

MK Special Operations Unit Project

Interviews

Teddy Sikakana

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London (telephonically)

Comrade Teddy, tell us a bit about your personal and family background? Did your parents or siblings influence you to become politically aware? Your friends, neighbours, school friends?

My full name is Mboniseni Michael Sikakana. I was born in Soweto – 7703 Lembede Street – just a street away from Mandela’s home and a few streets away from the Sisulus...

How could you not be influenced politically in that context?...

Well, I was influenced even before I was born (laughter). Anyway, I was born in 1954 – and it was in the midst of the apartheid system.

During the Second World War, my great uncle was among the over 600 South African black men who were taken from the country to assist in the war here in Europe. So, my great uncle was amongst those who died in the SS Mendi.

Also, my grandfather who used to be a preacher in Clermont township, Durban, was arrested by the police in 1960 when they were arresting people like the late President of the ANC, Chief Albert Luthuli. I was six years old then. When they came for him, my brother and I were sleeping on the floor, with just the straw mat and a blanket underneath. You know, those days we used to use an elbow as a pillow. So his arrest also influenced my political awareness. It was unimaginable to see a man of God in handcuffs.

Then on the 12 May 1969 the police came for my elder sister Joyce, who used to be a journalist for the *Rand Daily Mail*. I mean, they didn't come in a peaceful manner, they exercised their most brutal force, ransacking the house and doing all sorts of damaging things. They applied physical and mental force. Terrifying methods.

I was lucky in a sense that where I was born, we lived and grew up in the midst of families like the Mandelas, Sobukwes, Sisulus – whose husbands and fathers were on Robben Island. So, you could not avoid meeting up with these

families and hearing the spouses talking about their other halves...There is a guy who passed away, two years ago – Tom or Nzima Nobanda. He became a general in the South African army later. Together, we used to safeguard Winnie at her house because she lived on her own. Her two young daughters schooled in Swaziland. Winnie was banned and under house arrest, not allowed to have more than two people with her at any given time.

And on 12 May 1969, Winnie, Joyce and nineteen others got detained. There were seven women with 14 men who got detained. They were kept in solitary confinement for close to two years. So these experiences influenced me.

That was the 1969 trial of Winnie Mandela, Joyce and others?

Yes. They were kept in detention for long periods. The case was dismissed. They were re-detained and taken to court again. The case was dismissed again. I think there was one guy who was detained in Botswana for more than a year and was brought in to join them in the case. On his release, he committed suicide. Others in the trial came out with mental problems. I mean, even Joyce, when she came out was suffering from depression, paranoia and other challenges.

My first experience in terms of getting pocket money was being a caddy in a golf course in Clermont township. My grandfather's house was bordering a golf course – but Black people were not allowed to play golf there, you could only be a caddy. Actually, that was child abuse – because we were still children at the time.

With a group of others, I also used to go and sell newspapers on a Saturday afternoon in the city centre. The *Sunday Times*, *Sunday Express* and so on. So, I could see all these White people in the city enjoying life, buying newspapers, and some of them, of course, would verbally abuse us, especially the teenagers coming out from the cinemas. That got stopped by our parents when someone amongst us disappeared and there was the physical assault of someone else.

Then I got a job at IBM (International Business Machines) collating newspapers, and after that I went into ICL (International Computers Ltd) and became a machine operator. You could feel that there was a ceiling, above which you couldn't go. The next person above you, your supervisor, would be a Coloured person, then an Indian person managing the setup. Of course, the owner of the company would be White.

I remember when we used to play in the dusty roads in Soweto and we'd see an airplane flying above, you'd know it's only White people in it. So, you know what I did when I got my first decent wage doing part time work (laughter)? I bought a ticket to fly to Durban from Johannesburg. I was the only Black person in it, sitting right at the back. I got off the plane in Durban and found

my way to the train station, took an overnight train back to Johannesburg (laughter)! That shows you that we had these ambitions instilled in us. So those are the kind of influences we grew up in. I mean my life had already been paved for me before I was even born (laughter).

I was at the University of Zululand doing a BSc degree. That would have been 1974-75, I think. There was this strike when the admin block was burnt. When I left the university, I had recruits to take up to Joburg because I had links with people there who could take them out of the country. I remember my dad at that time, he had retired and had gone to Cape Town with his girlfriend, and I was manning his business in Clermont. He had taken over my granddad's plot and had built these rooms and a little grocery shop. I accommodated these recruits there but I was under pressure from them to leave. I couldn't wait for my dad to come back from Cape Town. Also, if I told him I'm leaving the country he was going to refuse. So I left all his money and the car keys in his wardrobe and we left by train to Johannesburg. There we connected with Inch Rwaxa; it was his full-time job ferrying people out of the country via Swaziland. I joined up with him and helped to get people out of the country. People like Jabu Moleketi were amongst the groups we took out of the country.

What made you decide to opt for the armed struggle? Why not take part in the mass organisations inside the country or the trade unions and other progressive organisations?

I did play a role with people like Sabelo Ntwasa and Harry Nengwekhulu who used to be in the BCM (Black Consciousness Movement) and later SASO (South African Student Organisation). Sabelo and I went to see Steve Biko when he was studying medicine. I also met Biko's wife Nontsikelelo then. So, there was that – but then what happened is I became more consumed by working with Inch Rwaxa ferrying people across – it was no longer even recruiting, people were just flooding us and requesting to be taken out of the country. That was end of 1975 into '76 towards the famous 1976 student riots.

(SACP and ANC leader) Moses Mabhida in Swaziland linked us up with Tokyo Sexwale, Selaelo Ramusi and another guy, Nsiki. They were trained militarily and were coming into the country. I stayed with Tokyo and Selaelo at my home in Soweto, and so there was this mix of us taking people out of the country and people coming in who are already trained – that already was a risk.

Inch Rwaxa was sent to Swaziland to get materiel needed by Tokyo and Selaelo. A week went by and he was not back, and the car he was driving, I had rented in my own name. Towards the second week, Tokyo and them suggested that Selaelo and I go to Swaziland to see what could have happened to Inch? But Moses Mabhida told us that Inch left, like, a week ago and that's when we realised that there was something drastically wrong. Later we found out that he got arrested at the Oshoek border in that car.

Moses Mabhida then instructed that Selaelo could no longer go back to South Africa. Rather that I go back on a sole mission to rescue Tokyo and the others. Inch Rwaxa fortunately resisted succumbing to the police interrogation for about a week. Mabhida rented a car and had a Swazi guy driving me to all the places I needed to go to in South Africa. Thousands of rands were camouflaged inside the biggest Surf washing soap box you could find in the market. A Makarov pistol was given to me for self- defence. I had to walk across through the bush, whilst the Swazi guy went through the Oshoek border post and we met on the other side. On the way to Johannesburg, I was worried and desperately trying to work out how I could access the homes in Alexandria and those in Soweto that I knew Tokyo and Ntsiki would likely be in, in case they were monitored by the security forces. I simply couldn't just walk into these places. I had to work out a way of getting information before we even got into these houses.

I went to see these two sisters O'hara and Mina, that I knew, who didn't stay far from my home and who happened to be Brigitte Mabandla's sisters. They were willing to accompany me and they volunteered to walk into these houses. We thought, because they were women, they'd be less suspicious to the security forces. On hindsight, I think that was a stupid mistake.

But when we got to Alexandra, as soon as they were walking on the street, they realised that the atmosphere in the area was tense. Some neighbours who saw these unfamiliar faces simply approached them to say 'Hey, we hope you guys are not heading to that house'. The police and the army have been there and they're still secretly watching the place. So the two sisters thanked them and just walked past the house and came back to where we were parked and confirmed that everybody was taken by the police.



Teddy Sikakana in the 1970s

I then went to say goodbye to my mum because I was going to be leaving the country. When I knocked at the front door, my mother opened and refused to let me in. She just said, 'My son, leave now, they have been here so many times looking for you and if they find you, they're going to kill you. You leave and I'd rather know that you're outside this country and alive than me having to think of you being arrested and killed'. And that's how I left, and that was the last I saw her.

Which year was that?

January 1977. I went back to Swaziland. Selaelo was still in Swaziland. I gave Mabhida the report that everyone had been arrested. The swoops had also taken in Carl Rabotho, a friend of mine who used to work for the Delmas company. His wife was highly pregnant and expecting at the time. I had introduced him to Tokyo and Selaelo.

Selaelo used to read all these books about Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, the Cuban revolution, urban guerrilla warfare and so on. His training was on urban warfare and he decided that I should also do the same course he did in Dresden, Germany – and he facilitated that to happen. I went to Tanzania from Swaziland, then to Angola and did a bit of military training there, then I was taken to GDR, then back to Angola, then Tanzania, then back to Swaziland to reinforce that Transvaal Urban machinery Selaelo had started. That was in 1978.

Now Selaelo was the commander of the Transvaal Urban machinery. He had asthma and suffered a lot in winter. He would struggle to breathe. So, he had that impediment. He was an athlete, and a really intelligent person – and this is what upsets me sometimes – because there are all these fallen heroes in our struggle that are never even made mention of.

When I got to Swaziland, Selaelo was briefing Solomon Mahlangu and his unit about their mission inside the country. There was another guy called Sipho – who was in the same class with me at Matseke High School. Selaelo was also briefing him on his mission inside South Africa. I never got to know about his demise after entering South Africa. I didn't find his name when scanning through the TRC files.

There were other trained units in safe houses that Selaelo had brought into Swaziland, all waiting for briefings from him before infiltrating into South Africa.

Also there was another guy called Khehla. I remember going with him to Sibasa in the Northern Transvaal. It was getting dark and the lights of his van faded out. He was a mechanic and in the dark he took out that generator and found a Coca-Cola tin somewhere, and breached this thing that was cutting off the alternator, and repaired the car, and we drove the whole night back to Soweto. In fact, that made me think of studying mechanical engineering.

When we were in Swaziland, Khehla used to work with the Political Machinery. Then in Swaziland, there was that just one route of going to Mozambique from Swaziland.

There used to be markers comrades used at the time – like they'd have a branch of a tree lying on the side of the road and then you'd know, okay, these comrades have come to fetch me in this area. Then you'd make a U-turn and come back and stop the car not far from where that branch was. Then from the bush will come out whoever has come to fetch you. But when Khehla went to Namaacha, this time he didn't see this branch of a tree. He made a U-turn, decided something had gone wrong and left, unaware that there was an ambush a few meters away.

A week later he did the same thing. This time he went with an old man called Majola – but they were waylaid in an ambush there and shot. Khehla was never found, it was just blood splattered all over. But it seems he fought back and might have killed or injured some of the security police. Majola crawled out of the car into the bush and the following sunrise he was found still alive but with injuries. Khehla was taken into South Africa and killed. There's no mention of people like that.

There was also the case of Bafana Duma who lost his arm in an explosion when he went to collect his mail from his post box.

Then there was this couple – it was the ANC acting chief rep Nzima and his wife – they were taking their two children to school and then going to work at the ANC office – and they were killed in a car bomb explosion. The children survived. Lots of these incidents...

When did you join Special Ops and how?

Selaelo got arrested. You see, the ANC used to give us this meagre R2000 to buy cars. And you can't buy a car in good condition with that. We started a network of guys who would steal – but, as we said, they were repossessing - cars (laughter) from South Africa and we would buy them for R2000. At one stage, they supplied us with these Dodge Colts which were quite conspicuous, especially when you're supposed to be underground. Well, one of these guys supplying us cars got arrested in South Africa – and this led to Selaelo's arrest. Selaelo had a girlfriend who lived in one of the chalets at the Ezulwini Holiday Inn. The police woke him up there. He had his weapon on the side of the bed, covered by his clothes. They shook him awake inside the bedroom. Can you imagine? I mean, Selaelo was a character that was never going to be taken alive. But that is how the Swaziland together with the South African police took him.

He was a very stubborn character and when he was inside he used to send us messages pleading that we find ways of getting him out of there. He knew that he had a limited time to live. We did deliberate on that, but it never happened. I think the ANC office got wind of our intention and they convinced us that we may be falling into a trap, that the Boers were planning and are awaiting for us

to do just that. They cautioned that we shouldn't do it. We were going to get killed. – and then the idea of rescuing him fell off. Selaelo didn't survive that 2½ years that he was sentenced to. The wardens at Matsapa prison deprived him of his asthma medication and so he passed away in the course of that winter.

And then Siphiwe (Guebuza) Nyanda took over the Transvaal Urban machinery.

I got called to Maputo to account for what exactly had happened regarding Selaelo and about this idea that they heard about us repossessing cars in South Africa. Also that we were deliberating on armed robberies in South Africa. When Joe Slovo came to see me in Bairro Triumph he was accompanied by Ruth First. She argued with Slovo – 'How could you possibly do something like that, give them just R2000, when they're doing such sensitive work? What can you buy with R2000?' Then Ruth said to him, 'Look, you need to move this guy...' They had just started with the Special Ops unit with OR Tambo. So Ruth said, 'You should put this guy in that structure'. And on the spot Joe Slovo decided that's what I'm going to do when I go back to Swaziland. So, I left the Transvaal Urban machinery and I focused on Special Ops. Slovo linked me up with Obadi (real name: Montso Mokgabudi), amongst the other people who were there. I already knew people like Barney Molokoane.

And that was how I started working in Special Ops.

So what was your role in Special Ops ?

My function was to facilitate Special Ops operations by organising safe accommodation, transport, infiltration through the borders or other means. We had learnt from the experiences of Solomon Mahlangu and others that we also had to organise contacts and create a situation whereby the specialised units only had to focus on their targeted missions and not be worrying about finding solutions for other problems. Trained cadres when they go in, they don't go in with their weapons, everything they'll find – DLBs (dead letter boxes) and all – will be there for them. They only need to focus on the missions they had to carry forward.

Special Ops was dealing more with heavy artillery. The cadres there and characters like Barney Molokoane and them – they didn't want to risk not having their Grad-Ps and other materiel with them (laughter). They wanted to live with their artillery and other weapons. And come back with them from South Africa (laughter).

But fortunately with Special Ops, it was just going in, hitting your target and retreating. But my main function became facilitating with safe accommodation and transport.

Barney in particular, and a few others in his unit like Victor Khayiyana and Vicks, tended to live with me. Vicks happened to have been friends with me from our school days at Orlando West High. His home was a few streets from mine. There was also T-Man and Pat (Lester Dumakude), who initially spent most of their time with me in Swaziland. They specialised more on reconnaissance, meaning routes in the rural areas that could be used, suitable even for cars driving into South Africa without using the border gates.

All really wonderful chaps. Barney was a huge guitarist. People like Eric Clapton, Bruce Springsteen, Earl Klugh – he used to imitate their music (laughter). We used to enjoy that. He also was a good story-teller. He was multi-talented in the sense that I saw his football skills when we were in Mazimbu, in Tanzania, later. Before he left South Africa, he was a builder. He could lay either bricks or blocks of a whole building structure.

People who trained with him spoke highly of his physical skills and understanding of his weaponries like the Grad-P.

We used to establish all these safe houses where cadres could stay safely and then, unfortunately, there was the Nkomati accord that came up, with Samora Machel forced to ensure that members of the ANC leave Mozambique. Swaziland also – the same thing happened and there was an influx of cadres coming into Swaziland. And all these people needed to be going home and that is what led to the skirmishes that happened in Swaziland where there were shootouts with the police and our cadres.

By that time, Barney and his unit had been into the country on numerous occasions and successfully hitting their targets. It was such work that compelled the South African government to come up with the Nkomati Accord. There was an increase of attacks on the military targets in South Africa and it was clear that the threat arose along the Mozambique-Swaziland and South Africa flank. This Nkomati accord was signed in March 1984.

Then we had a problem. We had a van, I think, with the largest amount of materiel ever found in Swaziland in a garage that I had in Fairview. It was a white Ford van. At the back inside the canopy were numerous trunks with all sorts of weapons – AKs, pistols, explosives, limpet mines, detonators, you name it – everything was there. Pat and (Ernest) Pule (T-man) came to pick me up in the early hours of one morning. They'd been on a reconnaissance mission to establish a route for some units to go into the country. We went into town to confirm some property that we were going to secure. I had my three year old daughter sitting in the back with Pule. Pat was in the passenger seat. As I was about to park, I looked in the mirror and saw numerous police cars driving into the car park at high speed. I could see these were police. I said to Pule and Pat, 'Comrades, we are getting arrested here.' Pule and Pat immediately dashed out of the car and ran in different directions. Pule, they never caught up with.

They arrested me with the child in the car and took us to the police station. I think it was about like two hours later when Pat was brought in wearing one shoe and dishevelled (laughter). He had been beaten up along the way.

I pleaded with them to at least take my daughter to her mother who worked at Trucker Motors. They took the necessary details and despatched some officers with my daughter to go and find her mother.

During my interrogation, they wanted to know where I lived. I had left Barney Molokoane sleeping in the house I rented in Fairview. I couldn't possibly tell them where I lived. Too much was at stake. After much argument, I took them to my ex-girlfriend's home which was in the midst of shacks as you drive out of Manzini, an area called KwaKhoza. I mean, it was like they were escorting a president of the country, as I was in a police van with all these cars in front and in the back (laughter). When we got there they spoke to the elder people we found and then they ransacked the place with high hopes – to no avail. My ex-girlfriend's mother also had a number of rooms around her yard which she hired to families. I think it was when they were questioning people around there, that they discovered that I had long vacated the place.

They were not impressed with me and they became quite vicious.

So when we drove back to the police station, they knew that I had misled them. How they found out where I lived, I still don't know to date because then it took a few hours for them to again reinforce themselves even with the military to escort me to Fairview. When we got there they combed the whole area around the house. They used loud hailers to instruct everyone who may be inside the house to come out with their hands up. I was at the back of a van sitting myself not knowing what Barney's reaction was going to be. Knowing his character, I was fearful.

After minutes that felt like hours, he eventually opened the door and came out with his hands up. They pounced on him. I think he had realised that there was nothing else he could do under the circumstances. So, they arrested him, ransacked the house and then found this van in the garage with everything that I had mentioned before. That, for them, created much excitement, they felt like they'd struck the jackpot.

They took us to the police station. Fortunately they locked us up in the same cell, with Pat and other comrades who had been arrested elsewhere. There was a shortage of cells. We just about managed to catch up on most developments. Remember that this was during the Nkomati Accord. They had the army deployed in areas they knew that the ANC used, like the route to Namaacha heading to Mozambique. Known ANC houses came under observation. The entire Swazi population was told to report anyone who looks unfamiliar or is suspected of not being a Swazi. Roadblocks were erected across the country.

Later that afternoon, I was taken out of the cells. I walked out onto the back veranda of the station. On the floor, neatly arranged and laid bare was everything they had found in my house, the weapons that were in the van. There were Israeli officers who were there to confirm that my identification of each item was correct. The Israelis trained the Swazi army.

The next few days were focused on interrogating us. The one time I got interrogated, they beat me badly for a very stupid thing, I thought. They wanted to know where I was born and I was telling them that at 7703 Lembede Street, Orlando West, Soweto. They didn't believe me. Now there were South African White people there – two I presumed to be Boers. The person who took courage, pride and joy in physically beating me up was the station commander – a Dlamini guy. Hitting me constantly and recklessly with a bat – he didn't care how he was hitting me. Normally the Boers would have a systematic way of interrogating. That one was just rough and tumble, and on a stupid thing of profiles, really enjoying beating me up, probably out to impress his bosses.

On their file they had information that I was born in Alexandria township. They wanted me to confirm that, but they were not telling me they had that on their files until the end of the interrogation when they were saying were you not born in such and such address. I knew of an relation who lived that address. Earlier years when our parents were migrating from KwaZulu Natal they used to stay with those relations in Alexandra. My older sister was born there but I was born in Orlando West. The way they beat me up for just that flimsy information...shameful in my eyes.

They used to fetch Barney at odd hours of the night – and then bring him back the following morning. When he described what happened. 'They kept me blind-folded throughout the car journey. Driving like what felt like two hours. At the end of the journey they'd take me out of the car and lift me going through a fence. I think my interrogation was in a farm at the border somewhere inside South Africa. The interrogation was about the operations I commanded inside South Africa, Sasol, Voortrekkerhoogte military base and others. Skirmishes I got confronted with in the past retreats.'

What happens to him after his interrogation?

In that same year, 1984, I was charged with unlawful possession of firearms and ammunition, explosives and blasting materials, that is, grenades, limpet mines, detonators, harbouring and using premises for unlawful purposes and if I remember, entering and remaining in Swaziland illegally.

During Barney's interrogation, he was told he was going to give evidence in my case. We were then transferred to Matsapha Central Maximum Prison. Our prison cell was a huge kind of hall and we found about a hundred of our ANC comrades there. The fact that we were all in this hall made the pain even

enjoyable, though next to it was the death penalty bloc where some of the prisoners were waiting to be hanged, some of whom we knew. They were not from the ANC or any South African political organisation.

Leaders of the organisation, like OR Tambo, were instrumental in negotiating with the Swaziland government to get us released. Regarding those of us who were being charged, they had advocate Dennis Kuny, as legal counsel.

Months later, when the trials began, I got acquitted more on technicalities. The Swaziland police couldn't define what arms of war were, neither could they define what an AK47 was (laughter). Anyway, credit was due to our counsel, advocate Dennis Kuny.

What happens after that?

After the trials, we were again rearrested and detained again in Matsapha prison. We were deprived of information of our predicament. We were locked up and the ANC had to charter a flight to get us out of Swaziland. We were being deported. The deportation took place a few weeks later and we were all flown to Dar Es Salaam in Tanzania. We were more or less hundred plus on the plane. From the airport, we were driven to Dakawa where we resided for weeks thereafter until our fate was determined.

Mine came sooner when Joe Slovo came to tell me that arrangements were being made for me to go to Zimbabwe. That I couldn't possibly be going back to Swaziland. He indicated that Barney and his units would in the meantime still use the Swaziland flank without spending any time there.

Does that mean you exited Special Ops?

No, even in Zimbabwe I was still with the Special Ops .

What were you doing there?

When Pule and them were largely conducting operations from Botswana, I was in Bulawayo. My sister lived in Bulawayo and her husband rented this farm for me. Well, what was interesting about that farm, was that the White people who sold it were breeding all kinds of snakes, and when they left because they couldn't fathom being under a Black government, they released all these snakes in the farm. There was I with my little daughter coming to stay there. I remember one occasion when my child was playing outside just in front of the kitchen in the backyard, when I walked out to check on her, there was this snake behind her. I froze on the steps there looking at my child and then I knew that if I take another step it might strike her. I froze, I don't know how long for, and I think from that act of freezing and my child just playing with the sand oblivious to what's happening behind her, the snake suddenly turned away into the grass and was away.

My sister had mentioned this property to Joe Modise, thinking it's viable for the ANC. So Joe Modise came round to see this farm and then he wanted the ANC to buy it. I had to leave that farm because large numbers of comrades were going to come and live there. So I moved into a flat in town, then to a house in Burnside. It was when I was at this property that members of the Special Ops started frequenting- being in transit to Botswana or Zambia.

In the meantime, the South African security came to know about this farm in Trenance. By then, cadres from another machinery were making use of it. The South African security went to the Bulawayo job centre in town, took a guy who could drive under the guise of employing him and gave him a car to drive to this farm. They escorted him to the farm and showed him where to drive in and park this car, promising him that they'll be waiting for him on the road. Unbeknown to him, that car had explosives and as he was parking they detonated it with him inside. Most probably using a remote controlled gadget. The explosion shattered the back – the kitchen part – and fortunately the comrades were on the other section of the house. I think it was winter so they were where they could enjoy the warmth of the sun. So, none of them got injuries from this explosion but this Zimbabwean guy died instantly. I think the Zimbabwean police ended up catching those who were behind this.

To a broader issue. What did you understand the specific role of Special Ops to be, as distinct from other MK units,?

I understood Special Ops to be a response to the heavy infiltration in the movement. I mean on all fronts there were arrests and deaths that were happening and for various reasons. The Botswana-Zimbabwe side was the worst. People who used to cross that Limpopo river were just immediately arrested when they got to the other side. So, what I understood about Special Ops was that it would continue with the work but having minimised the risks of infiltration. And it proved to be true because the trained cadres who were going in, like Barney and others, were doing excellent work in the country. You could see progress happening.

Which two or three operations of Special Ops do you think stand out?

Sasol, I think, was the major one and I think there were about three or four attempts at that plant. The one that did materialize was a sensation.

Which other operations?

I think Koeberg, but also the military base that was hit by Special Ops – Voortrekkerhoogte.

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

There were weaknesses just in terms of the characters that were involved there. Barney Molokoane didn't smoke or drink. He was always sober, and when he wasn't entertaining us, his mind was mainly focused on the work that had to be done. Highly disciplined and a fitness fanatic.

But then there were other comrades that would be accommodated in different shelters who happened to drink, for instance, who would violate the rules they are supposed to observe. They would go out to find their liquor irrespective of the set rules. They would just blatantly do that, to get what they felt they needed. Like in any organisation, of course, there would be differences of opinion on how to carry out tasks. But in terms of the structure, having a Commander and Commissar, everybody seemed to be clear that the final decision has to be made by the Commander, and that has to be respected and the others have to just go along with it, irrespective of what happens down the line. I think what led to the passing away of Barney was that on their retreat from their mission the car that was in front was Barney's and then they didn't see the turn-off and they went past. That's what caused the problem and which led to Barney and them being eliminated.

Which two or three people do you think stand out in Special Ops?



Teddy Sikakana, recently

I think there are probably more than three. There was that teamwork of Pule and Pat. There was a time when they were in really good communication. You couldn't separate those two. They communicated very well and the teamwork in terms of reconnaissance – they used to do outstanding work. They were both very brave. We had Rashid, who seemed more in control in terms of planning and I think he was outstanding in that regard. When it comes to Swaziland he organised his own place to stay and you'll never know where he stayed. He had that sensitivity in terms of security. There's also George Ndlovu, a kind-hearted soul. May he also rest in peace.

So what happens to you after 1990?

We were integrated into the army. I went briefly for interviews, but then I had a problem that I just found the whole task quite momentous. That integration process was still controlled by the apartheid structures. I mean, we had people like Tokyo Sexwale, who then was Minister of Human Settlements. A person who grew up in Soweto – why would he go and sleep in a shack to try to remind himself how it's like to be poverty-stricken? So, there were lots of challenges.

I had a huge conflict in terms of being in government, in that I knew you'd be constrained by the budget and in fighting for positions etc.

I had come into lots of conflict with people in terms of having to find solutions for certain problems that needed to be addressed. I also came into huge conflicts with my family and people who knew me – because they used to say you think of people like (Solly) Shoke and Siphiwe (Nyanda) ending up in the army as generals – but you are in that category, why are you not a general? But you know even the term 'general' these days has been smeared because some of the generals I see when I meet up with them – you find that they go out poaching animals as a hobby which I don't agree with. Those animals need to be protected, they are part of our heritage in our country.

You think of people who are supposed to be Communists, but their lifestyle contradicts that. So, I had huge conflicts with this, and I'm grateful that I didn't go that route, especially with the corruption that came about later. I don't think any organisation could have expected this scale of corruption. You can have your domestic worker there and your gardener in your house – the huge mistake you make is to undermine the intelligence these people have. Now, can you imagine that civil service being bloated by people who came out of poverty? What solution would you have for a person who gets a good package to have this position and still look elsewhere, what more can I take? We've lost it somehow and whatever other organisation can take over from the ANC will have the same problems the ANC has had to grapple with.

How is it that you're now in England? Is that by marriage?

I got married in Sheffield 1990 to a British lady I met in Zimbabwe. It was in 1986 when President OR Tambo and Trevor Huddleston organised a Repression of Children Conference in Harare. She came as one of the organisers of that conference. That is when I met her. Hundreds of children were brought out of South Africa to come and give testimonies of their plight under apartheid.

So later, she invited me to come to the United Kingdom to meet her family. I went planning to stay for a month and I ended up staying two years. We got married. We were planning to go back to South Africa at the time – and then we had a house problem. There was a tenant that my wife had in the property who refused to vacate it. The matter was heading to court but fortunately because there was still a bond involved we consulted the bank and they gave us a solution on how to sort out that problem - but it took about two years.

Then my parents died. My mother died first and then within three months my dad also died. That was in 1992. That's when we came back and we brought up the children in Westville, Durban until the children left home after university and my wife needed to go back to England and continue with her career and profession there.

I had a small business in South Africa that I inherited from my grandfather. I was supplying Boxer superstores with a herbal product throughout the country and it's still trickling along. I still supply some chemists with that product.