was delegated responsibility to maintain contact.

And once more Rashid reiterated, 'now we're not being theoretical, this thing here is deadly. This is how this thing works.' My training was no more than of

comrades Prakash Napier and Yusuf Akhalwaya from the Ahmed Kathrada unit who unfortunately died while trying to set a bomb.

I only raise that to say I didn't get intensive or professional training, we all got what I call very basic. That is the best we could do under the circumstances. We were shown limpet mines, but of course I was being shown by Rashid, and I wasn't worried that we may be compromised in any way or how will I go back with weapons.

We were given basic training in a hotel room in Mbabane. Two sessions per day over a weekend. No live demonstrations. I could focus because I was totally comfortable and I say it again, for the tenth time, the fact that Rashid was there meant I could execute my task better. But I think he was equally comfortable.

So, we got to know now what a limpet mine does. We had some political briefing, political education, and the type of targets, and what are the parameters within which we work. But Rashid was happy with my political maturity, my previous mass involvement. Chacha's previous activities prepared us. We were not the raw recruits they sometimes meet or that come through the system. 'Guys you need to go back, this is what we're looking for', Rashid said.

We were given limpet mines for that stage. 'This is a pistol, this is how you cock it, this is what you do.' The pistol in question was an antiquated World War II German Luger. We weren't ready for Makarovs.

We just got basic training on blasting chord and you put this with the detonator in here and it goes into the mini-limpet mine. And these are plastic explosives. And this is the prime one, the limpet mine. You start with the blasting chord. Light the fuse. 'Only this one is too heavy for you guys now. You've got to graduate'. So, we got the basic stuff and these are easy to work and they're small. 'You need to source a Peugeot 504', Rashid said.

We next met on 13 June '82 and were briefed on secret compartments and DLBs (Dead Letter Boxes) to be installed in the Peugeot, the specs involved, and time required to prepare for a three-day visit. The Peugeot 504 and 505 models had an inherent shock and suspension design that provided deep boot space. A false compartment put in was not easily detected.

With a four-day visit, we were told it was more important to pay attention to our legend domestically and on crossing the border controls, as we were to return with weapons. The process of such preparations and the DLBs instilled more confidence in me. I was on a steep learning curve. With many

preconditions in place and the vehicle acquired we eagerly awaited the next call.

This important visit was on 7 August 1982. It was a three or four day stay-over in Swaziland. While we pushed time in the hotel complex, Baker attended to the fitment of the vehicle and frequently came back and forth to the hotel. We received basic theory and instructions on the assembling of limpet mines, pistol handling. We were trained with the actual charge. But nothing physically to go explode. Nothing beyond the hotel room. There was also political orientation, discussion of the policy on civilian targets and the need for armed propaganda.

Throughout, the visit was tense, and three days later the DLB was shown to us. It was impressive, well concealed with a deep load area, and it was relatively easy to access from the rear seat. A small number of weapons was inserted. We had to wait for the smell of the glue to disappear.

'Then what will you guys do?' asked Rashid, and so I said can we select a softer, easier thing for target practise? 'That's fine, go do that. Don't be ambitious. Do what you can.'

It was very tense, we had sweaty palms, everything, but you had to keep your composure. For the first time you're going back. The meetings before were easier – this one now you're in it, and you know that there was a high casualty rate. And we knew that the Boere were very good, or we thought so. They'll just see you and they'll know. But we got through.

My utter disdain at being caught on the first mission afforded me the composure to safely pass the border vehicle inspection. Chacha held his own. There was silence at the border, each with his own thoughts. When we were barely three minutes over the border into South Africa we erupted spontaneously into emotional yelling and handshakes. Perhaps the best high five in all my life!

As I said, Baker and others in MK command were very frugal initially. We were given two German Luger pistols and approximately 10 mini limpet mines with blasting cord. Though this represented the most basic weaponry in MK's arsenal, to me, they were powerful instruments in my until now bare hands. An instruction to us was to target, within our capability, any economic or government infrastructure, mindful of civilians.

In the four months from August '82 to December '82 we had utilised all of the mini limpet mines in our small cache. All three targets were economic, low profile targets. We strategised that we stay within our ambit of capabilities and avoid over-ambitious or daring. For this purpose, we initially identified targets

in our suburban vicinity, on the outskirts of Lenasia's peri-urban area. Later we would go outside our zone. We targeted the Lawley railway line and substation, the fuel tankers in the Langlaagte railyard and the Johannesburg Magistrates court, which we did on 31 December 1982.

Our targets represented all-round entry level targets, but encompassed most of the essential elements critical to sabotage activity. They included cross-border collection of weapons and return and navigating roadblocks or unforeseen detours; pre-planned storage of a cache, which was buried; and the three stage recons (reconnaissance), which involved before the operation, on the day of the operation, and the hours closest to the time of the operation.

We also did a dry run – a day or so before. We had to sync our social and other responsibilities and construct a before and after 'legend'. We had to reintegrate at home and our suburbs after midnight. We also had back up contingency plans – A, B and C. Post-operation planning was also necessary – for example, concealing or destroying work-soiled clothing and gloves and cleaning our hands and tidying our appearances. We had to anticipate unforeseen stops by the police or anybody else or a vehicle breakdown.

Also, our initial activities were less intense than the activities that followed in the years to come, but it had sufficient potential to prepare us for unforeseen mishaps.

The first target, the railway line in Lawley in Lenasia South, was a real target practise. It was an economic target, being a railway station. The overarching reason was that it was a comfortable target for us to achieve. It was like a learning exercise. It was at night. It went off successfully. It was reported in the newspapers, which is what we wanted. The ANC claimed responsibility.

It makes sense. But would bombing a railway station in conservative Lenasia not alienate the average Indian person, especially commuters, not the politically aware, of course?

It would raise the consciousness of the ANC in Indian areas. So, politically it did have that message.

Your second operation?

Our second action was the sub-station. We felt we could take on a slightly bigger target that will have maybe a little more impact than the first one. Again, in the same area, also close to our DLB. We bombed the sub-station, but this time we used a limpet mine. Not the blasting chord with the small limpet mine, not the basic equipment. One up from that. The action went well.

We'd seen we were capable of using the limpet mine correctly, with the correct detonation, etc. Also, it was reported in the newspapers. People in Lens were talking of the blast that happened in Lolly. It had the desired effect.

And then from there our confidence obviously grew but not to the level where we thought we knew what we're doing.

In between these early operations, as explained, we would go to Swaziland to meet Rashid, and there'd be a little more political grounding, more education, reflecting on the jobs, and Rashid said we were doing well. So, he'll give us more. I think it was at that stage that we got the two antiquated Germany Lugers and the SPM limpet mine, the real charge. It's the big metallic one. You had the mini-limpet mine and then you had this.

Now this is a mechanical device, not an electronic one. It has various time ranges and fuses to detonate it. It's very much temperature related. So, it comes with its inherent dangers, and this may explain what happened to comrades Prakash Napier and Yusuf Akhalwaya (of the MK Ahmed Timol Unit, who were killed on 11 December 1989, when a limpet mine exploded prematurely).

Our weaponry had improved. Our Commander was more comfortable and he could see we're in the rhythm, we're into things. We were again briefed more closely on the parameters because we're going to use bigger, more deadly devices. Rashid said 'you're not going to just be doing economic targets now. We leave it to you, but you should be targeting more high-profile infrastructure and government buildings.'

So, from that time onwards we chose to maximise political mileage and we tried to plan around mass events. Wherever we could complement a mass event, we would do that action either a day later, a day before, etc.

By the beginning of 1983 we had been MK members for just under a year. We had overcome much of the groundwork and had an evolving pattern setting in. Importantly, we had survived security force detection and there were no mishaps. You can't take not being detected for granted. You always assume the police may have something.

Also, we survived friends' and family suspicions. We were now truly under the radar. We used mainly mini limpet mines till the end of '82. I think that our Commander's wait-and-see attitude and gauging our potential first, led him to make the all-powerful SPM limpet mine available from May 1983. Not only was it a higher spec – but quantities also increased.

Now more heavily armed, we were able to select targets that would yield maximum armed propaganda. But also, because we had a bigger and heavier charge than the convenient mini limpet, as well as increased quantities, it meant we had to have deeper caches. The scope of work increased twofold, as it was critical to select suitable areas for not only burying the cache, but retrieving the stuff as well. It's an area of work that is fraught with difficulties and the unforeseen. In fact, at times it was more dangerous than hitting the target.

It was burdensome work. We weren't used to that manual work; we had gardeners to do that. Now we had to go dig up hard ground in the dark of the Highveld winter. Select places. Come home, your clothes are dirty. What do you tell Ma? She's going to wash your jeans the next day or give it to the maid. There was that loneliness. You couldn't share it with anybody. Only with your comrade.

Chacha and I had to get back to normal life, but we were meeting more regularly, which also caused suspicion. We had to now counter that. I was suddenly frequenting the Haffajee house a lot – the Ismails, Chacha and Baker's parents, were also known as the Haffajees. Now the old lady is wondering why all of a sudden is Igs (Iqbal) coming around lot. Sometimes I'd go make like I'm buying a shoe or something at their clothing shop and I'd have supper more with Chacha. So, I was more in the Haffejees' household those days.

The family would ask questions because now all of a sudden, after many years, Igs is coming again. Not a negative suspicion. But the mother was sharp and Rashid laughs when I say, Chacha's got too much *gabraat* (getting anxious). He was a good guy, a trustable guy but it was one of the reasons we had to later part.

Chacha and I were left to our own devices. So, we quickly self-learn. We took what Rashid told us. Obviously, he gave us the key things that other guys have done so we were mindful of that, but we now were on the ground. We have to choose. And this is where we realise our special advantage that was critical to our success – our mobility as Indians and that we were less detectable than our African cadres.

Let's not go far from base for DLBs, I say Chacha, I know Lens so well now, but both of us also knew Fietas very well and the outlying CBD. For now, our interest was in the peri-urban areas of Lenasia, western areas, Zuurbekom. Anywhere where there was a eucalyptus plantation, any kind of hooded area, any veld. Lens had a recreation area Oupa Fats, a dam, and rivers. That's where we had to go.

I was into bird watching. I loved nature. I used to go out have my *dops* (drinks) there. So, while drinking I thought it's a lovely area. So, half the work was done already. All the buddies on a Saturday night, let's go braai there, gives us time, I'm watching the area. No cops. No unusual guys. I say, Chacha, this will be our next place for a DLB.

Much of all that was left to me. Chacha was occupied in the shop. So, that's how we started our first DLB. Recovering the arms was a great relief. We found it – sometimes with a little difficulty. One metre in the bush was one metre too much out. All your drawings, there was no GPS, you had to hit that spot. It was very frustrating when you didn't. Many armed caches were lost that way.

Ideally, you would've had to go over knee length. It was backbreaking work. It wasn't for me, but we had to do it. So, we'd maybe go less down than that, but because we were recovering our own stuff and much quicker than other units, I can say that in a very qualified way we didn't have to dig deep. We'd go back because we were using it in two, three months. So, we were okay. And we recovered 99% of what we hid. And Rashid will correct me, I think 80% of what I hid when I joined the Ordnance section of MK in 1988 and gave sketches for a third party was also recovered.

Did you ever have a problem with somebody seeing you while you were on a site for a DLB?

No, not while we were uncovering any caches, but once while I was trying to burn the special wooden crates in which the arms were packaged, a municipal official approached me and asked what I was doing in a remote dumping site. Aagh, I told him, I'm in the printing business and getting rid of these crates. I offered him a beer and he relaxed. He said can I take two boxes, I could use them in my office, and I said, ya, sure...

Anyway, to come back to our operations, as 1983 unfolded we had a good idea of where we as Indian cadres could slot in and complement the fight against what was called the 'Total Onslaught' by the state. In the nine months since we enlisted, we had done eight cross border visits coming across about four roadblocks. Our experience revealed the inherent natural advantages we had. The prejudiced approach and scrutiny meted out to different racial groups worked much to our advantage. We fell into the Apartheid stereotype profiling – by neat business attire, briefcase with brochures and a few crisp bank notes, samples of a commodity, politeness at all times, and half a dozen samosas ready on hand we could get away. Of course, all this was no passport to freedom.

One needed the utmost composure and anticipation of the unexpected. In the time that we awaited delivery of the formidable SMP limpet, we had already spun our strategy. Now that we could weaponise our ethnicity we anticipated a sustainable and visible campaign of urban warfare, primarily sabotage. From this early stage we ruled out or had zero appetite for any action in Indian Group Areas, as these would yield minimum results but demand a lot. Also, it would easily alert the security branch to an Indian unit.

Our target area of choice was the Johannesburg CBD. This offered many government, corporate and security targets. It was easier and less intimidating for an Indian cadre to gain access to these buildings than it would be for a Black cadre. To advance the ANC strategy of armed propaganda and stay within the civilian casualty parameters, our tactic was to choose high-profile soft targets that could be detonated after office hours, usually 7pm to midnight. To derive maximum damage, we adopted the 'on the double' approach – two back-to-back SPM limpets.

One must appreciate that up till then, most MK activities were on the periphery of Johannesburg, mainly in the townships and the peri-urban areas. I found the private and state security apparatus wholly unprepared to respond for over a year. When they did make an earnest attempt in about mid-1984 to counter the spate of bombings, it was too little too late, there were still many holes left unplugged.

Following on the heels of the Church Street Pretoria bombing in May 1983, in which we didn't play any role, we conducted six bombings from June to December, with December experiencing the most activity with four operations between 7 and 29 December.

By December, one could feel the complacency gone and replaced by pervasive chatter, across the spectrum, of how dangerous Johannesburg had become. Complementing the CBD targets we conducted operations outside Johannesburg, including in Pretoria and Warmbaths. All targets satisfactorily achieved our goal of armed propaganda, some more than others. The three that were most sensationally reported on and the regime made the loudest noise about were the Hillbrow attack on the Temple of Israel synagogue, the Carlton Centre Ciskei Embassy attack and the Warmbaths fuel depot.

It's not ANC policy or my view that places of worship should be attacked. That's not what we wanted to do. But there were exceptional circumstances here. There was no intention to cause loss of life through the Temple of Israel synagogue attack, that's why it was primed for after midnight. But this was a provocative announcement of the unholy alliance of South Africa's and Israel's political and military cooperation, attended by top level dignitaries – and this

aroused a radical 25 year old man. Why did they choose to consummate a political-military alliance, between two highly militarised societies, in a place of worship? There was no loss of life and the news articles stated that 'terros' had slipped through a tight security net; that Mossad had given a thorough look over before the event. At the time this was encouraging news and confirmed that our recon was effective. On a lighter note, if I was aware Mossad was present, I would have stayed far away!...

But it is a place of worship...

It was unfortunate but I stand by what I did. It was very clearly cooperation between the state of Israel and the Apartheid state. It was up my alley given the history of the intense relationship they had, and politically, the mood at the time. Our struggle was not separate from other liberation struggles, especially that of the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organisation). And by the apartheid state legitimising or giving credence to the state of Israel by getting dignitaries here and the State President meeting them in the synagogue, I felt if they're not separating the religious from political then we also have a right to make a statement.

But I want to make this very clear, I had no choice but to do the synagogue with the least, the most minimal, damage to the religious part of the synagogue. We placed the limpet mine in the yard. I could have opened a window and put it in the synagogue or at the entrance. So, I was aiming to hit the building closest to it to make a political statement. I didn't really choose the synagogue as such but the precincts, we put it outside the back door, not the front door or in any other way that would be more damaging to the synagogue.

The explosion went off at about six in the morning.

The damage psychologically was great. I didn't know this but it later came out, as I said, that Mossad does a clean sweep wherever an Israeli delegation goes. So, I felt great about it, I can escape Mossad, I can escape the Boer, so I must be doing something right. It's a feather in my cap if this is true, but I don't say it with bravado. So, look, our aim was not to attack the synagogue as a place of worship as such.

Of course, in carrying out operations people get tense, and Chacha got a bit nervous and began rushing away from the synagogue and unfortunately a White shopkeeper saw him in Hillbrow, and a sketch matching him appeared on 'Police File' (a TV show).

For the second time Khatija Bhai said to him, you're up to something, you and Igs. So, he was compromising me. I think it was after the synagogue action when I told Rashid that it might be better to work on my own. I'm not saying Chacha was not a good comrade, but we had very different personalities and styles.

Of course, Israel and the apartheid regime were partners in crime, and you have explained what you sought to do at the synagogue, but still, it is a synagogue, a place of worship; the back door is part of the synagogue. Would you have put a limpet mine at the back door of a mosque or church or temple?

A very valid question. No, whilst I accounted for what my frame of mind was then, I can say it was probably the most ill-considered, most emotional of our jobs, and I would not do it if it was a mosque or a temple. But my prejudices overtook me. I saw the synagogue at the time differently. At that time, I didn't see it as a place of worship but as a political meeting addressed by the apartheid State President Viljoen and a Zionist government leader, both of whom had much in common and were the enemies of the people.

Okay. You mentioned the Ciskei Consulate and Warmbaths operations...

Still new in the game, we certainly didn't expect the extensive, sensational media reports and fallout generated by our attack on the Ciskei consulate. Consistent with our tactic of high profile strikes I reconnoitred Carlton Centre and discovered a relatively easy method I could employ. The aftermath was evident that we not only struck at the homeland system but more brazenly struck at the heart of corporate business and White Joburg, simultaneously dealing an embarrassing blow to the security of both business and the state. Our confidence grew steadily.

The entire operation from start to end paved the way for a disciplined modus operandi in the urban environment. Reintegrating into the late evening crowds, leaving and being home safely by the time of the detonation informed me much about the fuse I used in this case, which was placed at about 5pm to detonate shortly after 7pm. I had a much better understanding of the range of the fuses of the device.

The attack on Warmbaths was the furthest we ventured out of our comfort zone. It brought to the fore the need for a forward and follow vehicle and long-distance intervals of communication. The press had announced in September that (State President, PW) Botha will be giving a key address on Kruger's Day,

10 October, and we were off. As we had made childhood visits to the Habibia resort, we were very familiar with the town.

We obviously did our reconnaissance of Warmbaths. We had to drive a week before, and did recon thrice, including the night before, to also monitor police patrols, commandos etc. The night before, Chacha goes in one car, I go in another, and we phone each other from call boxes along the way whose numbers we had previously taken down. Fortunately, under apartheid your call boxes worked well (laughter). Where are you, I would ask him? I said if I don't see you by a certain time I turn back. Our own common sense guided us and bit of the instructions from Rashid.

We managed to identify two excellent targets – a small fuel depot about a kilometre from the town centre and the civic centre.

I remember the night before, during our last dry run, an aggressive oversized *javer* (White man) blocked the cafe entrance and shouted at Chacha *Koelie, wat doen jy hier?* ('Coolie, what are you doing here?') We passively passed by and bought our snacks for the road home. Walking back out of earshot of this brute, I told Chacha you should have replied, *Baas ek doen niks vanand, maar ek kom weer more* ('Boss, I'm not doing anything tonight, but I'll be back tomorrow.') We laughed and returned home.

We got a lot of operational satisfaction with this target. Except for a minor hitch or two, forward and following vehicles and communication went according to plan. Once in town on the night of the action we parked one vehicle in an Indian area - a vital element, because if things went awry, we could simply stay over on the pretext of being on holiday, which would not lead to unnecessary scrutiny in an otherwise *verkrampste* (conservative) quiet town.

Close to 11pm we began all the steps, hiding a second car and making it on foot through the veld to the fuel depot. We had decided to hit the fuel depot because now we could cut wire fences with a wire cutter, and we had the basic tools. We knew how to now creep in the dirt and dig up our stuff. We were ready after our earlier easier operations for something bigger.

There were no security people at the fuel depot, but we thought there were, so we tried to creep like there were. But we were delighted to know that they weren't there. We became a little more confident. No guards at the Civic Centre as well. There was complacency on the side of the state. Because PW was talking the next day we would've expected them there, but thankfully they weren't.

We did what we had to do. We put four limpet mines on four separate storage tanks at the fuel depot and a second SPM limpet against a door at the back of the Civic Centre. We said we don't want the bombs where they can hide what happened.

Newspapers broke the news early the morning after the operation of a terror attack at Warmbaths. So, the impact was quite huge. The headlines were massive. In angry tones the regime was to claim that highly trained terrorists (laughter) were involved and planned to annihilate the cream of society. They said a startling new phase had started, etc. It was the second limpet that we placed at the civic centre as a backup – in case the fuel depot blast didn't take place that caused so much of a furor, even though the limpet was discovered before it could go off. We were surprised by their over-reaction, they felt that we wanted to wipe their leadership out. We only understood the ramifications of our action later.

As was the case with all actions, one relied on news reports to gauge the degree of success or not. But it was very important not to show any haste at getting the newspaper in the household or any enthusiasm for the article. This was done in a private space parked in a car somewhere in some shaded spot. On the way to the family takeaway restaurant the next day, I saw the headlines on lampposts. A warm feeling engulfed me. Also, Chacha and I would never call each other until about three days after any operation.

We were elated because I was in our family take-away the next morning, and my brother opened the paper. 'Hey, check these terrorists bombed Warmbaths!' I remember Imtiaz saying. Where and who, I said, and don't worry about that. How many chips does this customer want?

I'm dying to read the paper, but I can't show interest. I only got the paper later that evening. I couldn't show that I want to read the paper yet I said I'm not interested in it, you see. But I knew it was done. What a feeling in my heart. So, the bomb we put at the Civic Centre, was reported, and we realised that that became the concern for the security police and they focused on that, so it became a decoy, not realising that the fuel depot was the real target.

We learnt that that's the way to then do it. Plant the one bomb at a minor target as a decoy, give them a *churki* (a small cracker) and when they go for the small one, we detonate the big bomb, a method which I used later in the Krugersdorp bomb. It didn't exactly work out, but that's what the plan was.

I remained unaware of the entire impact. We sensed its obvious magnitude. It was not difficult to, but we erred on the side of caution and did not want to exaggerate it too readily. Only after our follow up meeting with Baker, in

Swaziland on 25 November, a month later, could we make an accurate assessment. It did have a big impact and had wide-ranging ramifications. PW's speech and the entire event was disrupted and cancelled, and had to be held on a later date.

We now learnt how the state machinery works in instances like these. Immediately after a blast, a nerve centre is set up for command and control purposes. In such towns, civic centres are the first venues of choice for a nerve centre. It was an 'Aha!' moment. We welcomed all the unexpected and unintended praise and compliments for the operation through the media. The real praise that counted awaited us a month later. A usually composed and reticent Baker was enthusiastically smiling and cheerful, anxious to hear from us in person the details.

'It could not have happened at a better time,' he said. A visiting Soviet delegation was assessing the weapons issued to MK and its effectiveness. Our operation assured them MK was alive and kicking. MK Command was very energised by the selection and execution of the target. The regime's response that Whites may be involved was a welcome diversion and reinforced our tactic of using our special advantages as Indians. All round, the planning aspects were more than satisfactory.

We noticed that there was zero security around the civic centre or any police presence into town, a weakness we would continue to exploit. The detonation time was 2:30 in the morning, by which time we were home. I was becoming proficient in the choice of the fuse for a specific operation.

If one took the blasts until then, including Warmbaths, and measured their success, I would confidently say Warmbaths alone, minus the other 10, had more than sufficient success and ticked all the boxes. Up till the Warmbaths attack on 10 October 1983, we had only had what you can call, hotel room training. I'm not undermining or being critical of this, with Baker carefully and patiently demonstrating practice and outlining theory to us. In fact, I'm rather celebrating how resourceful we were. It was little more than classroom theory in a hotel room without any live demonstrations. For example, we unfortunately couldn't set off a limpet mine in a controlled environment in a forest or somewhere. We had to use the little we could master and steadily build up from there. As a matter of fact, we carried two antiquated German Lugers till then. However, now I could demand my Makarov and AK47. My request was granted not too much later.

Up to this point any notion of the regime being all-powerful and super-efficient disappeared that morning – the burning fuel to form a dark cloud at the fuel depot in Warmbaths made me feel that. Morale was at an all-time high and we

rapidly carried out back-to-back blasts in the city, from 7 to 31 December 1983.

We utilised SPM limpet mines, there were minor casualties in all bombings and no deaths, and most blasts received high profile media coverage and achieved our armed propaganda goals. We tried to do these blasts as close as possible to prominent dates, such as apartheid public holidays or liberation events or industrial action or to make other political points, like rejecting the homelands systems.

By this time the family opened a takeaway in Von Weilligh Street opposite the Carlton Centre. So, working in the family business, it was easy for me to do the recon. The Ciskei issue, the homelands issue, was boiling. It was a pivotal campaign at the time.

I had all the time to go deliver sandwiches and check the place out. I told Chacha let's do the Ciskei Embassy, not knowing the impact it would have. So, we bombed it. Being the Carlton Centre, being the Ciskei consulate at the time, it was a very high-profile attack. This would be somewhere around 1983.

But by now we had almost *carte blanche* because we were acting correctly, Rashid says. 'I see you are politically mature enough, go ahead.' I never had to ask him again, can I do this one, should I do that one, what should I do. I tied our operations with our broad political strategy. So, we almost always married what's happening politically to our operations.

For instance, I went a second time to the Carlton Centre, it was the AECI strike. Workers were dissatisfied. As I already did Carlton once, it was easier. That is when they improved the security there.

Now between the Ciskei and the AECI ones, Chacha and I identified in his town of Roodepoort, the Police Command offices. He knew the lay of the town well. It's right next door, literally two blocks from his house and business. We did the recon. A lovely target. Can have a nice impact. You got a feeling of what can work now. And we decided to do that one. There, the only thing - that's where a little of our fallout started - was that he got too much *gabrat* after the job. He was very nervous.

While we are going, he'd say it's Maghrib Azaan_(call for Muslim prayer at sunset). I can't, it will compromise us. Why you late? 'I just went to the mosque, he'd say.' No, there are times to meet. So, I could see I'm assuming leadership. I had to work on my own.

Were you his Operational Commander inside the country?

No. I became as we went because, remember, he was my senior. I learnt everything from him. I took guidance from him politically. But when we came now into this new situation, I'm finding a niche. I'm finding my rhythm. I think I know what I'm doing. I'm finding these discrepancies in Chacha. I can trust him anytime. I know that. But he's compromising our actions, we are beyond cowboys and crooks now.

So, Rashid told Mohamed to take instructions from me. But also, more than that, I don't want to overemphasise that because we also had our own personal problems, I must say we also felt at the time very strongly that if we got caught, why must both go. It's more productive to let one guy go. If you work separately and you're gone, it's just you.

And then we won't compromise our Command outside as well. So, let's look at what are our respective strengths? These are your strengths. I think I'll take these risks because these are my strengths. I'll do the operation. We still collaborated. I needed still someone at certain times for certain things. But after a while I did all the actions on my own.

When exactly did you become the Operational Commander? I understood that you and Chacha were both going to work together with just an external Commander, Rashid?

For Rashid, it was you guys will work together, you'll find out who wants to do what.

I think it was after the third action and when we reported to him and he sees who's taken the lead, identified the target, how it happened that Rashid said I must be the Commander inside. But I don't want to detract from the valuable contribution Mohamed made.

But this is the beauty of what happened. No nepotism. An impartial, objective decision. That was the type of values. But look at the ANC's nepotism today. When we were given the basic weaponry and when we were given a little more, we were both sent into the same dangers. This I must say very loudly. He could have sent Chacha in the first car and the follow up car I could have carried the explosives over the border. He never designed things to suit his brother and to make me confront more danger.

And then he could have gone further because we were such good friends and he knew my mum and he could've given me just soft stuff to do. But he made me serve the needs of Special Ops. Whatever their needs were outside, I don't

know, they gave us our tasks. It served the struggle's needs. So, there also I find very strong values entrenched.

Obviously, my attitude to Mohamed caused a bit of tension between us, but we maintained our mutual need to cooperate, our working relationship, our friendship, also because our lives still dependent on this, and so did his brother's, my great friend. We understood that very clearly. Imperatives were clear. We had to cooperate.

Even when I did stuff alone and I felt that it might have implications for him I would alert him that an operation was going to take place without giving him details of the target. But I also always did stuff on my own that would only attract attention to me. So, no more could I do things in Roodepoort, etc. Having said that, I did go back to Roodepoort, but as part of a progression of targets. Now working on my own I had a whole different confidence.

Chacha and I anyway had sufficient experience to continue independently but collaborated at all times when the Command required the efforts and demands of a unit for an operation. Our separation was a cumulation of personal differences, operational aspects and pragmatism. We found that both of us were rather headstrong and given our all-round independent lifestyle, were fully capable of managing tasks without unduly involving one another's resources or time. This further translated into us not having to expose or draw one another unnecessarily into risk situations.

I had thought the security police were omnipotent. By now, I realised they weren't. They didn't have a clue. By now, I was firmly of the belief in my special advantages and I said I will now use that to its fullest.

Early 1984 saw the Nkomati Accord (between the apartheid and Mozambique governments, in terms of which Mozambique would not provide sanctuary to the ANC and the apartheid government would stop supporting RENAMO, the armed opposition to the Mozambique government) severely disrupt our command and supply. It was a frustrating time. The mood had begun changing. As corporate South Africa began improving its security, the state was still lagging. I simply adapted tactics and changed from soft to medium targets.

The regime was getting aggressive. Also, the situation was tense. Cadres were being hit. Activity was low. My schedule of trips reflects how far in between meetings became, going to Swaziland and it further reflects how the movement moved from Swaziland to Botswana, Botswana to Zimbabwe.

The long periods of inactivity grew longer. The frustrations more, and you're on your own. It was perhaps the loneliest time and you're sitting without

weaponry or you haven't got enough. And you want that contact with the Command. But it was within that time, '84-85, when I could work on my own without Chacha, with great mobility. The records will show that I went from inert targets at night to what I call live targets, meaning during the day. I said to myself I have to obviously complement mass action that was happening with armed action, but in a much more effective way. Then I said maximum gain can be made in Johannesburg, it's the economic hub. So, I'd focus on the Joburg CBD, which I knew very well. And I went for live day targets. Foreign Affairs in the day, Rand Supreme Court during the lunch hour. Railway Police Headquarters bordering Braamfontein four o'clock in the afternoon. I hit them while they were manning their radio room. I went back to Roodepoort, back to the same Police Headquarters. Because I did a night target the last time, they put a guard at the one entrance. There was an adjacent entrance that wasn't guarded. That's how weak they were.

The state launched a media campaign to make the public aware of what a limpet mine is, especially after a White court employee walked around with a limpet mine nonchalantly thinking it was some cylinder for hydraulics at the Rand Supreme Court and also because of the increasing limpet mine blasts.

So, the state decided they need to educate the public. They didn't want to show before the weapon, now they were forced to do so. So, my game plan worked. So now, the limpet mine was displayed at all government installations for people to see.

In that time as well there's an article that shows that they went on a drive to beef up security in Joburg. About 10 000 guards were deployed. And I'm still in my little family takeaway shop in Von Weilligh Street and I can see the building up of security. Every corner literally had two policemen. It was a time to lay low - but I couldn't. I had to do something. I managed through all that; I chose the simplest, easiest target. There was no message. It was Southern Cross Fund. They raised money for the SADF (South African Defence Force) Medical Aid.

I knew there was an office up there in one of the buildings in one of the streets I knew well. I put a bomb that next day to show we are alive. So, it was psychological. I had to show that. And it had an effect. 'Terrorists infiltrate security net', said the papers. It was probably for any activist encouraging, I don't know. That was the mode of operations and that defined what I did, until I went for specialised training.

A critical factor was Baker's review of all operational and political aspects of the actions I had done. This included taking into account the changed situation where I was now operating on my own - which presented me with much

flexibility and spontaneity. Logistical and consultative impediments were removed, allowing for rapid mobility and on the spot adaptations.

I could enter and exit buildings, navigate alleyways, corridors and stairwells speedily. If confronted, it would be easier to draw on one's inner strength and defuse the situation or shoot one's way out. The optics of two individuals at roadblocks or entering a building were not as good as a single figure operating.

But the 1984 Nkomati Accord really made things difficult for the ANC. The apartheid regime did not take kindly to its poorer Black neighbouring countries providing exile for our comrades, who were like the foster children of these neighbours. The regime ensured that these children don't make any place a home for the ANC for too long. My passport will also reflect the shunting of my immediate Command, and the exiled ANC structures from one neighbouring country to the next.

The success of our response to their 'Total Onslaught' – our own 'Total Onslaught' – in the early 80s angered the regime. It retaliated by raising even higher their 'Total Strategy'. Since my first, furtive visit to Swaziland in February 1982 until the last in July 1984, I had made a baker's dozen of visits, no pun intended. Just as I was getting to know this kingdom and becoming less apprehensive of its shadowy hotel lobbies and unfriendly police, Baker informed us that all future meetings will be held in Botswana-Swaziland was off the cards!

Swaziland was the secret bearer of an accord with the apartheid regime since 1982 and already did much of the whipping. This could be felt in the posture of Swazi police and officials, not to mention the blind eye the kingdom turned to activities of the apartheid security branch agents and collaborators. Actually, I was more wary of the Swazi border police than I was of the Boers, my countrymen. With the latter, I could converse and understood the culture, making small talk whilst driving the attention away as much as possible. It was known that Swazi police were compromised and would easily hand you over to the South African police if they caught you.

The disruptive effects of Nkomati filtered down to the rank and file like me, and resulted not only in 8 months of operational inability but also in loss of morale. Emotionally one felt detached. You must appreciate in this game of death, your soulmate is your Commander, especially so when you are solo. There is no one else to share your feelings of anxiety or helplessness with.

The Apartheid deep state had unleashed De Kock and his braai mates. Overall, the regime claimed gains and dealt brutally with captured cadres. The security police was to eliminate terrorists rather than martyr them in court proceedings.

My response, consistent with the pervasive mood and the Kabwe Conference not too long after, was to escalate from soft to hard targets. I reckoned that if I was to get caught, Vlakplaas was more certain than Robben Island. Therefore, I might as well take some of the enemy with me!

With Nkomati, there had to be a logistical and tactical realignment and this new situation of command and control led to Baker revising my supply chain. I no longer had to make the long trek to collect weapons and then bring them back home. I could now reduce the frequency of visits and rely on prearranged, months in advance at times, DLBs delivered by another unit. This was much-appreciated relief. It lessened a very onerous task and reduced the risk of detection.

Klaas de Jonge and Hélène Passtoors were also among the couriers. I didn't know them, but met Klaas in April 2019 in Johannesburg 35 years later, when he came to South Africa to receive the OR Tambo National Order for his contribution to the struggle. I only became aware of their role from media reports at the time of their arrest in 1985. The supply of caches relieved me greatly, from the last quarter of 1984 into 1986. The way this new arrangement improved my work could be seen from the fact that in 1985 I made only two visits to Botswana but managed averaging one bombing per month.

I targeted state infrastructure, with awareness to avoid civilian casualties, moving to medium to hard targets, still aware of the need to avoid civilian targets, but not sparing any element of the security forces in a mixed residential or business environment. In August 1987, I hit a day-time or live target, being the Roodepoort district police HQ. The detonation was at 15:20 – during work hours. The device was placed directly in the corridor of the police offices. The severe injuries were of policemen, with hardly any civilian casualties.

The optics of the police in tattered uniforms and being carried out on stretchers in the midst of devastated offices boosted my confidence. Seven days later I struck another live target, the Railway Police radio control room in Joburg. The detonation took place at 17:33. Again injuries and optics like the previous target.

For most of 1984 and 1985 when I could not achieve hard targets, I would select targets for early or late day-time detonation. The strategy was to maximise armed propaganda not only through the media but rather by getting everybody in that live environment, civilians, officials, police, tourists to live the experience. The targets before achieved more than the expected gains but the after-hours detonations did not convey the full message to the masses!

I also targeted the Department of Home Affairs and the Medical Command in Joburg. The limpet mine detonation chamber was not electronic, it was mechanical. Once activated a thin wire would cut through the lead fuse and then the pin would strike the detonator, just as a firing pin in a pistol. These lead fuses were of differing colour coded thickness, and they signalled different approximate times. The times varied according to the temperature. For the day-time bombings I went against the rules by opting for red. Red fuses had anything from 5 to 15 minutes delays. Given my strong desire not to have a bomb accidentally or on inspection get found, I took the risk of opting for the most unstable fuse. I was consumed by wanting to get to the enemy.

An equal risk was the choice of target. It was not on the perimeter of a building or by mail, instead I was rubbing shoulders with my targets in passageways. If any person just had to step out of an office at the time I was just about to place a device at the door, my game plan would be over. I use different means, such as pot plants and cleaning trolleys to disguise the devices. Once when I targeted the police, just as I was driving off about 10 minutes later, I heard the blast. I must say, it's a sound that resonates like no other.

By Christmas 1984, I had evaluated the year's progress. I was aware that I was merely a link in a chain, and I had to guard against being too adventurous or becoming complacent. In between targets there was the lively socialising, and I had to also guard against euphoria and consequentially any slips of the tongue. Importantly, I had to maintain my cover and avoid activists discussions or challenging those with reactionary views.

It was frustrating not to be able to defend ANC positions, or offer perspectives not only to the uninitiated, but also armchair and egotistical activists. I would quietly reflect on the year that passed and at the same time think of the year ahead. Foremost in my mind was how many days, weeks, or months I would survive in the coming year.

I was now a full-time MK operative and there was no opportunity for desktop calendar planning or diarising. One lived a full day perpetually ready for a no tomorrow. One also always prepared for that past midnight dreaded banging on the door. To asses gains, aims, objectives, it is ironic that much of it was a self-assessment, reliant on media reports, and not always on feedback from the Command.

What actually happened during the Krugersdorp operation? The decoy didn't work? Did something go wrong with the device? Or was

it the timing? And, on reflection, what could you have been done to ensure it worked out?

The decoy didn't explode as planned as a result of a faulty timing device. The car bomb exploded prematurely. I don't know why. Maybe the electronic devices were not reliable? The device itself was okay, it's the trigger mechanism, the detonation, that might not have worked? – the actual detonator was linked to these little battery tops, with the high tops, and you clip it. And it had switches on each, which were much more accurate than with a limpet mine in terms of timing – fifteen, thirty minutes as you break it off. But it's like a battery contact, if it's not making contact that can cause a problem.

So, the device is not a problem if all the circumstances are okay, but in the heat of things, this was one of the disadvantages of working alone, how do I get the whole bomb there? There's a whole lot to do before that. I've got to drive a car, park the car. I've got to take the train back home. Go back again. Get the other bomb. I had to get parking.

Then secondly, the circumstances became too much – this device needs such careful working. You've got to see if it's clipped in properly. I'm parked outside, the moment is right, it's abuzz with police activity.

There were logistical and maybe psychological reasons it didn't work out as intended. I was stressed. I wanted to get done with it. The job took me quite long.

Overall, though, in my operations, targets were hit regularly with good effect. I think that's when Rashid and them realised this guy needs to go now for special training. On 31 October '86, Chacha and I went for specialised training. Before that much was self-learnt, becoming quite adept with what we had.



Krugersdorp operation, 16 March 1988, Rapport/News24

Did you consider, after you and Mohamed drifted apart, approaching Rashid to recruit somebody else to work with you?

Not until Krugersdorp. After I went into the Ordnance section of MK we did recruit somebody, Farouk Farista.

Tell us a bit about your Voortrekkerhoogte operation...

Well, we were still getting experience, and weren't sure of our capacity, and we thought the water pipeline of Voortrekkerhoogte was an easy target. We actually thought it might be a fuel pipeline. We didn't have the capacity to hit the base itself. You would need a rocket launcher. There's not much more to say, really.

Okay. Why did you move to Ordnance?

Because of a change in the political situation. On the instruction of Rashid. From the late '80s onwards arming the SDUs to defend the ANC comrades against the IFP and the 'Third Force' (covert agency of the apartheid state orchestrating violence to destabilise the ANC and its followers) became a priority.

Maybe Rashid hasn't told you – they told me instructions from top, we're good, it's fine, no more bombs, we're going into a different phase. End of '88. So, the ANC was already in background negotiations or things were happening on that side. I was ready for another four car bombs because the next one I would've done much better.

This new phase, was it related to a focus on People's War or was it because of the preparations for negotiations?

No, the car bomb comes after I told you I wanted to go for live targets. I felt I was not getting the impact I wanted. The disappointments I had when I see buildings in civilian areas still shielding the enemy, and obviously now the movement is prepared to give me a car bomb. I'm qualified enough to do it. They only gave us limited weaponry until then. There was a vacuum and the time was asking for bigger action.

Did you ask for a car bomb or where you offered it?

The time, the situation. And then I availed myself to that situation and Rashid approved it. The leadership obviously gave me the different stuff that you needed for a car bomb. There were very different charges for this.

Did you get specific training on the car bomb?

No, because I had the basic training of putting the detonation together and with a car bomb, you just link it to this mother package.

Was the car brought in from outside?

This is one of those stories. This was probably the time I was closest to getting caught. The car happened to be, after everything happened, my cousin's car. It was a coincidence. I only learnt after the car went off. We got someone to steal a car. What a coincidence (laughter)! This guy brings me the car. I think I know it - it's a Datsun. But everything's okay. You're not worried. You've got a car. I gave the guy 500 bucks. He was a local car thief. I go, I slaan (drive it fast) it. The next day it happens.

They're blaming (Hein) Grosskopf (Special Ops operative). My cousin has been in detention, they're going for his brother and he was part of Qibla (radical Islamic anti-apartheid group). Because they picked up the chassis number, they went for my cousin. They start looking into the whole family. Now they're going to come for me. It was the time I was most tense. It was a hell of a coincidence. But I couldn't steal cars. I don't know how to hot wire them. So, I got a local thug to do it.

But didn't the guy later realise that the very car that he stole for you was used as the car bomb?

It was part of my fears. But nobody came for me. Nothing happened.

What happened when your cousin got detained?

They took my cousins in. One is a big businessman, he's a very wealthy guy. He got beaten up, and so did his brother. My cousin made the mistake of not reporting the car stolen. He couldn't be bothered about the Datsun.

They let him go, but it came with trauma because his brother was in detention for three months. Because when they went to his house, they found Qibla material.

Did your cousins have any inkling or suspect you might have had something to do with that bombing, using their car?

No, remember I was under the radar. They all thought I'm a lost cause.

Was the Qibla material illegal?

Yes.

The car bomb used in some other operations were brought from outside, but you set up your own...

Yes. They gave us two-way radios. But I couldn't use that because I was now a one-man operation. The two-way radio is also a way of detonating. But I used the other method, as I explained, the mechanical one with the switches.

So, which do you think was your most effective operation and which the least, and why?

I would think the Krugersdorp bomb was the best. It was on the biggest scale. You wouldn't want to do that work. Logistically it was very difficult. I remember a White woman looking at me through the glass door because she could see what I was doing and I had to move again. She had a child in a pram. We talk of civilians near the Magistrates' Court. She was like looking at me suspiciously because I moved the car from one to another parking space and fiddled in the car in a particular way.

But I was cool enough. Moved the car away. She was gone by the time I got a parking and then I couldn't move again. I think it was a very important time also of the struggle. And Krugersdorp was an important target because next to the Magistrates' Court there was a notorious police station that targeted political activists.

Which was the least effective operation and why?

I think the Temple of Israel, the synagogue. It was not in my genre actually, if I was well-considered.

What do you think were the strengths and the weaknesses of Special Ops?

I've changed my views on this. Before I would have been more positive about MK. But now I want to raise a whole different perspective and that is why I like your many questions. I just got a feeling I can talk to you about this, and let's look at the realities, let's not exaggerate. MK was often inert, it was very infiltrated. How effective where we? We have to look at these broader questions also to assess how effective the operations I carried out were.

MK did help with a political message, it helped to bring the Boers to the negotiating table. What if this collective bombing wasn't there? What would have happened, this question beckons? We need to analyse this.

These operations we did, I would be interested in what the investigating officers thought about their impact. We can't only look at MK from our perspective.

MK needed a very special kind of intervention at that time, which is why Special Ops came in. It was called the Solomon Mahlangu Unit. Then we had the Dolphin Unit. So where did the Dolphin Unit fit in? Was it part of the Solomon Mahlangu Unit? Or was it all one encompassing unit? I don't know myself up till today.

As for car bombs, I don't think there were enough operatives to carry out those acts. The resources were there. There were bombs, but I'm not talking of hitting installations but of government buildings – there was very little of this.

Maybe because the Maputo base was closed after the Nkomati Accord and most MK people were asked to leave Mozambique, Special Ops activities were reduced, but other MK units continued...

Yes.

In the TRC it was said that in almost all your operations, there were civilian casualties. This is apart from the three deaths in the Krugersdorp operation. Yet you suggest there was meticulous planning. Just to refer to a few figures that emerged in the TRC process: the Railway Police, seven people were injured; Department of Internal Affairs, it was seven; SADF Medical, sixteen; John Vorster, four.

Civilian casualties were minimal. The Railway Police operation - they were policemen. I planned for that. Also, there was only a degree of casualty, people were not seriously injured, cut by glass or so. They were usually on the street. You can't plan for that.

According to your TRC hearing, the Dolphin Unit was involved in 32 operations. You also said you didn't mention your smaller initial operations. Why did you not mention these?

I did the list with Rashid, we went through records, I'm not sure why.



Shaikh appearing before the TRC, May 1988, Independent Media

Weren't you more vulnerable with the day-time operations you carried out, with the shorter timing for the explosions?

Exactly, you hit the nail

on the head. The job becomes riskier. These limpet mines work on climatic conditions as well; they are highly unpredictable. That is when I really tested my mettle, and I knew I may get caught in an explosion but at least I'm going to get some security guys. That's all that motivated me.

During the day I had to change the fuse to red-code. This fuse was unpredictable and posed great danger because it can go off anytime between 1 and 15 minutes depending on the ambient temperature. Rashid did tell me once, hey, you're not doing the right thing, by using a very unpredictable fuse. I wanted to do it during lunch time so I put the fuse for fifteen minutes. But fifteen minutes means anything between zero and fifteen. It could just go off.

What is the longest timing you can set it for?

Three to four days. That's more predictable – it will go when you set it for.

So, why didn't you go at night and then target that it'll go off at, say, 4pm because it's safer for you?

Yes, it's safer. But it might not happen. It might happen at two o'clock. It might happen at half past four when they knock off. So, I did it during the day. Within half an hour it went off that one occasion. When I pulled it for thirty minutes...

How would you do it if people were walking about in the buildings that you were targeting?

Yes, I had my attaché bag. Remember you're always dressed for the occasion. A *toppie* (Muslim skull cap) and *kurtah* (outfit often worn by traditional Muslims).

When you were working in your family take-away across the Carlton Centre, you had to disappear at times? How would you explain that?

Yes, but my brother was filling in. He knows I'm going to see a friend or for a swim.

Were you more or less a fulltime MK activist during the period around 1982 till about 1993?

Yes.

Did the ANC contribute to your subsistence?

Yes, towards, I think, the latter half of '82 after a few actions, then they had to start giving us some allowance because I was more or less fulltime. Although we had a family business, I was in there and out and then that also ended. I was not working. Nothing. I was just doing MK. I received R3000 a month.

From '82 I worked full-time for MK. At times I worked at the family's takeaway restaurant. But when I was in Ordnance it was mainly full-time MK.

Was Rashid quite a stickler for money and records?

Yes, because people abuse the system.

Did he tell you he's still got all the receipts for the Sasol operation and I think others?

But I think he was quite liberal with me but maybe because I used it correctly. He trusted me.

Are you currently getting an MK pension from the state?

No

Why?

I did apply but nothing happened. It was not in time for the cut-off date.

At the TRC you came across very powerfully, as did your Commander, Rashid, on the necessity of the armed struggle and the need to avoid civilian casualties. At the TRC both of you said you regretted that there were civilian casualties. But in your day-time operations civilians were vulnerable...

There's no contradiction. Even at the TRC I said, if the target was a civilian target it was excluded, it was avoided. If it was deemed to be a state security target, military, police anything related, I did it without compunction, and then if there were civilian casualties, it was unfortunate and I had to accept it. My live targets were policemen and not civilians, and I chose my targets carefully to see there were no civilian offices. But it's an important point. You're right because what if there was an insurance office next door to a police office, then I wouldn't have done it.

Between the times you went out of the country to meet Rashid, how would you communicate with him? How would he know exactly which operations you'd carried out as you were given some leeway in choosing targets?

He'd sometimes phone after a day or two. This is where also our special advantages came. We used our vernacular (Gujarati) as the code language, our special blend of words. *As-Salaam-Alaikum* (Arabic greeting meaning peace be upon you), *tabiyat* (how is your health), *shukar* (gratitude). If my sister-in-law is mentioned, Hafsa, it signals end the call. How's Khatija Bhai? If I don't ask about Khatija Bhai, it means something else.

But a special thanks to our mothers for taking these calls and maybe knowing that we are doing something, I'm not sure. I told her we're printing those little communist leaflets, very dangerous, Ma. Someone has to do it. I get some money for it.

Was your mother progressive?

It wasn't a political commitment as such but a mother's protection of her son. She knew something more was going on. She'd take the call and tell me Faried phoned, he says he's phoning at three o'clock. She didn't know she's talking to Rashid. She didn't recognise his voice. She hadn't seen him for so many years. He was much older now.

And your stepfather? Did he have any idea?

No. He passed away. My mother was a widow at that time.

Did your siblings know anything?

No, nothing, but they knew I was political. Remember because of the mass movement, my mother knew, my siblings knew.

How did you manage your relationship with your personal partner or partners in the time you were with MK?

I had just girlfriends, nobody steady, until '85, '86.

Did you ever tell your partner about your role?

No, you couldn't talk to anyone. But not having a stable girlfriend helped me because I had more mobility. I wasn't attached to anybody. The struggle was all. Yes, it was burdensome, it was a lousy job digging up, creating DLBs, hiding, sketching and going back. And you learnt as you went. God's grace, most of our DLBs, we retrieved.

Conditions change, it's not as simple as someone thinks. You plant in July, you come in September, and the terrain looks different. The farmer may have put up a different road, a pipe may have come up, they could've uncovered it. It was fraught with shortcomings. Much of it was luck, but it also required careful planning.

With careful planning you minimise, you do not obviate or exclude things. And I'm referring to the basic training because we only had to use the resources we had. We didn't have conference rooms or weapons areas where you could practice and explode things. I don't say that in a bad way. I say actually with all that basic training we did remarkably well. What if we had proper training facilities?

What if I went to East Germany from day one? I would've been a quite a different thing.

So, with what we had, we realised our strongest weapon was common sense. All the theory, the James Bond stuff of secret work and all was good, we learnt a bit; but the real sophistication or occupancy markers, for example, a sticker in red, yellow or green on a bus stop, which would indicate either it's okay or not to proceed to the next stage of the operation, that came later when my role became more specialised, and I worked with the White left, who must be mentioned. Their role was very important.

I'm talking of the couriers. There was a woman that mentored me on how to do some kind of secret work. Going over issues intensely. This happens later when our actions are at quite a different level and the ANC's requiring me to do very specialised stuff. I mean SDUs and all that in the early '90s while Codesa (Convention for a Democratic South Africa) is taking place. This comrade liaised with me, helped me with the instructions, and went through the procedures in Botswana. I don't know who she was. Rashid used to call her Cathy (Jenny Evans). I think there must have been many like her. They also gave a lot, the White left, they brought a lot to the table.

At this stage it became increasingly difficult to work at home and I recruited a friend, as I said, after much scrutiny, Farouk Farista and he even built a double garage in his house at his own expense to store our weapons.

So, you go to East Germany for training? And?...

So '86 we go for three months of training. Chacha came with. They decided to send both the guys. We went via London and met Aziz Pahad there. In about a week. Aziz sorted things out. We stayed with my stepbrother, Hanif Randeru.

He thought I'm on holiday. He was also not happy with me. He felt I was not disciplined.

Did you use your normal passports when you left?

Yes, but what you did was a trick that at time you could do, you go on your original passport to London, but it doesn't show your stamp going out of London, because we used Aziz Pahad's boarding pass and another comrade's. We go to East Germany. It was actually very exciting, cloak and dagger stuff. Ja, because not everybody goes to East Germany at that time so whoever's on the plane, you're also wondering who's monitoring you.

The plane stops on the runway and then you get this Mercedes and military vehicle in front, in a convoy and the pilot announces our names and that we must please disembark.

Pseudonyms or your real names?

Our real names

Did you go to East Germany with your own passports?

Yes, but it never got stamped.

If you had a boarding pass in Aziz Pahad's name how did the pilot have your real name?

The boarding pass was just to get on to the plane. But we used our own passports. Aziz made all the arrangements.

Wasn't there a security threat in the pilot mentioning your names?

Yes. That's why that was scary. I mean one of the Communist Party's Central Committee members, high ranking guy came to the plane, took us off, got a guy to take our luggage and then we drove in this Mercedes.

Why were you given VIP treatment or is that normal?

Yes, we were very surprised. It's everything we've seen in movies. So, we thought what's this about? When our names were called, I was scared that there might be Security Branch guys among the passengers noting this.

I don't know why we got this VIP treatment, Rashid must tell you. I don't know if everyone gets that. I think the type of house we went to was also special

treatment. We didn't go to a camp. We went to a guest house where we stayed for three months. And instructors would come to us. From there, we'd go to do field work. Rifle shooting, RPG (rocket-propelled grenade). That's the only time I can tell you we had proper military training. They were preparing us for special devices, switches, timers and some bombs, different type of explosives, arms and all that. Its training that should've happened four, five years ago. But nonetheless it happened; we all didn't know where the process was going to go in the country then.

So maybe that's when Rashid was preparing us to do more Special Ops type operations? So, I suppose that's when we were going to hit military targets and all with car bombs, to answer your earlier question.

Did you get training in car bombs?

Yes, you get training in all kinds of bombs and how to put devices. Then your car bomb is just an aggregation of all those things. You use some bigger devices for car bombs. You could pack a hundred limpet mines or pack ten of those depth charges. But no, they don't physically take you to a car and have a practice example. That's what we would've liked.

But it was a highlight for any young cadre to go there.

Did you get political education?

Yes, we got some political education.

Was it from South Africans or Germans?

Germans.

Did Pallo or anybody else from the ANC not take part?

No, but Slovo came to see us, which was also a big highlight because I could see everybody's on their guard. Your chief is coming to greet you, it's not normally done.

He just came to meet and greet us. How you guys? Offer moral support. Are you enjoying it? How they treating you? Do well.

But did he talk to you about Special Ops and your work?

No, nothing. It was just a social thing. He knew Rashid's brother was in training. And about all the activities, he wanted to know who were these guys

doing Warmbaths and other operations. At that time nobody really knew that Chacha and I were working together.

Anything else you'd like to say about your East German visit?

We were in a village close to the Czechoslovakian border. It was snowing and cold. It was a different environment. It contrasted with conditions we would come back to work in, but you take whatever you can get.

They had workers at the guest house and all the little contradictions there we'd heard about in Soviet style communism. It was demoralising. You could see the poverty from the airport. The culture was definitely that you don't talk about these things and obviously I didn't want to embarrass the ANC, but I raised my concerns when I could, after a few Vodkas (laughter).

But I felt good that I went. I felt vindicated. After all the work I felt I was worthy of it because I could see it takes a lot of resources. Not anybody can go for that. Can't waste your training on anyone.

What happens when you come back?

Then when I come back there's a big lull. Now you've got to sit, relax at home. Seven months pass before I go to Botswana. Nothing happens. You are now just doing reconnaissance on what will be the next action. You're waiting. You're zero. Now you also don't come back to a job. You went overseas, you went to visit Aunty Tahira in India, you say. So, they all thought I came back from a holiday, I'll be better.

Now you've got to reinvent yourself a little. And you're older. By this time, I met Gina, so lucky I came to her. Immediately, after I came back, I couldn't go home anymore. She had a flat and I had a place to go to.

During the time that you are with her until 1993, how much did she know about your activities?

Nothing.

How did you get away with that?

Just had to be quiet. I couldn't endanger her. Gina knew me in '84, '85.

Were you working at the time or were you fulltime in MK?

No, I was fulltime. She was teaching.

And she was fine with you not having an income?

We were young and no children and so had very few commitments at the time.

So, you don't get a job apart from your MK work?

I knew I have to start fending for myself.

Was that because the money wasn't coming from MK for your subsistence?

Not enough, and not in the way everything was going - I could read the situation as well. So, we opened up a little bakery. Someone gave me a chance to run a little bakery and we started from there.

Did Rashid explain to you what your role after your East Germany trip was?

Yes. Ordnance.

Did you know you were a part of Special Ops before?

No.

When did you get to know?

I only got to know towards the TRC process and even then, I didn't know who was in Special Ops. One day Esther was lividly irritated with me on the phone because I said 'But who's Special Ops?'. She said, don't be stupid. I said I had my head on the ground, be a little more tolerant with me. Even Rashid, he used to talk to me like I'm supposed to know, but I don't. I never asked, you know.

Special Ops was meant to focus specifically on high-profile, high-impact economic and military targets, not routine MK targets, and its operatives were specifically technically trained for this. Some MK comrades have said that, strictly, the Dolphin Unit didn't belong in Special Ops but rather in MK generally because its operations were mostly routine MK activities. What is your response?

What I would say is that I was not recruited into Special Ops, I was recruited into the broad MK and I graduated to Special Ops by the co-option of my Commander. It didn't matter to me which structure I worked under. But I think

also people mustn't make a mistake about Special Ops. Is there a clear document that says that this is the specific role of Special Ops?

Anyway, our Krugersdorp, Roodepoort and Railway Police operations would qualify. But doing them within the broad framework of MK, not knowing about Special Ops.

Do you think Mohamed knew about Special Ops specific role?

No.

How do you respond to the view that the Dolphin Unit was under Rashid's Command because it included you, as his close friend, and his brother Mohamed?

That's interesting. It's the first time this question is coming. I need to first understand the context of why comrades would want to even wonder about or have demarcations between different operations.

You have said the Dolphin Unit was successful because as an Indian comrade you had 'special advantages' – less under suspicion, more mobility and resources, and so on. But most other Indian comrades in MK got caught and weren't as successful. And you went beyond Special Ops to Ordnance and continued until 1993 with the SDUs without being detected. So, there must be other reasons why you were so successful?

Well, I worked with someone very capable, somebody I knew, Rashid. Maybe also the way I operated. Maybe the planning, the thought I put behind it, maybe working alone too.

At least one media report at the time of the TRC suggested that you said working alone helped a lot to avoid being getting caught...

Yes. Probably it saved me. You're more compromised when there are more people.

Though, of course, there are weaknesses too in working alone, especially on certain operations, which you, yourself, have just acknowledged...

Yes.

Do you think you may have had a too militaristic approach to the struggle? Like you say, yes, mass struggle is important but it's not for you, others must do that, you'll focus on the armed struggle?

Can you explain your question more?

Well, there are different approaches on how the armed struggle and mass struggle should relate. Some in our movement argued that the armed struggle should be shaped by the mass struggle and the political underground inside the country. Others argued that the armed struggle would bolster the mass and political underground struggles. This is a crude over-simplification of each approach. And there were other approaches between these two overall approaches. You almost seem to believe that the armed struggle was primary? Would that be a correct understanding of your approach or not?

I think from early on I knew we had to be very realistic, that we couldn't defeat apartheid militarily. The armed struggle was just one of the pillars of the struggle. That, ultimately, we require a political solution. And you're quite right – it's with a sound political movement and political underground that we can achieve our goals. Even while I was doing it, I felt nobody's task was more important than the others, whether you were in the mass or the armed struggle.

But it's still my view, as I said earlier, that it was convenient for Indian comrades not to support our African comrades in the armed struggle, because that was the harder part of work. Political activism, going to UDF meetings and that, that was easier. But though I agree on the importance of the mass struggle and the need to find a political solution, we should have had a more effective military struggle. And then maybe we would've won more gains at Codesa, we wouldn't have been overtaken by events since then. We would have had a better outcome for the country.

Would you say the mid-eighties was a semi-insurrectionary or maybe insurrectionary situation or neither?

Yes, I would think it was gravitating towards an insurrectionary situation, especially the late eighties with the SDUs and that. That's where the importance of Ordnance came in.

Do you think MK was able to supply enough arms and other support at the time for the situation that was emerging?

Yes, certainly. We had capacity to carry the struggle for another few years.

When Rashid told you about your new role in Ordnance, did he tell you that he'd been moved from Special Ops to be the head of Ordnance?

No, remember I wasn't aware of Special Ops. I just knew he had a new, bigger role to play. I sensed it. But also, because I asked a question when we came to this new phase, I said I hope I'm not doing this for anybody's agenda and the orders are directly from the Old Man, Mandela. But I was assured and so I continued until they told us to hand everything in, which was in '94. When I say Mandela I mean symbolically the entire leadership. I don't want it to be just some military guy's ambition because I thought we were fighting a political war.

Special Ops seems to have declined from 1984 onwards. It seems a key reason was the Nkomati Accord and the ousting of key Special Ops leaders from Maputo. Maybe also the change of leadership, with Rashid moving to Ordnance. Also, there was the restructuring of MK and change in Slovo's role. Maybe too because of the new phase from about '87 in the armed struggle you spoke about, and the attempt to move from sabotage to a People's War with an emphasis of linking closer to mass struggles and increasingly arming the masses to wage armed struggle directly? It's been suggested to me that another reason may be because Rashid took some of the best comrades in Special Ops with him to Ordnance. Do you want to respond to any of this?

No defense of Rashid, but surely anyone can see the stage the struggle was in then, the conditions had changed. Ordnance then meant more than one big military operation. It was more important to arm the SDUs at the time than to hit some military target. I fully agree with that.

You go to Botswana to get instructions?

Yes, around July 1987 he says, right, now you're going to be doing new stuff. But he didn't tell me exactly what and he said we'll have less meetings. We're going to send you some stuff. Lines of communication, it takes time, and that's when the stuff came for car bombs. It was brought in by some other comrade. So, in between I was feeding other units, like the Kensington Seven. They were caught with rocket launchers.

Are you talking about Damian De Lange and them? The Broederstroom unit?

They were in Kensington, maybe it's the same unit. But you can find out from Rashid about a Kensington group of White people. They were caught. They had a lot of arms.

How did you know that you were feeding them?

When the newspaper reports came, I knew the packaging, I said this was the bloody stuff I dealt with.

How did you function in Ordnance?

You wouldn't know who'd arrived and left the package for you. The material would be in a car, and usually the key was kept under a mat. You'd get notice about where the car would be. You sometimes went to Botswana for meetings and sometimes you were given a spare key for the car.

When we spoke of a package it meant a vehicle - whatever you're receiving, whether arms or money or documents. Now it started happening between vehicles. We no longer had to dig up. So, people would take the stuff to storage places, let's say garages, basements, I don't know wherever they took it. But we were not digging up plantations.

Must have been a relief?

Yes, it was a relief. But the quantities were bigger now as well and the type of stuff different – SPMs, bigger charges, bigger explosives, rocket launches, AK47s, pistols, and a variety of other arms. I would just take instructions from Rashid and we would agree on a suburb. Once again you work where you're comfortable. 'Where would you like to go?' So, I'd say Fordsburg. Akhalwayas is there, Solly's Corner, I'd give the street names because I've got friends in the area. So, there was a predetermined place where the vehicle must park. I would know the make and number plate of the car. A door button will be up or a side flap down in the car; if not, don't go to the car, walk pass, because somebody might have gone into the car or detected it. But there's human error. A guy can just forget to put a flap down. A simple thing and the operation can go wrong.

Usually, there were about two indicators at least.

What was the other example of how you could tell that you'd found the right car?

The key will be left under the mat on the left back passenger side or on the left front passenger side. The unlikely side and that's where I'll find it. But if it's on

the right side under the mat maybe someone had come into the car – because no one would knowingly leave the key in the back seat behind the mat.

Did you ever not find a vehicle?

No.

How many times in a year did you pick up a car or other vehicle?

Four or five times a year.

I had stopped going out of the country to collect stuff in '85, '86 just before the East German training.

By that time Rashid and them had recruited internationalists and White South Africans to do this?

That's it.

What do you do with the vehicle thereafter?

I had to take the stuff into storage and then decant and put it into another vehicle and return the car with the DLB that had been brought into the country. I did this on my own. The pace increased. The scale of activity meant we needed to get a storage place; we couldn't operate from my mother's garage anymore. It was beyond that now. Later Farouk built a double garage.

And your mother didn't know what her garage was being used for?

No, that's a subject on its own; she deserves the credit and a thank you. She knew the garage is only for Iqbal. We worked from home with no resources. We put our families in danger. It was one of my biggest concerns. She knew something was up, didn't know what. She took my calls. She was my eyes and ears. She peered through the windows and I'd ask her ma, if there were any *javers* (Whites) around recently. No, nothing, just be careful.

Anyway, we had to move beyond that. I told Rashid and I think through Chris Hani and them, they gave me the funds, R25 000 or something, for a deposit on a house of a R125 000. I chose it particularly because it had a staircase and a cavity under it and I made that my DLB. It was south of Joburg, and a bit of a peri-urban area, Kibler Park. A White blue collar suburb but nice trees and where I was comfortable, close to Lenasia. I knew the area.

Was Gina living with you there?

Yes, we were living together. My daughter was born at that time.

Did Gina know what you were using the house for?

No. That's when we were going towards the SDUs, '88. In the garage which was separate from the house I built a false room in which I put the arms.

Did you do courier work?

No.

At the TRC, you were asked, and you said, yes, I did some courier work. 'There may have been a bit of courier work. If I had to do any MK work that was to be done, I would've done that in the course of what I was doing.' Is this not accurate?

Yes, maybe, what I meant at the time was just that when there was a package maybe of money or instructions for another unit I would go and leave it.

Why did Mohamed go for training to East Germany when he wasn't operating?

I don't know. I didn't see the sense for him coming. I think Rashid just gave him the choice since he had paid his dues. 'Do you want to go for training?' So, they felt maybe we can use him later, I don't know.

How did both of you get along then?

We got along fine.

So, after you come back from East Germany, you do only Ordnance, except for the Krugersdorp operation?

Yes. But then they said, put everything on hold because now we're going to go into a completely different phase of armed struggle, distribution of arms. Rashid said much larger quantities will be coming in and it will require careful handling, the mechanics of what we'll be doing would be different. He said it would be all vehicle-based transfers. We agreed and I said yes, the house is all set up, we're ready for you.

I think these transfers were a whole link with the Safari Group that brought things through that Safari truck with tourists from the UK and elsewhere covering Southern Africa. (See <http://youtu.be/foqURw31gmc>), So, it was

then put it into a High Ace in boxes. Well, I mean the boxes came, you can see it was industrially fitted boxes in an armaments factory. Those screws were helluva difficult to open. And they were extremely heavy for one person. So, they'd come, I'd put it into my garage. It had a strap. It was backbreaking work.

Anyway, I would take the stuff, secure it, and return the vehicle. Then I would be given instructions. Right, X amount of limpet mines to be taken to a particular vehicle, or as many as you can fit. And I fetch that vehicle. Bring it. Fit it in.

I did this right up to '94.

How would you get the communications?

On my visits to Rashid in Botswana.

Okay. To something else, when the ANC gets unbanned in 1990, what's your response? Did you know it was looming?

Yes, we knew, because of the activities, and we knew no more bombs, we're going into a different phase. There might be talks. We had a discussion in Zimbabwe. Rashid told me, I think, that we're going to talk to them. That was '89.

After the ANC's unbanning in 1990, it decided that the armed struggle would be suspended. But senior comrades and others didn't agree with this. What was your view?

I thought politically where we were going was right and I wanted to be realistic. We didn't have the staying power. I think if the regime persevered a little longer, they could have dealt us a severe blow.

But don't you think they were wanting to negotiate because they were weakened, partly because of the armed struggle?

Yes, but we also had our limits.

Is it true that you didn't want to go before the TRC?

No. I was fine with that.

I was told that some comrades felt that you were so unknown and had so completely gotten away after so many years of operating and

the regime didn't have any inkling about you, it was just better for you not to surface. Maybe it had to do with protecting you and your family from being identified by right wing forces or apartheid agents or even the people who were casualties of your operations or their families – in other words, those who could target you for retribution. Or maybe the view was you could be a 'sleeper' and be re-activated if the apartheid regime or right wing forces fought back? Any response to this?

I don't know. I didn't want to go to the TRC for the publicity. Then Rashid said we have to go.

Didn't you want to go into parliament, the provincial legislatures or municipal councils or government departments or maybe the SANDF (the new South African National Defence Force)?

Yes, look, I think in all honesty, I was also a little naïve in the start. I was too guarded about not wanting anything, whereas I could've contributed better, but not by going into parliament, I could've got an environmental, social kind of work, maybe in the Kruger National Park, maybe helping communities. That's up my alley, I like getting into communities.

Maybe I was naïve not to take certain opportunities, but having said that, they didn't present themselves. And neither did I want it to be because I did the bombings. Because I had no qualifications to say, look, I've got my BSc in this and I can do this job. In intelligence, military, I don't have any qualifications. I'm just an ordinary Fietas guy who got into the situation. I'm really not a military person. So, maybe for those reasons the SANDF didn't appeal to me at the time.

And then, when the rot in the state started under Mbeki I was glad I wasn't a part of it. It's not what I fought for.

Is your argument that you didn't have any qualifications valid? For example, many others far less educated and experienced than you went into the SANDF. Some demanded jobs and even senior positions. But also MK comrades went into other departments and areas of the state.

Yes, but I never felt owed. I felt I had to earn it. But I would have depended more on Rashid. He should have been more persuasive. He knew, given his maturity, my shortcomings, my ways. Maybe he should have said think carefully, don't just say no, get into something, get out if you don't like it.

Did you ever discuss any possibility of a job within the state with him?

No, we never discussed it like properly. 'You want to join the army or so', very casually, he raised it. I said no, and that was it. We should've had a more thorough discipline, what does it mean, why don't you get into the Defence Force, help with integration, you've got a good heart, maybe you can do this? I don't know. Who knows? I could've run certain education programmes in the Defence Force or I could've gone to study and do some bridging courses. It's too late now – and it's alright.

Where do you think the country is now and how do you feel given the role that you and others played in the struggle and were prepared to give your life for?

Look, things are not in a desirable state, but it's been coming a long time. I think we missed the train at the time of Nelson Mandela. There was too much hype about Mandela. I think while we fought, we didn't form a cult around our leadership like they did with Mugabe. But that we now did too, and I think the self-interest of Mandela and the rest of the leadership overtook things. Then events also overtook them too fast.

What self-interest of Mandela are you referring to?

His family, himself. Just the way things went. Obviously Hani being out of picture, we didn't have leadership. I don't think the Communist Party, MK, we hardly had a real seat there. Some political leaders muscled us out. I'll give you an example, Valli Moosa, he grew far too rapidly, had far too much say. Just because you can articulate, you have the intellect, but then what about the collective? We lost the plot after a while.

You want to say anything about Rashid? About his strengths and weaknesses?

See, with Rashid I can only talk of my experiences. I reiterate I would not have succeeded if it wasn't for Rashid's leadership; it was our mutual success. Again as a youngster, we weren't cut from the same cloth but we had to do what the circumstances we were presented with. I think he did a very good job. I think he made quite a personal sacrifice, and he's definitely leadership quality, and I think he should've taken a more active role in Government.

I can't see many weaknesses in him. I want to be objective – but can't see anything on the basis of my interactions with him. Everything was strengths.

In what ways?

In all ways - values, strong commitment, extremely disciplined, never abused money. Even if I thought to go off the rails a bit, I would look at it and think of him and I just couldn't abuse the money. He provided good leadership definitely.

In a very complimentary profile of him in the Mail & Guardian during the TRC hearings, Wally Mbhele quotes a comrade saying Rashid was very temperamental. Did you experience that side of him?

Remember, I told you I knew about how temperamental his mum was, he must have that gene from her. Rashid is temperamental. I think I was lucky enough to escape his wrath because of big gaps in time between our meetings (laughter) and when I did meet him, it was short enough, and he was happy enough with what happened. But I suppose he is a hard task-master. I've seen how he dealt with Mohamed Ismail when things were wrong.

What about the claim that his approach was to issue orders as a Commander and comrades below him had to just obey and he could get very extreme in his discipline?

No, I don't know about that. Maybe when he was in the camps. I wasn't there. That's different...

Not that you should get or want something simply because you took part in the struggle, but do you feel that Rashid should have been acknowledged more and been deployed in government more effectively?

Yes. Seeing the factionalism in ANC I can say that I think he didn't get what he should have.

When you were operating in the underground in MK you mentioned some of the anxieties and tensions you had. Do you want to add anything?

Yes. You're constantly looking over your shoulder. I only stopped looking in the rear view mirror after '94 and even then it took time. You're constantly on alert, you're looking out, you've got to be vigilant all the time. A very irregular life. Even at social events, you've got to watch any new people. You've got to be careful about what you say in social circles while having a drink. You don't want to give away anything.

So, basically you're playing a Jekyll and Hyde kind of character because people know you're progressive, but yet you have no political opinions anymore. You're even negative. So, I had to do that push back. So yes, there were a lot of fears. You're never safe. When you're too comfortable, that's when you get into trouble. You try not to be complacent, but remember a lot is about luck too. It was much planning but after it all, it's just luck.

Were you given an MK medal after 1994?

No

Why not?

I don't know.

Are you an ANC member today?

No, I'm not interested in the nature of ANC politics today

You said you were a Communist at one stage. Did you ever join the SACP?

Yes, I was recruited by Rashid but I didn't fill in any form.

So what does your mother now think about the role you played? Does she know most of it? Your siblings and others in your family?

My mum is just happy I'm alive, I got out fine. She feels vindicated, that at least we've done something in the family and she said she was always there for me, which she was. Siblings and everybody, hey lekker you were so involved, why didn't you get a role in government and all that, you shouldn't be so humble, you should've asked for it. It's too late, man.

And Gina?

Similar to that.

When did you tell her about your role?

'94.

So you waited till then?

I had to wait until after the elections to see how things go first.

What was her response?

She knew I was doing something. But I had told her always it was illegal material, *Sechaba* and all these publications.

Was she an activist?

No.

Does your daughter know about your role?

Yes.

What does she think?

You know, like any daughter, Leilah is proud of their dad, and she's progressive.

Do you have any reservations about that commitment or your role?

No.

Even looking at where South Africa is now?

No reservations

So you'd do it again given the same circumstances?

Yes, I don't think a few individuals or a clique or a clan today can take away what we've done for the greater good.

You seem to know very few other comrades who were in MK and Special Ops after they became known after '94. Why is that? Did you just withdraw from politics after '94? If so, why?

Our circle was so small. Think of it. The tightness was our success. Just myself and Rashid. I think we could have still carried on another ten, fifteen years.

** The dates were provided from Shaikh's passport details.*