

*An interview used in "Attacking the Heart of Apartheid: The ANC's MK Special Operations Unit" (Penguin, 2025), Yunus Carrim*

## **MK Special Operations project**

### **Interviews**

#### **Klaas de Jonge**

**10 December 2016 (Amsterdam) and 26 February 2019 (Cape Town)**

#### **How did you come to be involved with the ANC and MK, and the armed struggle, in particular?**

I was a sociologist and anthropologist specialising in African studies. Before I went to Southern Africa I did research in Tanzania, about social demographics, migration, fertility, mortality and all these kinds of things. Then, I did a study about migration and the consequences for the rural population in Senegal, and I had the idea that what we did nobody was really interested in. Until the end of 1980 I was working for the Africa Studies Centre in Leiden (in Holland). There were South African colleagues who were working there, so I was quite well aware of what was happening in South Africa.

You had there Esau du Plessis from BOA (Boycott Outspan Action Foundation – South African oranges), one of the main earlier Dutch anti-apartheid movements, besides Conny Braam's AABN (Anti-Apartheid Movement of Netherlands) and Sietse Bosgra's KZA (Committee on Southern Africa). Esau was interesting because he linked the racism of the apartheid to the racism in Europe. Nowadays you see this coming up again - there's the politician Wilders here in Holland and so on. He is racist and we never had such a right-wing party. He gets a lot of followers, especially anti-Muslim, anti-Black, anti-migrants.

There was also Vernie February from the Cape who wrote resistance poetry. And Karel Roskam who wrote a thesis about apartheid, one of the first Dutch to do so, and he was a radio journalist later. We became friends, and he edited the diary of my experiences in the Dutch embassy in Pretoria from July 1985 to September 1987, which was published in 1987.

So, I was quite well aware of apartheid but our Institute didn't want to work in South Africa, so we worked in other countries. I had the idea that I would like to do something more practical and at a certain moment – it was in 1980 I think – Ruth First (SACP leader and academic based at the time in Maputo)

came to Amsterdam to give a lecture at the Transnational Institute. She was talking about Mozambique where she was working at the Centre of African Studies at the Eduardo Mondlane University in Maputo, and what they did and what they wanted to do, working together with the government, which she described as socialist. Ruth and her colleagues combined research and teaching, connecting the development courses to revolutionary politics in Southern Africa. They really wanted to improve the situation of the population and build socialism by transforming the organisation of production. And I thought, hey, working in such a situation could be interesting.

So, in 1980 I was looking for a new project and at the same time I fell in love with Hélène Passtoors. She had just been divorced, had four kids, and she had been in Congo before and some of her kids were born there.

### **What was she doing in the Congo?**

She was with her husband and she was studying there. Her husband, Pierre Van Leynseele, was an anthropologist, and I met her in Leiden because Pierre was also working there. She became a linguist of African languages. So, when we were looking for options, she said we could go together to Mozambique. We went in February 1981. And, you know, socialist countries don't like sociology very much.

So, she as a linguist got a job before me at the university. And there in her department was Guido van Hecken, a Flemish guy, progressive, left-wing, and he had already contacts – I heard later – with Rashid and with Special Ops. And I knew Ruth First, so I went to her because I thought I will find a job there and I did. I found a job at a communication project of the Ministry of Information. They worked in community villages all over the country.

### **You could speak Portuguese at the time?**

Ja, I learned it and so I did research and toured around the whole country and Hélène was at the university. It's there where we met first Bobby (Sunny Singh, ANC MK activist imprisoned on Robben Island). I also knew Indres Naidoo (ANC MK activist imprisoned on Robben Island), Farouk (ANC leader Mohammad Timol), Sue Rabkin (British-born ANC underground activist who served a prison sentence), Nadja Manghezi (Danish anti-apartheid activist married to a South African activist) and others. They knew we were activists opposed to apartheid. Hélène got sick and had to be operated in a hospital in South Africa. We went there and we saw what South Africa was like; well, we knew a lot, but we now saw a lot more.

Then the ANC people came to see us: 'Can you take money and documents to Swaziland?' So we said, yes. We discussed it because H  l  ne had four kids and I had Enno, one of my own sons, with me, so five in all – quite a responsibility. But we decided we could do what the ANC asked, and we did it quite well, I think.

At a certain moment we were asked by Rashid - and then Slovo came - if we could do also something for the armed struggle. H  l  ne had her reasons, so she said yes, and I said yes. We discussed it. I was already interested in armed struggles. And in the '60s I was demonstrating against Vietnam and I studied also in Paris, and when there was the Algerian struggle, I fully supported campaigns for its national liberation.

And I was born in in Holland in 1937, before the war. For us to use violence to react to violence – including by an occupying government – was normal. You say this now to young people, they don't accept it. At the time there was no problem. And the same, I think, in terms of even general human rights. Self-determination was important and I had no problems with especially a quite modest kind of armed struggle. And when they explained the ideas of Special Ops, where it was as a kind of armed propaganda to show what the ANC was capable of, I agreed. And I saw how people reacted when something was done in the armed struggle - sometimes I was in Africa when this happened and I saw how people in other countries on the continent were very proud, 'Hey, it's the ANC!' But you must know this better than I do.

So, I think it was really important and most of these attacks were absolutely without any casualties, but sure we were aware of the possibilities of collateral damage; and, ja, you have to live with it if you choose these kind of things. And I think it was a good choice, not only because I agreed, but also because I was interested in social resistance from inside, to see how a liberation movement functioned.

I was Left-wing, but certainly not Soviet-Communist, like most young people who had this or some other kind of Marxism or neo-Marxism or anarchism or something similar. I wrote at the time about Africa and racism for a progressive Dutch weekly, the *Groene Amsterdammer*. And also in '66 there was a Gualtierio Jacopetti film, *Africa Addio*, that showed how great White people were in South Africa and how stupid the Blacks were, making war in Congo and I got so fed up, so angry. So, all these kind of things together helped me to take this decision and, like I said, already in the '70s I was interested in liberation movements and had read about Che Guevara and Cabral and other people of the revolution.

I was much more interested in Cabral because I supported his approach and I even visited the northern front during the guerilla war of the PAIGC against the Portuguese colonial government under Salazar. I knew Africa now a bit, and it seemed to be better, not to start with a military operation – the *foco-theory* by showing that you attack the suppressors but instead by organising before, in political ways, the whole opulation, making them conscious about what the system is and what you could do against it. And that's what Cabral did very well, and I wrote an article in '72 about guerrilla warfare, and so because of all this, I decided to participate in the struggle. And there's one more point: I was quite influenced by French Existentialism, which, among other things, stresses the need to react on everything you considered as social inequalities and injustices.

**So the French existentialist, Sarte and others, had an influence on you, like they did on so many others of your generation?**

Sartre, ja. And Sartre was an anti-colonialist, he became an eminent supporter of the FLN in the Algerian War and was involved in the 1967 Russel Tribunal which exposed US war crimes in Vietnam. By the way, Sartre and others at the end of the '60s launched the first French Anti-apartheid movement. And he was influenced by Frantz Fanon, an author and activist I liked very much too. You know all these things.

**He was at some stage in the Communist Party, wasn't he?**

No, while he was a Marxist, he never joined the Communist Party, although he said it seemed to represent the proletariat. But at the same time he was also quite critical of certain abuses of freedom and human rights of the Soviet Union.

I had also friends in the Dutch Communist Party so we were not antagonistic. More, I think you should have an idea that if you have to get rid of a certain system, you work together, you make alliances, right? So that was an influence. Marxism was an influence. Together with some Dutch friends, we wrote even a book on Marxist anthropology, and how you could approach analysing African rural societies and what the main class differences were – it wasn't between workers and capitalists but very often the older and younger people and all the other divisions. We studied old modes of production and its articulation with the dominant capitalist one.

We were influenced by Meillassoux and other French Marxist academics. They did all that work theoretically and I'm somebody who likes to participate in a more practical way, if possible, in a process of social change and revolution. I think it's worthwhile, and I found it an honour to be invited to join Special Ops.

I was also influenced by Wim Wertheim, one of my Dutch teacher's, views on the fostering of the emancipation of the oppressed. Engaged social scientists like me wanted to study the processes and mechanisms that impede or promote such emancipation. Besides liberation from domination by natural forces, also the liberation from economic and socio-political inequalities created by fellow human beings; in other words, the power structures, exploitation and discrimination in a capitalist society. And they should try to indicate through which channels an improvement of their situation could be achieved. But for me, studying alone wasn't enough; if possible, I would like to have played a more a more active role in this process of social change and revolution.

Then there was (Egyptian Marxist) Samir Amin, another big influence on me.

**What did you make of Samora Machel? I was a student, just into university at the time, I was very inspired by Machel and I think many others were too...**

Yes, me too.

**Very briefly, what was Mozambique like in the early '80s?**

The situation there changed very fast because of the attacks (by South African-backed RENAMO). I remember reading also that Samora Machel said they were going to change the whole situation; in one year there won't be any poverty! They were too ambitious. And with the war they started to also be more dictatorial...

**What did you understand the role of Special Ops to be? How was it distinct from MK generally?**

What I saw was that the Special Ops people were more disciplined as a small group. Even in the book by Manghezi you will see that Pamela (dos Santos, South African activist who married Frelimo leader Marcelino dos Santos) also is criticising the attitudes of a lot of ANC comrades, that they are not so disciplined. But that was not the case with people we knew from Special Ops.

**Why do you think that was?**

I think because the unit was small. I think because – that's what they told me – we were specially selected. The members were well trained and working with leaders they believed in. It was Tambo, Joe Slovo, Rashid, and Obadi (Montso Mokgabudi, the first Commander of Special Ops under Slovo killed in the

Matola raid in 1981). Also we had very clear, well-prepared projects. There were things that didn't work out because some were arrested.

I arrived in Maputo with my family in February '81 just about when there was the burial of the people killed in Matola. And we thought we were coming to work for Mozambique, but we saw immediately how South Africa was destabilising the country and helping RENAMO (Mozambican National Resistance Movement, a conservative South African-backed organization that opposed Frelimo). I was glad that the ANC was helped by Samora Machel. He did it until it was impossible any more. So, with the 1984 Nkomati Agreement we had to leave.

**Can I come back to this? You said what you saw was that Special Ops comrades seemed more disciplined, focused, partly because they were properly trained, smaller in number and had well-prepared plans. What else did you observe about Special Ops comrades, as distinct from the rest of MK and the rest of the ANC?**

Well, I didn't know much about the other ANC units.

**You only knew the Special Ops people?**

Not only. We started also with the political people like Sue and Indres and Sunny.



**Klaas de Jonge with Johannes Mnisi of Special Ops, Pieter Boersma**

**How long did it take from the time you came to Mozambique and your first Special Ops task?**

I think we started in February '82 with the first operations, bringing in money and these kinds of things into Swaziland but that was with Bobby and Indres and others. So, about one year from the time we came to Mozambique.

Guido (van Hecken, Belgian activist who served in Special Ops) was the head of the department where H el ene was working, and that's how I got to know him. I did courses at the Centre of African Studies and through that met Ruth's colleagues like Rob Davies, Dan O'Meara, Bridget O'Laughin and Helena Dolny who later got married to JS.

I got a very good idea of how Mozambique, South Africa and the rest of Southern Africa was integrated. And I got very good training on the problems of Southern Africa and I used it to write a book in Portuguese later.

Joe Slovo and Rashid asked us if we could take arms into South Africa, so we did think about it and we decided, yes. We got a kind of training – from Kasrils (Ronnie, ANC, MK and SACP leader) in Mozambique.

### **What was the training on?**

It was security. So, mainly it was on how to behave when you are stopped by the police or detained, that you have a 'legend' to explain what you are doing. Sometimes also that you are able to see if you are followed and check if you are under surveillance, and what to do if you are followed. All the basic security training. It didn't go very far, but it was enough. They explained how to pass the border controls in South Africa. You have also at the time, if you go with arms, the dogs that smell explosives. So, everything had to be sealed, vacuum-packed so that you could open the windows of your car even if you have explosives in it. But we never had difficulties.

In 1988 after my return to the Netherlands I received a more advanced training programme for three months in the GDR.

### **You were not trained with explosives. You were not trained to protect yourself with a gun?**

No. But I had done 18 months military service in Holland so I could use a gun. In the GDR in 1998 I had – besides security training – also some training with explosives and various firearms but because I lost an eye I was a lousy shot.

### **But when you went into the country, were you and H el ene armed for protection?**

In the beginning not, but then suddenly once I was alone and some Black people were throwing stones at the car. I later asked Rashid a South African would have done in that situation, and he would have said, probably fired back with a gun. These arms I was bringing in, we could take one out, but it takes time, and it's good that they remain in plastic. So, I bought a Brazilian gun in Joburg. I never used it. I could have used a German Luger from the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War that Rashid offered me but if you got caught with such a pistol you would have been immediately suspected to have links with the ANC.

### **You got a licence for it?**

Ja.

**You said earlier you took money into Swaziland? Who would you give it to?**

We gave it to somebody who Bobby asked us to.

**So your first political activity for the underground was taking money from Mozambique to Swaziland?**

Yes, and I also drove a stolen car from South Africa and brought it back to Mozambique.

**Did you steal the car?**

I didn't steal it but I paid the people in Joburg who did it and then drove the same day the car over the border – a very fancy one for Joe Slovo if I remember well.

**Let's look a bit at the theory and the strategy of Special Ops and then we'll look at the specific operations. So, what did you understand the role of Special Ops to be, apart from what you've suggested already, and where did it fit into MK as a whole?**

We didn't know much about MK as a whole. I knew it took a very long time to take the struggle home. It was what we heard from Joe and Rashid because we worked with Special Ops. I had the idea that long-time MK people like (Joe) Modise (MK Commander) and others believed in the possibility of an armed struggle winning and bringing down the apartheid regime.

**A militaristic approach?**

A militaristic approach, and I didn't believe in it. I haven't seen it work. Che Guevara also had his limits and he failed completely in Eastern Congo and later in Bolivia. Cabral's approach was better. Military action if only embedded in social and political activities. This phase of political preparation and the mobilisation of mainly the peasant masses took seven years, from 1956 to 1963. Only in 1962 did the PAIGC start with small sabotage actions and various protest actions followed the year after.

But by the time we got to Mozambique the ANC already wanted to change its militaristic approach but in practice they often didn't succeed. For example, there was that attack on the police station in Soekmeaar, a rural village in Limpopo. It was aimed at supporting the local community's resistance to forced removals. The attack caused little damage to the building and a minor injury to a policeman. Three trained MK guerillas were soon arrested and eventually

sentenced to life imprisonment. I know there were some very interesting attacks in the Transvaal on police stations. But now the ANC wanted to change from this militaristic approach.

**Ja, Sphiwe Nyanda played a major role in some of these attacks on the police stations...**

I think it was not very well done. I think it was typical militarism. There were also attacks sometimes in rural areas, and rural people, I think, never understood exactly why these attacks took place. It was not well organised. In one attack in a rural area there was an MK operation to stop people being forced to leave the land, if I remember well. But I think it was typical of the old style, without political preparation, and there were these attacks while the population living there didn't understand why somebody like a local policeman was hurt.

As I said, those comrades got long sentences, and that was part of an approach I think wasn't good. I think it's better if the ANC sent in people first to ask what are your problems? Why are they forcing you off the land? What's been happening since the protest? We are here to help you. There had been some reconnaissance but it seemed the MK guys didn't really know anything. According to Marnix de Bruyne who studied this case, the community had no idea that the bullets flew in solidarity with their struggle. So, I think it was not very well done – a military approach without political preparation in the field.

People wouldn't understand their role. That was the old MK. There are worse examples, but this is an example I know. I'd read a lot about it and, I think, to have some success it is necessary to show actions like Sasol. People saw it. It came into the newspapers, and people said, 'Ah! What is happening?' The Whites also. And they were impressed. Sasol was burning. You could see it from far, far around. It showed that the regime was not invincible and it energised the population.

And when I was arrested later I did show the police certain spots where I buried arms because I wanted to get out and see how I can escape. I brought them to places, dead letter boxes (DLBs), I knew were empty, the arms had been taken. And then I said, 'Oh, we had 100 kilos of explosives here,' and then the police said: 'You could have blown up a big part of Pretoria!' They were worried! Strategically choosing targets was important, and I knew it was not for military reasons; it was for mobilising the people, to show them that the ANC was there and was doing something. That was how I understood it.

**You're saying you were more sympathetic to Cabral's approach than Guevarism. You also seem to suggest that the problem with the ANC's**

**previous approach was that it didn't focus enough on mass or political preparation and there were some badly planned, isolated acts of sabotage. Special Ops, you say, was different. But then, in what sense? How did your activities link with the mass struggles? This is not to deny the positive impact of operations like Sasol on the masses, how it boosted their morale and may have inspired them to act. But was there any more of a link with mass struggles in the case of Special Ops operations generally?**

That's true, these limits. But I think the visibility of these Special Ops attacks were a boost for all the mass struggles, not just the UDF (United Democratic Front, the ANC-aligned front of a wide range of organisations), but also Cosatu (Congress of South African Trade Unions), and other sections of the broader democratic movement. But as I saw it, these mass movements had their own internal momentum, and this reinforced my view that Cabral was correct to say that armed propaganda is most effective where there is an organic mass movement or even just mass struggle.

Ours was armed propaganda – and these were big targets like Sasol, Koeberg, Voortrekkerhoogte and others. Sasol caused huge fuel losses. And there was no cost of people being killed in these. But that was different with the Church Street bombing in May 1983, it is true, but still it was a spectacular attack, the biggest against the South African Air Force Headquarters in Pretoria. But there is also something else perhaps I can tell you now. I had the idea we could also suggest targets. At a certain moment I understood that it was also a way of mobilising people through military means and the political things would follow and have to be taken up by the UDF and the trade unions. And then *Operation Vula* (major ANC underground operation located inside South Africa as part of the move to get senior leaders based in the country) was there too, a bit later.

But here it was the first time I think people could see the ANC has some power and you saw the reactions. Like I said, these policeman said when I told them about the explosives, you could have done a lot with it - and they were worried! At a certain moment I thought why not blow up parts of the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria? I came with a plan. I had been there. It was easy to use explosives. You have all these statues of Boers at every corner, friezes sculpted in bas-relief of Voortrekker heroes and dying Zulu warriors.

**So you proposed that?**

I proposed that.

**Did H el ene agree with you?**

No, no, then I was already on my own.

### **What was Rashid's reaction?**

Ja, he discussed it with Joe Slovo. Slovo discussed it with Tambo, and Tambo said no.

### **Why?**

I don't know exactly but I think what came back much later was that it was such an important monument that the reaction would be extreme and worse for the ANC than the benefits. There was also this thing that the monument represented the Afrikaners' nationalist fight against the British, and the ANC saw itself as nationalist. And I thought, what the hell!

I was amazed visiting South Africa after 1994 to see that the Voortrekker monument was not dismantled but instead declared a national heritage site...

...I thought the attack would be great. You don't kill people, and you blow up parts of that ugly fascist building that was erected to preserve the memory of the Great Trek and the Battle of Blood River, events which represent Afrikaner nationalist thinking and apartheid in all its glory.

**Attacking the target would certainly have huge emotional, psychological and moral significance. It would certainly have dented the morale of Whites. And the operation could have been done without any loss of life...**

Ja.

### **Anything else you want to say about Special Ops overall?**

Also, about going to Special Ops, I was very conscious that Hélène and I had an additional value, because being White, doing reconnaissance work and entering South Africa, with arms and explosives is easier for Whites than for Blacks. That one time I remember, we were on a road – I think it was the second trip for our first mission – bringing in a huge load of arms and explosives to a railway bridge in KwaZulu-Natal near a park, the Umfolozi Nature Reserve. It was probably a railroad from an industrial area to Durban. The first time we went in, we were there to do reconnaissance. We made pictures of it and I stood there so the Special Ops leaders could see how big it was, and Rashid, when we came back, he calculated how many explosives you needed.

And then we brought the arms and explosives in and afterwards a group had to go there to do the job. They were arrested because I think, if I remember well - but Rashid must tell you - that one of them had a detonator in his pocket and they were stopped on the road somewhere and so they were arrested. (Inkatha leader, Prince Mangosuthu) Buthelezi thought it was against him. It wasn't. But so that was our first job, doing reconnaissance, followed by a second visit to bring the stuff in. We had nothing to do with the way the other comrades tried to do the operation.

Later we always were with Rashid and with Victor (Johannes Mnisi) often packing the stuff. I had in my house a certain amount of the material. Hêlène and I were not together at the time and our houses were full of explosives. And so I was very close to what we needed and Rashid showed me the detonators and where you have to be careful. At the beginning we had these dynamite blocks of TNT and they were very unstable. Sometimes they leaked a bit and so it was not good stuff, it could be dangerous. It was hidden in Guido's house often where he was sleeping with his family. I think that was a bit amateuristic.

Of course, I know Special Ops had quite a lot of access to arms. That was not a problem. Later more and more went in, especially with the Safari truck. There was also a Dutch driver there. And they brought in a hell of a lot.

**That truck is in the Rivonia Museum in Joburg. It's really a remarkable museum. Anyway, you were saying?...**

I think not just Special Ops but MK generally had a lot of arms in later years. Chris Hani was very active, full of ideas. Rashid also. Joe Slovo too. But Joe Modise, he had not much initiative. I think part of the low profile of MK was because of him perhaps. Chris Hani was very well known. I was also impressed by Kasrils and his group.

But at the beginning of the '80s I was impressed with Special Ops because the bombs went off where we had planned it. They were not just in front of a café or something like that. And at a certain moment MK tried land mines in the border areas - it wasn't Special Ops - but there were a lot of Black casualties. And then Tambo decided not to do it anymore.

**I'm told he ordered it to be stopped...**

I think that was good. I liked Oliver Tambo and I met him. He was very quiet. He was very dignified. Special Ops was directly answerable to Tambo. I think I

liked him even more than Mandela who I met much later when he and Winnie – accompanied by Rashid and others – visited Brazil in 1991.

Joe Slovo was in the early '80s the overall Commander of Special Ops. He was responsible for the overall strategy and planning of Special Ops, together with Rashid.

**So, let's come to your first task for Special Ops again. Anything you want to add to what you've said already?**

It was the railway bridge reconnaissance we did. Special Ops asked us if we can do something else, not only take things to Swaziland, and we agreed and we did this.

I stood against the targets so Rashid and them could measure them.

**There was no security there?**

No security.

**And were you with Hélène?**

I was with Hélène.

**How long were you there?**

We took some time to find the bridge but I think we were there for three or four days. And we came back with a map and photos. And we explained also from which side you could come, how, what kinds of cars were there, a description of the situation, where you could bury the arms. And then a month or two later we brought in the arms. I think we had a bakkie at the time. We were stopped by a patrol. They said, 'you can't drive here. It is near the railroad. It's not a road on which you can drive.' So we said: 'Oh, we didn't know. We're tourists. We're going to this Umfolozi Elephant Park.' They said 'Oh, but then we can take you there'.

At that moment came a car with Blacks. These patrol guys then took them out and they were body-searched and they looked into their car - and there we were sitting on top of a huge load of explosives!...

And then these patrol guys, they said, "Come. We show you." And then we followed them ...(laughter)

And those Boers, they were so silly many times. Now they were waving at us and they say, 'Ah, you like South Africa? You like? Nice? Nice? We say, 'Ja.' 'Verstaan jy Afrikaans?' they say, "Bye. Have a nice holiday!"

**So, you offload the arms in the dead letter box? Then what?**

Ja, then we made a design, and also some photos. But the group that went in was arrested before they came there.

**Did the state find the arms that you left there?**

Ja, I think

**But, obviously, those MK comrades who went in and got caught, they didn't know who had put the arms there?**

No, no.

**So, what was the next operation you took part in?**

We did reconnaissance of pylons, railway stations, power stations and so on. We took photos.

There were these stations where they were pumping oil, and we were bringing in some explosives for some of these stations. This went without any problems. I remember there was an attack on a station and it was destroyed - and built up later on. There was no cost in lives. And that's what we did several times. I don't know how many exactly, you can ask Rashid.

Then there were some also interesting things. I was working alone as a volunteer, I came from Zimbabwe. It was after Nkomati. Hêlène, and I were not working together. I also brought in arms alone. Once, it was near a National Park in the Transvaal. In the middle of night I was there. I had made a hole and put things in it and walking from the car I heard something like a small roar. So I thought, oh, gee a lion! And I was walking with my hands full of arms, and I had only a machete. I was walking and that noise remained all the time I was there, putting things in the hole. It really made me tense. So then I was glad when I was in the car again. I could leave.

**So was it a lion?**

Yes, I think so.

**But you never saw it?**

I never saw it.

And once I was near Joburg, and where workers came out of the factory and there was snow. Sometimes you have it, hey. It was cold – and I was caught in a traffic jam.

**Snow? That's unusual...**

Yes, I know. And there was a huge traffic jam, and the cars had to stop. I can find perhaps where that place is. But I was in the car and one window didn't work, it was open so I got cold. And then people came out of the factory and they starting throwing snowballs at my car, and then after half an hour or so some of them began throwing stones and it became painful. There was a black guy who gave me cardboard to put on the window. I liked that. So nice.

These are the things I remember. But in general it went well, yes.

So, I got kind of accustomed to pass through the borders, many of them, sometimes through Mozambique and often through Swaziland. There is something in a book about (South African army officer imprisoned in Angola, Wynand) Du Toit. I was exchanged for him and released and the authors mention in the book how bad guys we were and they got from the police all these points where we had put bombs. They say they found everything but I know that's nonsense.

**When an operation took place in the country and you heard about it, did you know if the arms you'd taken across had been used?**

It's only Rashid who could tell.

**Fine, but did he ever tell you?**

Yes, if he knew it, he often told me.

**Was that to give you a sense that your work was leading to results?**

Yes, that was so. He discussed afterwards why a target was chosen and he was also open for suggestions on targets.

**Apart from the monument proposal, did you have any other proposals?**

No, not much. I was really then looking for something spectacular and what I was certain will be part of the kind of actions that Special Ops would do.

**On the Church Street bombing, what was your role, even if you didn't know what the target was going to be?**

Hêlène and I had done a surveillance of various possible targets in the centre of Pretoria, including the Air Force Headquarters in Church Street and we gave Rashid a report on possible options. We were not the only ones. I know there was another team who also did surveillance after us, which was more important.

So, I knew something was likely to happen. But we didn't know what the specific target would be because of the obvious need for security. I was aware that Hêlène had to take the car from Swaziland to Mamelodi. But whatever I knew and whatever my direct role, together with my comrades, I also take full collective responsibility for the ultimate results, as regrettable as some of them may be. A car bomb makes always casualties, civilians. We heard about 70% of those who died or were hurt were military personnel but still 30% from the 19 people who died and 217 people who were injured are a lot of civilians. But so, it is something you are responsible for and at that moment, like I said, I was able to push my limits for what I wanted to do or not, because I thought that too many times we've got a lot of civilians killed by the South African troops and we should do something after the murder of Ruth First and the Lesotho massacre by the apartheid state.

I was very glad that I was also linked to the surveillance in Pretoria because one of the things we always did is make a map of the area so those carrying out the operation know where to go and what are the problems. A car map and how you could get away. We noted the one-way streets and everything that could be helpful to drive around and also get away quick.

And that's when I found out that the Dutch embassy in Pretoria was also very close. It was also in Church Street, it was also a Nedbank building. So, I was aware of it – and this proved very useful later when I planned my escape from John Vorster square.

I also sometimes said instead of bringing arms in, I think we could also use them, like limpet mines, to do the operation ourselves. You can set the timer for a period and so there are possibilities. But the leaders of Special Ops didn't want us to do this. They said it had to be the South African comrades. Our role was solidarity, helping out on the level of reconnaissance and bringing in arms, not executing the actions. But in certain moments we could have done the actions.

Anyway, we knew for what reason Hêlène brought the car in. And it was Tambo himself who said later on that he agreed with it. And I agreed with it. But at the same I'm responsible and co-responsible for killing quite a lot of people and that's something you have to live with. And the two comrades Freddie Shongwe and Ezekial Maseko who did it from our side, they were killed also.

I agreed with it and at the same time I felt responsible and when we heard that so many civilians were killed and injured, I felt lousy, but still I wouldn't change that; we needed to continue to do this kind of thing. So I agreed with the objectives.

**But now so many years later do you have any regrets about that incident?**

No, not yet.

**Not yet? So you could still sometime in the future have regrets? How many times did you go in to do the surveillance for the Church Street operation?**

I don't know about how I will feel in the future, but no, not now. We came in once for Church Street. Two to three days we walked around, we drove around, and we looked around. But, as explained, we checked out several possible targets.

**And how long was it between the time you did the surveillance and the bombing?**

Some months, it took a long time to organise.

**So what other surveillance did you do?**

I can't remember all, I did oil installations, also I went to Port Elizabeth, and Durban, we did the refineries and other targets

**Were you involved in Voortrekkerhoogte?**

No. I did some surveillance of Waterkloof Military Airport in Pretoria.

Sometimes the arms were used for operations where something went wrong.

But mostly it was discussed before in general, but I said we saw Rashid, he talked about the aims, we did reconnaissance, and we brought the arms in.

**So, you were not involved in surveillance for Koeberg and the Dolphin Unit. And the unit led by McBride and Gordon Webster?**

I brought something in to Durban but that was for the refineries and that's where they made a mistake. I think that it was not organised well and they were caught. We brought arms once to an area where we had to hide them, it was not far from these refineries, and the guys came late, and there was bad weather and they couldn't find the place. And so I went back. The stuff was still there. I had a car full of stuff and I saw them somewhere and I gave the car with the key and later on they left the car for me in the neighbourhood. That was the way. We didn't speak much and they took the arms and that was it. I was several times in Durban, yes.

**But in general when you brought in arms, you used a DLB (dead letter box) and you buried the arms in cachets underground. What contact did you have with people inside the country who were to pick those arms up? Would the details of the DLB be given to Rashid and others in Maputo, and they would give these to the comrades carrying out the operation? And when there were cars to leave in South Africa how would the comrades access them after you'd parked them somewhere?**

Yes, so I brought in a car of arms and the guys would come and take the car. I saw the guys as less as possible. They would take the car and then bring it back to a fixed place in the same neighbourhood. In the meanwhile, I would have gone for a walk or jog or spent my time in some other way in the broader neighbourhood and then would have, after maybe an hour or so, come back to check if the car was parked again in the area. They came on time but we had also had this thing that if in five minutes somebody was not there, you go, and you knew a second possibility and that worked well. In general, there was no problem.

**So, they would take it from a White person without being suspicious of you?**

I had problems in Swaziland once. I had an appointment to bring something to a group and I look like a Boer and so they became very suspicious. They asked me for the password and I gave it to them. They said, no, it's not good. And then they took their pistols out and I said, oh, gee!

Now I must first tell you something about Bobby. We were both in Mozambique. He was a very good friend. I liked him very much, but he was a bit emotional, not as focused as, for example, Rashid was. My kids loved him because he spoke to them about apartheid in a clear and simple way which made them more conscious of what apartheid was and why they were fighting against it. Then he was based here later in Amsterdam as ANC representative in Holland, and we saw a lot of him. But he was not really Special Ops.

I liked him but he was sometimes too relaxed. He phoned me and said 'Klaas, can you bring some fishing rods?' I say yes. 'You know what I mean by fishing rods? Eight fishing rods and bring everything that goes with it'. And he went on and on, gee! And then you have to bring it to this place, he says. And I looked it up, and there's no water in the whole area. At least it could have been a river or lake or something. Nothing. So I think, hey, if somebody heard that, they would know what we were up to.

**But to come back to that incident, where the comrades pulled out their pistols...**

These guys in Swaziland, they became quite aggressive. It was at night and they were very nervous and I was also nervous. And they said, yes, sorry and they fumbled and said who told that password? Bobby, I said. 'Oh, Bobby' they said and then they believed me.

**So the password didn't work but when you mentioned Bobby they were fine...**

Yes.

**Were there any other incidents where there were suspicions of you from your own comrades? You know, you being White and looking, as you said, like a Boer?....**

No. But Victor I liked him very much, but he was a reserved guy. We worked together putting arms in and I saw him on a regular basis. The only one besides Rashid. And then Victor started talking and when he saw that we took risks and we discussed and we worked together closely, he became completely a very good friend. But before that he saw us as Whites and so on, not really as his comrades...

**So, did you actually literally get involved in putting the arms in the cars?**

Yes, but not alone. We did it in Maputo. We went to a safe house and we saw Rashid mostly and then Victor.

**And you didn't have any problems with the Mozambican security authorities at all?**

No, not then, they became difficult after Nkomati but then we were not known so much as part of the ANC...

**And while you were carrying out your Special Ops activities what about your paid work? How did you manage both?**

I was employed at the Department of Social Communication of the Ministry of Communication and the Minister Cabaco, was a friend of Joe Slovo and Ruth First, so he gave me some space, that if I needed to go, I was allowed. But the Director of the Department who was my direct head didn't like it, so he said I am too often absent, and this must stop.

**Did your immediate Head know you were in South Africa and what for when you were away?**

No, I don't think so. But he could imagine because he was asked by the Mozambican Minister of Information, Cabaco to allow me to be away from work. But my direct head was a Brazilian who had been involved in the armed struggle there and he knew what was happening.

**He sort of suspected but he didn't know for sure?**

Yes, he suspected.

**Did you receive any financial support for yourself from the ANC?**

No. I had a job, but then I went to try to find a job at the University of Venda, later Bophuthatswana and I'd been to the Transkei, so then I was asked to come for that, and the ANC paid me for the car and the expenses as well. But no money as such. And then when I got a job as a teacher in history in Zimbabwe, they paid a part of the rent of the house because we had a lot of arms there and they paid for the costs of the car.

**You started doing ANC work by taking money and political literature to Swaziland. Was this specifically for Special Ops or was it for MK generally or the ANC as a whole?**

Initially it was for the Political underground. But once I joined Special Ops it was for the Military but at times I did help the Political underground.

**How many times do you come into South Africa with arms?**

Seventeen maybe. Some of these trips were reconnaissance only, some were bringing in arms...

**Now you and Hêlène were together in a partnership when you first got to Mozambique. And you worked together in Special Ops. But while you were in Mozambique you separated. After this separation did you continue to work together?**

Yes, we separated but we continued to work together. Often in new relationships with children from previous ones there can be challenges – and we had some of these. Also, I had other relationships and she didn't like that. And then also that I challenged her. She was not very critical. For example, Joe Slovo was in 1983 completely defending Stalin, and perhaps he did that because the ANC got the money and arms from the Soviet Union. I understood, but still I found it difficult.

**It's said that Ruth had criticisms of the Soviet Union...**

Yes, I know. I disagreed with Slovo. And Hêlène was often angry if I said so.

**So Hêlène was sympathetic to the Soviet Union?**

Oh yes, but that also very late in life. I was of more a political activist than her but not a supporter of the Soviet Union. But she became completely uncritical. That's my interpretation.

**You got detained in 1985. So your operations were from '81 to '85? And you separate with Hêlène in which year?**

Beginning of '84, I think. We got officially divorced in 1985 while we were in prison.

**Now between the time you separate and the time you get arrested did you do any work together?**

We did, but Hêlène had to stay put and get integrated into her life in the academic world in Johannesburg. She could continue to work with me if she wanted but couldn't be involved in any other operations without Rashid's permission. Something went wrong because she got involved in the work of

another unit that had Ebrahim Ismail Ebrahim, her lover, in it. I think she tried to help Ebie get out of the country.

Rashid didn't know anything about this. He only heard later.

And Hêlène's work with Ebie had some problems and I heard the police went after her and him. And they found them and they were monitoring them. I contacted her once because it was necessary, I wanted help with a DLB. I had applied for a job at the university in Bophuthatswana. Enno, my son, was now 18 and I thought he should return to Holland and join his mother and younger brother, Arjen.

**You were going to be based inside the country yourself?**

Yes, but in Bophuthatswana. I thought it was a nice area to be based in, near Gaborone, an important area. And going there I had phoned Hêlène in code and told her that I wanted to see her and wanted her to do something for me. It seems she was being monitored by the security police before I met her. I saw her after I had my interview with the university in Bophuthatswana. They accepted me but I heard about it only when I was already in prison.

So anyway, I went to see Hêlène on 22 June 1985 and we then went together. I had asked if she would find a place where we could put a DLB. She showed me, and that night we came back and brought the things and we were under surveillance. Then we thought already – there is also something, that you get the idea, hey, have you seen these guys, in this car before, are they following you? - and then there were these sporty-looking young guys and so I thought, hell! We had an idea that something was wrong. We were not feeling right but we didn't stop then. I didn't go to her place because I had to start the next day early so I went to a hotel.

Very early the next day, 23 June, I left for Gaborone. The car heating wasn't functioning and it was very cold. Before the border I saw some people from Bophuthatswana Customs and I gave them a lift. I had nothing to hide and so I took them with me. It helps to get through. Sometimes you also get information from them. As an anthropologist I think I can manage this kind of thing. Hêlène thought it was irresponsible to take somebody as a hitchhiker but I thought I get some information. On one of these trips, I saw a South African soldier, he told me about his unit and how they were, and I put him there at the entrance of the barracks. So, it's how I am. He was talking and I was feeding him so that's what the job of an anthropologist is.

**What was Hêlène's concern, that if you engaged with the person, what would happen?**

That somebody will remember me and maybe in certain situations could maybe help the police.

But somewhere near Zeerust, there was a car passing by, very quick, it moved past me and came in front of me. There came a car besides me, another car behind me and then they slowed down. I had to stop and people jumped out three, four armed men.

I was with these people whom I was giving a lift. They were frightened much more.

**So, what happened to them?**

Oh, they let them go immediately. They said they got a lift with me, the police asked for their addresses and let them go.

**And what happens to you?**

It was like stepping into a film. They searched the car and they couldn't find anything. They didn't say anything. They brought me to a police station in Zeerust and there we were waiting until some police officer came and brought me to John Vorster Square (in Johannesburg) and that was the beginning of the process.

They didn't do anything about Hêlène. They knew we were together because they got me through Hêlène and I think they thought, hey, we wait and monitor her, and see who she's in contact with. So, some days later they detained her. And she thinks she was caught because I told them things. Ja, I told them things but nothing that could harm her in this way.

**But you admitted that you knew her obviously because she was your former wife...**

Yes. Sure. And they had seen us together. But they didn't ask me so much about her. Only when they dismantled the car they found the hidden compartment and my personal gun and the radio I'd bought for Victor. So, that was the beginning of the end. And then I was angry. I'd seen these guys - and how did I let myself get caught like this. And so I told them I'm going to escape. They said, 'Where? We are the best'.

**Why exactly was Hêlène based in the country? Was she there for Special Ops?**

For Special Ops, yes.

**What was she supposed to do for Special Ops?**

Stay put.

**You mean just wait. Be like a sleeper?**

No, but she had to just lie low until somebody required her help, as I did.

**What was the intention though?**

I think I moved in December '84 to Harare and she moved about the same time to Jo'burg. She had to keep quiet, Special Ops said - and that's what didn't happen.

**So, she was meant to carry on an ordinary life until they activated her again? Do you know what she was going to be activated for?**

Rashid thought - because I discussed it with him - that she still would be active after some time for Special Ops. But then she started to work with Ebie and Kasrils for other things.

**They reached out to her?**

Yes, and she said she did it because she was asked. She's also adventurous, and she likes to do things, and she thinks she can do everything together, she wants to do a complete job – and she shouldn't have done it. And they didn't tell Rashid so Rashid didn't know anything about it.

**So how did she get to the attention of the security police? I've heard that she was assisting Ebrahim to leave the country?**

Yes, I heard the same.

**And they were trailing him?**

Yes.

**If so, then it could mean that Ebrahim made Hêlêne vulnerable? That she can't be held responsible for that?**

Yes, I think.

**Do you know how Ebrahim got exposed? Was there some weak link in his underground political unit?**

I don't know...Hêlène met Ebie in Swaziland and they became partners and she was in love with him. I think he had a lot of problems getting out of the country. You'll find something in Thula Simpson's book on MK (*Umkhonto we Sizwe: The ANC's Armed Struggle*). Hêlène and Ebie were being recorded by the police.

**So, what happens after you get detained?**

At John Vorster Square, Craig Williamson said, hey, are you one of the guys of Conny Braam (Dutch anti-apartheid activist who played a major support role in *Operation Vula* and who wrote a book, *Operation Vula*). Other police said you see, this is the window where Timol jumped. And then bringing me down to the cells I had my handcuffs and and leg irons, they said if we push you here you break your neck. So, these kind of things but no torture, no beating.

**Why do you think that was?**

They didn't know who I really was. I had given the Dutch Consul's address as my address when I entered at the border. He had not known about this but the police thought maybe I'm linked to the Dutch consulate.

**How did you know his physical address?**

Oh, I found it in some directory.

**So, you said you're living there?**

Yes. So, they thought at the beginning maybe I was linked to the embassy as a spy or something.

**Basically they weren't sure what your role was?**

Yes.

**But they knew about Ebrahim being ANC and Hêlène associating with him, and you were of course previously Hêlène's partner? So, presumably they would take it you're ANC? Or not so? Did they think you may be spying on the ANC for the Dutch?**

I don't know, but something like this.

**So, how did you feel when you were detained?**

I was tense but at the same time I was not really afraid until they began threatening me, like saying they could break my neck and so on. Although they asked me many questions, physically they didn't touch me. I was in a cell alone and sleeping on the floor. There was always this camera and light on but I can handle these kinds of things very well. So, I wasn't much worried. And then I got angry. I said, oh, so I'm arrested. So, I started thinking how to get away...I was a bit afraid in the beginning and then afterwards wasn't...

**Why were you suddenly not afraid anymore?**

I thought when they caught me and there were six or seven police threatening me, oh, they are going to torture me. But they didn't. When I was in the police stations they gave me something to drink. I knew what could happen to people who were arrested. But then I thought maybe because I'm Dutch they were not going to torture me.

**In the training you got, do you think you were prepared adequately on how to handle detention as well?**

Yes.

**And did the training help?**

Yes, it helped also. You must tell as little as possible and if you say something you can always stop and you tell them certain names and things I did that they know anyway.

**But presumably once they saw that you had a DLB under your car, they realised you're ANC, right?**

Yes.

**Then they confronted you about that?**

Yes. And I said yes, I'm with the ANC.

**So then, you must have anticipated a spell in prison, surely? A sentence? You saw that coming?**

Absolutely, yes. But I knew from the beginning when I chose to do this that there was a possibility I could get arrested or even killed. I was very conscious of that.

**Well, you can be conscious about this, but when it really happens, it could debilitate you...**

Yes, but then I saw that they didn't torture me also, but just some threats and some jokes and these kind of things, but they didn't touch me. And you have these interrogations from the bad guy and the good guy. I had a problem. I was angry with myself, I was stupid how I got caught...

**Can you remember what exactly they asked you? How much did they seem to know already?**

I was amazed that it looked a bit like the booklet of the German author Stephan Zweig, about a chess player. It's about a guy travelling on a ship to the United States and playing chess. He is an ex-prisoner of the Nazi regime who maintained his sanity in a situation of total isolation and heavy interrogation by endlessly playing chess games in his head. He imagined matches against himself. In a similar way I tried to prepare myself for the what you might say is the interrogation game and try to control this situation as much as possible.

And I thought I can say certain things. At John Voster Square I am going to escape. And the police said impossible here because there are always guards on the top floor, you can't. I said okay. And then I thought how can I get them to take me out of the cell? If I tell them perhaps where I buried the arms but I know that they are not there anymore it can't harm anybody. And then I can find perhaps a way of escaping. And so that's what I did, after ten days I think.

**How many hours a day were you interrogated?**

Sometimes it was at night, sometimes during the day. You sleep and they just come and get you up. At a certain moment they said Brigitte, your daughter, she's here, in prison and H el ene's in prison. Brigitte is pregnant. She's trying to commit suicide and if you tell us what we want... You expect these stories but then you think it may also be possible it's true. So, then I said, okay, I will tell you something and I thought about places where I knew the arms were not there anymore, they were empty.

And they also showed me photographs and I said I knew Tambo and Joe Slovo. There were photos of Indres and Rashid but I didn't say I know them.

It was more about places than about people, about where did I put the arms. So, I took them to the empty Dead Letter Boxes and they asked me what was in it. And I said, well, a hundred kilos of TNT and so on. And they said, whoa!...

I felt great. I saw how shocked they were. They were always the same people. There was a photographer, quite a nice guy, a blonde who was a very athletic commando type, and a bit nervous police captain.

**How many people interrogated you? And at what level were they?**

Quite high, they were captains. Three or four. But there were two main interrogators.

**Have you ever met them since 1990?**

No.

**So what happens after you take the police to the DLBs?**

Well, I was thinking of escape.

**When did you actually make that decision?**

Well, from the first day.

**From the first minute even?**

From minute one, yes. I made a mistake by getting caught and I was very angry with myself.

**But why did you blame yourself for being arrested?**

Because I had a feeling that something was wrong and that we could be under surveillance and I suppressed this feeling and didn't take it seriously although we were trained for this type of situation.

**So when and how did you decide to escape to the Dutch embassy specifically?**

From the first moment. The police took me out three or four times. I brought them to a beach near Durban. They took me in a helicopter. And I tried to get them to take me to Cape Town also. You see, I'd never been there...

**(Laughter)...They said no to Cape Town?**

Yes, and I don't know why. But we went to Port Elizabeth in a helicopter. And they tried to walk around with me in a hotel that I had stayed in before to see

how people were reacting to me. And we also went to certain places in Transvaal. And I had at the time a good remembrance of where it was that I buried the arms so it was no problem. And the last one before the Dutch Embassy was a DLB near Mamelodi, and I knew there had been already an attack with these arms so I presumed they were all gone. And I took a long time before I took the police there and then I saw that some arms were still there. And I was very angry with myself that I took them there. I thought what the hell! I don't know if the police put these arms in there and did it to destabilise me, a way to try to make me afraid also. But I got angry with myself anyway.

**But the police couldn't have put those arms in there? How would they have known before you took them there that the arms had been buried there?**

I don't know if they were the same arms but the police had found it already. They had opened it already.

**Before you got there?**

Yes. But I don't know. I asked later Rashid and he said sometimes the comrades take the arms away, but if they think they are buried well they cover it up and they leave it there. And so I got very angry with myself. The police thought if they leave me to go free then I could get killed by the ANC people.

**You mean project you as having become a spy for the Security Police?**

Yes. I knew that's what they might be thinking, but I didn't discuss it with them, but it was just enough for me to confirm my decision that I find a way to get away. They thought they broke me and I thought now I try to escape.

**Why do you think they thought they'd broken you?**

When we went out next time they were much more relaxed.

**Were you handcuffed all the time?**

Leg irons. All the time. And so I went to Pretoria, I said I want to show you where I was doing reconnaissance at Voortrekkerhoogte and the military airport. And so I showed them not from where I was monitoring before, but from somewhere else close and told them I made photos. It wasn't true but they believed it. When I walked, my chains were not long but I have long legs and so it was impossible to run away. So, I said I'm not going anywhere else with them where I buried arms with these chains so they gave me a kind of a

leash to loosen the leg irons a bit. When I had to go with them I had no laces in my boots. But I found laces in the prison from somebody's shoes that were lying there. I was in good form because for three weeks I was jogging when I was given time in the open in the prison. I'm not a sportsman but I thought it was necessary.

When they took me out of the prison the next time, they were very relaxed. It was very different from the times before. They thought I'm now telling them everything. So we went to Voortrekkerhoogte. Then I told them there was something else we wanted to do, the ANC changed its policy. We had decided to take action against companies which don't respect the economic boycott, and one of the targets was in Nedbank, Church Street. They were shocked. So they brought me there, and they always take photos of me pointing to anything for their files. So, the guy was there standing before me and making photos. They must have a photo of me in their files in front of the Nedbank sign under the official shield of the Dutch Embassy.

### **They didn't notice that?**

They didn't know. I step inside the building and I say let's go to the second floor.

### **The second floor was the Dutch Embassy?**

I knew it was on the first floor but I said second floor. While waiting on the ground floor for the elevator I saw above the elevator the emblem of the Dutch Embassy and to the right a list of the companies based there, amongst which was the Dutch Embassy. So, to distract them from noticing this, I said, oh, a lot of people are waiting here so let's take the staircase. Also because I now knew where the embassy was. I take the leash of my leg irons and I start walking up the stairs and they follow me without saying anything. So, I come at the first floor with the Dutch Embassy on the left side. I pointed to the right side and said here is the company where we wanted to put explosives because they won't support the boycott. Then all three of them turned to look at that office, and I then rushed into the embassy in the other direction. I was afraid of the police captain because he was nervous. So, I thought he could shoot me, but he didn't, probably because we were all in a public building.

### **How far was that company from where the embassy was?**

About ten metres.

### **They didn't notice you were getting away? That's astonishing...**

Yes, they noticed and they did go after me. But they were so shocked, they had to turn themselves because they were all looking in one direction and I was rushing in the other direction. So, before they turned and before they went after me, I was already in the embassy. The door wasn't closed. There was no lock, nothing. I came in and the police jumped on me and threw me onto the floor and there were three ladies behind the counter staring, amazed.

**So, the police came into the embassy after you?**

Yes, they came after me. They ran. They threw me on the floor but they didn't shoot.

**But you were inside the embassy?**

I was inside. Only that Pik Botha (Foreign Minister) wrote a letter that I was only in the embassy up to my stomach [laughter]. He was trying to say my whole body was not in the embassy so I can't claim immunity. But I was fully in, it was not true, what Botha said. So, there were ladies there and they got a fright. I shouted that I'm a political prisoner, please help me.

**Were they South African or Dutch women?**

I don't know.

**So, what happens?**

The police took me out of the embassy – but then the counsellor, Bentinck, came, the ambassador was in Cape Town. The counsellor protested. I say I'm a political prisoner, I'm Klaas de Jonge. Boom! He says let's talk, come in. The police didn't want to come in and they were very much shocked. The police took me, ignoring the counsellor's protests.

Anyway from that moment I liked it because everybody knew that I was caught and that was important. And I felt great that I outsmarted them, even though I was taken back to prison. And one of these guys said, Jesus, is there a place for me in the ANC because my career as a police officer is over now!...

I remember the feeling I had then, I felt great, I said I had them! They brought me then to Joburg again. And there they said, oh, we can do this and this with you ...but only words...I said I have a right to escape and you are so stupid that you let me escape; you thought you were one of the best and compared yourselves with Mossad. And they didn't like me challenging them.

I didn't know what was happening, but I was with them for another week. And they took me to the Transkei and Durban and other places. I said I did something here and there. No problem, nothing any more.

The embassy told them that you can't take a Dutchman from the embassy, that is a diplomatic incident and the South Africans said we don't give a damn, and Pik Botha came on television with many, many limpet mines and Kalashnikovs to show what I had done.

**Were these brought in by you or were they exaggerating?**

No idea.

**So, basically the Dutch Embassy protested and then negotiated for you to be returned to the embassy from which you'd been hauled out?**

Not only the Dutch, all the foreign embassies in South Africa said we can't accept this; you have to resolve this. So, the police brought me back to the embassy after a week.

And then the police tried to change my indictment from one of Section 29 serious charges to a lesser one of smuggling arms and money and cars into the country. This was because the Dutch government said they could not hand me over from the embassy to the police because the Section 29 offences they charged me with were in violation of the international human rights to which the Netherlands was committed. And there were a lot of negotiations, months and months about my status, but that you can read.

**So, what happens in the embassy?**

Well, I was alone because the embassy people went to another building. So, I was there surrounded by a Special Task Group of the South African Police, mostly members of Unit 16, and they were trying to make my life unhappy but then also inside there were always one or two Dutch military policeman. For them I was a terrorist also. I did some sport, I built something thing to do push ups and a lot of things. I read and I wrote.

Also when I was in prison for short time in John Vorster Square. From the beginning I told them I'm going to escape. They said no, no, you see here on top of John Vorster people here get killed.

Sometimes I had my room in the embassy at the back and then the police would walk there and talk to me and we played chess sometimes. I had a big

knife, and I said if you ever come a bit further.... and they thought, I was brave. I wasn't. I would not have used the knife but I know how to sell it that I can. But once I was with one of these younger policemen, Dutch policeman, we were doing a bit of karate. A South African policeman saw this and asked: 'are you good at this?' I say 'very good, do you want to try me out? Come in'. I was obviously provoking them but they took it so seriously that the next day under the windows on that side of the embassy they put barbed wire all along. They thought I might try to escape. But I was just teasing them – and then they come with extreme reaction. How stupid can you get!

But I have also an idea that in the twenty-six months that I was there people got more conscious. That was a time Black people were walking more confidently, not feeling so dominated by Whites; there was this change, small change.....

### **In the way they carried themselves?**

Yes, yes. It had nothing to do with me. But I saw this from my window.

### **Did it boost your morale?**

Yes. Great that things were changing for sure now. There were all these problems in the whole country also and the Whites couldn't govern like before.

### **Did you have a TV?**

No.

### **Newspapers?**

Yes, newspapers. I got books and newspapers but that was not from the Dutch government, I had to buy them myself. I told the government that I want to work and I can't work, so you have to pay me, as in Holland if you don't have a job, you have a small allowance. But they didn't like it so much, and they gave me an allowance and took half because I was living free in the embassy. And from this half I had to cook, and buy clothes and newspapers. And then I started to work for *Fact and Reports*, a journal with a lot of cuttings, which was sent to Amsterdam.

The day I was going to be released I was very aware that Hêlêne was still in prison and so I showed a 'Free Hêlêne Passtoors' poster at the window. There were hundreds of people outside in the street that day. A Dutch MP who was there said be careful while I was standing at the window because he felt I

could be shot. There was previously a shot fired at the embassy and almost hit a Dutch policeman.

There were many people who would put their fists up to greet me, express solidarity and there was the singing. There was a White guy who stood there once and he looked a bit unhappy and he looked around and he made the rude middle finger sign which I could see from above but those around him couldn't. I laughed.

I read a lot and I had a radio, it was the Dutch Communist Party who sent me one...

I sent a message to my brother through Kathy Satchwell, my lawyer, to send me a shirt which was bullet-proof and he sent it but it I never got it.

### **Was it to assist your escape from the embassy?**

Yes.

### **But how was he going to arrange for you to exit the country?**

No, I had the idea to escape and he wanted to give something that could help me.

### **How did he get it to you, via Kathy?**

Yes, Kathy went to see him in Holland.

### **But you weren't allowed visitors from your family obviously?**

No.

### **Were you allowed phone calls?**



**Klaas de Jonge in the Dutch embassy, News24**

Not at first but I did get very few calls from the very few people that the Dutch government allowed. Glenn Moss, Kathy, Jacky Cock, Judith Hawarden and Dali Mpfu visited me at times. I had a girlfriend from Zimbabwe, she came to see me for two days but after first day they said she can't, I was punished for making propaganda or something. So,

I was very angry. But they couldn't punish me really. I didn't give a damn. And I had a rope also with knots and I had an idea to go out through the front door because when it was rainy a bit and there was a rugby match the police were all in the car at the front side watching on a small TV. They were distracted, so

I thought I might be able to get away. And I had a grenade, not an explosive, but that gives a lot of fumes.

### **How did you get that?**

Through somebody, let's say for now 'Comrade X', without her knowing. The police had an idea that I was planning something and then they sent a tip off to some Dutch police to visit my room. They did find everything, the rope and things, but not the grenade.

### **So finally you get released, when was this and why?**

I had no idea there were these negotiations taking place. Wynand Du Toit was released from Angola, he was captured there, he was from the South African army. There were also about 130 Angolans who were caught in Namibia, they were released. And there was (Pierre Andre) Albertini, from France, who was arrested in the Ciskei for ANC work.

They put me with him at the last moment. There was this exchange with Du Toit, the French guy, Albertini and me. A senior diplomat at the Dutch Foreign Affairs Department in the Hague went there to arrange it. He got a phone call only at the beginning of September and the exchange was on 7 September. This whole thing was months and months in preparation, it was already organised and my release came in at the last moment. So, I think that Pik Botha organised this without much discussions with the President and Security Police. I got out so easily and I think the South African police had a problem with my release, which later proved to be true, with the attempts to kill me after I was released.

So we were exchanged in Maputo on the night of 7 September 1987, two days after my fiftieth birthday. I was taken to Maputo. It was a transit. There were hundreds of people at the airport to receive us. The French Government had sent a plane for Albertini. Du Toit came in a small plane with Pick Botha, the Angolans in another plane, and I had to pay for my ticket for a KLM flight - for we are Dutch, you see!

### **[Laughter] Is there a stereotype about the Dutch and money?**

Yes. The Ambassador in Maputo said you can sleep at my place but you can go also with this plane later, but I must say you have to pay for yourself the ticket. But I had no money. So, he said the embassy would pay but I have to reimburse. He took my passport so that they could be sure that they could get the money back, and the Ambassador seemed to be ashamed. This is so Dutch!

### **So, you did pay them back?**

I had to pay back because when I wanted to go a bit later to Lusaka for this conference and meet with Tambo with Albertini, I couldn't leave the country before paying because I wouldn't otherwise have a passport.

### **But why couldn't the ANC just pay for it?**

Oh, the ANC, I don't know. I never thought about it. They were not involved in the deal. I came at the last moment so nobody knew and couldn't make any arrangements. And the South African police were very angry about my release. They even destroyed a part of my luggage.

### **You said Pik Botha at the last stages without consulting the security establishment decided, okay, fine, let's include de Jonge in the deal....**

Not only fine, he said he was so happy that I had left the country, he could have given me ten bouquets of flowers and ten boxes of chocolates. He was so glad he got rid of me. I never got the flowers and chocolates from him but it showed that they got fed up (Laughter).

I was a pain in the arse for Pik Botha and them.

### **That's why you think he let you go?**

Yes. He was so happy - because they couldn't reach me, and they couldn't put me in jail. And the Dutch Right Wing wanted me delivered to the South Africans. They couldn't do it because of the situation.

### **You can't go to jail. You're stuck there. You have an international anti-apartheid movement campaign around you. You're drawing enormous international publicity. You were a headache?**

Yes. One of the Conservative Party people in South Africa said good riddance to bad rubbish. And in Holland they were fed up with me also because I was a pain in the arse for them. They wanted me to be grateful and I said that they are stupid, never criticising the right wing in the country and so on.

### **What was the political composition of the Dutch Government at the time?**



Klaas de Jonge on arriving at the airport in Asterdam after his release, Wikipedia

It was centre right, like it always is. It was social democrats together with Christian Democrats and right wing liberals.

**So the anti-apartheid struggle in Holland was really a civil society campaign? It didn't involve any major political party in government?**

No.

**Unlike, say, in Britain, where the Labour Party supported the anti-apartheid struggle. The same also for the Social democrats in Sweden and elsewhere...**

Well, the governments here sometimes said they opposed apartheid but not like the Labour Party in Britain or the Social Democrats in Sweden...

**So, when you got to the airport in Amsterdam what was it like?**

Hundreds of people were there, including my family and friends and members of the various solidarity movements, including Conny Braam. There was a lot of singing by a Dutch group from the anti-apartheid movement. And lots of cheering. I was lifted onto people's shoulders and hugged and kissed by scores of people. It was a very festive mood. I got lots of flowers. And surprisingly my partner from Zimbabwe, Beverly, was also there.

Conny said there was a group of Japanese tourists there who were a bit confused wondering about what all the noise and cheering and singing was about. And when she explained, they bowed and waved to me.

I also spoke with people about my experiences and the need to release H el ene and end apartheid.

**Back to your detention, did the police know about your role in the Church Street bombing?**

They asked and I said nothing about it. But H el ene might have said something about her own role, I think. But you should ask her.

**They would've accused you of murder then.**

Yes.

**For me and for others, I'm sure, you were very important when you were holed up in the embassy. If my memory serves me correctly, there was a photo of you in the media at the embassy window with your fist raised high in the ANC salute? Anyway there were many images of you. And to many of us it was very significant that you were not a White South African but a Dutch comrade, somebody fighting for us, involved in the armed struggle, who could be sentenced to prison. I think it boosted people's morale and inspired them, and you mobilised people in your own way from that embassy. Of course, you did what you did because of who you are, because of your values and views, and you could have acted on them in Holland or anywhere, but as it turned out, it was South Africa. Maybe people have forgotten it now, but I think you were very significant to us.**

Thanks, that's nice for you to say that...

**But you did have an impact...**

Kasrils said that, when he released his book on Eleanor recently. He said here we have a a guy, he's Klaas de Jonge, he has the name of a Boer, he looks like a Boer and he was on our side....

**To come back to an issue you raised earlier. You said you offered to carry out some operations yourself. Maybe place some limpet mines on some targets? And Rashid and others said you shouldn't.**

Yes.

**Did you agree with that?**

Yes.

**Why? Why couldn't you just place, say, a limpet mine or two on a target?**

Well, I'm a foreigner...

**But you're an internationalist...**

Yes.

**And the South African state wasn't going to give you half a sentence because you didn't use the limpet mines ...you were going to pay the same price as those who used the limpet mines...**

Yes. But I asked the Special Ops leaders if I could carry out operations. Perhaps they thought that I wasn't good enough. It's possible because I'm not really a military guy, I'm a political person, that's my strength...

**But you could have been trained. Who's inherently militaristic?**

Yes, but I think that sometimes people carry out operations where civilians get killed...

**But then how do you feel about the fact that the arms you took in did lead to civilian deaths?**

I find it worries me, yes.

**Did you speak to Rashid about this? Did you say you'll bring arms into the country but you didn't want them to be used in actions that would lead to civilian deaths?**

No, but it was clear that sometimes there might be collateral damage, but the ANC tried to prevent this. The ANC was on the whole careful.

**Now after you were released from the embassy you go back to Holland immediately. When do you reconnect with the ANC?**

Oh, immediately. I was at the airport, hundreds of people were there, it was Conny Braam leading that, and then they organised a meeting in a church where there was the Head of the ANC in Europe who came and so on. And I was asked at the end of 1987 to go to Lusaka. We were thanked and we had to tell them what happened. Albertini was there too, the French guy who was working underground for the ANC.

**What then?**

I got more training in the GDR (East Germany). But I could not to go back to South Africa – it would be stupid. They knew me. But I could train people who worked for *Operation Vula* and who had to be supervising safe houses. So, they had to know something about security, all these kind of things and I got training in this in the GDR by the Stasi (East German Security Police).

**What training?**

Training for *Vula*. Conny needed help with general security for people who are going into the country

**Did you do any of that?**

I did. In Holland, with Dutch people who went to set up safe houses in South Africa. And they survived. I worked with four, I think. Two worked later with Tim Jenkins in Cape Town.

**I hear your life was threatened even when you got back to Amsterdam?**

Yes.

**Was the threat from the South African security police or the Dutch state or Right Wing or all of them?**

The South Africans.

**How do you know about it? And why would they want to kill you?**

I can show you a letter. I found out because of Ferdi Barnard, a criminal, he was in the TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission) for amnesty and these documents were not opened until 2015 and then I got them. And he said that he was involved in trying to kill me. I got data from South Africa Historical Archives about the plan to kill me here in Amsterdam. In the documents it says somebody very high up, very close to the President, said about Klaas de Jonge, kill that cunt because he's continuing his activities against South Africa.

**You were speaking all over Holland and elsewhere?**

Yes. And also, I think the police were angry because they thought they could get me into prison and at the last moment there was this exchange with Du Toit, Albertini and me.

So, they gave Barnard \$15 000 to organise a group to go to Amsterdam, set up a safe house and find out where to get me. Then they were going to get an explosive specialist from Australia who had to put in the device in my post box. or in my car. But the car would be difficult – because I had only a bicycle. And so, he prepared, but then somebody talked too much about it, he said. And then it was blown off. So, it was not done.

At same time, that was in '88, there is another possibility – I lost an eye. I think I was followed, and I don't know that for sure, but I put my luggage somewhere. I was very careful, but I came back and the luggage was not there anymore. I had the key of the locker. But my luggage was at the place where

you can hand it over to them to keep. So, I went to see and somebody said they had to review the lockers so here is your luggage. If you give the key back, you get the luggage. So, I said I don't trust it, call the police, perhaps there's a bomb. They laughed and they opened the bag and nothing happened.

I took the bag. I went to my parents. That same night I had an enormous pain in my eye, I got an eye infection, and the next day I went to the hospital. They give me tablets, and say come back in two days. I said but it's very painful. Yes, come back in two days. I came back in two days and they say, oh, but you are blind, it must have been very painful! I said, I damn said this, so why wasn't I given proper treatment? Yes, you should've come early, they say. I said, no, you said two days. So, I was very angry. And then the ANC sent me to a special hospital in East Berlin.

They did everything and they found out that it was something special, but they couldn't make out what was the reason. They treated me and I now have a glass eye. I don't know, maybe Barnard's team did this or they heard about it and decided they had punished me anyway. But I was lost for three months because I got training in East Germany so I wasn't in Holland then and nobody knew where I was, so it could be that also caused confusion for them. I tried to write to people in South Africa, but nobody knows anything about who was responsible.

**So, you've never been able to establish whether the Security Police had anything to do with the loss of your eye?**

No. But to prove somebody was behind it is hard. It seems somebody in Barnard's group talked about their plans for me, I don't know what for – I incompetent people they are, they talk about who they want to kill. So, I find it a ridiculous story, but Barnard was interrogated during the TRC hearings, and you can read about it.

**Now in your years in the struggle, were you in any sense anxious, tense – at the border or at any other time? After all, you could get arrested...**

Always tense, but the people don't see it and I'm quite good at managing my stress.

**Well, maybe if you're driven morally and angry about apartheid you're able to overcome some at least of your anxieties?...**

Ja, Ja...But I think it's also an adventure, taking part in the struggle. So, I'm part of a movement. We get in when we want. We do what we want. And we

are going to change the situation. Apartheid has to stop. I was very, very concerned with this because I got really very angry and that anger helps with these things, I think. It was in '82, I think, we did research for Central African Studies. I went with students and with other people. I was doing research in the Limpopo River area about parallel markets. And I saw first-hand how destructive RENAMO was and it had the support of the apartheid regime. The people in the rural areas complained about this – RENAMO is going through this valley here and attacking villages, burning and so on, they told us. I was told that I have to handle a gun for my protection.

We saw the burnings and I thought, gee, sitting on the hill as sociologists was a problem because the people were just being attacked. I want to do more. Apartheid has to stop otherwise there's no way Mozambique can develop. I thought I have seen these bastards try to destroy everything that Mozambique has built and I will help to destroy them. It was about the same time that the apartheid regime killed ANC people in Maseru. I thought what the hell, I'm prepared to do things with the ANC even if it means that some people might get killed from apartheid's side.

I had been conscripted in the army in Holland but I came out quite anti-militaristic because of the atmosphere in this army, the stupidities of what I saw and the way they talked about a lot of things. So, I got fed up. And what I liked of the ANC, they were political people. They were not just military, so when they say I have to do this, they discussed it with me, they were completely different from a normal army. So, although I had some difficulties about the use of violence, I didn't find it difficult to push myself to my limits and to say, yes, okay you can count on me even if you need me for armed actions where people might be killed. Can I go through the process? It takes time, but, yes, in that situation it's possible.

**Maybe I'm wrong, but apart from the British, it seems to me that the Dutch were disproportionately involved in our political underground and armed struggles. Do you think that might be true?**

I don't know. But I think South Africa is something special. Even the word apartheid is a Dutch word. But it's not so that we have sense of guilt, because I'm not responsible for what the Dutch did in the past. But we knew about apartheid. My first books with photos, when I couldn't read, were my grandfather's, and he had books about Afrikaner people – the heroes fighting the British. So, it was already books from childhood. And there were books about the struggle for Namibia and a lot of cultural books about Afrikaners, the Anglo-Boer War. They were heroes for us. And so, I was brought up with this, and before I could read, I was already walking with big books with photos of Boers and so on.

And just opposite my house where I was living in Deventer you had a statue of President Steyn (of the Orange Free State in South Africa) and some Voortrekkers with guns from South Africa. So, we are much more, I think, involved because of the culture and the Boers were also so damned religious - I am an atheist - and in Amsterdam you had the VU Protestant University, they were very much in favour of contact with the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa.

And you know we are a trading nation with South Africa. And then Conny Braam wrote a book about the First World War in which the Dutch were not involved; we were neutral. And we produced cocaine in India and we sold it to the British and the Germans the same time. I mean we are really a trading nation, so you can do a lot, and I saw that we have this idea we are against violence because violence is not good for trading. Quite hypocritical!

### **So, there are historical and cultural and economic links...**

Yes. We had an enormous anti-apartheid movement here. We had it from '69 or so and over 300 000 were in one way or another linked to it. Out of a population of about seventeen million, I think. And you had various big groups, Conny Braam's Anti-Apartheid Beweging. You had the KZA that was a bigger one and they were not against armed struggle, they helped also. That was Sietse Bosgra. Before he was in favour of the liberation movements in Portugal. So, you had Esau du Plessis with BOA. And then you had on a local level the Christians, Socialists, Communists, all kind of groups. And I think we got involved because it has something to do with our culture and we had very good people doing it...

### **And Hêlène?...**

She married a Belgian so she had dual nationality. When I was arrested, I was helped by the Dutch, she decided to opt for the Belgians who were worse than the Dutch.

### **You were saying...**

Ja, well, you must remember that Mozambique was a socialist country so a lot of internationalists who were interested in socialism went to Guatemala or Colombia or Mozambique or Angola. So, they were nice people to ask to help the South African struggle. It was easy for people like Bobby (real name: Sunny Singh) and others to move around in these internationalist circles and try out who they could approach for help with the South African struggle.

And it was the same with Conny. She's a very charming personality. She was a member of the Communist Party. She has the background of parents who were also linked to the Resistance against Nazi Germany. And she managed to also make people enthusiastic.

And I also managed a bit sometimes after I came back from South Africa. Joe Slovo said, well, now you have to go around to people here (in Holland) and talk about apartheid and that will help us. Recently I gave a talk on Human Rights Day and I raised criticisms of Amnesty International who didn't help Mandela because he took up the armed struggle, and for me the armed struggle was also a kind of human rights action against an oppressive regime.

**On reflection now, is there anything you would've done differently in your role in the South African struggle, and if so, what?**

I was a bit naive or stupid in not realising that every time I took the police to an empty DLB I would be charged for an additional offense. So, that meant the more I cooperated with them about these empty DLBs I would end up with an even longer jail sentence. Had I known this I would have taken them to fewer of these DLBs. But remember my aim in going out with them was to see how I could escape and to make them feel more relaxed with me and think that I now accepted that I was going to prison.

Every time again I exaggerated the arms I buried, it really had an effect on the police. I saw that. That gave me some power over them. But I underestimated the psychological effects of my choices on my kids and some things, yes, I should've done better in the sense that I think maybe it was better that they stayed with their mother. I went to Mozambique not to take part in the armed struggle, but then I didn't send the children back and perhaps I should've done that.

**Of the Special Ops comrades, who stands out for you? Two or three people maybe?**

For me, it was Rashid. I didn't know very many others. I think Hêlêne also, with all the problems I have with her, I think she was very dedicated, probably

more than I was. I'm a bit more fantasy-like. I think Victor (Johannes Mnisi) also was good. But I didn't know many of them...



**Klaas de Jonge, with  
Chris Hani, around  
1990, News24/City  
Press**

### **Why does Rashid stand out for you?**

His strengths. He's very committed. He is not a militaristic guy. You don't need one. He's very committed. He has imagination. He can improvise. He cares for people. So, I think these things make him very good for this work. He cares so much that every time he had an ulcer; this was also from the stress and everything.

And you know Rashid - he prepares everything very well. He always felt a strong sense of responsibility for all members of the group. I was impressed by him and we remain friends till now.

I never talked much with people about him but I know Hêlène liked him very much. I did, and he was heavily respected by Sue and Joe Slovo. And he is also a very humble person and I think he was right for such an undercover job. It's not for nothing that he survived. He's got a good combination for a good leader.

### **What are some of his weaknesses, do you think?**

We didn't know each other that well that I could see weaknesses.

Perhaps he's a bit too closed, he doesn't talk very much. And I would like to know more about somebody I work together with, but he's closed. You must be his lover probably to know more about him.

### **(Laughter) Ja, he's a bit introverted, everybody says that.**

Yes. And I don't know if it's about security maybe that he's like that. I didn't have contact with many other Special Ops people.

### **Is Rashid still introverted when you meet him now?**

Yes, but I can feel that we are really friends.

### **Anybody else who stands out from Special Ops?**

Well, first of all, as Rashid would also tell you, it's Slovo. He was quite a character. I loved and admired this guy as a real revolutionary although I didn't agree with his defending Stalinism. But I liked his Stalin jokes and those about

the transformation in Mozambique. He was very sociable and our kids loved him too and liked his guitar-playing.

He also wrote interesting articles about the South African revolution and the armed struggle which I read in Maputo. I remember *No Middle Road*, for example. Basil Davidson co-edited this. He was a Special Operation Officer himself during World War II fighting the Nazis in Yugoslavia together with Tito's partisans. I met him once with Joe when they were discussing the role of the lumpen-proletariat in the armed struggle. Most of the MK guerrillas came from this class. They also discussed other issues about the recruitment of Special Ops personnel – 'Rambos'.

### **What did you make of Victor?**

Victor was somebody I liked. I wrote something in English about Victor. He was from Mamelodi, one of the experienced operators who survived the struggle although he died soon afterwards. He left the country in 1979 and went to Mozambique. He received military training in Angola. In 1980 he became a member of Special Ops, and I met him when we were preparing attacks on some power stations. He played a major role in the Church Street operation. Although I had the name of a Boer and looked like one, we became very good friends after some time.

I think he was badly treated. For instance, he died in extreme poverty. He didn't want to go to the army and he didn't manage to survive on what he got and he didn't get any help. Rashid went to his funeral but perhaps he could have stepped in earlier to help Victor. But I don't want to give Rashid the blame for that but he could have done more.

After 1994 I met him and his wife several times. When I heard from his wife, Pauline, that he died I was very saddened but also very angry that he died in such severe poverty...

Internationalists like Guido, H el ene and I provided ANC operatives with safe houses, stocked arms and explosives, carried money and material into South Africa and Swaziland, did reconnaissance work and at times took in arms and explosives into the country.

**You and H el ene had five children between you when you went to Mozambique. You decided to offer yourselves for the struggle in South Africa, knowing full well it could mean detention, even death maybe. What would have happened to the children if this happened to either of you, and especially both? Did you discuss that?**

We discussed it. I think H  l  ne, she had been in Africa before and she was very anti this apartheid. She couldn't stand the oppression and so on. And so it was with me also. I think she'll talk for herself because we are separated. There are problems between us, so it's better I don't say anything.

**But couldn't you speak for yourself at least?**

Ja. What I thought was H  l  ne had a former husband and I a former wife in Holland so there were still parents who could take responsibility for the children. We discussed this with the ANC and they said that they would do everything and they would get the kids out and make sure that they were helped, etc.

**Did you discuss it with your respective former partners?**

No. We thought that it would be a bit dangerous.

**So, they were not aware that you were doing this?**

They were not aware, but we wrote letters, in case something happened. I discussed it with my brother. He was not political but supportive. But it was a very important thing and some of my children later, they said, 'How could you do that? I would never have done this.'

**Did you never have a problem on the border?**

No.

**Did you ever have your children in the car when you crossed the border?**

Yes – but only when I went to Swaziland. And later they went to school in Swaziland. There were attacks on ANC people in Maputo, so then the kids went somewhere else safer to Swaziland.

When we went to Swaziland, having propaganda material, or a letter or money or so, we combined this with doing something nice with the kids. Sometimes it was difficult because my son was in puberty. He was pro-Mozambique and he could be very, very undiplomatic, and when at the border they would ask, 'Have you something to declare?' he would say, 'Ja, we have atom bombs,' and so on. So, we were careful.

And the children were never with us when we took arms into South Africa.

**But today, as adults, now that your children know what you did for the South African struggle, how do they feel? You don't have to answer this...**

Hêlène and I are separated for some time now. But my own son, now he does say that I had brought him into an area where war was going on and he was often very afraid that something would happen to me and this whole period has had psychologically effects on him. Not so much what we did, but he had the idea that he was in constant danger. It was much more his idea, and I don't think it was true, but he felt it like this. So, I had this mistake that I hadn't thought about that. The fact that at certain moments I had to tell him that we had do something, he liked that. And, once, he found out that some arms came in the house, and he says now, that he was worried then that something would happen; he was thinking about it and it was a problem at that time. So, he had an idea that it was very risky, very dangerous, and I didn't think it was, but it influenced him.

**How old would he have been then when he saw these arms?**

Sixteen, seventeen.

**And when he looks back at it, he feels that he was more vulnerable than you think he was.**

Ja.

**So, it affected him? Has he gone for psychological counselling and the like?**

Ja, he says that he has a kind of stress disorder.

**Till now?**

Ja.

**Has he blamed you for it?**

Ja.

**Is he himself progressive, or not really?**

He is – more progressive. He says the ANC is not progressive enough.

**He is to the left of the ANC?**

Ja.

**But he still holds you responsible for some of his stresses?**

Ja.

**Your grandchildren – they know about your role? If so, do his children think that their father was made vulnerable by your activities?**

It's difficult to say.

**But aren't they proud of you?**

Well, they are. Ja, my son is also. It's a strange combination: he's proud, at the same time, he says you brought us into a difficult situation.

**Is his main concern that his father could have died?**

Ja, but there was also something else. For example, I knew that the kids liked adventure. I took them camping near the sea, but I said you can't go over the other side. There are sharks, so stand this side of the waves. There was also a river nearby. In the river are the crocodiles, I said. So, be careful. Don't go there, but stay here. There was nothing that happened, but the effect of this emerged later. They loved it at the time – but later they reproached me. They said a good father would not have left five children in that insecure situation.

I wrote them a letter because somebody wanted to make a film about my story, a play, and they interviewed Rashid and other people and my lawyer and some diplomats who hate my guts and some others, and also my kids. The most critical were my kids. They are proud but they said you were a very bad father.

**Have your children been to South Africa recently?**

Two of them have been in Africa, in South Africa also.

**Is that in English, the documentary?**

It's not. No, it's not been made yet. It's a student who heard about my story. When I was in Rwanda, she was doing research for her studies and she wanted to make a film and she started interviewing Ronnie Kasrils and others. She

couldn't get the funds to finish it. She also wanted to make a play. People said it's a good idea, but she didn't get the funds for that too.

### **Here in Holland?? What a pity!...**

Ja, in Holland. But now there is also another group wanting to do something. There were several people who have wanted to write books and to make films, but nothing happened. But there have been two documentaries and my diary of my experiences in the embassy was published in Dutch in 1987. And now recently somebody has started a book. And there is one group who did it, and they - there's a Belgian guy together with a Lebanese friend - filmed me and asked me about the armed struggle; and also, there was a young guy who interviewed me and was very upset when I said we did the reconnaissance for the Church Street operation.

### **But you didn't apply for amnesty.**

No, it was not necessary. Hélène brought the car from Swaziland into South Africa. I brought in arms and explosives from Maputo.

You know, I think the biggest difference between Hélène and I is that she always goes for something hundred percent and even more. She's something of a believer and sometimes not critical enough. I'm always more personally involved. I don't do whatever I don't want. That was sometimes clashing.

She thought that I was too easy in a lot of things. I thought she was too fanatical in a lot of things and sometimes you got problems. Besides I had other relationships so she was very angry with me.

Hélène is very intelligent. She's very committed. In an interview with a Belgian newspaper she admitted that she had brought the car bomb in for the Church Street operation and was shocked by the consequences but stood behind the action.

Somewhere she wrote about herself as a soldier for Mandela and I would never do this in this way. So, she was really committed in this complete way. And, of course, she had a relationship with Ebie.

Hélène became also a Moslem when she was in prison. She was a Left-wing Christian before.

### **Is that because of Ebrahim?**

I think so. Perhaps for the possibility to see each other in detention...

### **They met in Swaziland?**

They lived some time together in Swaziland

### **Do you have any regrets? I mean, about your role?**

Yes, I made a mistake and I got arrested, but I think I corrected it in a way that was quite nice. I am not a hero in this kind of thing but I found at the same time an adventure and it was good to be part of a whole process with people I liked for an objective that was important. And what will always go with me is that I am co-responsible for the killing of civilians, but at the same time it was a war.

### **If you consider how wrong and abhorrent apartheid was and the intensity of the South African conflict, do you think the number of civilian deaths was too high?**

No, not at all. I have no regrets and if I meet people, I would say I'm sorry, I didn't want us to kill civilians, I am co-responsible for the deaths. But that's what happens, unfortunately, in situations like this.

### **You dealt with Special Ops strengths. What were some of its weaknesses, do you think?**

It still remained a militaristic structure so although the leaders were quite open about the need to be political and that Special Ops was armed propaganda, we never discussed how we must measure it, or how you could see its success in terms of the political. If you think there were quite big projects, Sasol, Koeberg, Voortrekkerhoogte, Church Street, they had an impact. But let's be frank, Church Street was not a typical example of this militaristic approach. Sasol is, Koeberg is, Voortrekkerhoogte is. Church Street was a car bomb. It was big, like the landmines on the borders. Tambo said this must stop.

Church Street was perhaps the most successful but it's not really the most typical for the kind of policy they wanted at the time. I know that Tambo said yes, now we are going to also not stop actions that might lead to civilian casualties. At that time, we had huge strategic targets and this was also strategic but also with quite a loss of life. So, it being a strategic target wasn't an issue but afterwards what was exactly the effect of this kind of militaristic actions, Church Street, on what we wanted, bringing the end of apartheid closer?

I think in general, yes, it helped very much, but I think, for example, that personally my own contribution of making a fuss from the embassy, outsmarting them and making them angry also contributed politically. I was making propaganda for the ANC from the embassy. I also made my own 75 years of the ANC posters and I gave interviews that I was not allowed. The Dutch embassy was not happy because they get were getting all these problems from the South Africans. So, I think personally that my contribution to mass mobilisation was somehow better, doing it from the embassy without any arms than when I was bringing in arms.

**That's a very interesting, original observation. It impinges, in a way, on the issue of the relationship between armed and mass struggles, which keeps coming up in the interviews on this Special Ops project. About these interviews from the embassy, how would you do them? Did the Dutch Embassy allow journalists to meet or phone you?**

No, but through Kathy Satchwell, my lawyer, journalists sent questions and when she visited me, she'd bring them and I would answer them. Also, I spoke with journalists sometimes from the embassy window while they were in the street.

**Were they Dutch and other foreign journalists only or South Africans too?**

Foreign mainly.

**Didn't the South African Security Police tell the embassy that you're not allowed to give interviews?**

Yes, and the Ambassador said you can't do this, and the South Africans also protested. I promised that I would be quiet and not create problems. But did it again when I thought it's necessary.

I refused to be treated as a prisoner.

**Overall, how would you see the ANC's armed struggle in terms of its achievements and failures?**

Well, the ANC had these four pillars of struggle and the armed struggle was just one. I think in later years there was more focus on the political, the mass struggles, together with the UDF and Cosatu. And then there was also *Operation Vula*, setting up a political underground and sending the ANC leadership into the country underground. As a propaganda pillar, I think the armed struggle did its job. But not if you think military-wise, as a fight against

the South African army, then it wasn't a big success. But I don't think that was the intention anyway. But some people thought that. They really thought it was going to be a military fight with the South African army. But they changed, I think. From the mid-1980s things went wrong in Mozambique, they kicked the ANC out but still the ANC continued to do things and then *Vula* started.

**Why did you not apply to the TRC for amnesty?**

I was never accused. I don't understand why Hêlène was never killed because she admitted that she brought the car in. I never did. I talked about the arms I brought in and sometimes where I hid them knowing that they had already been used, except the one case when I took the police there and found that the arms were still there. In Hêlène's case they knew about the car. They asked me about it but I said I was never involved.

**People were expected to come forward and tell the TRC what they did. So, you didn't because you felt it was unnecessary?**

Yes.

**That's simply it?**

No, I discussed it with Rashid and he said there was no need.

**You feel you grew, developed with your participation in Special Ops?**

This experience was very important. I was in my forties when I was involved. It was a time where I met very interesting people I admired. Joe Slovo, I found him to be a very nice guy. Humorous, intelligent, engaged and also a bit of a strange revolutionary...

**In what sense?**

Oh, he was talking once and dropped his revolver. And then he said this happens so often that if I am really under attack, I'll have to throw the gun at my attackers. We didn't really discuss, like I said, about Soviet socialism also, and I found it a pity. But he was a very important kind of leader. He could motivate people. I liked him. He was nice to know and then his whole participation in the struggle, to be part of it like that, which went well, and to be able to be part of the new government, become a Minister of Housing until he died too early.

I was a small fish, did something through my participation in the struggle. I worked years and years in Africa on conflict resolution in one war after the

other. But through Special Ops I can say I helped something. I have an idea I helped something, I saved somebody also. But in other African countries I did years and years of work and don't know where it led to. In South Africa it led to something. We saw it get better with apartheid having to give up and the government negotiate with the ANC and others for a democracy. In that way all the pressure helped and we did manage to do it without civil war, and that was great; and I was part of such a process with people I found amazing from the top down, on every level. I loved Victor, I'm thinking also about Slovo, Ruth First, Rashid, the other friend of Victor's also. So, I was hopeful about a country which produced these kinds of people, with this calibre, and I found it stimulating.

Yes, I got arrested – but then on the day I became fifty I heard that I would be free.

### **On your birthday?**

Yes, birthday. I was organising a party, a small party. I wanted a cat and they brought two cats for my birthday, but then I was told I'm getting released and I had to return the cats the next day.

### **So, who came to the party?**

I can show you the photos. Kathy Satchwell and her partner. Glenn Moss and his wife, Georgina. And then the journalist Pat Sidley with her husband and some other people who got smuggled in, including sociologist Jacky Cock. The Ambassador and his wife also came.

### **Did you receive a struggle veteran's pension?**

I applied, but sometime later I was told that I had to make another application, but I was somewhere in Africa at the time, and I didn't then re-apply.

### **But shouldn't you still apply?**

I heard later that as a non-South African I did not qualify. But, well, if South Africa had more money...As long as the money is well used, benefitting the people, and not going into somebody's pocket, it's okay...

### **Have you been given a national orders award for your contribution to the struggle in South Africa?**

Hêlène got one.

## **Yes, but why haven't you?**

They wanted to. I said yes, but, well, who's going to give it to me? And they said Zuma, and I so said no. And then I said I'll accept if you agree that when I see him I must be able to say I don't respect you. So, that kind of statement. I like to be provocative. No, no, they said, that can't be done. So, I left it

**Even if comrades don't respect Zuma, shouldn't you accept the national orders award anyway? It's not his personal decision to issue the awards, it's a special panel that decides on this; and its meant to be the country, not the President, acknowledging somebody for their contribution to the country's struggle. It's about recognising the internationalism of our struggle, about its global reach and support, and our acknowledgement of the contribution of people from the world over. The youth in our country need to understand the role that internationalists played – and this is also what this interview is about...**

Yes, I accept that the youth must know their history. But what has that got to do with giving people like me medals? It would be better if people did interviews like this, wrote books, did documentaries and in other ways communicate the history of the country. That's why the Rivonia and Apartheid museums and other such places are so important. Also, the history books used in schools. In any case, it was a collective struggle and to unnecessarily focus on individuals, especially small fish like me, is not something that I feel comfortable with. Also at a fundamental level, I took part in the anti-apartheid struggle for myself - because it affected me personally – I felt offended by the racism, the violence, the exploitation, the inequality, the injustice; and I wanted to fight it myself too.

**Well, a senior Special Ops comrade was annoyed that Hêlène was given an award and not you. And others have raised the need to give you more recognition. Others have also raised the need to give more recognition to internationalists generally who took part in the armed and underground struggles. At our last Politburo meeting the SACP endorsed a request that the London recruits be recognised for their contribution. There's a book that's just been published about them and it was launched in South Africa recently...**

Yes, I know, I read it.



Klaas de Jonge receiving the Order of the Companions of OR Tambo (Silver), 2019, X

### **So, when's the first time you come to South Africa after the unbanning?**

First, I came to bring people back who were wounded in Angola to Transkei and I met Chris Hani. Also (Bantu) Holomisa (then head of the Transkei Bantustan, later ANC National Executive Committee member, now leader of the parliamentary party, United Democratic Movement). That was 1990.

We went to several parts and gave lectures. I have photographs with people dancing the toyi-toyi and I was with Hani and Holomisa. And we still passed White areas, hey, and they were target shooting. Also I met Mbeki. So, it was a bit of showing off. In 1990 was the first time that I saw how the people were responding, and there I got also got a part-time membership card of the ANC. I went to Transkei through Johannesburg but they didn't arrest me.

Then in 1992 I got an invitation for a meeting of a lot of anti-apartheid movements from throughout the world.

### **You were not based in Angola in 1990, so how did you come to bring the wounded ANC comrades from there back to South Africa?**

Conny Braam was organising it together with others. She asked me to help. I think because at that time if my name still is mentioned these things sometimes get more attention in the international anti-apartheid movement.

### **It seems to me you must be one of the more high-profile figures in South Africa from the internationalists who participated in the armed struggle?**

No, I don't know. Conny Braam and Sietse Bosgra are more well known here. I was only involved in anti-apartheid activities from Southern Africa. I started with a small group in Amsterdam and got involved there; but it was because of the way I escaped and got a lot of attention that it made me, as you say, high profile. But Conny Braam was the one and Sietse Bosgra and other that were very much in the public eye here.

### **So, when last were you in Mozambique?**

I was there when I worked for Penal Reform International and Prison things. They asked me to do something in Mozambique in 2000.

**In the interviews I've done so far and through some of my reading, what seems to emerge is what you might call a 'healthy rivalry' between MK units. For example, Special Ops was led by Slovo. Military Intelligence was led by Ronnie. Nyanda commanded the Transvaal Urban machinery. Then you had MK as a whole commanded by Modise. And, of course, you also had Mac heading *Operation Vula*, which also linked to the armed struggle. Did you get any sense that different machineries and units of the armed struggle were in some sort of competition with each other?**

I don't know very much about it but Bobby said in an interview he gave, yes, we were very happy with Hêlène and Klaas in the political underground but then the higher people came, Joe Slovo and them, and they took them from us.

**There's a paper written by Comrade Rocky Williams, who was in MK, who says of the Special Ops approach that: 'The effects of this strategy were twofold. On the one hand, it resulted in a situation where the Special Operations Division, due to its profile, responsibilities and capabilities, began to assume a much greater responsibility for the conduct of internal military operations than it should have done. On the other, the preferential location of the Special Operations Division under the command of Tambo created a degree of resentment and mistrust amongst MK rank-and-file and strained relations between the division and the army commander, Joe Modise - a phenomenon not unusual within those armed forces, be they irregular or regular, that maintain specialist special operations capabilities. Criticisms of these operations from the 'left', however, maintained that spectacular military operations of the Voortrekkerhoogte type were no substitute for the task of rooting the military underground in the local population. There were definite reasons for a shift to the special operations-type activities, however, and this was reflected in the fact that Special Operations, initially under the command of the late Joe Slovo, was placed under the direct command of the President of the ANC, Oliver Reginald Tambo, with the Commander of MK, Commander Joe Modise, retaining only nominal oversight over this division.' What's your response to those observations from Rocky?**

I can understand this when you are a member of another MK group and you see what Special Ops is achieving. Personally, the only big operations I remember are the Special Ops ones. I think Durban Magoo's Bar bombing, that was more a kind of action I didn't support...I wouldn't want to work for an organisation doing those things. It is the way the Algerians operated; they had

terrorist attacks to make their political points. And I'm against this approach, which is in a way a terrorist approach. That is also the only example I know where a quite terrorist approach had finally success, and I don't know of many others.

So, these big things, I think, were okay only if you think that it was possible to do it in a really People's War situation, but if you see what happened with bringing arms in and there's not much control and everybody doing a bit sometimes, burning of spies or so-called spies took place... This *People's War* approach didn't get enough support from the ground and it failed. And then *Operation Vula* came but then the negotiations came also so *Vula* couldn't continue. So, I think still I would have wanted to have seen People's War but, no, I never saw the beginning of it. And I think Special Ops did something that was very important and helped with certain propaganda. It's not a clear answer, but I hope you know what I'm saying.

### **How did the ANC treat you after 1990?**

After 1990 I worked in Rwanda and in Burundi. And I did some espionage for you. I was getting information for the South African foreign affairs people. First, they said, can you find out how they think here in the Netherlands about South Africa and South Africa's relationship with the European Union. And so, I went to Brussels and saw friends and other people. Many said, oh, you're Klaas de Jonge, we know. I said, yes, I'm interested to write an article for the anti-apartheid movement. I got the documents.

I did the same in Brazil. I worked there, I had contacts and I wrote reports and got some money. I had no job at the time, I couldn't get a job so I did some information work for South African Foreign Affairs. The strange thing is we played a bit of James Bond because I had a small case and the other guy from Foreign Affairs a small case and then we saw each other in a lift or so, or I'd walk from one metro in Paris to another and check that I was not followed. We would have a meeting, eating and discussing, but it was in a time where there was no danger anymore. So, I found it a bit ridiculous but it was fun!

Then they came also to me when I was in Rwanda. I worked in Rwanda from December 1997 until about 2004. And there, people came from South African Foreign Affairs and there a guy, one of the last who had been from MK who was in prison, but I can't remember his name, met with me. And he was with Security and he wanted data about Rwanda operating in Congo, and so they asked me to do something, and, well, Rwanda was not an enemy of South Africa, so I thought I can do it.

Like the East Germans asked me some times if I could do something in Holland. I said, no, I'm not interested so I didn't assist.

But so, I gave the South African Foreign Affairs some data and my contact was an Afrikaner guy in Uganda from the old regime. And I had a fax machine which coded data so that nobody could read it. And once he sent an uncoded message: can you see as soon as possible the troop movements there and there and there? I said what the hell! He wants to do something against me and I didn't trust him. And I contacted this other guy from Intelligence from Foreign Affairs and I said I don't want anything to do anymore with this handler and with this data because it's too dangerous for me.

So, I stayed interested in what was going on in South Africa. I saw some times Kasrils and Rashid. But I must say that none of them I know well enough to say how they are. I have mostly seen them at work and I like them but I can't say I know them very well.

### **So, what do you make of South Africa today?**

Well, Zuma's not good. I thought that some of the leaders of the struggle, also MK, were among the most politicised so that they would be grappling with your problems. But this thing of making deals with a lot of people and doing other wrong things says also something of the level of this kind of people, they are not really conscious enough about what the revolution was. I can't imagine any one of the people of the Special Ops could join these leaders doing wrong, not Joe Slovo, not Rashid or the others. These people would be fighting for a new society, a democratic society, not thinking about themselves only.

And then also I know about this group around Kasrils who now oppose the ANC. I think they didn't change so much in terms of the ideas of what should happen. But they are a bit outplayed, hey.

But it's difficult also – because you have narrowed the whole system and it is a lousy period in terms of economics and the political situation in the world, but I'm hopeful. I have seen now the reactions of the MK Veterans Council, of the Communist Party, the views of some of my old friends.

I think Zuma is not alone otherwise he wouldn't be staying in for so long. I don't know Ramaphosa, but he became very rich and he has flaws also, and is a real neo-liberal, and I have my doubts, but he is probably a good manager. Thabo Mbeki did it once but he can't come back. Mbeki with his Aids policies, that was bad. I think with foreign policy, he was hopeless with Zimbabwe and so on. You have Mbeki talking about the African Renaissance but in reality things were different. Younger people, I don't know very well. But I think if

you see in terms of education there are many problems. But the main thing is that apartheid is gone, people still have quite a strong civil society and journalism. You have a Communist Party with some good people, and also some of them don't side with Zuma.

And the fact that you can have quite a lot of criticism now, and you see how lively everything is, the whole discussions about the Economic Freedom Fighters, they are populist but they shake the whole thing up. Then the students are quite active. But there's also this racist discourse again, hey, and that is also worrying.

All that we know is that South Africa is much more powerful economically than all the others in Africa, and the infrastructure, education and so, but that Zuma and the people around him are just doing wrong. But there are much more possibilities for change. So, I'm hopeful in the fact that so many people from the Kathrada Foundation to the MK Veterans to, yes, also Malema, and the DA, and quite a lot of people from the Communist Party and even inside the ANC are opposing Zuma.

The EFF is raising the land question. That's important. That doesn't mean you need the Zimbabwean option. But the land problem, something has to be done.

Zuma is a problem. But I'm hopeful because of the way people react openly and massively against Zuma and the group he represents. I think if you can clean the ANC up and have more people who are more responsible and not part of enriching themselves but really trying to improve the situation of the masses that will be very important. In South Africa there's hope because people are fighting back. You don't see that in much of Africa...

But nobody here says I did it all for nothing, fighting against apartheid. Let people in South Africa now decide. But we signed the Declaration, Conny and me and others criticising Zuma and saying that we thought he had to step down. Personally, I would love to see him in prison.

**Yes, that was in the South African media.**

But we are former activists now on South Africa, not actively involved now.

**But you took part in the struggle, the armed struggle too, and some of you were imprisoned, and as internationalists you have the right to express your views.**

Okay.

**Is there much coverage in the Dutch media on what's happening in South Africa? Or have people here lost interest now?**

Not much coverage. Well, they know about Zuma and not much else. The focus is on the Middle East especially now, Trump and Russia.