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MK Special Operations Unit Project

Interviews

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Can you give me a quick overview of your political role before you left the country and joined the ANC in exile?

I grew up in Roodepoort, which is 20kms west of Johannesburg, and in the 1960s with the political upheavals in South Africa and the Rivonia arrests and subsequent arrest of many other political activists, it was inevitable that my political consciousness was awakened. I also attribute it to my brother, Ahmed, who was seven to eight years older than me, who in a way kept us abreast of the political developments that were taking place in the '60s.

My first brush with the Security Police was in May 1966. It was the fifth anniversary of the Republic Day celebrated by the apartheid regime and they imposed this on our schools. They wanted us to sing the national anthem. In 1966 on Republic Day there was the specific hoisting of the South African flag that was being planned – and a day before the celebration, a flagpole was brought to the school and put into the ground in order to raise the flag the following morning. We removed that flag that evening and we wrote slogans on the wall.

There were about six of us. We wrote slogans such as 'Release Mandela', 'Long live the ANC', etc. And a few days later we were detained. Seven of us were arrested and beaten up. We were taken to the Security Police offices. We all confessed our role after the assaults. We were then charged for contravening the Suppression of Communism Act, there was a plea bargain, and we received a one-year suspended sentence.

My brother Ahmed left South Africa in December 1966. He went to Mecca and then to London. I finished my matric in 1967; and he encouraged me to come to the UK. I arrived in the UK on 16 September 1968. I stayed with Essop and Aziz Pahad, meeting other political exiles, and being in a relatively free country, I learnt more about South Africa and apartheid than living in a small town,

west of Johannesburg. It was an awakening for me. I was very fortunate to have met (SACP Chairperson) Dr Yusuf Dadoo as well.

In '69 Easter I was informed that Dr Dadoo had called a meeting at the ANC office in London. It was on a Sunday morning and I remember going there with Essop and Aziz. The focus was on Indian comrades in Congress, and Dr Dadoo said he wanted a mandate from the people there because he was invited to go to the Morogoro Conference. So, they gave him a mandate. And that's the first time I heard about the Morogoro Conference.

Ahmed – that's his own story – very quietly told me in early '69 that he was going to the Soviet Union, and obviously it was a bit of anxiety for me. However, Ahmed returned from the Soviet Union and then he left for South Africa in February 1970.

How long was he in the Soviet Union?

Nine months at the Lenin Institute with Thabo Mbeki and Anne Nicholson. Before my departure from the UK to return to South Africa, I approached Essop Pahad to get training before I returned to South Africa. And he put me in touch with Dr Dadoo who facilitated my training with Jack Hodgson. So, I was trained for about one month basically in the preparation and operation of leaflet bombs, secret communication and underground work. Obviously, I did reading on security and surveillance and on interrogation methods used by the enemy. and this was basic training that was given to me before going back home.

And I was told that at some time in the future I would be contacted and then be part of an underground cell. I returned on 30 September 1971. But before my departure I had my last meeting with Dr Dadoo. He confirmed my suspicion that Ahmed was involved in the underground and he told me to tell Ahmed that they had not heard from him for some time and were concerned. I was told that if he was okay, I must send a postcard with the necessary code, signal, that he's fine.

Ahmed fetched me at the airport and I conveyed that message to him. But it was on a need-to-know basis, I didn't want to know more than necessary. He was teaching at Roodepoort School. The next day my mother said my hair was too long and I went for a haircut. I'm telling you this because when I returned from the barber shop, my mother told me the Security Branch came and asked for me. The same chap that had been coming to inquire about me while I was abroad. I cannot recollect his name. I was only twelve hours in the country and the Security Branch are on to me already.

But by staying so openly with the Pahads and meeting Dr Dadoo and even attending a meeting in the ANC offices hadn't you made yourself vulnerable? What did you expect?

At the Pahad's flat in London there was always a flow of people coming and going, family, relatives, friends from South Africa and exiles. In 1971 one did not get an indication of surveillance on the flat by the South African intelligence service. However, whilst there were open political discussions, there were no secret matters openly discussed.

I visited the ANC office once only in April 1969 for the pre-Morogoro discussions led by Dr Dadoo.

The meeting with Dr Dadoo was pre-arranged and the necessary precautions were undertaken. Dr Dadoo was also a close acquaintance of my father, and our grandparents came from the same village in India. It was not unusual for other South Africans, whose roots were from the same Indian village, visiting Dr Dadoo in London.

With my heightened political understanding and determination to make a contribution in the struggle against apartheid I did not feel vulnerable and so returned to South Africa at the end of September 1971.

So, what happens after your mother tells you the security police are looking for you?

Ahmed came back from school and I informed him. He said go and see them. The office wasn't very far away and as I walked in, the Security Branch immediately recognised me in the corridor, and he said 'Mohammed, when did you get back?' And I said last night, you said you wanted to see me? He said, 'no, we don't want to see you, we want to see Ahmed.'

Now either my mother got confused because they used to come and inquire about me, or alternatively they deliberately played a game. I think that they may have got the information from passport control at Jan Smuts airport that I had arrived. I may have been red-flagged about my activities in England so when I arrived the security police might have been informed. They said, 'how was England and what did you study?'

After the visit to the Roodepoort SB (Security Branch) offices, I informed Ahmed that the SB's wanted to see him and not me. Two days later I asked Ahmed did he go to the SB's office. He replied 'yes,' and that they wanted to see him on the matter of his passport. On the evening of 17 October 1971, a Sunday, Ahmed informed me that both of us were under surveillance by the

SB's. He told me that I should leave for Durban the following day as I had planned to do in the near future. After my return from London, I informed Ahmed and my parents my plans were to go to Durban, find work and settle there.

On Monday afternoon, 18 October 1971, Ahmed arrived home from the local school where he was a teacher, gave me money and I took the train that evening for Durban. Ahmed and his friend Salim Essop were stopped at a police road block in Johannesburg at around 11pm on Friday 22 October 1971 and arrested. According to police reports, banned literature and documents were found in the boot of the car and so they were detained. Ahmed was murdered by the security police whilst in custody on the 27 October 1971.

What happens to you?

I was arrested in Durban on the morning of 25 October 1971 and taken to the security police headquarters in Durban. I was assaulted and tortured and detained under the provision of section 6 of the Terrorism Act. I was released unconditionally after 141 days of detention and in the main was in solitary confinement.

When and how did you hear that Ahmed was killed?

Ahmed was detained on a Friday in Johannesburg. I was in Durban and didn't have a phone and the family couldn't contact me in time, and so when I was detained on the Monday after Ahmed was detained, I didn't know he had been detained. The police were interrogating me intensively, then on that Wednesday evening the atmosphere suddenly changed at Fisher Street (Security Police Headquarters in Durban) and they stopped interrogating me and I could hear in the corridors the police talking to each other quietly – something was going on, but I didn't know what. Then they took me to Berea police station and the following morning they didn't continue the interrogation, they said I must just write down everything I was doing politically. Later that day the SB told me Ahmed had died in detention, but I didn't know he was detained, and I thought they were trying to intimidate me and so I didn't believe them.

But later as we were driving to Fischer Street, I saw the newspaper posters saying 'Death plunge, Vorster speaks' and I realised Ahmed may have been killed. And when I was alone for a moment, an Indian SB expressed his condolences about Ahmed – and now I knew! And later when I was taken to my cell in Berea police station an ordinary White policeman told me he was sorry about my brother's death.

What was your response?

I couldn't believe it! was really very upset, very upset, as you can imagine. I never accepted that Ahmed took his own life. But I had to be strong in detention, I had to control my emotions, the worse thing was to go into depression, then I would find it hard to resist the SB, so I was determined to be brave.

Presumably, you weren't allowed to attend his funeral?

The SB wouldn't let me. I learnt that Fatima Meer (sociologist and ANC political activist) also asked Vorster (South African Prime Minister) to let me attend, but he refused.



Elliot Shabangu, Sheila Suttner and Mohammed Timol, Human Rights Day meeting, 1975

What happens after your release from detention?

I was active in the Human Rights Committee, a Johannesburg-based organisation of political activists aligned to the Congress Alliance. I was detained in August '76, and imprisoned at the Modderbee Prison in the Benoni area with about 60 other political detainees. You will remember we were in the same cell

together; there was also Peter Magubane, Govin Reddy, Norman Dubazana, Rashid Meer, David Gaza and others. After that I was placed under house arrest. I left the country on 1 January 1978.

I went for training in Angola. While I was there Rashid pitched up. We had known each other from home. In '75 when he had finished his studies I received a phone call from Yunus Mohammed, who was then a lawyer in Durban, that there's a comrade who's from Fietas (Vrededorp) who'll make contact with you, and get him into the Human Rights Committee circle. I introduced him to the Naidoo's, (the famous Naidoo family with a history of struggle from Gandhi's time) etcetera. Rashid came to the attention of the Security Police when we organised a Braam Fisher memorial meeting. It was a weekday lunch-hour meeting and he wasn't working and we asked him to clear up the hall. As he was walking back to his brother's shop, the Security Branch picked him up and they beat him up, and they told him not to associate with the Timols and Naidoos.

Anyway, Rashid left the country and had gone to the GDR (East Germany) and he was sent to Angola as an instructor. But shortly after that I left for further training to the GDR. And after my training in GDR, I was deployed in the ANC Intelligence and Security Department in Maputo in November 1978. Rashid pitched up there in early 1980 as part of Special Operations. I was about the only person that Rashid really knew there then. So, the fact that we knew each other from home, we could confide in each other in that difficult situation.

Joe Slovo was the overall Commander of Special Ops. Obadi was the Commander on the ground and Rashid was a Commissar.

Obviously, what they were preparing – it was on a need-to-know basis – one never really inquired. But subsequently we found out that they were actually responsible for the Sasol operation in Secunda and in Sasolburg as well as all the power stations that were being sabotaged. The first time that I was really roped in was after the Voortrekkerhoogte attack by Barney and them. And when they returned from the operation, Rashid asked me to cook for the unit and Moses Mabhida was going to be there. I don't think Joe was there to debrief them about the operation. So, I was privy to the information that was being discussed because I cooked a curry for the unit. There were about four or five comrades there.

Barney also told us about the Indian guy that he had to shoot in the thigh very reluctantly because that guy started shouting and pressing the hooter of the car that Barney had wanted to use as a getaway car. But he also told us that when they offloaded the Grad-P it looked like a pipe and there was a policeman with a bicycle that actually eyed them. He thought that they stole this pipe from somewhere, and they talked him out of doing anything about it. I think they gave him a small bribe.

Rashid, Joe, Sue Rabkin, Ronnie, Sonny Singh, Indris Naidoo and I used to socialise. I had an Indian passport and because my wife had her sister in Harare and I got married there, I was in and out of Harare. And I was sent by my department the first time because of the killings that were taking place in Matabeleland. I was sent there to get further information. Peter Wellman, the *Rand Daily Mail* journalist who was in the Human Rights Committee, assisted me a lot to get information on what was happening in Matabeleland.

Joe told me to make contact with Jeremy Brickhill. Mac informed him that a guy who had worked at Koeberg, who knew Jeremy, wanted to make contact with the ANC. Joe asked me to assess the guy. I met Rodney Wilkinson. We had a long meeting, and after I reported to Joe and Rashid we arranged for Rod to meet with Rashid in Swaziland.

My own view was that Rod had come to us, what's there for us to lose in seeing whether we can do something with his information? Jeremy Brickhill seemed to be quite happy with him. It never occurred to me at that time that it might be a trap. It only came to me afterwards that it might be trap laid to kidnap Rashid. But, you know, we had to take a lot of risks. Anyway, after I assisted with the arrangements for the meeting in Swaziland, I was out of it. All I know is that they met.

I used to listen to South African radio where I stayed in a flat with Sue in Maputo, I would always listen late at night, the eleven o'clock news, when the reception was very clear. I picked up that there was an explosion at Koeberg. In fact, that Sunday morning we were having a get-together at Rashid's place, and Chris (Hani) was also there, just having a social. And I mentioned to Chris that there was an explosion at Koeberg. Rashid probably knew already. Obviously, I had to just connect the dots there.

It was December 1982. My wife, Julie, had gone to Harare to her sister's place. Rashid asked me to ask Julie to make contact with Rod's wife, Heather, who was in Harare. The instruction from Rashid was for Julie to make arrangements so that Heather accompanies Julie on the same flight when she comes back to Maputo. So, Julie came with her, and Rod and Rashid were at the airport. So, I now met Rod again.

After a few days, we invited them over for supper. So, that was my little contribution to the Koeberg operation. Rodney was a bit strange but I felt we should take a risk, and it worked out. And obviously it was a big economic and political setback for the regime.

Then we had Nkomati (the accord between the apartheid and ANC governments in 1984 in terms of which Mozambique would not give sanctuary to the ANC and the apartheid government would stop supporting RENAMO which was seeking through violent means to overthrow FRELIMO), I was one of its victims. When the ANC was told to submit the names of ten people that would be part of the ANC office, my name was included. But the Mozambicans said that they didn't want me and another comrade, Mancheck, the Commander of the Transvaal Rural Machinery, to remain in Maputo. I used to liaise with them so they knew that we had sources of information. So, I had to leave. JS and Rashid were in Lusaka, and I stayed with Rashid.

Were you involved in any way, even peripherally, in assisting with any of the other Special Ops operations, even if you were not aware of what was being planned?

Before Nkomati there was the Church Street bombing. We in the ANC Intelligence and Security Department received information as to what actually happened. One could not work out why the car loaded with plastic explosives and near the target that was a bus waiting for air-force personnel exploded a minute or two before it was meant to. We got written information from a source who was actually working at Kompol, the Security Police Headquarters in Pretoria. I think that was the headquarters of probably the Transvaal SB.

I remember when I got that information sometime later, I met up with Comrade Joe who was on his way to London as Dr. Dadoo was seriously sick. So, I showed him this report as it is. He said now it makes sense. They could not work out what actually happened. What had happened is that the Dodge Colt which had the plastic explosive, was positioned as close as possible to the bus, but it detonated prematurely and also killed the two comrades carrying out the operation.

The Security Police found their Kombi a day later with the remote detonator and some documents that identified those comrades. There's the Air Force, Kompol, other military and security establishments there – and one of them – caused the detonation of the bomb prematurely through their radio signals. That's what we believe. So, that's my other outside involvement with a Special Ops operation.

But we also passed on information to Special Ops, including intelligence information on guys that got arrested and the information that they'd given. In fact, regarding the 1981 Matola attack, we had a source within the SB, a black guy from Eastern Transvaal. He was in a unit with White SB's to counter ANC operations and activities in the Eastern Transvaal and Swaziland. He used to go to the Nelspruit and Ermelo SB offices, and socialise and drink with the Black security police there and *askaris* (former ANC cadres who were arrested, turned and working with the SB's). So over a period of time, he told us it seems that the SB's are planning an operation against the ANC in Maputo.

And we informed the Political-Military organ in Maputo. And they discussed it that afternoon and that very night we were attacked. The Special Ops house was the main one. Obadi was shot and died subsequently as a result of the wounds.

In fact, we had information implicating George (Naicker) and Ebrahim (Ismail Ebrahim) in ANC underground activities and they had to leave the country. We had information that the chap who was bringing them literature from Ivan Pillay in the ANC political underground structures in Swaziland was working for the Security Police, so we had to work out an operation that we arrest this guy but at the same time Ebrahim and George also leave the country.

In April 1984 after the signing of the Nkomati Accord, Rashid had to leave Maputo for Lusaka and Special Ops had to close down there completely. Rashid was then transferred to Ordnance. Joe Slovo also had to leave Maputo after the signing of the Nkomati Accord for Lusaka As I said, I also had to leave Maputo and was based in Lusaka.

During the second half of 1984 Slovo had gone to Maputo to attend a party-to-party meeting – SACP-Frelimo in late '84, I was away in Lusaka for seven months. Joe had met the Mozambican Head of Intelligence, Fernando Honwana. And Joe said, look, this comrade of ours, his wife is in Mozambique, she's just had a baby, why don't you facilitate for him to return? So, there was this special arrangement made. I mustn't go to the office, but I must keep in contact with him, the Head of Intelligence. And because my wife was Mozambican, we were told to contact someone at the immigration there who could facilitate my entry into Maputo. And I returned after seven months – but I couldn't go to the ANC office and I was semi-underground. That was the agreement with the Mozambicans for my return to Maputo.

Sometime in 1985 I had to go to Lusaka for some meeting and met with comrade Joe. He was busy with the planning of an operation and he said I had to be the middle person between himself in Lusaka and Comrade Barney (Molokoane). Barney had to report to me and I must get the information to him. So that was in '85.

Where was Barney based then?

Comrade Barney was operating between Lusaka, Maputo and Swaziland. Barney came to Maputo to meet me as I had to give him funds and to pass on information from Barney to comrade Joe in Lusaka. Barney, Faku (Velaphi Msane) and Victor Khayiyana were the main guys and the three other comrades were Major, Valdez and the sixth comrade, I don't remember his name (Vincent Sekete). I just had to facilitate the money that they needed because Joe had given it to me. I remember the night they left Maputo for Swaziland in a Ford van. That was the last time I saw Barney, Victor and the other comrades. Barney tells me, 'Comrade Farouk, I'm warning you, you'll have to go deep underground after this operation (laughter)'.

I didn't know the target of the operation. And then they went in. Subsequently I heard how Barney, Victor and the other comrade (Vincent Sekete) got killed. You may have met Faku and them; they would have told you what happened. After the operation Faku, Valdez and Major came to Maputo from Swaziland and briefed me. It was around the time Sue's husband, David, had died in Angola; and I accompanied Sue and the children to Angola. And Joe and Chris

had just returned from a Party (SACP) meeting abroad and they came to Luanda for David Rabkin's funeral. By this time, I had the information already – what had happened according to the three comrades involved in the operation.

Firstly, when they got into Swaziland the first time from Mozambique to prepare for this operation, one of the bakkies which had the Grad-P in a special hidden compartment, had a problem with the ignition. And the Swazi cops stopped there and the comrades said they're stuck. And the cops actually helped them move that bakkie into the nearby Manzini police station till the following day they get a mechanic (laughter) to fix the bakkie. and the police complained that the bakkie was very heavy (laughter). That was a good one! I think Barney may have told me that because the vehicle was there already in Swaziland with the weapons when he came back again to Maputo.

Did he go back all the way to Maputo?

Yes. Barney had to find his way back to Maputo to fetch the other three comrades that were going to be involved in the operation. Meanwhile the bakkie was parked at the police station in Manzini to be fixed.

From what Faku and Valdez told me, they successfully entered South Africa from a spot on the Swaziland-Eastern Transvaal border. They had to cut the fence in order to enter South Africa and they entered probably about seven o'clock in the evening to carry out the operation and get back the same night. So, they got to Secunda and then prepared to launch about six or seven rockets inside the perimeter of the Sasol tanks which were the targets.

They then realised that one of the most important instruments to measure distance, they didn't have with them, so they had to improvise. That means the six or seven rockets they actually shot did not actually hit the targets, they dispersed all over the show. I think one or two landed inside, but didn't hit the target. Remember, they strike it from between ten and fifteen kilometres away. So, they missed the target completely. They had to retreat. I think their plan was to try to get back into Swaziland as quickly as possible. They were in two bakkies, and each vehicle had three guys in it. In the front one was Victor, Barney and another comrade (Sekete). Victor knows the area very well because he was from the Secunda area and he knew Swaziland well.

Faku and the other two comrades (Mangaliso Matyobeni and Xolile Sam) had been following Victor. And at a certain point they had to turn right, go towards the fence, which was a few kilometres away. So Faku sees Barney and them go straight. So, they flashed them and stopped and they waited for them but Barney and them just carried on straight. Then Faku and them said it was getting light and they had to go through. So, they pushed through and they

get back to the safe hideout in Swaziland only to learn over the radio that three terrorists were killed in a firefight.

So, what we cannot understand is they're driving in front and they see the flashing of the lights and the vehicle is not behind them anymore and they didn't turn back. We heard there was a firefight and they got killed. Their bodies were then taken to Piet Retief police station, I think. So, I had to give that report to Chris and Joe in Luanda. That was the last operation from Joe as part of Special Operations, to my knowledge. The reason why I got the report from Faku and them is that they knew I was the go-between between the unit and Comrade Joe.

But there was another operation which I wasn't directly involved in, but in the early '80s there was a plan to hit a train on a bridge in the Northern Cape. I think that train used to transport soldiers to the military bases in South West Africa, Namibia, I think the Caprivi area. We got some intelligence about that operation. The comrades arrived at the target and they planted the explosives and they were also going to trigger that with a remote. But then something happened there, and they had to use just a normal fuse and the fuse was too wet, they couldn't light it, and it was getting daylight, so they retreated. And the explosives were found in just a routine normal check by a railway worker, who monitors the rail track before the train crosses over, and he found the explosives.

From my recollection, the comrades were specially trained in the Soviet Union on actually how to demolish a bridge because you've got to know some engineering. And when they were in the country, they were somewhere in the East Rand, and they skipped a robot and the ordinary SAP was behind them, and there was a firefight, and three of the comrades were killed, and the other three comrades in another vehicle reached Swaziland.

The other operation Rashid must've told you about is where Clifford Brown died in Durban. They missed their targets, and as they were retreating, they were intercepted and there was a firefight and they died. Comrade Brown was from PE (Port Elizabeth) and when he came to exile, I was one of the group that interviewed them.

It was a Special Ops operation?

Ja.

About the attacks on the power stations, do you know anything?

No.

You say you met Rashid early '80s again in Maputo....

Rashid came in 1980 before the Sasol operation.

Did you gather from him that he's involved in Special Ops?

Well, I mean you got to hear that he's the Commissar of Special Ops.

Did he tell you that?

Yes.

Wasn't that supposed to be kept secret?

Well, I can't recollect exactly how it happened but it was formally known that there was this unit called Special Operations. Look, they had their own house in Maputo, which was attacked. And Obadi was the Commander and Rashid the Commissar. Rashid became the Commander after Obadi died. And then they had Chris (Nungu), who subsequently died also in an ambush. Maybe he was the Commander after Obadi. But I think Chris was killed in November or December '81.

How did Chris die, do you know?

The other Victor from Pretoria and his brother.... this Victor had a lot of contacts in Pretoria, he would know...

Victor Molefe who was arrested?

Yes. Victor was in Special Ops. He was sent into the country on a mission and was arrested. It was not known that he had been arrested in 1981, it was around December, and he broke during interrogation, he was forced by the SB's (Security Branch members) to phone Chris and another comrade (George Ndlovu) to meet him at the Oshoek border at night. And the two comrades were ambushed with bazookas and the car was completely burnt. Victor subsequently escaped from Vlakplaas and returned to Maputo.

In Maputo, Victor said he phoned Chris and he did mention the code over the phone to signal that he was being forced to phone him, but it seemed that Chris did not pick this up, this danger word and came to meet him and was killed. But we don't really know what happened during the phone call.

However, Victor later escaped from Vlakplaas with his younger brother who was also an MK operative, arrested earlier in the country and turned. They were handed to us at the Department of Intelligence and Security to check whether they are genuine or not, whether they're still working for the other side. To prove they were genuinely on our side they were sent for an operation against a very notorious black security policeman in Pretoria. But that had nothing to do with Special Operations.

It was a test?

Yes. They carried out that operation.

It's quite possible that the SB were still using Molefe and his brother as informers and they would have been prepared to sacrifice the life of an African security policeman so that Molefe and his brother could be seen by MK as being genuine – how did you know that this wasn't the case?

That could be - but we felt that Victor and his brother were genuine – though I didn't obviously have much to do with Victor after that....

They did the operation against the SB.

They were debriefed, they were questioned, and we had a source inside the SB.

The same one you mentioned earlier?

Yes. But that chap, the source, was then arrested. That was much later in '85 or so. Yes, the source was arrested later and managed to escape and was sent to Lusaka for investigation and debriefing.

Both Victor and his brother were asked to carry out the operation?

Yes.

How did you know that they'd done it?

Because it was in the media. From the description that they gave, what actually happened. It depends how you're going to use them and what information they get exposed to that could be a threat. Now with Victor Special Ops never had any problems with him after that...Lusaka had become more difficult for the SB's to operate in unless there were deep cover agents there.

Victor was involved in the Church Street bombing...

Yes. He identified those two comrades who did the operation and got killed. You see, what you don't know is whether this was a set-up

Who was set up?

I mean if the SB's had set up that detonation to take place before it was meant to....

So, they arrested your SB source because it was found out that he was leaking to you?

Yes, they found out he was leaking to us. I don't think that they could work out where the leaks were going to exactly.

Why would this guy leak to you?

Because he was not in support of the system. It wasn't for money. Around '79 he made contact with Stanley Mabizela. He came with a batch of documents and just gave it to Stan. When I was based in Maputo, the ANC Intelligence and Security Department heads were Peter Boroko and Willy Williams. They then gave me all these documents from the source. Then (ANC veteran) Govind Chiba came from Lusaka, that's (MK and former Robben Islander) Laloo Chiba's younger brother, to assist in the processing of documents and setting up of a filing system for the Department. Mac got him from London to Lusaka to help the ANC.

How was the SB source found out, do you know?

Look, he was an operator, he was accompanying the White Security Policemen at a high level and we don't know how they realised he was informing.

Who was the SB? Can you give his name?

I wouldn't want to give his name.

Did you get to know before Sasol took place that it was going to happen?

No, we didn't know. It's just that we knew that there was a Special Ops Unit.

After the Sasol operation who did you think had done it?

We just assumed it was Special Ops. I think when the comrades came back, they spoke a bit about it, not necessarily Rashid.

Where were you when the operation took place?

I think I was in Swaziland with Indres at the safe house.

What was your reaction?

What a big operation! We were excited. We also thought it may be Gebuza's Transvaal Machinery there. They were responsible for the first big attacks on the police stations – Booyens, Moroko in '79-80.

So, you weren't sure who'd done it?

Yes, we didn't know at first, but subsequently we got to know it was Rashid and them who were responsible.

Can you remember how exactly you got to know?

No, I can't recall. Rashid wouldn't talk about it.

So, he never spoke about it?

No, he never ever spoke about it and he wouldn't even tell me, only when he needed assistance on a particular aspect I would help out. But I wouldn't know about an operation or who was involved.

But other chaps would talk....

Would they actually tell you that they were involved in the operation?

No, they wouldn't, but you get to hear that that it was a Special Ops operation.

And in '81 their house was attacked and we knew that was a Special Ops house.

When? After the attack?

After the attack, in fact the morning after the night they attacked, Joe came to my place and he said you know we were attacked. And he said let's go, so we drove to Matola.

How many houses in Matola were attacked?

That house, the Natal Machinery house and a Sactu (South African Congress of Trade Unions) house.

Do you know how many people lived in the Special Ops house?

Maybe twelve to fifteen people. That's where Comrade Ghost got kidnapped. They took him with and that's where one of the SADF (South African Defence Force) guys was killed in a firefight. My recollection from what we were told is that there was this truck that came over and a guy, in a FRELIMO uniform, talking Portuguese - it was about eleven o'clock at night and our guys were sitting around. And this guy asked to see the Commander. Obadi was staying in that house and came out. And Obadi also spoke Portuguese. So, as Obadi was speaking to this guy who claimed to be a FRELIMO officer, the other South African security guys got out of the truck and opened fire. Our comrades had no chance. It seemed that the comrades who were inside then started firing back. And Obadi was very badly injured and died about two days later.

Did you think it was reasonable to have all the highly trained Special Ops cadres in one house?

In retrospect you can say no, but you've got to look at the conditions. These were not ideal conditions that we were working in; you were in a foreign country, restricted, and there were many problems and pressures. You've got a huge army now, particularly post '76. Special Ops was formed probably early 1980 and I think that it was Oliver Tambo's project really and Joe Slovo was reporting to Oliver Tambo. It wasn't part of the main Military Headquarters. And you had thousands of young people coming out after '76 and they're trained and sitting in the camps. You've got to try to find ways of getting them into the country, and you get them in from Swaziland, but from Maputo first. Flying in from Angola to Maputo was a hassle.

Why didn't you use the Maputo-KZN border?

I think it was in use a bit. If I'm not mistaken Zuma was one of the first guys of Ordnance taking weapons in through there.

But you also couldn't use Mozambique easily because that Northern Natal and the South of Mozambique area, that's where what you have this beach, Ponta do Ouro, I think there were a lot of military landmines there.

Is there anything you want to say about the Voortrekkerhoogte operation? Did you know anything about the operation beforehand?

No.

After it happened, you were asked to cook and Rashid came with a few comrades?

Comrades who were involved in the operation.

Except Moses Mabhida who wasn't involved in it?

No, he wasn't but he was most senior leader in Maputo that time. JS was not around.

Can you remember what was said?

I can't remember much. All I know is that the comrades were on a hill. They didn't get all their targets, some of the rockets fell on a sports field. They were carrying this rocket on to the hill and a policeman on a bicycle saw them but they said it was just a pipe and persuaded him somehow. And then after they launched the rockets, they needed a getaway car as the car that was going to meet them was not there.

Do you know why they missed their target?

No, I can't remember. Maybe it was the same as the second Sasol operation, they didn't have that important measuring instrument?

On Koeberg you meet Rodney. Why do you say Rodney is strange?

I got to also know him when he was working for National Intelligence after 1994. I think Rodney was a bit crazy to make himself available for that operation. It was a high-risk operation.

And Heather Gray?

What my wife, Julie, told me was that Heather was very nervous.

I think he told his wife to go to Harare first and wait there for him. So, I don't know whether he contacted her or not in Harare but she was very anxious. I don't know what role Heather played in the operation.

Well, from what I've been able to pick up she was aware of the operation and actively supported it, maybe even prompting him to go to the ANC...

I see.

After she came to Maputo, did you have any contact with either Rodney or her?

They came for supper.

And?

We didn't talk about the operation; it was more like a social get-together.

The Church Street bombing, what do you know about it beyond what's in the public domain?

Victor offered his services and Rashid asked what we thought about him and we told him. About what other operations after that he was involved in I don't know.

Now regarding the interference of radio signals from one of the state institutions or private companies that triggered off the car bomb before time, couldn't that have been foreseen, prevented? Was that MK's first car bomb attempt?

Well, yes, I would think so. I think Joe did mention this when I showed him that report. Joe had discussed this with his contacts in the Soviet Union, but they didn't think the frequency being used in Pretoria could have detonated that. You know it was just one of those coincidences...

To my knowledge it was the first car bomb operation by MK.

Of course, the police claimed that the two comrades who died in the operation were criminals and that the ANC sent these two helpless people to their deaths? Your response?

Victor was an MK operative. He had a lot of contacts. I don't believe that Victor would dupe those comrades. I think Victor recruited them because it was also a time of heightened onslaught both from the apartheid side and MK activities. I got to know Victor; he was a smart operator; it would not be difficult for him to recruit people from the townships. In fact, Victor's entire family came out of the country, not only Victor and his brother, but his nephew, nieces, and I think his mother or aunty; they were a whole group of about twenty people.

Were they all active in the ANC?

What I know is that Victor, his brother and the nephew – I can't recall their names – were in MK, and I think the other family members were involved in other ANC activities in exile. There were children there too.

And do you know Victor Khayiyana's story? Victor was a con-man. He was arrested, I think, for stealing cattle. They got to know that he was a relative of Gert Sibande, an old ANC activist. They called him the 'Lion of the East'. He was based in Swaziland. The SB's sent Victor to Swaziland to make contact with Gert Sibande for the purpose of assassinating him. I think on his second visit he told Oom Gert that I've been sent to assassinate you. They called Stanley Mabizela. Then he told Stanley he was arrested for criminal activities and recruited by the Security Police and was sent on a mission to kill Gert Sibande.

His own uncle?

Yes. It was then worked out for Victor to go back, get his family out, I don't know the details, and then Victor at some point, I think, was the main guy on the information about Secunda. He came from that area, and so he was put into the Special Ops unit as part of the Sasol team that did the 1980 operation. He died in that operation with Barney in 1985. And Faku said that Victor kept saying that he just had this feeling he was not going to come back. And I remember that last time I saw him he was with Barney and he was very subdued. You know, he used to be a very jolly guy. About two or three days before the operation they were with me in Maputo, it was the last time I saw them.

Obviously, apartheid criminalised many African people. Do you think that this served also to push people into the armed struggle, that it was easier for people to defy the state through the armed struggle as well, if they'd done so already through crimes?

I wouldn't say that there were many people in MK with a criminal background; some, yes. In my department, if we knew someone had a criminal past, we would always red flag that person, that there's a possibility that person could have been broken or could break if arrested. But I don't think it was ever an issue. Look, because of the conditions of apartheid it was very easy to be a criminal. There was a comrade with the name 'General', I was told by other comrades he was a car smuggler. He used to get the cars into Swaziland and then they were driven to Maputo.

Was he in Special Ops?

No, he was never in Special Ops but then there was a big fall-out with Zuma sometime in the 1980s and then he left the ANC while in exile and he joined the National Party after 1994.

Did you know if H el ene and Klaas did reconnaissance for the Pretoria bombing?

No.

Do you know that H el ene brought the car bomb in?

The Dodge Colt? No, I didn't know that.

How did you know it was a Dodge Colt?

I must have heard it from a comrade. All I knew was that the Dodge Colt was preferred because of the size of its boot; it was a medium-sized car, but because of its boot size, one could partition and make the boot smaller and have a hidden compartment. It was a preferred vehicle. And that Dodge Colt was stolen in South Africa.

Do you know who stole it?

No.

You said there was a report on the Church Street bombing?

Yes.

Where's that report?

That was my departmental report. Don't ask me where all the reports are. I came back from Lusaka in December '91 and was busy working at Shell House. Joe Nhlanhla was overall Head of the Department. I was one of the last persons of my department to leave Lusaka and I had to ensure that all that documentation, even all the information from the biographies, the reports that were sent to Lusaka from Tanzania, Luanda and Uganda were put together. I had to find a place to store the documentation until such time that we could get it to South Africa. We had some Zambian Indian contacts, big business people, with a factory, they gave me a container that we loaded and locked. and I had the key to the locks on the container. There were boxes and boxes of documents.

In '92 or '93 I was sent with another comrade from my Department to Lusaka to deal with documents. That container was put on a truck and brought to Shell House. I did my job. I told Joe Nhlanhla here's the stuff. I don't know what happened after that...

Let's come to the Secunda Sasol 1985 operation – how did they get the bakkie into South Africa? They cut a hole in the fence and drove the bakkie in?

It was a Ford bakkie. That's what I was told – that they cut a hole in the fence with the aim to come back the same night, but I think Victor was already there. From Secunda it's probably about a two-hours drive to Swaziland. They made all the preparations and they knew exactly the Swazi/South Africa border area the unit was going to use. All I know is what Faku, Major (Matyobeni) and Valdez (Xolile Sam) told me.

Is there any other peripheral connection you had with special ops?

I would be in and out from Maputo, traveling to Lusaka and Harare. Rashid was still in Special Ops until 1987 when he moved to take over Ordinance after Cassius Make and Paul Dikeledi were killed in an ambush in Swaziland. I had to introduce Louise Colvin to him - Rashid. I actually met John Daniels and Louise Colvin in 1982 in Harare, and they took me to Bulawayo to meet Peter Wellman. Every time I used to go to Harare I used to meet with Louise.

Rashid, after Nkomati, was based in Lusaka. How do Special Ops get weapons into the country? He still had Klaas and them operating, but he also needed other contacts. I mentioned to Rashid, look, there's Louise who could help. Rashid was going to Harare. I told him take the bus from Harare airport, it will take you to the city centre and Louise will meet you at the bus terminus. And he pitches up there and who's with Louise, but Klaas de Jonge? Now I don't know how they met but Louise was with Klaas. I think subsequently Rashid starting using Louise as well. Louise was then coming to Lusaka. She had a British passport and could also travel to Botswana easily.

In which year was the operation planned for the train on the bridge in Northern Cape that failed?

That was probably '82 or '83. Klaas and them did the reconnaissance and I know the comrades that tried that operation were sent to the Soviet Union for training. And the target was that they had to bring the bridge down in order to delay the transporting of troops

Was it meant to hit the troops on the way?

No, I don't know whether it was meant to hit them but then we had to have the intelligence, what time the train crosses over the bridge and how often into South West Africa.

Anything else you can remember about Special Ops?

If I'm right, I don't know if Rashid knew about the 1985 Sasol operation in which Barney and them got killed, I don't think that was Rashid's op, definitely not. It was something between Joe and Barney, and I was just the middle man based in Maputo. Definitely not, Rashid was not part of it. Unless if Joe had discussed it with him.

Why would Rashid not know?

That is a good one – why Rashid didn't know about it and he was still in Special Ops.

How do you know he didn't know anything about it?

Rashid may have known but he didn't discuss the operation with me.

The fact that he didn't raise it with you doesn't mean he wasn't involved?

Maybe.

To come to something more general. Why do you think Special Ops was formed? What were its aims?

I think the aim was to target specific infrastructure of the regime that would impact economically and that would be high-level targets. I think that was the main purpose. I don't think Special Ops was involved in any police station attacks, it was basically aimed at economic targets.

But then the Air Force wasn't an economic target?

Yes, but the Air Force was particularly used for attacks in Angola, Mozambique, Zambia. It was specifically chosen because of the heightened activities of the South African Air Force at that time in the frontline states

So, there were both economic and military targets?

Yes. Also, Magoo's Bar, that was targeting the military. What I heard was that the Magoo's Bar was a drinking hole of military personnel based in Durban, therefore it was targeted.

Then there was Groskopf, he was involved in that military base attack in Johannesburg.

Overall, what were some of the strengths and successes of Special Ops?

They managed to penetrate, no matter they may have had casualties, key state infrastructure. Whether they successfully hit the target or not, there was a psychological impact from the Voortrekkerhoogte, and the second Secunda Sasol attack as well. It may not have been enormous but the whole idea was to hit those tanks and those huge explosions, like in the 1980 attack on Sasol, it burned for days on end. There were also the attacks on the sub-stations and power stations, which caused economic setbacks for the regime. And it was not something that the enemy could hide. So that was the impact Special Ops had.

They were not in the business of setting up bases, recruiting for political work, etc. That was the job of the Transvaal Machinery and Natal Machinery of Sipiwe Nyanda and Thami Zulu – to create a network base, create infrastructure in order to infiltrate personnel and weapons into the country. I think their task was more military-political, working through the political to set up bases inside the country as well as recruitment from within the communities. But Special Ops would go to the target, hit it and retreat. You had to have the infrastructure just to give you that support for that specific period of time. Go in, hit the target, and come out again. I think that was their strengths. They did suffer losses as well, but they had an impact on the enemy.

Do you think it was one of the more successful units in MK or is it hard to say?

I think it was successful for the period of its existence, but it had its setbacks with Obadi being killed and also Barney and Victor. You could look at it from the perspective that there was heightened political consciousness in the country and with all these personnel that you have after '76, you need to go and fight. So, there was the recruitment of the best possible between that lot and we had to send them in. Natal Machinery had a lot of casualties. I think even Gebuza's Machinery had a lot of casualties. But there's never an ideal moment to go in and no matter how good the training was given to people, at the end of the day you had to, no matter how good the comrades in the military were, have help to operate behind enemy lines. You had to know how

to organise and work clandestinely. A lot of that '76 generation that left were never really involved in political activity like people like you were. They got caught up with the events that were taking place and then wanted to get arms and fight.

So, they weren't really political activists in the true sense of the word. And if some were, it was over a very short span of time as political activists. They were young people coming out of very difficult conditions. Then they got stuck in the camps for a long period of time. It wasn't easy. I mean I was very fortunate, I just went for a very short military course. I could've landed up in Katanga or one of the camps there and just be sitting and waiting.

But this is what actually happened to a lot of people, they were waiting to be taken by a machinery into the country. So then, there was a lot of risk taken in sending people in and the survival rate of MK comrades was 20-25 percent.

Was that objectively determined in some way?

I don't think it was determined but...

Did that seem like a reasonable estimate?

Reasonable estimate.

And the comrades who went in knew that?

Not necessarily only death, but arrest also. You think even the senior cadres, Jeff Radebe, Tokyo Sexwale, all these guys were arrested. The chances of getting arrested was high.

And then we used to get the reports of comrades who broke. And most of the people broke. And the information we would get is that comrades were given albums of photos to identify other MK comrades. Do you know this chap? Do you know that chap? So, we used to get information that comrade so and so gave this and this information. It would be in the reports of the Security Police for their consumption.

And you got copies of this from your contact within the SB?

We got it from our contact.

Did you have only one contact within the Security Branch?

We had this one contact, who developed another two contacts.

So, you had three?

There was also the Bible project, that was Mo (Shaik) and them, much later in the '80s, who also had sources within the SB.

The source who went to Stanley Mabizela, you said they found him out? What happened to him?

He ran away from the SB's. He came to us in Swaziland and was sent to Lusaka via Maputo

Where is he now?

He's around.

He's working for the post-apartheid state?

No.

In '85 he was arrested by the SB's and they took him to Swaziland and he was forced to arrange a meeting with comrade Thomas, his ANC handler. When meeting Thomas at a pre-arranged venue, the SB's pounced on Thomas and kidnapped him and took him to South Africa. Comrade Thomas was reporting and sending source reports to me in Maputo and the reports were processed and analysed. Under duress the source set up the kidnapping of Thomas by the SB's.

After the kidnapping of Thomas, the SB's brought the source to Swaziland again to set up the kidnapping of September, an MK operative. On this trip he told us he managed to escape from the SB's and made contact with the ANC comrades and they brought him to Maputo. He was sent to Lusaka and I was involved with Super Molozi in the debriefing. After lengthy discussions with the source on his arrest, the kidnapping of Thomas and the mission to kidnap September he explained how he managed to escape from the SB's.

We assessed all the information and we decided he's no threat to us as long as we have him in a controlled situation. But we also had to weigh up the information that he provided that saved a lot of lives over the years from 1979 onwards right up till 1985. He used to give us very good information then, and I'm telling you if it was not for his information, George Naicker and Ebrahim Ismail Ebrahim would have been arrested.

This Indian guy, whose code name was librarian, I think he made contact with George or Ebrahim when they came out of Robben Island. Librarian was from Natal, but then living in the East Rand. I think between Ebrahim and George, they sent him to Ivan (Pillay) based in Swaziland. Ivan and his unit were sending messages into the country. This informant was reporting to the Springs Police Station SB's, they were photographing or videoing when he would meet George and handing the messages and leaflets and so on from Ivan

We got this information from our source that there was this particular person, no name mentioned, just his code number, when John Nkadimeng was in charge of the political underground based in Swaziland. This was '80 December and Ivan didn't want to believe that this guy was actually working for the enemy, so I showed Ivan the official SB report, compiled by the Springs Security Police on the visit by Librarian to George Naicker and handing over leaflets and message to comrade George.

What happened to the guy that was informing to the ANC after he approached Comrade Mabizela?

The source and his other two recruits who were also SB's, were with us in Lusaka right up to the unbanning and then came back into the country. Actually, one of them, his father was also in the Security Police - and in fact they were relatives of Obadi. If I'm not mistaken Obadi did tell us that his uncle is working at Kompol. This was his son. I don't know what happened to them subsequently, but they came out in exile. I think one of them was deployed within the police services.

On Special Ops' strengths and weaknesses, do you want to add anything more?

Special Ops tried to recruit probably the best, but also people that had initiative in difficult situations working behind enemy lines. I think that their operations were successful in that they highlighted the vulnerability of the enemy.

Where there any MK machineries that stood out for you?

I don't know enough about all the units in MK, but from what I heard, the Natal Machinery was very successful. It's very difficult to tell. But you could look at the data of operations, especially between 1979 to 1990.

But there were some operations like the Wimpy Bars that we condemned. In fact, I was in a very serious debate with Siphwe's younger brother, Zweli, on this. We were training together in GDR, we shared the same room. Even in the camps we shared the same bunk bed. When the Amanzimtoti bombing by

Andrew Zondo took place, I said it's wrong and Zweli and others felt that it was right.

It's been said that some cadres in other MK machineries resented the resources and support given to Special Ops compared with what they had to make do with. You know anything about this?

I wouldn't be able to say whether this happened, but if there was resentment it would be a natural thing.

Why do you think that?

Because any unit that is a special unit would get all the best resources and would try and get the best personnel as well. I think the resentment more than anything else would be that comrades after training wanted to get back home, and unlike the Special Ops guys they were stuck in the camps. Special Ops were in the forefront, carrying out these operations with a good success rate. I don't know the success rate of the other machineries, but I think Special Ops had fewer casualties.

Rocky Williams, in an article, says something to the effect that there was resentment for several reasons, including that Special Ops was seen to be getting more resources from Oliver Tambo and JS, and also, they were not answering directly to Comrade Joe Modise but to Comrades Slovo and Tambo.

That's true.

So, they were seen as like a parallel structure.

But Joe Modise was a confidant of Tambo, and I can't see this not being discussed at Military Headquarters. It may not have been discussed in open meetings, but I know that Joe Modise and Joe Slovo had a good relationship as well, and Joe and Ronnie also. It may be discussed in one-to-one that, look, this is what we're busy with. So, at that level I didn't sense any animosity – at that higher level.

Yes, at a lower level – because there were frustrations. I mean, you know, the thing was that even when you were in the frontline, if you're brought there from Angola preparing to go inside the country, if the infrastructure had not been set up, you had to wait there. So, this was a particular problem of the machineries, you get to Swaziland you can't still get into the country. Then remember, in 1984, with the Nkomati Accord, there was a huge setback. And

the old Swaziland infrastructure, the Maputo infrastructure was virtually 95% of it attacked and dysfunctional.

Why would Nkomati be such a big setback in using Swaziland as a route to get into South Africa?

Because we had no direct infiltration from Lusaka into Swaziland. You could only get into Swaziland from Mozambique. You couldn't get in from anywhere else. It was too risky. In fact, I think it must have been '82 we had this information that a chap from inside the country who was in touch with Chris was actually working for the enemy. And I was tasked to go to Chris in Maseru, I had never met Chris. Well, the plane from Maputo stops in Swaziland and from Swaziland you continue to Maseru. We had this situation where Victor *Nkondo* was arrested after the plane couldn't land in Maseru, and came to Jan Smuts Airport. And the cops there wanted to know who were the passengers. and Victor had this Tanzanian travel document that we used to use and he was arrested, but subsequently he was released.

And I didn't expect the plane to stop in Swaziland. We actually got off the plane. I thought maybe we had to get to the transit lounge and then be brought back. And, fortunately, I had hidden that report in my shoe but the X-ray machine picked it up. What have you got in your shoe? And I told the lady, no, my sole has a hole and that's why I put cardboard in there. I could've got caught.

They let you pass?

They let me pass (laughter). I just gave that story.

So you meet Comrade Hani? And?...

I met Comrade Chris in Maseru, showed him the processed security police report that a certain person from home who was in contact with him was in fact an informer of the security police so he needed to be cautious and careful when this informer makes contact again.

So, to come back to Special Ops. The other criticism of Special Ops has been that it was too elitist and too militarist, that the aim was to attack economic installations and high-powered military targets so as to mobilise the masses, but it didn't really do that. Of course, the relationship between the military and political was a perennial problem in MK, and Special Ops might have strengthened that divide with what were seen by some as elitist actions. It could be said that it would have been different if there was a workers' strike at Sasol and

Special Ops hit Sasol while the strike was taking place? Anyway, your response?

You know, I mean, people all have their own views about that. I think at times Rashid and his unit didn't have very good relationships. And Rashid, was a taskmaster, he was firm. You had guys when they get to Maputo, they start drinking. I'll give you another story that happened. You have to understand that people also had good times; they didn't know that they were going to live or die. Rashid was tough on them. but if you're in charge of a unit, maybe you have to be; but it was also his personality as well. He needed to deliver and he was expecting them to deliver and he didn't have the balance right.

There was one incident that took place, and this is a Special Ops incident, but not from a military perspective. There was this seven series BMW that was stolen in South Africa and it got to Maputo and I think when the PMC or the most senior body there met, they decided it should go to Joe Slovo. It was a blue seven series BMW. He liked driving that car, you see.

Joe, the communist?

There were some problems with that car and we had a mechanic in Matola. Joe was going abroad so he gave Rashid the key and said get Kenny, the mechanic, to fix the car, but please make sure that I get the car back (laughter). All I remember (laughter) is that one Sunday morning Rashid came to my place and said come with me to Matola. So, I realise there's trouble! And he tells me what happened - and as we arrive in Matola, there we see that the car had rolled over. And Joe is coming the next morning (laughter).

Desert was in Special Operations. Kenny said that the car was ready, they were waiting for Rashid to pick it up. So, Desert and a comrade said they've got a meeting with Rashid in the city centre. So, Kenny said, okay, take this car to Rashid. Now Rashid, the poor guy, is waiting for that car - and the car never pitches up. He gets a message that there was an accident. And Rashid, I mean, his health used to suffer, he had this ulcer problem, and now he's very angry (laughter). Desert and the other comrade were drinking and went for a joy ride and the car just rolled over (laughter). But you must ask Rashid about that.

And then what happened?

What can happen (laughter)?...

Was the car rescued or written off, as it were?

My recollection is the BMW was repaired and then on the road.

It was a stolen car...so the person whose car it was got some revenge (laughter)?

Ya (laughter)...But you must remember we're in a difficult situation and we never had our own cars; cars were very important for getting the ANC work done.

I thought the ANC stole cars for some operations?

Yes. So, this car I think was probably used by comrades for that but was still available. It was parked at our Department of Intelligence and Security offices in Matola on the outskirts of Maputo. Peter Boroko, my Chief, I think he wanted it, but the leadership decides Slovo must be given it.

Obviously, you can't look at the structure of Special Ops without looking at the people who made it happen. Not that you were involved in Special Ops directly, but from what you experienced and know which comrades you think stand out the most amongst them?

Rashid stands out the most.

Why?

Look, Rashid was a good planner. He was based in Maputo, but he was highly wanted.

What do you mean?

By the SBs. Guys who got arrested and were in or knew about Special Ops were always asked who's Rashid, the Indian guy. But the information we got was the Boers thought Barry Gilder was Rashid.

But Barry was in Botswana?

Yes.

And Rashid was in Maputo?

But Rashid was going from Maputo to Swaziland as well. Rashid was prepared to get into Swaziland, which was a risky business, especially after the Sasol operation and Ghost got kidnapped in Matola. The Boers were building up a profile and everybody knew Rashid in the ranks. So, he was highly wanted.

And he was prepared to take the risks. He never told me, but I think he was going into the country as well.

He came in once, I think....

I don't know how many times...

And he recruited his brother as well, Chacha (Mohamed Ismail). You know, I wouldn't want to recruit my own brother. Chacha carried out operations for him. I know that the TRC reports covered all that. Once Chacha came to Lusaka from India. I think he first went for *Haj* (pilgrimage) and then pitched up in Lusaka. Rashid and I met him at the airport and we took him back to the airport. He had these Eastern daggers (laughter), I think, from India. But you can't take that on to the plane (laughter). But I never knew that Rashid had actually recruited Chacha.

And Chacha's the guy who took me out of the country. He took me to the Swazi border. I was under house arrest. It was January 1st. I was supposed to come out. Marais Schoen was supposed to take me out. But I got word from Marais that they can't take me out. Fortunately, because that was Craig Williamson's (Williamson was a Security Branch spy, not known at the time) pipeline. So, the last resort was Chacha. I knew Chacha, but I didn't know him well. I discussed it with Prema. So, he said okay, you know, we'll get Chacha because Chacha had taken Joe Gqabi and other comrades out of the country to Swaziland.

My brother who lived in a separate house from us gave me his car. I told him I'm going to Fietas (Vrededorp) and will drop the car there. He had the other key. I locked up his car. In those days you could lock up the car without the key, which I left in the boot. Told him to pick up the car the following morning. Chacha had done this before. We got to Amsterdam and then we turned toward the border – and it's raining. We miscalculated. We were right at the border gate where the spotlights were pointed towards the road. We took a U-turn quickly and he's also panicking now. He said what must I do? But it happens with my luck! So, as we drove further away from the gate, I said to Chacha now stop and I'm getting out. I'm not going back now but it was raining, it took me a hell of a long time to get on to the other side of the border and into Swaziland

He dropped me off at the T-junction at about 2.30 am. There's the border gate and the fence ahead. As I faced the border I turned left and walked away from the road as far as possible for about a kilometer in the bush. I then turned right walking in the direction of the Swaziland border. I had a raincoat and a cap. I continued walking for a long time and as it was getting daylight, I could

see a tar road in the distance on my right. As I reached the road, I could see the tarmac was not the same as in South Africa. I then knew that I was in Swaziland. It was 5.30 am. I walked further away from the border post and I was told by Chacha that there's a village not far from the border and I could get a bus there for Mbabane and Manzini.

So, you jumped over the fence?

Just walked through. I didn't even know where the fence was. I just walked and walked and walked. I went in that direction of Swaziland, it was dark and raining.

The first village that I got to, I went to a rondavel, and they opened up, no problem. Changed. They gave me tea, everything.

Didn't they ask you who you are?

I said I was a refugee. I was told by Chacha to take a bus to Mbabane, Stanley Mabizela will be there. But there was no bus that day, so my host, the local villager had to get me a taxi.

Okay. Why do you say that Rashid was a good planner?

Because he was meticulous. That's how he operated. I wouldn't know the details but...

So how could you say?

If you stay together in a house with a person you can tell if he is meticulous in every respect. And from what Joe told me he was quite meticulous. He wouldn't work haphazardly. He had to be that, working with Joe and you had to minimise risk as much as possible. You had to plan the operations. They may not have all succeeded, but the planning was very good.

What was meticulous about the way he managed his life in the house?

He observed time and all those things. I mean we lived together. We were living with someone else who was a lecturer. We lived in a very organised way. We all had to cook. I know the lady we stayed with never bothered about cooking or anything. I mean we had a routine, a discipline. We were neat, we kept our rooms clean, and we washed our clothes; we lived in a very organised way.

I would say Rashid was a very good Commander. You know he had to take all the responsibility, and remember he was not an African comrade so it was a bit more difficult. And you must also look at this in the context that a lot of young people that actually came out of the country in the '70s had very little contact with Indians, and we were very few non-Africans in the frontline states. And just as Rashid was in a senior position at some point, I also became appointed to a senior position within my department and there was resentment from other comrades about this.

So African comrades felt Indian comrades shouldn't be in senior positions?

No, not necessarily. But here again I mean I would also be firm about money and accountability. Joe had given me R30 000 for this operation of Barney's. In 1985 that was a lot of money. And I was giving Barney money as he requested and I had receipts for Barney to sign.

And then in '86 Ebie was kidnapped, and Zuma, Sue, Sunny Singh, Indres Naidoo, Keith Mokoape and I were asked to leave; when Botha wrote to Chissano that these people were still engaging in terrorist activities and if you don't take action there'll be trouble! So, we had to leave. So, I took the money, whatever I had. Now that's from '85 after Barney's operation and '87 January when we had to leave. I always wanted to return the balance of the money to Joe, but Joe let me just hang on to it. Now as I was leaving Maputo permanently for Lusaka, I gave that money to Joe with a proper account. And Joe gave it to MHQ – and Joe tells me afterwards Cassius (Make) said, you know what, we never have accountability of money that has been issued, this is the first time we're even getting money back that was given for an operation (laughter). We had a good laugh.

You know that was what Rashid was like, very organised and accountable for his actions to Joe and MHQ.

Govind Chiba will always tell me, look, Indian comrades are fortunate that we come from a family tradition of hard work, also of small family businesses and that we didn't have break-up of family life and all those things. The young comrades we worked with, they had no real family life. Often there was a mother, but no father around. And we needed to assist the young comrades when we notice shortcomings. This was when Chiba was working with me in Maputo, that is when he was setting up a manual filing system of all the reports and other documents of my department. Peter Boroko who as the head of our unit, had hidden source documents and other documents under his mattress or in suitcases. So, Mac in '80 had this plan to set up a computer system at the Revolutionary Council compound in Lusaka. So, they built a

house to install the computers. Chiba came from London to Lusaka. While Chiba was waiting for the computers, I think Peter Boroko told Mac he had a lot of documents in Maputo and needed assistance to organise the documents. Mac knew Chiba was good in setting up information systems so Mac agreed to send Chiba to Maputo to our offices – and he set up a manual filing system with information on index cards.

We always said that if we got to work in an organised way, the enemy would be confused (laughter)! The enemy knew we worked in a chaotic way! We always laughed, you know....

You say Rashid was under stress and it affected his health?

Yes. Look he was under pressure all the time – and the responsibility! If you're a Commander and you've got to lose people, you feel bad about it. Whatever you have planned, we don't have perfect reconnaissance; we don't have aerial photos, nothing of that scale; we don't have enough back up. And you lose people – they got arrested or died. It does impact on you. And you know they'd shoot him if they found him. It had a toll on him and I think the ulcer was as a result of that responsibility and that emotional attachment to your unit. You are a political animal, but you have the human side as well.

There's one story about Rashid, this big Commander in Maputo, he was staying with this Belgian couple and he had a room upstairs. He had a meeting downstairs with I think it was Chris and Joe and as he went upstairs to the room, he found that somebody had stolen his briefcase with money in it. How the burglars got in and stole his bag, we don't know (laughter)! On another occasion he had his Makarov near him while he's sleeping, his trousers placed on a chair next to his bed; and the burglars stole his trousers and got away (laughter). He slept through it (laughter).

In a *Mail & Guardian* profile of him it was said that he had a temperamental side. That your experience?

No. When he came back from his training and sent to be an instructor in Angola, I'm the only person that he knew and things were not right in the camp. He said we got to sort these things out. I think he must have expressed himself to the other instructors or the camp command. I think that two weeks later there was a mock-simulated attack, it was a mock attack on the camp where we were staying, planned by the Command of the camp. I think they deliberately didn't inform Rashid. Normally from what we knew, all the command staff would do the planning of the mock attack and the rest of the personnel in the camp are kept in the dark about the planned mock attack.

Rashid was in the trenches with us, the MK trainees. But from my understanding, it was within a very short period of time that I think the command staff recognised that Rashid criticised the way the camp was run by the Command staff. Their attitude was this comrade has just come to the camp and was critical without taking time to get to know the situation on the ground. But they recognised he was very bright. and I think that's what Joe probably realised too – but I don't know who suggested that he be part of Special Ops.

You knew Rashid before he went into exile. What was he like then?

Rashid had come back after studying at Salisbury Island/Westville university in Durban. I didn't know anything about him. That was '75. As I said, Yunus Mohammed phoned me; he, Pravin (Gordhan) and Goolam (Aboobaker) were our Durban contacts as the Human Rights Committee. We made contact with Rashid through them. I took him to the (Indres, Prema and family) Naidoo's and that's how our friendship and comradeship developed. He was very active with us in the Human Rights Committee. And then he left in mid '76.

I remember that when he was picked up by the Security Branch, they beat him up and told him not to associate with the Naidoo's and Timol's. The following evening I picked him up to take him to the Naidoo's and he told me what happened. He said his father used to be a member of the Congress and used to have a lot of literature on it. And I think just after the Soweto uprising, he went to Europe and I heard that he was in London and met Indres and his wife Shahida. But I was completely out of contact with him. Then I met him in the camp in Angola around May, June 1978. Ivan (Pillay) also came for a short training course at the Funda camp when I was training. Marius Schoon also came there for training.

For how long were you in the camp in Angola?

From April to July 1978.

Why were you taken from the camp in Angola to Maputo?

You see, here again, you know things work in another way. When I left the country, I had to make contact with comrade Mabizela in Mbabane. I went to Manzini instead of Mbabane. In Manzini I went to a school; it was on a public holiday and found my way to the residences of a teacher; there were a number of people in the house, they saw how I was dressed and asked if I was a refugee from South Africa.

They phoned Stanley Mabizela in Mbabane who then came to pick me up. But obviously he had to be careful. So, we got to some flat and he tells me to wait

in the car, then he comes out and he says okay you can go in - and who's in the flat? It's Indres! He had left a year earlier. So, Indres is surprised to see me and mentions he was going to make contact with me to set up underground political cells, but now I'm out of the country.

So then, I left Swaziland for Maputo with a group of comrades including a Dr Pule and we jumped over the fence into Mozambique. Later I went sent to Angola for military training and thereafter to the GDR as part of a group of four comrades on specialist training in intelligence and security. After training, back in Luanda, Comrade Pule, who was the Head of Intelligence, recruited me to join the ANC Intelligence and Security Department and in late November 1978 I was deployed to Maputo.

How long did you spend in the GDR on your training?

We were there for about five months. When my group came back to Luanda, I met Ronnie (Kasrils) for the first time. And Ronnie and Mac came to my room, it was November 15, 1978, it was Ronnie's birthday. So, a bottle was opened. And they couldn't get back because of the curfew at eleven o'clock. So, they had to stay over in the hotel.



Mohammed Timol after 1994

You spoke about Rashid because, of the Special Ops comrades, you know him the best. What about the others? What about Obadi?

He was a go-getter. He was a very likeable character. Obadi was a popular Commander of the Funda camp where I was. He wasn't based there, but he was in charge of the camp from Military Headquarters. He was easy to get along with. Very bright guy. I

didn't know much about him, but we socialised. He used to come to our flat, I used to stay with Sue at that time. Mokgabudi, that was his real surname.

Who else stands out for you from Special Ops?

I think T-man was a very solid guy. I didn't know his actual role. He was also my trainer in Angola. But then he was deployed with Special Ops. And I know he had a good relationship with Rashid and at one point in Lusaka he came to stay with Rashid and me.

And Faku? What do you know about him?

Faku was a bit hot-headed at the time. Very big guy. One would always tread with him carefully. I think Faku's the guy who floored Rashid. If you are not African and you're a senior person, you've got to also take into account the way some Africans might see your position, the cultural differences between comrades coming from different backgrounds.

What did you make of Chris Hani?

I think Chris had extremely good relationships. He knew how to manage people, particularly restless comrades. He was fantastic with politics and how he would articulate his positions; one would listen to him very carefully. Also, Joe Slovo, he would just have notes, but he would be so good at explaining. I said, Joe, I think you're brilliant. He said you've got to prepare yourself for your audience. Don't take it for granted that you go there and just talk. So, he had prepared for this specific group of comrades in a transit residence. Chris and Joe were so good.

But unlike Chris, Joe never used to do training. You know, I used to go very early on Saturday or Sunday mornings fishing. Chris used to pass me many times, early hours of the morning jogging, he used to keep himself physically very fit. And if you wanted to know which building Joe was in you had to smell the cigar smoke, he loved smoking cigars. In our block of flats, we had this old lift, and you know Joe's around when you smelt the cigar smoke...