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MK Special Operations Unit Project

Interviews

Rodney Wilkinson

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Let's start with a quick overview of your family life and a bit about your upbringing?

Before we do, I'd like to say that over the years, stories have been told and truths unconsciously bent to cover the gaps of recall, and sometimes maybe I remember the Koeberg story as told rather than the reality? And I can't be absolutely sure about the sequence of what I did in planting the limpet mines in the Koeberg action, but I'll try to recall as accurately as I can.

The bombing was a political statement against apartheid, pollution and a dirty war. The positive goal was to motivate others to resist and to succeed, it was armed propaganda. I didn't want to be identified as the person who carried it out. It came out inadvertently through somebody else. Now you are asking me for the full story. You say it's part of our history and needs to be told. If there are lessons to be illustrated through anecdotes and recordings of stories in detail, so be it. There may be valuable things here. But on the other hand, there may be better stories to encourage the youth of today? Anyway, I'll try to be of use.

So, I was born in '49 in Parktown North, Joburg. I was the second son of four of us. My father was born in Canada, also a soldier in the artillery in the Second World War and that influenced our childhood quite a lot because we would go on holiday with his old soldier friends. So, we learnt to shoot at a tender age and we learnt to drive. Life in Joburg for us was typically White middle class. I went to Parkhurst Primary, a government school, and learnt the 'K' (extremely derogatory term for Africans) word and when I used it at home, I got into such trouble that I didn't use it ever again - and it opened my eyes.

Was that from your father or mother?

Father was at work. My mother heard it and I was chastised. The 'K' word was used against a Zulu maid called Sophie. She stayed with us for thirteen years. I got to know her very well. She changed my life - the perceptions that White people had of Black people. And also, in those primary school days we often witnessed police pass raids where they would brutalise Black people on the street who didn't have their passes. We witnessed it on walking home from school. A mind opener – the brutality of the police. Also, as teenagers we would drink. We went to a drinking place behind the Parkview Cinema, in a little alley. The police raided. They chased the people from there whom they beat till they fell, except the little White boys. That influenced my take.

In '67 I went to do my military conscription. I was just out of school and confused. I wanted to shine as an individual but I was also traumatised by the brutality of authority. I was 17 years old, into the 3SA Infantry. I had 6 weeks of military training.

In England in the Middle Ages, they would chain gang young men into the navy or army. They would mess with their heads as in brain-washing, turn them into military machines and let them loose on the enemy to great effect. Same tradition.

I was ambitious and wanted to test my limits. I volunteered for parabats (parachute battalion) just to see how good I could be, as a challenge, with little consideration for the common good. If you combine the brain-washing and the individualistic ambitious of youth you get confusion. I failed the test for inclusion into the parabats because my ears had been under water too long and could not take the pressure changes. So, I was sent back to the PBI – the poor bloody infantry.

We did basic infantry training in Bloem (Bloemfontein, now Mangaung) and then posted to Lenasia where we guarded the arms factory and continued preparations for war.

In camp at Lens there were strict routines. One was fall in at 7am. Shiny boots, badges, buttons, barrels, fixed bayonets, in formation, for inspection. (ANC underground activist and political prisoner) Renfrew (Christie) was there. To avoid confrontation with higher ranks one tried to fall in the middle rank. One day, after listening to 'Hotel California' and 'If you're going to San Francisco', this skinny guy, Strydom lined up with brightly coloured flowers chalked all over his helmet. The brave fool went to detention barracks for a week or so. In the '60s, it was the time of Vietnam and flower power, peace and love, all that.

A bit more of a sense of your family life. Would you say that on the whole, your parents were liberals?

Yes.

Who would they have voted for in the elections in those days?

Helen Suzman (of the Progressive Party), I think.

And your father too, despite his army background?

He had been in the Communist Party in Canada as a student. But the war and the Soviet Union and Stalin had got to him.

As a student were you politically aware? Politically active?

At Wits we were hippies. Peacenicks. We sided with American students against the Vietnam War. But I wasn't involved in Nusas (National Union of South African Students) formally.

What were you studying?

Building Science, BSc. After three years it gave me a pain. I think I was getting rebellious. So, I got a job at an architect's office. I went to Wits from '68 till '70. Then I dropped out. I worked for Toyota for six months. Then I had a fencing accident, and went to England with some friends for eighteen months. I got a job there as a clerk in American Motors, I'd been a clerk at Toyota in Joburg, and they transferred me.

After returning to South Africa, I worked for six months and then went back to Wits to do a BA, with Sociology, Political Science and Anthropology. I just did one year of that in '73 and ran out of money. Then I became a fencing instructor and I did six months in Joburg with a British Olympic fellow and took over his circuit, he went back to England. I taught fencing until I went into the army again.

How did you get involved in fencing? You became a national champion?

I was nine when I got into fencing. A friend of my brother had Austrian friends who were fencers. Very good. And my brother went along, and when I turned nine, my ma said you go along too. They taught us free on condition that we came twice a week. So, by the time I was sixteen I was doing very well. And

by the time I was twenty-three I was winning. And eventually I won all three weapons – almost. Second in sable, but top in foil and epee.

Did you compete in international tournaments?

Yes, but we weren't allowed in the Olympics or any other major international events. Internationally, we did a student tour in '68. As university students we went to Western Europe and England. And then in '73 they did a Springbok tour of Argentina and I went on that. I gave up fencing in England in the mid '80s.

Do you think fencing contributed in any way, however small, to the way you managed the Koeberg operation?

It gives you confidence that you can be the best at something. When I was eleven, I won a Kayak race at Sea Scouts and that did worlds for my confidence.

But that could be said about most sport? There's nothing specific in what you say about fencing...

Yes. Fencing is a combat sport, not a team sport, and for every move there is a counter, and the attacker usually has an advantage because he takes the initiative on the place where you fight and the timing of the fight.

You know, all dagga smokers have to smuggle, and it was sort of a cult thing, we had to learn to hide the dagga and smoke without getting caught. So maybe that's relevant.

But there are so many dagga smokers and they don't turn to sabotage? Maybe your fencing acumen might have helped more?

It did. All these things help. It becomes a personal competitive provocation in fencing, in avoiding being caught with dagga.

Any sport gives skills and those skills overlap between sports. Fencing is not unique in that regard. But it may have helped me when I did the Koeberg operation by giving me a sense of relaxation and not to have too much of a panic reaction. Also by being fit; paying careful attention to detail in preparation; reading a situation and adapting your actions accordingly; focusing your opponent's attention elsewhere and giving you a sense of camouflage and hiding, because in the military you have to consider shape, shine, shadow, silhouette, symmetry, colour, movement. You also develop a feel for rhythm; good timing; and in this context body language.

Okay. So, you went back to the army?

In '76 they caught me again. I'd been AWOL (absent without official leave) and address-less since about '70 and never corresponded with them. In '76 my father got a phone call from a guy, claiming to be my friend, wanting my number. So, my father took him at his word and gave him my number. It was the sergeant in the Transvaal Scottish, a Sgt. Kemp. He phoned me and said either you pitch up on Thursday at Park station for a three-month camp or you go to jail.

So, I asked my father what should I do, should I run away or hide or go to jail or...He said 'go to the army, young man'. So, I did, but I went with a bad spirit and wanting to sabotage it from inside, which I did to an extent.

In '76 while in re-training I got a phone call from my girlfriend, Althea Gregoroski, saying she was pregnant. She lives now in Noordhoek and the child, Kyla Greenwood, is living in Bournemouth, England. She's got a daughter, Leila.

So, I applied for leave to go and marry her and they said I had 48 hours to go from Bloem to East London, get married and be back. So, I went to East London and ten days later I came back.

Because I'd been a Springbok in fencing before, they'd given me two stripes – which they promptly tore off, because of my being AWOL. The lieutenant overheard me laughing about it with my mates. So, I was sort of sidelined from then on, which suited me just fine. Except it halves your pay.

So what do you do in the army?

The conscription army consists of training and active service. We were later taken in trucks to Cunene. The night before we crossed into Angola, we stayed near the Cunene dam and crossed over early the next morning. The feeling of going into a hostile country with a rifle between your knees, illegally, with no recourse to authority or law was unforgettable and unnerving.

I was trained as an infantry signaller in '67. In early '76, after retraining, we manned a radio base on the Cunene River just inside Angola and the forward observation guys were on the radio to our little section at our base. Battalion headquarters was in Namibia. So, we'd get messages from the forward base and we'd decode them and recode them and send them back to battalion headquarters who would then give us a reply and we'd decode and recode it and send it on. We were the middlemen. We could mess with the messages,

slow them down. The conscripts, especially older ones – their hearts aren't in the job, we called it Naafi (no ambition and fuck all interest).

For example, one day the message came 'we've spotted a helicopter, it's got no markings, must we shoot it down?'. So, we decode the message and send it back to battalion headquarters and half an hour later they respond "shoot it down, shoot it down". But after we've decoded and recoded that one, the helicopter is well away. In the Land Rover we could listen to Radio Moscow and Radio Freedom all night.

Blue stone (which it is said was put by the South African Defence Force into food and drink to repress the sexual urges of the recruits) had ceased to have any effect. Other petty acts of defiance were hunting for pot, cutting telephone wires, a huge birthday bonfire and shots in the bush causing alarm in the camp. Whenever I liked I could wander back to the main camp and talk to my mates and drink around a braai fire.

I was told that you and some friends stole an armoured vehicle to go to have an alcohol binge somewhere and overturned it? Not that you used it to go AWOL. You know, that you went on a joy-ride, sort-of...

Where do you go for a binge in that faraway place on the border? If there were local villages with drinking dives, they were unknown to us, and they would have been very dangerous as we were not popular. One would expect to leave in a body bag.

We got tired waiting for our transport to take us for our leave period. So, twelve of us left the tented camp near Grootfontein in a stolen Unimog, a four-wheel drive troop carrier, a softy top Mercedes Benz, it was not armored, and we filled it with crates of beer. The others all got out at Windhoek airport. They were going to fly home. I decided to take the truck and drive it till it ran out of fuel and then hitch-hike. But as I drove at about midnight, I fell asleep at the wheel and turned this thing over, right upside down, head over heels, over a culvert. I injured myself severely, I had a hole in my forehead about an inch deep.

I broke my skull and I was pinned underneath the vehicle, Upside down, with the steering wheel in my chest and feet up in the peddle well, hot oil pouring out of the engine onto me, but I managed to wear the ground away with my shoulders and got out before it possibly exploded. It didn't explode. I walked till dawn and found a farmhouse. I was covered in blood. The farmer called the cops, and made me sit outside until they arrived. He gave me coffee. We were not the first – judging by the reaction of the farmer, it had happened before, and he was hundreds of kilometers south of the action.

The police took me to a clinic near Then the cops drove me to the Unimog which had been righted, but was a bad wreck. Then to hospital in Windhoek where I was stitched up. About a month later they flew me to One Military Hospital in Pretoria and made me sign a document saying I wouldn't sue them for my injuries. They let me go. They could've taken action against me, instead they asked me to give them an undertaking not to take legal action against them.

All vehicles that crossed were unmarked, no numbers, not even on the engines, because they were used for occupation and that invasion was denied, but had been exposed in the press. That is why all troops were ordered out of Angola by 27 March of that year, if my memory serves me right.

They were more concerned about being exposed for being in Angola than tackling us for being AWOL and spilling secrets in a court process.



Rodney Wilkinson, late '70s, early '80s, Supplied

When do you end up in the Western Cape and why?

My girlfriend, Althea, and I lived together in '73 when we were students at Wits. In '74 we moved to Cape Town and she went to UCT. I got a job as a draughtsman for an architect, Stegman. Then in '75 I went back to Joburg to be taught to coach fencing and came back after I had been through all the shit in the army to start a new fencing circuit. After the army, the circuit in Joburg was gone so I came to Cape Town to create a new circuit. But our marriage was rocky, and it was a year and a half maybe before she went home to her parents

Then I bumped into a guy in Cape Town I had met in the army and he tells me about Rob Sacco, who had this farm near Paarl and they were growing stuff organically and they had cows and pigs. So, Althea, little Kayla and I went and stayed in this commune.

We later went back to a house in Salt River, Cape Town.

One of my fencing pupils, Dennis Penaluna, in a pub, claimed to be a Communist, and he thought that the way to provoke the revolution was to

behave like the oppressor, and suggested I contact his friend who was an engineer at Koeberg for a job.

I got the job. I worked there for 18 months as part of the permanent staff of Koeberg Civil Contractors, designing and drawing shuttering for concrete. Most of the bosses were French engineers.

In the prefab site office where we worked, was a library of drawings of the concrete shapes to be moulded by the shuttering. There was a catalogue to identify the detailed drawing required. Each room had a description of the function of the room. A fat catalogue, A4 and 40 millimetres thick. That was what I eventually got to Mac (Maharaj, senior ANC leader and former Robber Island prisoner).

Why did you steal it?

I thought it could be useful to some A-team from the Soviet Union if they wanted to do something to Koeberg.

Why the Soviet Union?

The USSR was backing the ANC.

Did Heather (Gray, Wilkinson's then partner) nudge you to take those documents?

No. She had nudged us both to go to the ANC because we were getting nowhere with our own sabotage plans and were looking for help.

I was increasingly anti-nuclear because I was learning more about it. And I shared that with Heather and the others. And they all agreed and we all thought we could try and do something to sabotage it. Couldn't work out what. So, Heather came up with the idea, let's go to the ANC. That was the most feasible thing we could do.

So when and how do you meet Heather?

She was a friend of Althea's sister. They lived in a commune in Gardens and I moved in there after Althea and Kyla went back to Althea's family.

I came home one evening to the house in Salt River from Koeberg and suddenly despaired, and gave up trying to be an activist with Althea. She was a Ma and I was not there, in that space. My job was something else, not familial, a most terrible shock. I was on a social mission and Althea was on a parental

one. Kyla was one and a half years old. Three and a half years later Koeberg blew and Kyla paid without the opportunity to choose. This was a most unfair decision for her because it had consequences for her.

If you were anti-nuclear, why did you go to work at Koeberg?

I was pretty desperate and I was unable to look after my family on fencing and the commune wasn't making money.

Did you and your friends in the commune collectively discuss stealing the plans or doing something to sabotage Koeberg?

Doing something to sabotage it, we did discuss. I didn't tell anybody except Heather about stealing the plans and we didn't talk to anybody about trying to connect with the ANC. Except my brother, Gregory, who took the plans in the small Renault that passed through the Beit Bridge Border with us in a different car when we went to Zimbabwe. I don't think he knew what it was, but he had some idea that it was a sensitive document.

Several articles have it that Heather suggested to you that you take those documents from Koeberg.

They got the sequence wrong. We were in the doldrums. I was not yet Heather's lover when the theft occurred or maybe just, but the idea of going to the ANC she had mooted. Heather didn't know about the plans until after they were stolen. It was a spur of the moment initiative. Remember we are talking about the first phase. They were *klaar* (finished), stolen when Heather came on board. She had very little idea of the circumstances or environment at Koeberg. She was just very supportive and encouraging of the project. She didn't need to know and could not know the details. She was not yet a chosen team member of the minuscule unit which came into existence after the meeting with Mac.

So, who were some of the people you spoke with about possibly sabotaging Koeberg?

Heather's brother and his girlfriend, Roger Gray and Gayle Gray, Rodney Bishop and his girlfriend Carol. Rodney was a civil engineer friend of Rob Sacco too in the commune.

So, this commune had mainly progressive people in it, anti-apartheid, anti-nuclear?

Yes.

You get the plans and, according to what you've said in the public domain, 'they came in a blue book about four centimetres thick, which was in our office. I asked the photocopy man to make me a copy of the book and he did.' That correct?

Yes.

Why would he photocopy it? He could have got into trouble?

I did say to him they won't like it if they know. He was a friend. I got on with him. He was a Black guy. I can't just now recall his name. He put it on my desk in an envelope the next day.

Do you think he worked out when the operation took place that the plans he photocopied were used for that?

It took two and a half years between the time he photocopied the plans and the operation.

Was he still employed there, do you think, when you went there the second time?

I've no idea. I was working for a different company at Koeberg.

Koeberg is such a sensitive plant – did it have the necessary security precautions, do you think? For example, how could the guy photocopy the plans without being detected?

Physical security is at best a deterrent. They try to look as if they're doing their job but it is an almost impossible one to do. It's day in and day out. They can't anticipate when or where an attack will come. Not even what form it'll take. All the chips are on the side of the attacker who chooses how, what, when, and where. The why and who should at least be intelligence driven.

Counter intelligence should be anticipating and understanding the foe's ambitions. Knowing identities, who to watch, and not knock off time and month-end bonus – but who gives a damn?

The problem with nuclear is humans.

They also allowed you into Koeberg without doing a check on you. There's your rebelliousness in the army, you live in a commune,

people say you came across as 'hippie-ish'. They could have been cautious about you?...

They didn't do any vetting, they did nothing. The fact that I'd worked there before maybe was the reason they took me so readily the second time, but actually none of that was even noticed.

I don't think there was any intelligence done on who the multiple subcontractors employed. Not even by the subcontractor themselves.

The investigators later blamed the main contractors for the sabotage. Does that imply that main contractors were not trustworthy? Not vetted?

Why did you take the plans to Zimbabwe in particular?

It was 1980 – the year of the first democratic elections in Zimbabwe. So, I wanted to get to the other side of the revolution that was coming south down Africa, to learn an African language and to create a base in a peaceful country. But things didn't work out like that.

Heather's previous boyfriend, Mike, had friends in Harare who were ANC, but we didn't know that. He turned Heather on to the ANC. I'd been warned, don't go near the ANC, it's riddled with spies. That was my brother, Justine's, warning to me.

You spoke to your brother before you left?

No, that was years before. He'd told me don't go near the ANC.

You were wary of going to the ANC, so Heather's former partner connects you to somebody in Zimbabwe who could reach the ANC?

Yes. They knew the Brickhills (Jeremy, a Zimbabwean and Joan, a South African). Jackie, the daughter of a lawyer in Harare, lived on a little farm outside Harare and she had a guest called Desi Angelis. She was ANC. But we didn't know that. I talked to Desi for about six weeks before I let on that I had this book of plans on Koeberg and she said take it straight to Jeremy. So, that's what we did.

And then he disappeared with it for about four months and the start-up date for Koeberg was getting closer, and I thought that at least they'd speak to me if something was going to happen. So, I raised the alarm with Jeremy to say if they're going to do something it has to happen now because that start-up date was, I think, in October of '82.

And so, Mac came. And he suggested I do the operation. And then nothing happened. So, I raised the alarm again and then Farouk (Mohammed Timol, ANC Military Intelligence) came.

Weren't you irritated, maybe frustrated that the ANC was taking so long to decide on what to do about Koeberg? The sense you had that maybe they didn't trust you, that they might be thinking that you're an apartheid spy?

I didn't suspect at first that they might be thinking I'm a spy. But it makes so much sense. But also, I think I was prepared enough to know this is a damn serious thing that we were doing and it could lead to people being killed so maybe it can't be rushed. And if they did think I was a spy, what the hell?

Is it correct that you established that nuclear fuel had been moved into the plant ready for loading into the reactors and this was making you anxious to get the ANC going?

No. I observed the fuel being delivered to the site but that was when I was back there in late '82. I saw it myself. It wasn't hearsay.

What worried me was Heather and I getting caught, of course. Killing people by accident. We tried not to kill anybody. Civilians shouldn't die, they are not the military or police. But this had been thoroughly discussed with the ANC.

If somebody had died, would you have felt that the operation should rather not have taken place?

No. Sometimes there are casualties that were not intended. That was the ANC position. But it was a horrible risk but we managed to avoid it.

I was told that when you first got to Zimbabwe you were asked to take the Koeberg plans to somebody's house but they were not in? What happened there?

It was Desi Angelis. She said take it to Jeremy, but I already knew him by that time. She never let on to me then that she was a part of the ANC so I just took it that she was giving me good advice. So, we went to Jeremy's house in the dead of night, knocked on his door and nothing happened. The doors were locked, lights were off. So, we found a toilet window open, and we threw the document through it.

Was he expecting you to bring the document?

He didn't know about the plans. We probably phoned him the next day or something.

How many times did Mac speak to you in Zimbabwe?

Sometime in the winter of '81, Jeremy came to me saying I must come to his house for a meeting. Mac arrived and we sat under the jacaranda on the front lawn and Jeremy went inside so he would not be privy to what was discussed. He later brought us tea.

I thought somebody in the ANC with experience would carry out the operation but Mac asked if I would try to do it. I said I'll think about it. That was the only meeting with Mac until he visited us in Ladbroke Grove, London after the bombing. After the tea date, everything went quiet until I raised the alarm with Jeremy in February '82 and Farouk came.

Did you expect Mac to ask you to do it? Or did you think Mac would ask you for advice and then take it to some ANC structure to do it?

Yes. I didn't expect to do it. A Soviet Union structure maybe.

I'd given Jeremy the book (plans), who gave it to Mac. Mac and others had sent it all around the world to have it checked. When I raised the alarm with Jeremy, they hadn't got positive feedback yet that could say it was not the genuine article, he came to me and said would you try to do it – I think also because they could not trust a little White boy coming with a thing like that.

Were you okay to do it? Or a bit shaken?

Yes, shaken. Mac was very thorough in his interview. He described how different people in the ANC are good at different things. Some are good at singing or drawing posters or writing and some people at underground activities. He basically said 'do what you feel good with because if you aren't really into it, you can fuck it up'. He was good in that way. So, I just had to think about it.

Weren't you afraid? I mean you didn't have a huge history of activism? And it meant joining the armed struggle?

Absolutely. I was shaken. I spoke with Mac alone. He said 'for your own sanity you're going to have to talk to somebody, but it must only be one person and it's a person of your choice'. So, it was obviously Heather. And she was keen. She was solid but earlier I had had my doubts about the ANC.

How long does it take you then to decide, okay, I'll do it?

Well, I couldn't say I'll do it, I'd said I'll try. It took about a month for me to decide to try do it after Mac suggested that. But Jeremy had started with the political training programme long before that. They had a lengthy book list of ANC writings and other stuff, including related to (Kim) Philby (British citizen who was a spy for the Soviet Union). So that was very thorough training. We'd read a book and then discuss it over a weekend with Jeremy. He was with ZAPU (Zimbabwe African People's Union).

Who did the ANC take the Koeberg document to, to verify their authenticity?

I don't know exactly, but Mac does. I think he told me the East and West Germans.

It's said it was Moscow, East Germany and some nuclear scientists in the West...Were you aware at the time that you agreed to try to do the job, that Renfrew Christie had been detained?

Yes.

Did you have any contact with Renfrew Christie at all?

No, I knew him from the army and saw him around at Wits.

What work did you and Heather do in Zimbabwe?

I had a job as a draughtsman in an engineering company. Heather was teaching speech therapy.

I visited Zimbabwe in early '80s for the official elections result announcement. I was fascinated by the politics of the time. I then came back to South Africa and waited for Heather to finish her university studies at the end of 1980. Then we went to Zim in January '81. By March '81, I'd handed over the book to Jeremy.

After Farouk came to see me in March '82. He said I must go to Swaziland on the first Saturday in April and meet Rashid. He gave me R1000. I was to fly to Swaziland and book into the Ezulwini Sun hotel and I'd be contacted.

Rashid came to my hotel room. He told me afterwards that he thought he was walking into a trap.

Rashid was different from Mac, much more cautious and not so bubbly but he helped a hell of a lot. The job couldn't have happened without him.

We started off with the security issues; the morale issues; and the need for a 'legend', a cover, going through extensively how to relate with family and friends. First of all, excuses of why we were going back to South Africa. I used the excuse that I couldn't pay maintenance for my daughter with Zim currency. There was a clamp down on exporting of currency, which convinced most people.

I don't think it convinced Heather's brother and Gayle because they just shut up completely. I think they guessed we had a political agenda. Before, when I was first at Koeberg, I'd been speaking too much to too many people, including people at work, which I now thought could be my undoing.

Following the meeting with Rashid I worked a month's notice in May at my job in Zim.

By the middle of June '82 I was back in Cape Town. The second meeting with Rashid, the first weekend in July, I reported that I was due to start work at Koeberg and that so far, the legend and cover we had discussed at the previous meeting was holding up.

Heather joined me in early July, before I started work at Koeberg

What more can you say about your first meeting with Rashid?

We drink a bottle of whisky and talked the whole of Saturday afternoon and then again on Sunday.



Rodney Wilkinson passport photo at the time of the operation, Supplied

Why do you think the ANC asked you to do the operation yourself? And why did you agree to do it?

I think because the ANC was suspicious of me, that was primarily the reason. Secondly, I had potential access to Koeberg, which they may not have had; if I could get a job back there, the operation was half done. Also, because I'm White, I wasn't going to get subjected to the scrutiny a Black might.

But maybe also because you were not known to the police as a political activist?

That's right. I hadn't been a demonstrator at Wits – though Heather was arrested for demonstrating at UCT.

Why did I agree to do the job, I honestly don't know really. I think I agreed to try to do it because, well, we'd been trying to think of ways of doing something for years and then I'd been also brutalised by the army and I changed from being a pacifist to accepting the need for sabotage. I also think that period of political training also contributed.

How many times did you meet Rashid?

I think seven, always out of the country. It was April, July, August, September, October, November and December.

How would you connect with him while you were inside the country? You had a code system?

I only once sent a telegram to him in Mozambique. I signed it as Venter and addressed it to Rashid as Abie. I pretended to be talking about horse races because we'd numbered all the targets. So, I was saying, for example, number three isn't a winner, I'm going to bet on thirteen instead.

Did you always go to the same Ezulwini Sun Hotel in Swaziland?

No, we moved around a bit. At each meeting we decided where and when will the next meeting be and the fall-back position, plan B as it were.

I used to fly in to see him. The ANC paid R1000 for this. There was one occasion that I went by bus. They couldn't fly because of the weather.

From the moment you decided you're going to do the operation, did you have any doubts? Any fears?

Every day, really every day.

I never knew until the very last pin was pulled that it was going to happen. I had told the ANC I'll try, but I was never sure it would happen till that day.

I got the feeling sometimes that I was doing a parallel operation with the ANC also having somebody else there. I did see ANC slogans sometimes painted on walls. Also, in October 1982 there was a fire in the transformer room and OR claimed responsibility.

Do you have any evidence about a parallel ANC operation on Koeberg?

When OR says the ANC caused the fire and I know it's not me, it makes you wonder at first. Maybe it was paranoia too. It was not a policy of Special Ops to share information generally because if one op is exposed it could jeopardise the other.

You asked me about my doubts – well, another was this feeling that I'd been set up maybe, that there was a parallel operation or you are being followed. You go a bit crazy, which I did, and driving to and from work there was a lot of time to think.

Once you come into the country what happens?

I went back to the employment agent who I'd used before. It was economically a down-time and so there was not a lot of building going on and the agent said there's a possibility of Caltex Refinery or Koeberg. I said not Koeberg, I've been there. I said that just for a cover. So, he said phone me next week. I phoned and he said it's got to be Koeberg, there's nothing else.

The previous time I'd been there they hadn't let me take a car into the site, but they'd allow me to bring a motorbike in. I thought the same would apply. I went looking for motorbikes. I also found us a house in Claremont.

I had one more meeting with Rashid before I started the job. I told him I'd got it and I was starting on 19 July. I also told him I left Zim on 6 June. The 5th was Heather's birthday and we had a big celebration. That was quite dodgy because they were almost celebrating too much. My younger brother, Greg, may have picked up something at that party that I was on a job. Besides being a party for Heathers' birthday, it was a send-off for me. A big send-off was not really in line with the legend.

Did your brother say anything to you?

No. This was Greg, my younger brother, not Justin, who works for NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) in the US, who told me years earlier to keep away from the ANC.

Anyway, Heather's brother-in-law left to go to England and he left us his car, a little yellow Renault. So, I didn't get a bike. I applied for a gate pass to take my car in. The situation had changed vastly from when I was first there. I got the permit.

We also inherited a dog - Gaby, the digger.

I was into a very serious training stretch from the guy I was taking over from who taught me how the plant worked. I knew about the concrete, but now all the piping was in, and you could work out and ask about technical operations. That was very interesting. I was more able to select targets. Most of the focus was on trying to narrow down the targets.

Rashid, at the third meeting, said I could have six bombs, thus six targets. And then he narrowed that down to four a few months later. Maybe it had to do with the availability.

At all meetings with Rashid, I bounced everything off him and he discussed and advised, including on security and how we were coping, whether Heather and I were falling apart.

Did it feel like that was happening to you and Heather?

Sometimes, yes.

In what way?

You asked me if I wondered if I was doing the right thing – and I did every day. I started to hallucinate almost suspecting I was being followed. There was also this parallel operation which I was sometimes convinced was there. And I would like to know from Rashid if he was having me watched.

What makes you think you were being watched?

Thinking about it years later, watching *The Secret Safari* (see details later in the interview) about the Africa Hinterland project, that car that came crashing into the tree next to the safari truck, that must have been set up on purpose. A policeman at the border had boarded the truck with a sniffer dog while the passengers were processing their passports, and put his hand into the crack between the seat cushions, and asked how one removed the bar that was holding the seat cushions down, as if he knew that the compartments were underneath. Just that very moment a car coming crashing into the tree next to the truck. Neither of those things had ever happened before so I think the ANC had somebody following the truck to keep an eye on things. We also had a comrade on the truck, which the team didn't know about, who was keeping an eye on the passengers and the team.

Why have you never asked Rashid?

We have seen little of each other since 1990 and it never came up. I'd like to ask him.

So how do you get to know about the DLB (Dead Letter Box) for the limpet mines for your Koeberg operation, where you must find it and so on?

At the last meeting with Rashid, he gave me a map, a sketch, of where it would be, between Richmond and Middelburg, south of Colesberg. At milestone 25 of that road, there's a large, round reservoir on the left side coming from the west and a willow tree over the road from the dam – under the willow tree on the far side from the road a metre down are the bombs. I memorised it and then ate the map.

We left Cape Town on a Friday and got there early in the morning just when it was getting light. We put the limpet mines on the back floor in wine boxes so they wouldn't be just on display. If somebody stopped us and looked into the car, they'd just see old wine boxes on their sides – except that the limpet mines didn't fit very well.

When we got to Cape Town, we cleaned them. There was lot of wrapping and grease and muck. They were wrapped in plastic and tin foil. Two limpets had been in the ground longer than the other two. They were slightly different models and the ones lower down were wetter inside.

Early one morning, I hid them in the sand dunes in plastic bags between Melkbos and Blouberg, it was a deserted beach with Port Jackson willows growing. I had to leave a marker, a piece of yellow plastic. Later, I collected them one by one each day to take them into Koeberg.

But elsewhere you said that you hid the devices in the holes conveniently dug by your dog, Gabby.

That was all the packing and leftovers. The limpet mines come with a box of fuses, about ten different sizes. We only needed one. We didn't need the boxes or the wrapping. I kept magnet plates on the bombs to keep the magnets strong.

What role did Heather play in the operation?

She played a very vital role. Anyway, it was her initial idea of going to the ANC. But she kept my morale up, kept me sane. She was in solidarity. She was good at listening and a bouncing board. She helped with the legend and cover and she was like a gatekeeper. Most of all she was a loyal lover.

She had a few nasty shocks. Like when I got arrested drinking. I drank a bottle of Vodka while at Koeberg. I was testing the security and drinking vodka and I went out of my area into the control room, which means you've got to go out of the nuclear island into the Turbine Hall and up a flight of steps to get there. I'd gone in there but my badge has code coloured background stripes - which describes to the guards what area you're allowed into. The security there caught me. He searched my bag, found the liquor, took me to the guardhouse at the entrance gate where the chief guy knew me from the squash club. He kept me waiting a long time. So, I'd phoned Heather and said I'd been arrested but it was not serious and I'd be home late.

When you got back what was her response?

She was angry.

But did you take the vodka in as part of your preparations?

Sort of, yes. I pushed my luck too far.

So why would she get angry? You got caught?

Because she got such a fright and it was maybe a stupid thing to do.

It was not abnormal for people to take liquor in. There were regular Friday afternoon drinks at the office. Anyway, I went in many times with a wine bottle to test the rate and thoroughness of security at the vehicle gate.

I hadn't seen a limpet mine before. Rashid had described it as the size of the whiskey we were at. We were going to practise using one, one day. I'd gone to Swaziland by bus that time and fell asleep before the practise. I'd been on the bus through the night and then we'd drunk a bottle of whiskey. Rashid couldn't do it the following day, so it had never happened. But he described clearly to me how to use it. It's not very difficult. But I know it could be dangerous.

In the firing mechanism which screws into end of the bomb, there is a slot into which one pushes the aluminium chip, when the pin is pulled, a spring-loaded blade engages the chip and gradually cuts through it, releasing the spring which then drives a firing pin into the percussion cap detonator. The thicker the chip, the longer it takes to cut through. At Koeberg, I chose the thickest chips for twenty-four hours to gain time for the escape. If the chip or the blade do not hold the spring, bang!...

If you had been given more limpet mines, would you have been able to do more damage to Koeberg or could you do only four targets?

Maybe for my own safety Rashid didn't give me more. We were still looking at lists of targets so by the time it got to a late stage, I was geared up for four. It was just fine. I think if I'd had six, I would've had to operate differently and it would've taken me longer. The pressure was to keep getting back to the office while planting the limpets to be seen to be there.

How did you decide on what to target at Koeberg?

We wanted there to be damage but also make the political statement, that the ANC could get into the very heart of Koeberg. The reactors had to be the political targets. If we were to blow only one reactor, they could move the head from the other reactor and still start it up, so it had to be both reactors. That took care of the politics. The other two had to be damage-causing.

Rashid taught me that cables carry fire to both extremities, at both ends. So, that was the effective way. Close to the end I thought that one target could be electrical and two bombs for reactor 1, which was just about to start up, and one in reactor 2. But that didn't work properly. I chickened out anyway. They were putting extra security on reactor 1. So, I rather took them to the control room and the cables of the control room that handle the waste systems. This was the original agreed plan. In hindsight, I believe that was the better choice.

If I understand correctly, there were three possible targets that you identified. First, were the two reactor heads. The second, was a section of the containment building. And the third, was a concentration of electric cables under the main controls. Is that correct?

Yes.

How did you get the limpet mines into Koeberg and how did you carry out the operation?

Firstly, every time I touched a limpet after it was cleaned, I wore gloves.

I'd picked the bombs from the beach, and put them into the dashboard of the Renault. With one Phillips screw, I could loosen the panel underneath the cubbyhole and it was just the right size, and so I put it in the dashboard. I could've put them in the door panel but that would've made it more difficult to get them out. I took one bomb each on four separate days. The first was on Saturday, 11 December, this was the Saturday before the bombs exploded on

the 18th. The second limpet was put on the Monday, the 13th, the third on the Tuesday, the 14th, and the fourth on Thursday, the 16th. Of course, 16 December is MK day. The fourth one went into the basement on the 16th and on the 17th, the Friday, I put it on the target. Overall, it was a four-stage process – beach, basement, target and pulling the pins. The pins were pulled on the Friday.

One of the things I learnt about during training was that we go for conventional things in the ANC, mostly conservative. And if I was going to suggest an operation, I'd have to sell it. So, I did conventional things like staying above the law in other ways.

To hide a limpet in a car you find a panel because that was ideal, since when I got through the vehicle gate I could, while driving slowly to the office, with my left hand unscrew the dash, get it into the shoulder bag, and re-screw the dash panel, and carry on driving with my right hand. I think I discussed this with Rashid. And then get to the office before anybody else and lock the bag in my steel desk draw.

I went through the first car gate where they could search your car, but hardly ever did. They must have searched me maybe once in six months. Actually, maybe I could have gotten away if I put the limpets in my booth. Everybody was smuggling liquor anyway. But at the gate they had a sign saying no firearms, no liquor, no lah di dah. There were dogs and all that there. Anyway, I drive through the gate, stop and let them search if they want to, they just wave me on. They've got a mirror to stick under your car.

And about eleven o'clock when the guard shift was going to change, it's the last hour of their shift, and they are just looking at their watches, not paying much attention, it was the best time to go. The second gate was a pedestrian gate, where there was usually a guard or two with dogs and they hardly ever checked on you. So slack. I'd taken my sling bag out of the desk draw, I had two identical bags that I got from Cape Union Mart, which was a practical place in those days. And the limpet would be in the bag in the draw, the other bag I would use normally for taking my drawings to the site and marking them up.

So when I was going to move the bomb, I put the drawings in with the bomb in the bag and walked off to the neighbouring prefab building and would go to the loo, and I would get it out of the bag and into my belt. And I had two belts so that it wouldn't wobble as I walked casually through the gate, hands in my pockets, gazing at the ground.

On Saturday, the 11th, I took the first limpet into the site early in the morning, then to Reactor One, and I hid it under a big boron tank which you can see in

some of the photographs on Koeberg's website. It's boron infused water which they used to slow down the nuclear reaction, so in case of a spill they flood the reactor with boron, and that is why the tank is right next to the reactor. That was going to be the second target and there were a lot of convenient hiding places in and around it, so I hid the bomb in the reactor for later putting it right on the target, the head.

Before I took the limpets into Koeberg, in my garage at home, I had already put the splinter for the fuse into the firing pin. So all that was ready; and it had a magnetic plate on the bottom. As I said, I go to the toilet, prepare myself, and walk through the pedestrian gate, hands in my pockets to cover the bulge, bag on my shoulder, which they sometimes looked at. Then I walked 70 metres and went to the basement stairs. The reactors are built on rubber bearings so if there's an earthquake the ground can shake independently of the reactor. And to do that, they build two metre square blocks of concrete and then on top of that is the rubber bearing, about eight inches of rubber and then the concrete slab of the reactor base on top of that. And there's a little skirt around the rubber, I think, to keep the dust out.

So, I hid the bomb under that skirt in that gap. And every one of those blocks had a number, a grid number on it like B7 or Z3. I just had to remember those grid numbers so I could find the limpets again.

And when I brought the last bomb in, I didn't take it down underneath the Reactor. I just walked straight into Reactor 1, there was an extra guard there and the security had been tightened so that you had to go to a change room to change into paper overalls with overshoes and a silly hat. You got searched and you weren't even allowed to take a box of matches or a sandwich or anything because it was a clean area and they don't like dust in there because you could then inhale it and it'll turn you into a radiation source.

So, the two bombs went into the clean area through a hole between the dusty area and the clean area.

There was a tunnel going from the unclean area to the clean area and it had some pipes that ran along the wall. They'd put a diaphragm of plywood and plastic to stop the dust going down the tunnel, but they'd notched out the plywood to let the pipes through. And between the pipes there was a gap so the bomb fitted between the pipes and I could drop the bomb in that gap, go through the change room, and come around from the other side and get it.

So that first one went into Reactor 1 and I hid it in a tank. And then I went and got the second one, which went under the main control room. Then the third

one into the second Reactor head and the fourth one under the other control room.

Three of the targets were outside the clean area but that second bomb had to go into the clean area through the pipe tunnel and then it had to come out again to get to that landing. I didn't put it back through the hole because they didn't search you on the way out, only on the way in. So, I just walked clean out through them and I said I'd be back in half an hour, so they didn't sign me out.

When I took the first one, I'd hidden it under that boron tank and then when I was taking a second one, I chickened out; that was on the Monday when they just change the shifts and change the security arrangements; we had new cards. And this guy that made me so scared, I hadn't seen him before, and that's why I chickened out and went back to the airlock and put that bomb under that landing. That landing was about the height of a table or a bit higher and it had this mass of cables underneath it, and I crawled in under and put it in among the cables. I left the pin in and I'd come back on the Friday and pulled them out. So, those were the first two that I did, and they didn't go into the rubber bearings underneath the reactor, the other two did.

I went back to the office, did some work and went back in the afternoon, pulled out all the pins, visited them all, then went back to the office, did some work, had a few drinks with the pallies, and said I was off.

The bombs were supposed to go off on a Saturday so that the likelihood of hurting anybody would be minimal.

You told a journalist that when you spotted that guard watching you with apparent suspicion, 'my legs were like jelly and I could feel beads of perspiration on my face'...

I wanted, as I said, to put two bombs in Reactor 1, and as I was taking the second one in, I saw this guard at the entrance to Reactor 1, he seemed to be watching me with some suspicion. That was my most tense moment. I sort of froze and I turned away from that option and put the limpet mine instead under the second control room where there was another concentration of cables. I had also been battling, as I just told you, to get the limpet mines into Reactor 1 and finally I got them to pass through the airlock and collect it on the other side. This was what had been challenging me for some time. In fact, I was having sleepless nights about it, but I finally found a solution.

And also, when I was pulling the pins on that Friday, you didn't know if you'd be alive the next second. The pins themselves are aluminium and they get cut

through the wire blade, like a cheese cutter, that is spring-driven and driving a firing pin. And if they didn't hold or had been tampered with, or were old - and they'd been wet, they could feasibly explode immediately.

Why did they change the security system on that Monday?

They were doing it every week as they got closer to the start up. Fewer and fewer people could get in. There was more security around.

Why did you go in on Saturday, the 11th, with that first limpet mine? Weren't there fewer people there and you could later be remembered to have been there?

There were always people around even on Saturdays doing various things. Saturdays were quieter but still many people around.

Still, I'm surprised that they didn't trace the operation to you, they could have checked who went there on a Saturday previous to that...

They didn't want to. That's what I believe. If they checked my military record or what I was saying about Koeberg, they could've worked it out. It's crazy, they didn't want to know because they would look so red-faced.

Also, at my first job at Koeberg I'd blown my mouth off a few times about what I thought about nuclear power and I suspected that when the bombs started to go off, they'd immediately pin it on me.

I understand the limpet mines exploded at 03:23, 08:40 and 11:24 on 18 December and at 02:53 on the 19th. Was it planned that way?

No. I know all the pins got pulled within an hour of each other and they should have gone off within an hour of each other. I don't know why they didn't. It's probably the quality of the aluminium and maybe the temperature as well.

Since the limpets went off so far apart – over about 23 hours - why didn't the security start looking for other bombs after the first went off?

That tells a story. When we went back there after 1994, one of the people in the control room told the story about how frustrated they were not knowing how many bombs were going to go off, and how the others went off while they were trying to look for them. Also, they were afraid that they might get hurt if a bomb went off near them.

The security people who didn't know the technicalities of the plant, the location of the fuel, didn't know the implications of the damage and must have feared the worst. I feel for them.

The attack did a lot of damage. It was so embarrassing to them that they never admitted that there were two bombs in the Reactors. They played down the damage but it was round the world news.

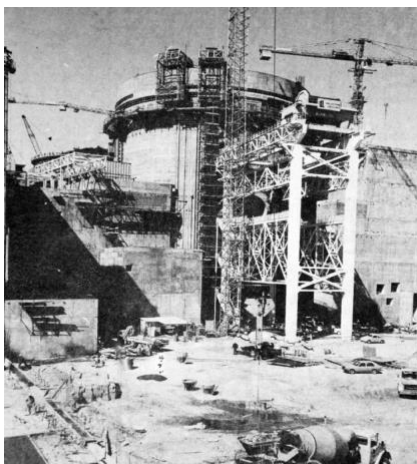
A funny thing is I don't think the apartheid police were interested that the ANC might have carried out the operation. They would've been so red-faced if they blamed us. They had to blame somebody else, and convincingly.

A SAPS chief investigator in an interview with Arthur Fraser all those years later, in '97, said it was impossible that the ANC did it, that our story was nonsense, that the ANC didn't have the know-how to so accurately target, and that they knew it was the French company, Framatome who did it. He said that they did so because there was a penalty clause in the contract which stated that for every day over completion date, a penalty of R1 million was to be paid by the contractor to the client, Eskom, unless it was not their fault such as an act of God, like weather or political unrest, etc.

It was about 18 months overdue by the time it blew up – R540,000,000 penalty payable minus justifiable delays.

He said the French company hired somebody and that somebody was very rich, would probably be French and have the know-how to choose those targets. Targets that had a political component such as political unrest as well as a damage component would prolong the contract.

A conjecture is that when PW flew into the site on the Monday, the 20th, in his presidential chopper, having heard OR claiming for a second time that ANC had hit Koeberg, he was determined to rubbish the claim and find another culprit. The builders were who he told the investigators to frame. They had the motive and capability. To admit that the ANC was responsible was not politically expedient for him in the climate of '82.



Koeberg being built, late '70s, early '80s

To what extent was your operation consistent with the plans you made with Rashid?

Mainly – but I didn't think that the security was going to be that bad. Every week they were tightening because they were getting closer to start up. I had to go through four security

checks for two of the bombs – first a car search at the gate, then walking past the security guard with a dog at a pedestrian gate, then a check at the cleaning area of the nuclear eyelet and finally at the entrance of the Reactor. But for two of the bombs, I had to go through two security checks.

They had watch towers with sentries on 24 hours duty.

I tried to get an extra limpet into the Reactor 1 containment as a political gesture, off my own bat, but our final plan at the last meeting was what happened in the end. I didn't think that the security was going to be that bad.

I understand there were some events that almost derailed the operation. In May 1982 four men entered the security zone, breaching security. What was their aim? In July 1982 a fire destroyed some electrical equipment. In August '82 two men entered the security zone and came within a few metres of the nuclear reactor before they were discovered and arrested. What do you know about these incidents? Who do you think was behind it?

It scared the shit out of me too. I don't have any idea what happened. Well, that fire that Oliver Tambo claimed was an ANC operation, Koeberg managers just laughed that off because it was a short circuit in the control box. But what they didn't was think, hey, maybe Koeberg was an ANC target.

Why did Tambo claim that the fire was an ANC operation? Wouldn't Slovo or Rashid have had to confirm this before Tambo claimed it in the public domain?

Tambo was told that there was going to be this operation but not the details. Not when or what. And that fire was tiny, it was nothing compared to the limpet mine bombings.

So, after you plant the limpet mines, what do you do?

Shauna Westcott had stayed with me that last week and she drove me to the airport. I gave her all my boots and my jackets and stuff and she disposed of them. She brought me a bicycle. Shauna didn't know what I was up to, even if she suspected there might be something political. I took the bicycle as hand luggage, taping the wheels to the sides of the frame. Could do those things in those days. Met my sister, Cathy, and her boyfriend at the other end, Johannesburg airport.

Heather had already gone to Zimbabwe.

Why take a bike to leave the country?

I discussed it at the last meeting with Rashid. I'd had many ideas about escaping. One would've been that we get friends to go to a town ahead of us to be able to phone back if there were roadblocks. That would prove to be very cumbersome and difficult, we realised. But Rashid had told me that on the south west corner of Swaziland the road passes very close to the fence and that's a popular crossing place, for them anyway. I'd not done a reconnaissance but I figured if I could jump the fence, I'd want some form of transport...So, that's where the bike came to my mind because it could go across country more easily than anything else.

I had to get some help anyway from my sister, Cathy, and her boyfriend, Adrian Turgel I'd phoned them two weeks before and said meet me at the airport at this time and I'd never done that before so they didn't ask questions either.

When they picked me up at Jan Smuts airport, my sister sort of burst into tears and said 'what have you done?'

I said I can't really tell you. So, she said 'did you kill anybody?' And so I said 'I don't think so'. And she says 'is it political or criminal?' So I said 'it's political.' So she felt a bit better.

Cathy and Adrian were going somewhere that night so I stayed in the back of the Kombi because we went straight from the airport to the place they were going to and not back to their house. They parked outside the place they went to and I just stayed there.

Later, they drove me to where I asked them to, near the South Africa-Swaziland border. In the back of the Kombi, I put on the wheels and took a test ride down a long hill and was satisfied with the bike. We got there 11ish in the morning. We didn't rush. It felt secure and relaxed. I couldn't see where the fence was because it turned out to be a silly little rusty barbed wire fence. Just looking like a farm fence. So, we drove past it. We got to Pongola, looked at the newspaper to see if anything had happened yet. Nothing. We had a bite. We went back to look for the fence. We passed an army roadblock that waved us through.

Eventually I pinpointed what I thought was where it must be on the map. We exchanged farewells and Adrian gave me his black silk tie. I left them and went parallel to the fence like a fool, down into a ravine and asked a little herd boy, where's Swaziland? – and he said he'll show me. So, we went back up this bloody ravine where I'd come down and he showed me this little fence.

Wasn't the boy bemused to see a White person there?

It was the middle of the day and I don't know what he thought. As it was a low fence it was easy for me to cross with the bike. I think they made the fence quite difficult after '82. I rode down a long path into a valley. There was a little stream a few kilometres inside, I was so relieved, it was so hot that I lay in this stream in all my clothes. And it was quite a busy path so people were laughing at me and I was laughing too.

Didn't they think it was odd, suspicious maybe, that you, a White person, was there?

They didn't give a shit, I think. They probably saw the odd cyclist-type there.

I rode up on the side of the hill and the hailstorm of all hailstorms hit. I hid under a tree. I was so relieved though. I felt bloody good. I had a backpack, some money, clothes, a hat and a tie and a South African passport.

Anyway, after about two hours I got to a dirt road. I had one of those racing bikes of the time, with the tiny tires. I rode for five feet on that stony road and the tires both went flat. I hitched a ride on the back of a pick-up and they took me to a little town. And they fixed my tyre and put me on a bus with my bike. In the evening I got back on the bike and found a farmhouse and asked the Afrikaner farmer if I can sleep on his stoep. And he said, sure. And then they wouldn't stop talking and I didn't want to talk to them. They were so kind, they didn't want me to sleep on the stoep, but I wanted to. So, I told them I had to leave very early and I didn't want to wake them up.

I didn't want to be in their company when the news broke of the Koeberg bombing. Of course, the bombs were supposed to go off on a Saturday so that the likelihood of hurting anybody would be low.

But why would they necessarily suspect you? What did you say you were doing there?

I thought I'd be suspected. I said I'm a tourist riding around. It wasn't really credible because if the police had checked, I didn't have the stamp in my passport.

As soon as it was light, I was gone. I went to Manzini. It was in the paper in Swaziland on the Sunday. Only two bombs had gone off. I still felt fantastic. But I was a bit worried that the other two hadn't gone off.

Rashid had said go to the Wimpy Bar in Mbabane at 11 on Sunday and wait there, you will be contacted. Boy, did I wait! I had to go to the Wimpy on the hour every hour. And if you're not there at 11, they'll come back at 12. Not there at 12 they'll come back at one. We had a plan B emergency phone number for Rashid, the back-up.

After several hours, I phoned him. I was pissed off because nobody pitched up and my dilemma was that I didn't have a stamp in my passport, so I hadn't arrived, so I couldn't leave in the conventional way. I maybe had to jump the next fence as well to get into Mozambique. And I heard that that wasn't so easy.

I phoned Rashid in Maputo. It made a sound like an engaged tone so I put the phone down and dialled again – but the same sound. I dialled again – same sound. The queues were getting longer and longer behind me. Eventually I get to the back of the queue again and then try again. And after the third time I've gone to the back of the queue I thought I'm going to listen to this damn noise and pretend that I'm talking – and then suddenly he came on the line!

What sounded like an engaged tone to me was actually a ring tone in Mozambique. And then because it was a phone, I didn't want to tell him I hadn't got a stamp in my passport and I can't leave. I had discussed with Rashid my escape plans but the final details were left to me. But eventually I had to say I couldn't fly to Maputo with my passport. He said get on to the plane in Manzini at five o'clock. I did. Maybe the guys who look at passports are lax or the ANC told them to let me pass.

Rashid met me at the Maputo airport. The Prime Minister of Nigeria had just landed when I did, so the place was jammed. Rashid was in the crowd and spotted me. He drove me to a flat overlooking the Norwegian Embassy.

On the Monday, 20 December, the news was out that there had been four explosions so far. Rashid brought me whisky and Soviet fish and debriefed me. It really was great, really nice. Nobody had been hurt, nobody got caught. It was world news.

During the following week I bumped into Albie Sachs in the lift who just smiled and winked at me in a knowing way. He didn't say a word. I stayed in that flat for two weeks. I didn't go out alone. Rashid came regularly and brought provisions.

A few days later Joe Slovo came to see me. It was quite funny. We drank whisky so I was feeling talkative and he said come with me, and got into his flashy big, white BMW. So, I said to him geez, who can afford a thing like this?

And he laughed and said it was stolen in Joburg two weeks ago. He congratulated me on the success of the operation. We went to see OR. It was like a big government house. We walked past some MK guards who greeted Joe with such affection. Tambo just hugged me and laughed and we cried. He said well done. I can't remember what else we talked about for the next 20 minutes.

They flew Heather in with Farouk's wife. She joined me on Christmas eve. We had dinner with Farouk and his wife and we went with them to a music concert.

I heard Heather was extremely anxious while she was in Harare waiting to connect with you in Maputo?

I think so but she was staying with Jeremy and Joan and they knew how to party. They were also reading the news.

I think Mac was sent to go and speak to Heather and calm her down and assure her that the ANC would assist you and her.

I can't remember that.

How long were you in Mozambique before you left for the UK?

We were there for about thirteen days. We arrived in the UK on New Year's Eve. Heather's sister, Diana, and her husband Eric met us.

And what about the ANC?

Well, the ANC wanted us to move on. Disappear into nowhere and get forgotten.

Why would the ANC not want to nurture you and make use of your services further?

They were going to. We were sent to London and Aziz offered me £1500 to get myself established and settled in a job. So I said to him that I'd rather have £150 a month and be taken on by the ANC and do other projects. So he agreed to that. Mac was not there at the time but later said it was a risk keeping me attached to the ANC. If I stayed in the structures someone was bound to ask who I was. If they found out, it would mean that the story would spread, which is exactly what happened.

Who paid for the airfare from Mozambique to London?

The ANC. First, we stayed with Heather's sister. Then we moved into a little flat in Ladbroke Grove and Mac came to visit us soon after. Mac said that by the Sunday morning when they heard nothing, some of his comrades had said Koeberg's not going to happen. And he said it will and it did, saying he had confidence in us. After that, he introduced us to Aziz.

We went to stay in Woodbridge near Ipswich because Heather had a cousin there. I got a job as a barman because I didn't have a work permit and Heather got a job as a locum teacher at several schools as a speech therapist. She had a British passport so she could work.

Did you feel at the time that you were getting enough support from the ANC?

I was keen to carry on with another project on smuggling weapons. The ANC was concerned that if somebody asked too many questions, then the story of our involvement in Koeberg would come out.

I didn't have any rights to live in the UK, so I had to marry after the local bobby came knocking at our door to tell me my tourist visa was about to expire. During '83 Heather got pregnant and the baby, David, died soon after birth. It was seriously traumatic and by the end of that all I wanted was to give her another baby. I married Heather in December '83 and after five years in the soggy little island of UK they gave me citizenship.

We became part of MK for no other reason than to beat apartheid. Maybe the ANC wanted to give us £1500 and say bye-bye. That's what it seemed Aziz initially wanted to do. That was a lot of money in those days. I believe ANC people were concerned about us.

Did you or others in the ANC get any information that the security police had identified you as having carried out the operation and were trying to find you?

No. But the ANC told us to just lie low. We didn't mix with South African folk or Anti-Apartheid etc. We were an MK cell.

I'd been seeing Aziz once a week for ages in Barbican in what was the tallest office block in London. We'd meet almost every Tuesday at a restaurant there.

With Aziz, between '83 and '84, we had thrashed out the plan for the Safari truck that would take tourists into South Africa. I had initially suggested a convoy of Land Rovers to use as a safari for tourists through Southern Africa

with compartments underneath them to store arms that could be taken into South Africa. But then Aziz and later Slovo felt that there would be too many teams, couriers and drivers, so we agreed on one big truck and I took it from there. I visited a few Australian pubs in London and two of the operators, 'Nomads' and 'Drifters maybe, to see how they did advertising pamphlets etc.

I designed the structure of the smuggling compartments, did the research of other examples. In '85 I completed the business plan and submitted it.

JS came with Aziz to one of our Barbican meetings.

He said he liked the plan and that they were going to set up a committee to expedite it, and soon after that they introduced me to Mannie Brown who had been planning similar smuggling projects and liked the idea, my design of the truck with its compartments, and business plan. Being a businessman himself in the London environment he had a lot to offer for the project to take off.

Aziz was the overall Political Commissar and Joe, Commander. We were not using those terms. At another meeting soon after, I met Laurence Harris member of the Communist Party of Great Britain. He was the contact to recruits who would do the work, dedicated activists, like those to run the travel company, sold the tours, the drivers and couriers etc. Mannie set up the company, Africa Hinterland.

The committee gave me £80 000 to buy a new 8 ton, four-by-four military type Bedford, with a steel drop-side load bed.

We built the passenger and storage body on the load bed, extended the chassis for a trailer hook, camping equipment, extra fuel tanks and jerry cans.

The driver was trained as much as possible and also the spy passenger, Stuart Round, who took over driving after the first trip.

During '86 the 'internals' were brought in to the London Traders Committee. Muff (Andersson, MK member) and Calvin (Riaz Salojee, MK member) became part of this project. Calvin ran the internal distribution structure to whom we were to hand over the weapons. We had to arrange an overlap with them to pass them the weapons.

The truck carried a ton of weapons on each load. I had thought it would carry between two thirds and three quarters of a ton but recent information is that it was packed with a ton per load. That could be because all the nooks and crannies in the boxes were full of small ammunition. The truck went in and out originally from Nairobi to Cape Town and then they moved the office from

London to Joburg. And shortened the round trip from Botswana to Joburg. The turnaround time from Nairobi to Joburg went from six to two weeks, so if you took an average of a four-week turn-around over nine years, it gives you just over 100 tons of weapons. I'm sure the operators and Muff can give much more information than I can.

They'd carry passengers as a decoy. The truck was loaded at first in Lusaka but later in Botswana, they never got caught, and it operated until after the release of Mandela. (The documentary, *The Secret Safari*, that covers the role of this truck can be seen on <http://youtu.be./foqURw31gmc>)

Why did you continue with the truck after 1990 when the ANC had decided to suspend the armed struggle?

It was in case the negotiations failed. So, MK took the decision independently of the ANC, that we should just continue. I wasn't part of the project by then. My involvement with the truck ended when I drove it through the snow from the rural Suffolk workshop onto the ship at Felixstowe bound for Dar-es-Salaam. I was sent to Lusaka in '87 to meet it and show the loaders their job. There were people to run it, load it, receive the goods and run the office. I had another project by then – boats. I thought we should look into getting a 60-foot Catamaran, two-hull boat and use it to transport a lot more arms than the truck could – but nothing came of it.

So if you brought in so many arms, why do you think the armed struggle didn't escalate more? And were the arms brought in through the Safari truck used by the SDUs (Self-Defence Units) between 1990 and 1994?

I don't think some of them ever got distributed. Some did. I could not and was not involved with that.

So where are they now, do you think? Were they traced and handed over to the new government or do you think they are still in DLBs in different parts of the country?

After 1994, the impression I got, hearsay, from some of the distribution teams was that on receiving boxes, they would store them and then distribute as much as they were asked to for the time being and then cached the rest. After 1994 a particular distributor who was asked to return what he hadn't distributed managed to return 10 tons, and I have no idea of knowing how much overall was used, how much returned or how much is still in DLBs. There's no records in a situation like this.

You come back in 1991? Any reasons why not sooner after the February 1990 unbanning?

I had a job, Heather also, we had a house to sell and two kids to move. It hadn't much to do with security concerns. There were certain comrades who warned that if the police or other right wingers knew what we'd done and we popped our little heads up in South Africa, they could get taken off.

We discussed this. I felt that if such a thing happened, people in the ANC would know why, but also wrote a 20-page note to Kathy Satchwell, that if something happened to me, it wouldn't be suicide. I distributed a few copies, one to my sister Cath. Nothing came of it, and Kathy Satchwell lost the note. When I went back to her five years later to get a copy, she said she didn't keep documents for more than three years so she had lost it, but then my sister Cathy had a copy.

Were you helped by any Returnees' Committee?

No, but we didn't look for that. We didn't need that. And the ANC had paid me for years while I was in England.

Before that article by David Beresford in the *Mail and Guardian* in 1995 that identified you and Heather as being behind the Koeberg operation, do you know if the police had worked out that it was you two who had done it?

Eskom said that they had anticipated an ANC attack on Koeberg but I don't think they wanted to know it was me. The police said that it wasn't possible that it was me. They were intentionally looking the other way.

What have you been doing since returning in 1991?

We travelled a bit, went back to Zim. Visited my ma in Knysna. She was game to putting us up while I built a house for us in Knysna. My family lived in my ma's house for a year and I worked at a carpentry shop, doing drawings and later at an engineer's, and built the house and then I was chain-ganged into the ANC (laughter). The ANC sent this guy – I can't remember his name – to ask me to join the ANC branch.

I joined the ANC branch in Knysna and then created a new SACP branch. We were very busy politically, often at weekend conferences in Cape Town. I had a Kombi so I rode a taxi taking ANC comrades to meetings every weekend while the kids and my wife got on with life. I was taken into the ANC fulltime for the election campaign in George as administrator of the Southern Cape sub-region.

Would you travel every day from Knysna to George?

Yeah, some nights I just stayed in the office. We distributed literature and posters and helped to grow the membership and administered the finances and ran a programme of rallies as the ANC offered leaders to address them. It was very frustrating at times because you would set up the whole thing, a rally, and the leaders would not turn up. So, you had to do these things self-service, do the speech and arrange local leaders to talk.

But anyway, the countdown to the elections had begun after Chris Hani is killed.

Then came election day and we had a fear that the police and possibly the White right wing were going to attack our office so we spent the whole election day hidden in the back of the office to protect the equipment. We stacked all the undistributed posters up against the shop front windows as a sort of a buffer. Four of us had a 38 Special, a Brazilian pump action shot gun and a 9mm Makarov and listened to the radio – and nothing happened but a peaceful election.

So, what was your feeling when you cast your first vote in the democratic election?

I didn't do it that time, it was the next time, because we were protecting the office.

Did Heather get to vote?

Yes, I guess. We were newly separated and not talking. A terrible time.

Well, what was your feeling about 27 April 1994 anyway?

Magic! We felt that magic.

Then I returned to Cape Town immediately, on the 28th, because Heather had left by then. I packed up my Kombi with all the equipment that we could and the weapons, and drove to Cape Town. I handed the weapons over to the ANC office at the Salt River office and went to stay with Desi in Observatory. The ANC had not paid our salary so I sold the office computer to survive.

I was unemployed for six months, it was hard times, I visited various political contacts that I had and it all came to naught. I met Joe Slovo, Jeff Radebe and

Aziz Pahad, who told me about the Washington Consensus. Joe said something like it is the real world now, a free market, not jobs for pals, nothing happened.

But we were now in power and you had served the movement?

Few knew about the contribution and what was there to compare it to? It was chaos and everyone involved had to find new feet in a new environment. Like Joe said maybe. I certainly didn't make any progress.

Didn't you feel cheated off with them?

Not really because, many of us were in the same boat and looking after each other. I was by then staying in a house in Obs with comrades. Then I went to visit Jacob Madikiza. He was the head of the ANC's DIS (Department of Information and Security) who I'd been in touch with during the election campaign and who'd given us the arms and bodyguards and who we reported our intel to. He said yes to me for a job so I joined the ANC DIS in Cape Town about six months after the elections, and after five months we were amalgamated into the NIA (National Intelligence Agency) and moved to Pretoria.

Heather was working as a speech therapist in Cape Town.

Did the DIS comrades know of your role in the Koeberg operation?

I didn't give specifics but I told of a safe contact, so Jacob, for example, could have checked, if he hadn't done that long before and got the nudge, wink, say no more. I don't know. The culture was that people didn't ask questions but relied on their confidence in others without wanting to know. Details were dangerous to the movement so you don't ask, you trust those who you trust.

The Koeberg story wasn't out then, they just knew I was in MK.

The story leaked to the public on 16 December 1995.

What did you do in NIA?

The first job I had was as a deputy divisional head in the property division, running all overt NIA property, which was not handled by Public Works. Office job – but also traveling the country to get to know the managers and spaces. NIA has their own property division with properties countrywide, so it was overall managing, management of the properties and trying to find properties which had disappeared from our books. I had section heads who ran the cleaning and maintenance sections, those sorts of things. Rental contracts,

budgets, new leases and renovation, new Nicoc (National Intelligence Coordinating Committee) offices for Joe Nhlanhla (ANC veteran and Minister of Intelligence) in Pretoria and other duties.

The negotiated structure was that we fitted in with the old enemy: one of us, one of them, one of us, one of them. So, my boss and my immediate subordinate were old enemies. I was one of two deputies, the other was one of them, so I was surrounded on three sides. The other deputy was trying to teach me my job so in fact I was completely out-manoeuvred.

Arthur Fraser (ANC activist and later Director General of the State Security Agency) took me to see the chief investigating officer of the Koeberg bombing. Rashid, Arthur, Heather, John Galloway – from counter-intelligence – and I were taken by Arthur to visit Koeberg. We were entertained at the visitor's centre by a couple of managers who drove us to look at the entrance to the nuclear island near the Reactor 2, the one I had used many times being the nearest to my office.

Huge safe doors had been added to the entrance that had never been in the original design as security was managed hundreds of metres away. We could not enter because the island was by now highly contaminated. We returned to the visitors' centre where we were met by staff who had been there at the time of the incident. An engineer who had been in the control room at the time of the bombing congratulated us – I think his name was van Heerden – and told animated stories about the events that followed the first blast. The other was a security guard who had been closest to the first blast, near the entrance. He described the experience. His face turned grey and he was not amused at the memory, nor at meeting me. I hope it was not hatred.

After we went to visit the plant, Arthur called in a guy called JP, the SAPS investigating team of the Koeberg bombing, and he refused to accept that the ANC carried it out, saying that we didn't have the skills and know-how to do the operation!

I also later heard that there was a strike by the labourers after the bombing. I think they were concerned about their security. And scab labour was brought in. I don't know how that was settled and what exactly had happened.

I later worked in NIA's transport division. The motivation was low among the staff so we spent a lot of time team-building. Some of the old guard were busy sabotaging the new, and also the new had been bugged up by Bantu Education. Some of the ANC comrades who came into NIA were very resentful that they had old guard bosses. They also felt that their material conditions had not improved significantly.

In 2003 I was transferred to Cape Town where I worked with Arthur Fraser.

I left the NIA in 2007 and have now got used to being free. I've done a bit of farming and right now I'm looking after my ailing mum.

To other things now. Why did you decide to speak to the *Mail and Guardian* about the role you and Heather played in the Koeberg operation?

Because one day I got a phone call from a journalist, Peta Thornycroft, who said we've got this story, do you want to talk to me because if you don't, we are going to print it anyway? I went to Mac and he said tell her completely and honestly, it'll be fine.

But I went to Beresford rather than Peta because I felt he would be more understanding and do a less sensational, more accurate story. He was kind enough to agree that I could comment on his story before its publication and he was even prepared to publish it, suitably, close to 16 December – MK Day.

I had to get permission to go to the press from the NIA and told my bosses that Mac had said I could tell the story and they said it's fine.

Did Rashid know that you were going to speak to him?

Yes. He said it's better for me to tell it the way I want rather than it coming out from a journalist without the proper story.

You applied for amnesty?

Yes.

Okay, to move on, what do you see as the significance of the Koeberg operation?

It assisted in the aim of armed propaganda, as it was intended. It was a major outcome. We managed to do a lot of damage. Eskom claims that it was R600 million but if you work out the 18 months delay it was closer to R2 billion. The interest alone was more than R600 million

The figure in the media was that Eskom lost about R500 million?

Eskom said R600 million. I'm sure it was more, and that is just taking the interest into account, let alone the physical damage to the Reactor heads. I have no idea about the cost of that and the French certainly wouldn't have cut

their prices. And Eskom also had to upgrade their security, they put big fat safe doors at every entrance to the power station at huge cost. It was successful also because we didn't get caught and no one got hurt.

Did your operation have anything to do with the SADF raid into Maseru before it?

No.

The ANC said that it was partly a retaliation for the Maseru raid.

That was expedient to say, and fine. The operation was planned long before. And the Maseru raid happened the week before.

Ja, so what? There's no moral issue here; in fact, what's good is that it would have boosted people's morale and the ANC's credibility even more for people to think that the ANC could retaliate so swiftly with such a sophisticated operation. Anyway, I believe that the Cabinet had an urgent meeting after the attack and they were worried...

P W Botha (the State President) flew in the next day to Koeberg to check the damage.

There are pictures of one of the bomb sites, the secondary control room that I've seen on the Eskom website. That landing that blew up – all the cables were underneath.



Rodney Wilkinson, 2015, Centre for Public Integrity

It's said that the Koeberg operation was one of MK's best. Your response?

It wasn't visually spectacular at all, you couldn't even see smoke, nothing. It was only spectacular in the news coverage. It must've hurt the security a lot, that feeling they'd been defeated and were vulnerable after all. The security guys there didn't know the complexity of the plant the way we technicians did, and they read all the propaganda that it was, oh so safe, until it blew up with one after other limpet mine going off. It must've been a pretty traumatic time for them.

Beresford describes the Koeberg operation as one of the most audacious acts of sabotage ever carried out by one man and says that the TRC delivered just 14 words on this episode. He also says that even the ANC showed reluctance in evoking the glories of the struggle through the Koeberg attack. He says 'it seems almost as if the ANC itself is too shocked by the sheer audacity to acknowledge the act.' What's your response to these observations?

Yes, it does surprise me that the ANC doesn't take more credit for this. You're the first person from high up in the ANC who has really shown an interest in what we did. And unlike some others, you are not interested in struggle credential rivalries, to use words I think McBride once used.

Why do you think that that the ANC hasn't made more of this very successful operation?

I have no idea.

Doesn't it make you feel a bit cheated off?

I think the nuclear industries propaganda machine had effectively conveyed the picture that this industry is very complicated and it's above the normal person's ability to get their head around it, so that that people are put off by it. It has been made out to be complicated and difficult.

But that's why the ANC needs to make more of the success of the Koeberg operation. It shows the sophistication of MK and its daring?

Yes, but I really don't know why the ANC wants to forget this operation.

A journalist said – these are his words - that 'the surgical efficiency of the operation proved so embarrassing to the White minority regime's security sources that they claimed it had to be done by an outside team of professional saboteurs. An Ian McRae from Eskom even stated that their investigations also showed a possible link to the Baader Meinhof Gang of Germany, but they could not confirm this' (laughter)....

(Laughter) It's just a joke, isn't it?

Here's a journalist too: he says 'If adventure fiction is not a flourishing art form in the new South Africa, it's probably because true-life tales about that country's struggle for rebirth often exceed the boldest reach of literary imagination. A case in point: the young

White hippie who penetrated maximum security to blow up the former apartheid regime's secret nuclear installation as a goodwill gesture to the then-banned African National Congress. For sheer improbability, this December 1982 caper topped even the surprise Israeli air strike against the Osirak nuclear reactor in Iraq six months earlier. Like the raid on Osirak, the sapping of the Koeberg nuclear plant near Cape Town was deftly aimed to avoid any danger of radioactive fallout.'

Ours wasn't a goodwill gesture. I put my heart into it. I knew what I was doing. I planned it with the ANC. The claim that Osirak was the only other nuclear plant that was hit, I think is wrong. I have read that one or two other little nuclear plants were also sabotaged

Here's another comment: 'the authorities at Koeberg have since made the extraordinary claim that they not only anticipated the attack but had pinpointed the date. In a book on the history of the plant, a former executive, Paul Semark, is quoted as saying: "We knew the ANC would not target Koeberg once nuclear fuel was there, and that they would try to attack at a time which would ensure the least loss of life. We even pinpointed 16 December 1982, which was a public holiday, as the likely date.'"

That's a joke. Part of propaganda. In fact, the fuel was on the site when the attack took place.

One comrade interviewed for this project said that Koeberg fell into the laps of Special Ops, as it were. You and Heather turned up at their door. They had very little to do except to guide you – and you did the rest. It wasn't in their pipeline of planned projects.

That's surprising after Renfrew Christie's efforts.

I had read a lot of hectic stuff about interrogation and Kim Philby and all that and about sabotage in the Second World War, and I didn't know about the ANC and the Special Ops. So, they steered me well.

Did you have anything to do with Renfrew Christie who was arrested for his work for the ANC on nuclear issues?

He was not, as far as I know, directly involved in our operation.

Somebody described the Koeberg attack as an operation born of chance. He says if you hadn't had financial problems, you wouldn't

have gone to Koeberg, and if you hadn't gone to Koeberg the operation wouldn't have happened. Waldo Stumpf, the CEO OF the Atomic Energy Corporation, said that the paranoia of the apartheid government was exacerbated with Portugal's withdrawal from its colonies in Southern Africa and the uncertainties about the true intentions of the Warsaw Pact countries and especially by the Soviet Union in light of their openly declared expansionist policies in Southern Africa, and this soon converted to a nuclear laager with the transformation of the country's energy program into a nuclear weapons program. A nuclear strategy was approved in April 1978 during apartheid Prime Minister John Vorster's time. Do you think that the apartheid system was having nuclear at Koeberg not just for energy but as a basis for also a weapons program or do you think these two aspects were unconnected?

I think they were connected. The regime was interested in a nuclear weapons programme, of course. There were rumors about nuclear shells being used in Angola later, and what else could justify that type of spending? The super enrichment of that fuel makes for devastating weapons and anyway we did land up with nuclear weapons.

It's not true that if I hadn't been broke, I wouldn't have gone to Koeberg. After I got offered the job, I went home to dinner with all the commune and I described what I'd been offered. And we all agreed that I should go with a bad faith. So, the opposition to Koeberg was planned right from the first day. We didn't want that nuclear plant. The people in the commune were a bit like Maoists, they focused on the rural areas and were anti-industrial development, and were against nuclear.

How is it that none of them worked out that you might have been behind the Koeberg operation?

Rob Sacco felt he had a role in it. About three years ago I met somebody who said that Rob felt that he was instrumental in my decision, and in a way he was. We did discuss doing something at Koeberg. Rob later moved to Zim.

After Beresford, you also spoke with other journalists. You met with somebody from the Centre for Public Integrity in Tshwane, do you remember?

He was CIA, a security journalist.

Yet you met him?

He was quite open about it. And I began to speak with those who asked me because I felt the more completely I can tell the story, the better.

So, this guy says "Rodney Wilkinson is nervous, insisting on a seat near the door of the Mugg & Bean restaurant in a suburban Pretoria shopping mall, ordering a beer before lunch, rushing from the table at one point to calm himself with a cigarette by a window. By the end of his two-hour interview with a foreign reporter, the sunburned citrus farmer holds out his trembling hands. 'I didn't shake at the time,' he said. 'Now, just the thought of what I did makes me shake.' What's your response?"

He gave me the complete shits, that guy. I shake a lot anyway. But that was a disastrous interview. It was a hostile interview and I knew I was speaking to the CIA. His colleague was sitting there too recording. It just got to me. He also suggested that I had been irresponsible.

And he also says: 'Behind the MK coup lies the tale of a disillusioned, frustrated White couple, wanting to strike back at an unjust, authoritarian society being driven by a brutalising military machine.'

I was being brutalized by that second experience in the army and did want to hit back, it was an unjust system, threatening to turn the country into a civil war zone.

To something else. Mac says that after the Koeberg operation Tambo was very pleased and said it was good work. Mac says he could hardly tell the President that to win this guy over he had to smoke zol (marijuana) and become a bit hippie-ish

(Laughter), He said that?

It's certainly colourful.

(Laughter) Well, it's legal now.

Some suggest that your proness to get nervous was compensated by Heather who had a calmer disposition, and it was felt that Heather needed to be involved in the operation. Your response to that view?

It was instructions from Mac. He felt I also needed somebody to talk to about the operation, and calm me, yeah. But I don't agree that I'm a nervous guy because fencing gave me a very cool head. I do get scared, yes, but relative to most people I don't panic. As I explained earlier, in the sport of fencing we are

trained not to panic - because to be able to react to your opponent you have to be relaxed so that you overcome a tension before creating a new one to respond.

Well, I suppose an important test was that you did the operation very well.

I think that's the real test. If I was to get very nervous, I had to overcome that completely, which I did that week of the operation, I just put myself into automatic.

You have also been presented as a most unlikely saboteur, as almost not having the personality for it. You want to respond?

I don't agree with that.

Maybe it was a childhood dream to do something like that? We had our own war games. As kids we used to go on holiday, our family and my father's War buddy family. They had a big farm near Greytown and we would go there for six weeks every Christmas. When we got there, we'd be seated in their little lounge, reading their books. But then for the next holiday they tried to set up defenses to stop us getting inside the house without being caught.

So, we would give them a vague time of our arrival and they would send out trucks and kids to scan all the incoming roads and they would be in radio touch, and so we recruited one of their friends who was a honey farmer, and got in the back of his bakkie and I got underneath a blanket and he drove us in through all of their ambush. It was a game we called infiltration. And we did it many times with various outcomes and that was good fun and we talked about it endlessly, so that was part of my upbringing.

Did you know that the Koeberg Operation was called 'Operation Mac'?

It was called other things too. It was also called 'Operation Sword'. I think that was related to my fencing or a play on my name because there used to be 'Wilkinson Swords'.

Let's move on to Special Ops as a whole now. Were you aware that your operation fell under MK's Special Ops unit? If so, who told you and what?

Well, Rashid told me about Special Ops and its focus on certain types of sabotage.

What else did he tell you?

Not much. I can't remember anything specific. We focused more on the planning of the operation?

You and Heather went through a lot together, including carrying out the Koeberg operation, going into exile, working with the ANC there and again when you come back into the country, and you have two children together. You then separated. To what extent, if any, did the rigours of the political struggle or differences between you on how to relate with the ANC contribute to your separation?

It was acrimonious. I've got a theory about this. I don't think Heather will agree with me, but I think it's to do with the insecurity she felt after that death threat in Knysna. Our house phone number was on a pamphlet advertising Raymond Mhlaba's election campaign visit. Somebody traced the telephone number to Heather and put a note our letterbox which said 'Hit List 33 – Heather Wilkinson'. She let slip that to her family, and her father just said come home.

I wasn't home a lot of the time – in meetings. When I come home exhausted, she would start yapping at me and I couldn't take it and would walk straight out again.

We divorced in 1994 but we remained lovers for six years after we divorced, though we didn't live together.

I think our separation had to do with politics, her father, the kids' vulnerability, and the insecurities of living in a wooden house that could be penetrated easily.

So, what do you make of where the country is now?

I'm relieved the Zuma era is over, but is it really over? The rot seems to go so deep, and it's going to take a while to get better, but it seems that Ramaphosa is our man, he's going to mend things. I have been disgusted for a while now with where things were going.

What do you think are some of the strengths and weaknesses of the country's transition from apartheid.

Well, we have a great Constitution, the rule of law and non-racialism. Non-racialism has got its ups and downs but it feels good in the street to me.

Things have really changed overall and I'm hopeful. People are very helpful and protective.

And the weaknesses of the transition, in your view?

The lingering racism and the lack of confronting this and cultural differences, including languages. The privileged not knowing the languages of the under-privileged is a problem and the continued geographical separation. And the terrible inequality.

We could never have foreseen it would be like this and it's been such a learning curve, the whole experience right from the beginning. The more I've got into it the more I lived exponentially. I think it's been a surprise in many ways.

Do you feel disappointed in where we've come to?

I do but I'm getting more hopeful. The corruption and greed is the first thing but the urgent next is the plastic culture. We have got to go green fast and to do that we have to go red immediately.

Do you have regrets about the role that you played?

Not now, but at some stages in the last decade. I think others sacrificed far more than me. And even my little sacrifices are eclipsed by our poor kids who have also sacrificed. Growing up without a father – still it's not as much compared to what others have sacrificed.

Could one really say that? Of course, others died and were imprisoned and they and their families suffered more, but that doesn't necessarily lessen your own sacrifice and your own pain. You may not have sacrificed as much as others but you also had choices as a White South African – to just benefit from apartheid and turn a blind eye to what was going on...

Of course, I'm proud I didn't do that.

So how does this regret reflect itself?

I'm at peace with the shit the kids went through, sometimes, in the way that, that is the culture and we need to know all of that. What is very annoying is reading about all this recent corruption and that's what precipitates the regret at times. But maybe now we are going to learn the lessons from this recent phase and can move into a communal culture and use this example to get over

it. Not only communal but vitally ecological for on the current trajectory we are doomed.

When I was in London, we hit corruption big time. I was working for Mannie's buddy, we were doing business with properties, and corruption was rife, and all it takes is a whisper about a price and there you go. An official meets a contractor in a pub and whispers a tender figure to him. It got so much worse here that they were discussing escalating prices, a R6 bar of soap for R100 was quoted...

How do your children feel about your contribution and the sacrifices they've had to make because of your political involvement?

My youngest one, Amy, a teacher, is by far the more enthusiastic about her parents' history.

Kyla, I left when she was 6, as I separated from her mother. She was born in '76 of Althea. Of Heather there's two, Jessica and Amy.

Have they asked you and Heather about your political involvement?

It's a different world now. But they have picked up some things. Amy got thoroughly involved at one time and even wrote a school essay about it.

You don't seem to have any sense of entitlement or any major grievance about not being recognised sufficiently about your contribution to the struggle? Maybe it's this generosity that also drove you into the struggle?

Well, I had a very generous upbringing. Of course, I went to St Martin's school, that is quite an outstanding place and we had a very special education, fencing, swimming rowing, scouts, holidays. I did also science and arts at university. Travelled extensively, sailed, etc. Had lots of opportunity.

But other middle class people also had that opportunity. They didn't take to the struggle, let alone the armed struggle?

I had an advantage over them because I had parents who could make me see through what they didn't see through. A harmonious environment for the kids meant getting over apartheid before having them.

You know, it seems that almost every time I mention the SADF or you talk about it, you seem to frown and there's a glint of anger in your

eyes. Maybe – who knows? – it’s your resentment of authority that partly drives you? Well, you were quite rebellious in school...

Yes. I'm the second child. My father said my big brother was the head boy at school and I was the head gangster in the same school (laughter)... And we dug tunnels in our breaks and I don't know what my brother did – maybe read books – but some of his friends who were two years ahead of me joined us while we dug tunnels and smoked and brewed beer in the tunnel. His friends came along too because they liked to smoke and drink and do what we were doing. My brother never joined us. We got caught and he asked what we are going to do? We were always very close despite our different personalities.

We always worked things out together and so eventually we decided that we were going to have to have a public meeting for the whole school and discuss it with everybody because there were lots of people involved. So, we did that at an assembly and I represented the bad guys and he represented the good guys and it ended up a big joke actually, and his buddies came along and admitted it

There were lots of other examples of my rebelliousness. For example, dangling upside over a 90 foot excavation of Carlton Centre while it was being built, car roof riding, and starting fires on veld.

Of course, comrades were driven to the armed and other underground struggles by many impulses, moral, political, existential and other. Do you think as part of many reasons, there was also an subconscious sense of adventure too?

Yes. The biggest regret that I had about the Safari truck is that I couldn't go on it into South Africa (laughter). But, you know, just being active in this great liberation struggle was an adventure!...