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MK Special Operations Unit Project

Interviews

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Roodepoort

Rashid, your brother, spoke at length about your family background so you don't need to cover that in great detail. But perhaps you'd like to say a few words yourself? Tell us briefly how you became politically aware and why.

I spent my young days in Vrededorp, Pageview and we lived well. My father had a business. We used to travel daily to school in Lenasia. There wasn't much you could do at the time. Going to the Post Office we found our separate entrance marked 'non-Whites'. And as time went on, in the seventies I associated myself with people who were politically aligned and began talking with them. I started my own record business in Johannesburg. And we met some activist people. And over the years I thought to myself there is injustice, the police brutality, Whites beating up on innocent black people walking in the street – and nothing happens. And then after a time I decided that the only way to end apartheid was through the armed struggle.

Is there any relationship between you joining MK and the fact that your brother was already in MK in exile?

We had already been involved with people like Prema Naidoo (ANC veteran from the Naidoo 'struggle family') and other activists, and Mozambique had become independent, and the political climate was changing in the early seventies. Then you had 1976, and the police killing innocent students. And the ANC was increasing the armed struggle. I knew Indres Naidoo (ANC veteran also of the Naidoo 'struggle family') after he came out of Robben Island. He then went to Swaziland. In fact, I took him to the border so he could get out of the country. He called me one day to Swaziland. He asked me if I wanted to join the ANC. I thought about it but then after that I never met him again.

When did he contact you? Can you remember?

In 1978 or '79.

How did he contact you?

He sent a woman from Swaziland to come to my place. She was also in MK. And she gave some description saying I was sent by so and so. I looked at her cautiously. But, anyway, I went to Swaziland, but Indres had already left to Maputo. I met another comrade there who said he would arrange for Indres to come back from Maputo. Indres returned to Swaziland to meet me.

Can you remember who the woman was?

No, I don't.

But why would you trust her?

She gave me some personal details about Indres. I couldn't be 100% sure but it's the way she approached me, I just felt she was genuine.

So you partly went by your instinct?

Ja.

And who was the comrade in Swaziland who connected you with Indres?

I can't remember, but it was a teacher in a school in Manzini.

I stayed over the Saturday, Sunday, I came back on Monday. I met Indres on Sunday.

Where did you meet him?

In Manzini. He visited me at my hotel room for a few hours.

Did he come in disguise or as normal?

Normal.

Why did he approach you?

He knew I would be eager to join.

Why would Rashid not approach you?

Because at that time there was no contact between Rashid and me. Then later we came into contact with Rashid, through (Transvaal Indian Congress activist, who was killed in detention in 1964) Babla Salojee's wife, Rookie. She had already met Rashid in Swaziland.

How did they meet?

I think she was in Swaziland to see Mac and they met Rashid. So, Rookie called me and said, 'hey, we met your brother in Swaziland'. And then he made contact with us and then after that, I think it could've been '79 when I went to see Rashid in Swaziland. It was the first time I met him since he left in '76. I went to see him one weekend and an ANC security guy looked at me suspiciously. I said I'm looking for this guy. And then there were other guys who came and asked me who I was. I said I want to meet this guy, Rashid. And they also looked at me suspiciously. It was a Saturday, and only on the Sunday evening I met Rashid.

Where did you meet him?

In Manzini.

Was it in a hotel?

No, they brought him in a car, and he got out of the car and we met. We met a bit out of the town.

Where?

It was an open place.

Did you know he was in MK?

Speculatively, yes.

Did he tell you before he left, he's going to join MK?

No. My father sent him to study. He had studied for a BSc, and then he said he's leaving the country to study. And he landed up joining MK. At that time, we didn't know, but when I met Rookie, of course, we speculated it was something along that line.

Why would he come all the way to Swaziland and not come home unless he couldn't?

Yes.

Let's come back to the period before Rashid left the country. He used to come to your record shop regularly, especially after work?

Look, initially during the holidays, as he was studying. He would hang out at the shop, meet people, and see what's happening. He had a friend who used to come with him.

Were you politically aware at the time?

Yes. At that time, I was working with the TIC (Transvaal Indian Congress).

Did you speak to your customers about politics? And Rashid?

Sometimes, not much really. You know some guys can just show up and start talking politics. And then one day there was a Coloured guy who gave me some literature for Rashid, a book on Julius Nyerere. And we used to talk to him. Mainly, it was Rashid. He used to sometimes give people literature.

Was all the literature legal?

Yes, TIC and other stuff, above board.

Would he put this into the record covers?

Yes.

Did you mind? You didn't think this might negatively affect your business? What if the customer was not interested in politics?

No, he usually spoke to the guys first, then he would put the literature in. And a lot of guys used to come with Indres Naidoo, he brought the late Joe Gqabi (ANC leader who was on Robben Island and assassinated by the apartheid security forces in 1981 in Zimbabwe) there. I had a radio fixed for him and things like that.

So, what was it like meeting Rashid in Swaziland for the first time?

Look, it takes a lot of guts to do what he did. It's not just anybody who can get involved like that. Okay, we could get angry with a Boer. If a Boer told me

anything bad, I would tell him 'bugger you'. I never got a beating. But I never was stupid also and provoked anybody. But I was very naughty. So, within the whole family I was the naughtiest guy, so like, you know, for me to go into MK, it was not difficult. And when Rashid asked me to join, I agreed.

So you were rebellious?

Yes.

What would you do? At school did you tell the teachers off?

No, I'm not that type of guy.

You were not in the sort of rebellious or delinquent teenager culture that Iqbal Shaikh (Mohammed's comrade in the Dolphin Unit in which they both were) says he was part of for a while?

No, not that type. I would do my homework and never bunked school. I did things in my own way. The teachers used get angry because I never wanted to wear a tie, I would put the tie around my neck and never wear a knot. I never drank or smoked. I was naughty in different ways.

When you met Rashid for the first time in Swaziland, did he tell you he was in MK?

He told me, not in direct words, that he's with the ANC and with Umkhonto we Sizwe and now he's in Swaziland. He was in Angola before that and he was travelling through Swaziland to Mozambique at the time. And he asked me how things were back home. I said no, fine. But it was a brother-brother feeling. You know, we used to sleep in one room and we grew up together and we were very close. He is a year and a month younger than me.

He just said he was not doing what father had sent him to do. So, he was not too open, he was discreet, and I knew basically that he was with the ANC and MK. And he asked me about my situation. I said, no, we go for it.

So he recruited you?

Yes, if I wanted to. He didn't believe that Iqbal would be that type of guy. So, I said, no, don't worry I'll talk to Iqbal.

When Rashid had no contact with the family, what did your parents think had happened to him?

Well, I took the family to meet him after that first meeting I had with him. About a month later. And, of course, they realised that this guy was not studying. He spoke to my mother about this.

What was your parent's reaction?

I don't know how much they could see, you know, I suppose they accepted it because of the situation he was in. That's not what they wanted, but now he's there, and there wasn't much they could've said or do, so they just let it ride. They were concerned for his safety, of course, but other than that they resigned themselves to it.

But before you informed your parents that Rashid was in Swaziland, weren't they anxious that they had no contact with him for three years?

Yes, he never contacted the family in three years, and then it was quite a bit of a surprise that this guy is now in Swaziland. Yes, of course there was concern. They thought three years and this guy's not phoning. Of course, they knew there was something like happening. And then I took them to meet him.

And then after that did you arrange regular visits for your parents?

Yes, then we used to go. Sometime four times in a year, five times.

So, when Indres approaches you to join MK, what was your response?

I think I was also positive. I did not know what happened. I think that he shifted away from Swaziland, but he never came back to me.

What happens after Rashid approaches you to join MK?

I became positive and I told him I was going to contact Iqbal. Then one weekend Iqbal and I went to Swaziland.

When you approached Iqbal, did he readily agree?

Yes.

Did Iqbal not approach you and say he wants to connect with MK?

No, he was with AZAPO (Azanian People's Organisation). Then I met him and told him to meet with Styles (Yunus Mahomed, Natal Indian Congress leader)

in Durban. And he approached Styles and Styles was surprised. I should've phoned Styles first, and told him to expect Iqbal. Styles rang me and I said, no, I had sent Iqbal, he's okay but it was a bygone.

But then we went to Swaziland and we met Rashid. And then after that, we were on the go with him and things were alright. I think it was round about August '81.

From towards the end of '79 and until then I met Rashid mainly in family meetings. Only in '81 we joined MK officially. So, then we had to buy a car, and we went to Swaziland and we met Rashid again.

Who paid for that car?

I think Rashid gave Iqbal some money.

What car did you get?

It was a green Peugeot 504. Not a very good car. And then they did an operation on the car.

Was it a dead letter box?

Yes. They shortened the boot and they did all that in Manzini.

What training did you get before you started operations?

No, just basic, how to use a limpet mine, and they gave us old pistols (laughter). You know, he showed us how to use a limpet mine, and how it operates, you pull the pin, and you've got a timing device on the pin. It could be for ten minutes and it could also be much longer. And the thickest one they had, it could be for a seven hours delay.

Where was the training done?

In Manzini. In a hotel room, I think, if I can remember correctly.

You never did an actual live explosion?

No, nothing like that.

Did you feel confident enough?

Yes, he just showed us the basics, it was easy. Rashid said we'll take it from there.

How many days of training did you get?

About two to three days. We came back via Northern Natal, we didn't go directly back.

When choosing the targets, to what extent did Rashid, as your Commander decide on that and to what extent did you decide independently, within some guidelines you agreed with him on?

When we joined, we told him, listen here, we're going to work as free-ops. No telling us, we decide the when, the how, the time. We need to do it on our own. In those days, we had a free reign to do whatever.

What did he say?

They were fine with that.

What was your first operation?

We put a bomb at a Magistrates' Court in Joburg. And you see what happens, what the impact of that also would be. So, we put it outside the door of the court and then, of course, it shattered the windows and the offices.

What was the aim there? Why did you focus on the court?

At that time, we were seriously inexperienced and we wanted to see what effect the limpet mine, what type of impact, it would have.

So, in other words it was like a training exercise?

Yes, we wanted to actually see how things worked out.

What did you feel about the outcome?

Well, it wasn't so good the first time. You know in a Joburg court a car going past, somebody might see you. So, it was a bit of a risky incident. Iqbal was staying at that time in Mayfair so he went there and I came home. And we went to see what happened the next morning, what the explosion did and we took it from there.

Can you remember for how long you set the timing device? And did you know whether it went off at the time you planned it to?

The first time we set the timer for about 10 to 15 minutes, but depending on weather conditions, if it's hot, it can go off quicker. But usually, we set the timer for between one and a half and two hours, and we used this to give us enough time to get away.

Were you told you're a part of a Special Operations Unit in MK?

Yes. But we were not restricted to any target. I think we got an understanding of that type of thing with Rashid. We had a free reign to do things at our own discretion, in our own time.

We went to hotels in Swaziland from our own money, our own pocket. Whenever we were in Swaziland it was all from our own expenses. We didn't take any money from the ANC for this. Rashid gave Iqbal some money to buy a car and maybe some other money when Iqbal was more fulltime.

Was Iqbal a fulltime activist for a while?

Yes, for a while. So, I think he could do more of the operations on his own because he had more free time. I also was living with the family so I had to be a bit cautious.

Were you married at the time already?

No, I was single.

How many operations do you think the Dolphin unit carried out?

I don't know the exact number. But I think maybe 34. I left the unit in 1985. I think we did about 23 by then. Some Iqbal did on his own. I think we did 13 together.

Of all the 34 or so operations carried out by the Dolphin, which three or so do you think were the most effective and why?

Look, Warmbaths was very effective. I used to get the *Rand Daily Mail* and I saw an article that PW Botha was coming to Warmbaths on 10 October. And when we were young, we used to go a lot to Warmbaths for the hot baths and that. I said Iqbal come down. We used to contact each other. I tell him what is happening. So, we said we go for it. It was in 1983. And we went to Warmbaths the week before. I think the 10 October was on a Wednesday or

Thursday. So, we went there the Saturday night before. We were walking in the town and a policeman sees us there, and he says 'what are you guys doing here?'

What's wrong with you walking there? Weren't there Indians living in Warmbaths?

Yes, but the White policeman, Afrikaner guy, wanted to know what we were doing at that hour in the middle of the night.

Were they doing reconnaissance and security checks themselves?

Yes.

So what did you say?

We said we're just walking. And they looked at us and said nothing. So, that gave us a bit of an awakening. In a way, it was good. We had to be a bit more cautious about how we check a place out, especially in these more *verkrampte* (conservative) type areas, these Platteland (countryside) areas were like that. We saw the Town Hall where they were going to have the rally. We drove around, we saw a fuel depot which was about a kilometre away. We decided on the target and the plan. This day, this time, we go.

We came back the night before (the public meeting). Iqbal got the limpet mines ready. Everything we got right. Now we used about a one and half hour timer on our operations. The intention was to hit the fuel depot. With the hall, we wanted to hit it at night so the rally won't take place at 10 the following morning. So, by the time the explosion took place, we were home and in bed probably. We gave ourselves enough time to drive back so there would be no roadblock on the way by the time we left there.

We went first to the fuel depot. We cut the fence, Iqbal put the limpet in, and I was keeping guard, and then we got out from there to the town. There was a big pot plant at the hall and we put a limpet mine in it.

Of course, the next morning it was on the news, about a blast at the fuel depot. At first they were not sure whether it was a technical fault, but later they confirmed it was a sabotage explosion. And the one in the Town Hall, somebody walking in the morning saw some sand, and that seemed suspicious, and of course they found the one in the pot plant, so it didn't explode.

After about a week later the regime went to attack an ANC base in one of the neighbouring countries. The Chief, PW Botha, sent the guys in. I think the

regime thought the bomb was meant for him. It wasn't so - the blast was supposed to happen in the night. That was the intention of the whole thing. Not to injure anybody or whatever. If you put the limpet mines at about eleven to twelve o'clock at night, it would go off plus minus two in the morning. So, there would've been no civilians at that time of night.

What was the aim of the operation?

To create a message that MK is around, an effective MK, and also psychologically, if you hit that hall where PW was going to speak, it would demoralise everyone and also give credit to the movement, to show that Umkhonto we Sizwe is operating, and in that way, give some momentum to the struggle. So, my idea of the operation was that it was psychological, symbolic. Psychologically, to create a positive mood among the oppressed people and also to demoralise the enemy, to make them feel that they're being hit right there under the nose of the Defence Force or right there where Botha was going to be. So, it puts them also a bit on the back foot, to see that despite all the security they have, they could still be targeted. We needed to create a positive atmosphere for the armed struggle and, at the same time, a negative one for the apartheid state.

Which were two other operations that you thought were very effective?

The Roodepoort police building was very effective. It was also in '83. I think we became very effective from '83 and '84. And that building we also hit at night. In fact, it was the fasting time, so it was past *Taraweeh* (prayers performed at night by Muslims during the fasting month of Ramadan) time. I came out of the mosque, Iqbal was waiting for me, and we went up the building. They had a security guy there. We put a limpet mine on two floors.

Did you leave before or after the *Taraweeh*?

No, while the *Taraweeh* was on, I left the mosque. People saw me there, so it gave me a cover. We had a time that Iqbal and I would meet. There were two floors that the police were using. And we put limpet mines and the building was destroyed. All the floors were burnt off. And they used to put a type of chemical in the limpet mine to create a fire.

Which of the operations did you feel were not very successful or ineffective and why?

Iqbal would put some targets for us to discuss, but I used to think that I'd rather go for the bigger stuff. I had plans of doing a lot of bigger stuff, but

time was against us and we waited to see how the situation would grow. Iqbal did several operations on his own, like the Military co-op. I think that was quite effective psychologically, because we were attacking the military.

But we couldn't do the Sun City operation (the SADF was having a conference with homeland leaders there). There was too much security. That was where we couldn't be effective. We went to Sun City and to some bushes until we get to the power station. When we got there, they had Doberman dogs, and they smelt the limpet mines. We used to carry them in a belt, which you strapped on your waist. And the dogs started barking one way.

Why did they have Doberman dogs there? Were they expecting an attack?

No, I think for the general security for the power sub-station.

What happens when the dogs start barking?

These dogs are barking. So, I said now what do we do, we can't go in there, those dogs are vicious. There's no chance we can even go near that and, of course, we had to retreat. Called it off and turned back. And we say abandon mission. So, we realised with Doberman dogs there you're not going to get into the sub-station.

Did you and Iqbal have specific roles in the Dolphin Unit? How did you work together?

I think it was a joining of the both of us. I would say let's do this or that, but sometimes he was a bit lax for a while, then I would contact him. Sometimes we would lie low for a few months, don't do anything, see that we're not being watched and we're not being followed, nothing's happening. And then I would contact him, hey, what's happening? And then we'd get together and meet, talk about what do we do, go around, decide on what action. When the time warranted, and we saw there was a need to do something effective, then we did.

What were you told was Special Ops' specific role? Did Rashid explain?

Of course. MK was there to further the armed struggle. That was obvious. The aim was not to kill White people. We wanted them to negotiate with the ANC, which I felt, of course, was the right way to go, and I was in favour of that. We wanted to create that understanding, and the armed struggle was there to

mobilise the people more, create a mass understanding of the liberation struggle.

Did Rashid brief you specifically about Special Ops, not MK in general?

Yes, we understood that.

Did he explain that Special Ops was a very specific unit within MK that aimed to hit high-profile economic and military targets, for example, Sasol, Voortrekkerhoogte, the power stations, the South African Air Force, Koeberg, etc?

Yes. They were a bit big.

Special Ops was not meant to do ordinary MK operations, but these high-profile ones with very specific aims. Did Rashid spell out the specific role of Special Ops?

No, not in that sense.

There are MK comrades who say that the Dolphin Unit was very successful, but that, strictly speaking, it did not belong to Special Ops because it focused on ordinary targets, not specific high-profile economic and military targets. Your view?

What I understood by Special Ops is we were given a free will to operate. So, we were not trained to do the high-profile type of activity at that time. It was '87 when we went to East Germany for further training. Prior to that we were not trained to use hand grenades, RP rockets, other weapons for high profile targets. So, of course, if you say do a high-profile activity, all we had were limpet mines. We did not have the weapons for high profile targets like you describe.

To what extent did your religious beliefs influence you to become politically active and later join the armed struggle?

You know, Islam is about fighting injustice. I'll say, yes, it was necessary from an Islamic point of view to become politically active against apartheid. As a Muslim, I live my life in that way as well. So, to be a self-style socialist, Islam also covers that part of my life. I believe in socialism, it was my way and I think socialism in the forefront would have been the ideal for this country as well. I don't know what is happening today. Socialism was my view in that it

brings about a place where people would live better, fairer, no oppression, no poverty. When I see poverty, I get sad about how things are today.

I've been religiously inclined from a young age so I've moderated my lifestyle and ways. But I take the middle line, not the extreme in any way.

Do you think the synagogue, even if it was used for a meeting to foster relations between the apartheid and Israeli states, was a politically reasonable target? I mean, it's a religious site of worship?

You know, the radio and papers did announce that the State President was going to be coming there and he was going to meet some high-profile people from Israel. So, my plan there was to undermine the State President. It was not a religious attack, it was a political attack. So, it was not meant to attack the Jewish faith or religion or any religious place. That would be offensive. But the attack was because it was related to the political nature of what was happening at the synagogue.

What if it was a mosque? Would you have attacked a mosque or a temple or a church if an apartheid politician addressed a congregation there?

I would say no, I wouldn't.

So, why is it okay to attack a synagogue and not a place of worship of another religion? Do you think, on reflection, it was right to attack the synagogue?

You know, it was in Hilbrow. There wasn't a synagogue as such, it was, I think, more like a library type of institution. It wasn't a prayer place. What I remember the place being - going back - is more like a meeting place. So, it was not an exact place of worship. It was not where people were praying like in a mosque or temple or church. It was different from that.

But MK didn't target places of worship so this attack didn't seem to fit in somehow...

It's like regarding Israel today. I'm not anti-Jewish, but anti what they are doing. What we are opposing is what is happening today to Palestinians. I'm not hating Jews. It's the Israeli system we are opposing. We were not anti-Afrikaner, we were only opposing the apartheid system.

Obviously, in the armed struggle, however meticulous the planning, there can still be casualties. How do you feel about the casualties in the Dolphin operations?

No, not in the operations I took part in, I don't think there were any....

But Iqbal admits that there were and I think expressed his regret at the TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission). In the TRC hearing it emerged that there were casualties.

Apart from the Krugersdorp Magistrates court, where people were unfortunately killed, and I was not involved in that, on some occasions there was injuries, but I mean superficial injuries.

I don't think people were blown apart or things like that. Not to that extent, no. Maybe superficial glass or flying glass or something like that.

In the Krugersdorp Magistrates Court Operation people were killed, two policeman and one civilian. You were not in the Dolphin Unit then, but do you have anything to say on that or not?

Yes, I wasn't in then. In fact, that was my thought at the time because Iqbal did this job on his own, but he didn't do it the way I would've thought it should be done. He used a car bomb with a remote device to detonate it.

Were you aware of what operations Iqbal was undertaking on his own, although you were not part of the unit now?

Yes, I knew most of them, because I knew his thinking or we discussed the target before.

How did you know the Krugersdorp operation was done by Iqbal?

I knew his style and we used to meet and talk; even without him telling me, if something took place, I knew it was him. The Krugersdorp bomb, I knew it was him because we did mention that target.

Was it discussed by the two of you before?

Yes.

When you used to meet him while you were active with him, did he share with you what operations he was doing on his own?

Yes, I knew all the operations...

Did he tell you, I did this and I did that?

Yes.

Was he giving you more information than you needed to have? Which would not have been very wise?

Yes, I knew, he didn't tell me everything, but I also knew some things beforehand and other things I knew he had done after he did them.

What was so distinct about his style that you could tell that it's Iqbal's work rather than that of some other MK unit?

I could sense the situation. I knew the type of targets he was focussing on.

You seem to suggest that he was not cautious enough? Did you tell him that? Weren't you worried that he could get caught?

Yes, but he could get angry with on me. I knew he was doing the stuff, but I never really told him that. Sometimes I thought he was a bit on the careless side.

Can you give some examples?

We had a code between us. If ever he got caught, he would tell the police he wants to phone me and if he mentions the name Hafsa then I would know. So, if he would say how's Hafsa, then that would mean danger, better run or something. If I phoned him and gave him that name, then he would know it is danger, and he has to make a run or whatever. If we referred to hot dogs, that was limpet mines.

Why would the police allow him to phone you if he's detained?

Because sometimes it could happen. Like, if he told the police okay, I'll phone the comrade I'm working with, then he phones me to set me up for the police to arrest me, but he's actually warning me to get away before they come for me... But we would use that code to signal danger even if the police had not yet detained either of us. And even if he spoke to you while being detained, you can still get away before the police gets to you.



Mohamed Ismail (2nd left), with Iqbal Shaikh (1st left), Rashid and Mac Maharaj, Independent Media

You were described by the commentators during the TRC process as one of the most successful units MK had. Why do you think the Dolphin Unit was so successful?

Look, we had a natural advantage being non African, we could move around freely to Swaziland, nobody would ask why you going to Swaziland, and we could come into the country easily. This was every

month.

We had a car, access to resources to come up and down. One or two times they searched the car. One day at the Swazi border they opened the bonnet checking the car.

It was in the evening and the cop asked Iqbal anything to declare and he says 'limpet mines'. We had limpet mines in the car. And I just smiled, I didn't say anything.

Were you mad with him?

It was like in a joke, you know. And the cop didn't take us seriously. And we went through.

What about the dogs sniffing?

Well, I don't think they could smell it as it was all covered in foil.

The day Iqbal mentioned limpet mines at the border, were the dogs not being used to sniff?

No.

But they used to bring the dogs to the car to sniff, did you experience that at all when you crossed the border?

Once.

And how did you get away?

At the borders they would have dogs. One day we came from Botswana, you pass the Zeerust Military Base and they had a roadblock on a Sunday afternoon. We would go to Swaziland to meet Rashid on a Saturday night and spend the day with him, and come back on a Sunday. So, when we came to this roadblock, we didn't have anything in the car. The cops came, stopped us. *'Ja, wat het julle in die kar'* (Yes, what have you got in the car?). 'Open the boot'. In the cooler bag we had some beers and samoosas. *'Ja, vat man'* (Yes, can I take some?). Gave them the samoosas and beers; they forgot to search the car. It was a hot afternoon too.

As I said, we had the advantage of being Indian under apartheid and also our cautiousness. That's why we got away with so much. I think also foresight and planning. I would see a place, then we would check it out, and then only we would say right, we're in.

How would you usually report to Rashid about targets and outcomes?

Whenever we met, we briefed him on our operations, but they would also see the papers and speculate who it might be and sometimes they were able to tell it was us. We would review how the operation went and discuss it.

Did you phone him and report in code or did you report to him personally?

Directly, personally.

What would be the average time gap between an operation and the time you'd see Rashid?

Two to three months.

How would he know which operations the Dolphin Unit had carried out until you reported to him?

He would ask us, sometimes after the event. Sometimes he wouldn't know what we did and then we would report to him. Sometimes he would think, no, it's these guys, and then we would confirm it.

Was Rashid the only MK person the Dolphin Unit dealt with, or did you meet other MK comrades as well?

One or two others.

Their names?

I can't remember. There was very little contact with them.

Did you ever have to report to Rashid immediately after an operation as it was necessary to let him know quickly?

No...

There was one time, when a comrade brought our arms cache and he buried it somewhere in the East Rand. So, Rashid gave us the DLB sketch of where it was and we went to find it. It was a trunk full of limpet mines. On a Saturday afternoon we dug up that thing, loaded it in the car. We used to bury the stuff just outside Lens (Lenasia). There used to be a dam there, there was a place near there where we used to bury. One time we brought a whole trunk full of arms from Swaziland. Then we would dig it in. And the police found a whole trunk of arms. They were doing roadworks and they hit the steel trunk and called the police in. But we knew they found the arms cache.

How do you respond to the view of senior TIC comrades that they were amazed to find out after 1990 that you were involved in the armed struggle? You came across to them as a typical middle class Muslim guy who goes to mosque regularly and is very pious and who did take part at times in political activities but you were not in the forefront?

Yes, they were quite surprised. But if you are involved in the armed struggle you have to be keep it quiet.

You left the Dolphin Unit in 1985. Why?

Iqbal and I had a bit of differences because we didn't always agree on the choice and timing of targets. Sometimes when I disagreed, he would go ahead and carry out the operation anyway. Sometimes we got angry with each other when we disagreed. I don't drink and at times I felt that Iqbal needed to be more careful about his drinking as it could compromise us. If we were together, we would be more effective in the more on-running period than when it was the quiet time. I'd do my own reconnaissance in the quiet time, checking out and doing things. Nothing came of that, he wouldn't take account of my targets. So, we started moving apart...

According to your evidence before the TRC, if I'm correct, you decided you wanted to take part in the mass struggle and I think Iqbal felt that he could manage operations on his own. Did you actually get

involved in more TIC and United Democratic Front (UDF) activities or not so?

Yes, I did, sort of. Not in the open. Could not for security reasons, and if something happened, then Iqbal would be in danger, but I got involved in mass work in a quieter way, not a very open way.

How do you respond to the suggestion that one of the reasons you left the Dolphin Unit was because you were getting nervous and were insecure during operations?

I think it was different styles of operation. Iqbal's style was a bit haphazard and I would've been more subtle, quieter. My view was selective targets, effective targets, but he wants to hit something like the defence force. Fine, but it depends on your level of preparation and resources. We couldn't do such an attack easily – we didn't have the means to do something like that at that stage.

Did you argue about the targets?

I would mention to him some of these types of targets are not worth it, but these are now by-gones. In Pretoria in the Defence Force, he hit the pipeline, it wasn't even mentioned in the South African press.

Why do you think?

I think because it was embarrassing to them. Rashid said he read about it in the papers in Lusaka, but the South African Press never even mentioned it. We didn't even know what happened, whether the explosion did take place.

Why were the water pipelines the target, why not Voortrekkerhoogte itself?

Because it was not possible for security reasons and we didn't have the resources, and maybe we needed more training.

Reflecting now on the Dolphin Unit, are there some things you feel you should've done but didn't?

Yes, Iqbal did scuba diving. So, this was one of our aims. He was a good swimmer. We wanted to bomb oil tankers and military ships in the Durban port. He did scuba diving so he could go prepare to maybe hit oil tankers in the Durban docks and putting limpet mines under the ships but we never got to that point.

Why didn't you?

By the time we did military training in East Germany, we came back in March '87. In '88 already Rashid said there were discussions about negotiations with the apartheid government.

Comrade Clifford Brown and other comrades were sent in as a unit to target the ships, but it couldn't work out, and they decided to target the oil refinery in Durban and were accosted by the police and were killed in a shoot-out, unfortunately...

I don't know anything about that...

Why did you go for military training in East Germany since you had left the Dolphin Unit?

Iqbal was going and he asked me what do you want to do. I said alright, we'll go. I didn't say I would abandon totally the armed struggle. If it became necessary, I would still take part in MK activities.

If the Dolphin Unit needed your help, you would cooperate?

Ja. If the situation became more suppressing in the country and we needed to hit big targets, then we would've gone for it. So, in that way it was good and so I wouldn't say I totally abandoned the situation.

How did you get to East Germany?

We went to East Germany in November '86. We were there for four months until March '87. They flew us through India afterwards. We went to London first at our own expense. We met Aziz Pahad there.

You paid your own way?

Yes, I paid my own way. I don't know about Iqbal. And then we met Aziz. I just phoned Aziz, they gave us his number.

Did you phone him openly on his line?

Yes.

But weren't you concerned that his phone was tapped?

I didn't expect it to be, but in any case, we met a restaurant.

Where did you phone him from?

From a call box in London. He expected we were coming.

Who told him you were coming? Rashid?

Rashid arranged with him already.

Did he facilitate your going to East Germany?

Yes.

What was East Germany like?

Well, they put us up in a house in East Berlin. Over weekends they used to take us out sometimes. No, it was fine.

What training did you get?

RPG, grenades, fire-arms, car bombs, espionage, that type of thing. I really spent a lot of time on espionage but less time on the physical military thing; it was more espionage and car bombs for me. Then later, towards the end they took us on the ground to shoot the RPGs. Then the first time they gave me the RPG, I shot a target spot, I took the aim and hit it. Iqbal got a surprise. Then after that, he shot and he also hit the target.

What was East Germany like?

Yes, it was fine, I had no problems with it. I never ate the meat there. Veggies or eggs or whatever. Iqbal used to eat the meat. The East Germans were surprised that I don't eat meat, and said you're so thin - because they didn't understand it. I said, no, I eat Kosher meat. So, one of the guys said I'll get you Jewish Kosher, I said that's fine, get me Jewish Kosher, I'll eat. But they never got it. So, I used to eat fish, whatever.

Did you find it challenging being in East Germany?

No, not really.

You said you had socialist leanings. To what extent did being in East Germany make you feel you're in a socialist state or did you feel this is not socialism?

I wasn't really able to tell.

Why didn't you use the training when you came back?

We had the intention of using RPGs but we were not provided them. We asked Rashid, but then the negotiations began.

Were you involved in arming the SDU's?

No.

Before you became part of MK, you transported Indres Naidoo and Joe Gqabi to the border

I took Joe Gqabi, Indres, Mohammed Timol, and Salim Essop. Drop these guys at the Swazi border – that's how I got to know the route those guys took out.

Ahmed Timol was from Roodepoort. Did his death in detention influence you in any way?

Yes. I went to his funeral, I saw his body – the bruised face, fractured nose, broken jaw – and the brutality of it made me more committed. It was clear that he was severely tortured.

Is there anything you regret about your role in the Dolphin Unit or the armed struggle generally?

We could've been more effective.

How?

Iqbal was not with his own family, with a wife and children. I had a thought in mind, that if, in fact, things became a bit hot, and we needed to step up the armed struggle in the best way, that would mean leaving the family and living apart and then we would be more effective.

One of the criticisms was that the armed struggle failed to link up with the mass struggle more effectively. What's your response to that?

No, I don't agree with that.

Why?

I think people supported the armed struggle because they realised through it they would gain liberation. I think the majority supported the armed struggle.