

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

## **MK Special Operations Unit Project**

### **Interviews**

#### **Victor Kgaladi (Two Six)**

#### **Johannesburg**

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#### **Let's start with your personal details, date of birth and where you were born?**

I'm Victor Kgaladi. In MK I was known as Two Six. I was born in Johannesburg on 27 April 1957.

#### **How did you become politically aware? Did your parents or brothers or sisters or any other family members influence you in this regard?**

When we were growing up in school we used to discuss some political issues – but very lightly. At times we used to collide with some political literature. One cannot say what exactly was the source, but the reading material would be in circulation and our interest grew and grew over time. The consciousness was building.

And right next to our house, lived Comrade Frank Chikane (United Democratic Front and ANC leader), he was a priest. He used to hold sermons there mostly on Wednesdays. He would throw some political light in his sermons but at that time we weren't really aware that this was conscientisation.

Sometimes he would speak very directly about his experiences of struggles at Turfloop university. We used to listen with great interest because we also saw ourselves at university level at some stage. About two years after that, the June 16th events happened. One can say that superseded almost everything.

#### **Which school were you in?**

Moletsane High School in Soweto.

#### **What made you decide to go into exile and join the ANC?**

The June 16th events made it very clear what we were up against, that mere talk will not drive sense into the heads of the powers-that-be. Being in those '76 battles, stone throwing while they were shooting at us, one really had to decide there and then to say no, we can't keep hoping that things would become better. It was just a pipedream.

**So, who did you go with out of the country? Who facilitated this? Where did you go?**

I left with 12 other comrades in a Kombi. Five of us are still alive. The latest to be buried was Comrade Mdu, his real name is Dan Oliphant. He was at the SSA (State Security Agency).

We left from a shop called Mafanta in Emdeni. We were hidden there for two days because the guy, Roy, was not back in time from transporting others - and then we were taken to Swaziland. We didn't know Roy and whether that was his proper name or a pseudonym.

In Swaziland we were under comrade John Nkadimeng. And comrade Stan Mabizela would assemble us and give us lectures.

He had just recently been released from Robben Island so he also related their experiences there. After about two months we went to Maputo and stayed in Matola. Comrade Jacob Zuma was also in Maputo.

I had to go to Dar es Salaam because I had an ear problem but the other comrades I left the country with left for Angola. In Dar es Salaam the person who was responsible for us was Nthathi Mashego

There were two ANC residences – we used to refer to them as Temeke 1 and Temeke 2. Bheki, the late General Masondo's sons, other guys and I were at Temeke 1.

The other person at Dar es Salaam that was with us was a comrade we called Bobby, he was also one of our earlier comrades. He was also just recently released from Robben Island, he played a very big role in teaching us more serious politics as we were mostly into political Black Consciousness.

After receiving my treatment in Dar es Salaam I re-joined the comrades in Angola.

**Then?**

I was first at the Engineering camp. That's a transit arrival camp and we mixed with a lot of other comrades. Many of them went to the GDR (East Germany) and had returned, including comrades Obadi, Paul Dikeledi, Simelane and Walter, whose real name is Ndidi.

Some of them left with us for Benguela, and we then went to Novo Katengue, which was then a new camp. We were just taking occupation after the place was not used for some time. It looked like it was a mining compound. It was just next to the railways. We had to get the place to be habitable.

### **What training did you get?**

Well, we got basic training in military and then tactics, firearms, explosives, engineering, topography and artillery. With the artillery, it wasn't much, small weapons, an 81mm mortar.

We did politics, of course. The chief instructors were comrades Mark Shope and Professor Jack Simons, others they really did it ad hoc. It was formally in the classes and informally after school when we were just sitting around and talking.

### **When do you join Special Ops? How does it happen?**

At Novo Katengue our Camp Commander was Julius Mokoena, the Chief of Staff was the late Thami Zulu and my Company Commander was Comrade Siphso. He was a Major General in the army and he just retired a year ago.

We left after the arrival of the Moncada detachment. A lot of other comrades went for further training to the former Soviet Union and some of us followed later. I went to Quibaxe in Northern Angola and from there we went to Fazenda. We continued with further training – and we were instructed on survival training by some of our comrades who had been in ZIPRA (Zimbabwe Peoples' Revolutionary Army) camps. There were a number of newly arrived comrades who were doing their basic training. I became a Platoon Commander.

I got into Specials Ops in 1985. I was informed by Bra-T (Godfrey Ngwenya), he was the Regional Commander of the West, but he didn't tell me that it was Special Ops, he said you will be leaving to go and work in Botswana because Lusaka decided. I only got to know once I was there. Javela, who was like the immigration guy, used to meet us at the Lusaka airport because we didn't use passports.

The following morning Comrade Vic (Johannes Mnisi) came together with Rashid to see us. Vic knew me because when he was in Angola, I was his Commander.

In Special Ops I worked with Vic and we were mainly the support staff for Comrade Rashid in Lusaka and also for Comrade Tommy, whose real name was Lester Dumakude.

**Wasn't he also referred to as Chris?**

Correct, he was known as Chris in Botswana. My role was to assist Special Ops in various ways, but mainly to infiltrate personnel and material into the country. I used to move between Lusaka and Botswana.

Sometimes there were urgencies and some of us carried stuff to be picked up on the other side of the border, in South Africa by comrades as prearranged. Sometimes I would also go to Botswana. I would also reconnoitre routes. We would sometimes receive comrades from inside the country at short notice for us to train them quickly and to send them back. The training we would normally give would be based on what those comrades prescribed.

We also had to replenish them when they needed to. Sometimes what they would request was not available, then Comrade Rashid and Vic would send this to us. On occasion there would be cars that would come with DLB's bringing stock.

Sometimes, I would pick these cars from prearranged places and drive them away to some place to unload and return the cars to where I found them.

The person that would come most of the time was called Ruth, but in the SANDF she was General Black.

**You'd jump over the fence into the country when you had to?**

Yes.

**Did you do that quite often?**

No. But we did the reconnoitring of routes – so we would get in to see the place. We had to acquaint ourselves with the people who live in those areas so that you can work out which are the best routes for comrades to take depending on the task at hand.

I would be with Teaser and the late Tommy Masinga. Teaser is Pule. We used to call him T-man, this comes from Teaser. He was also called Oupa.

**So you worked with T-man, Masinga, Mnisi and Rashid - and who else?**

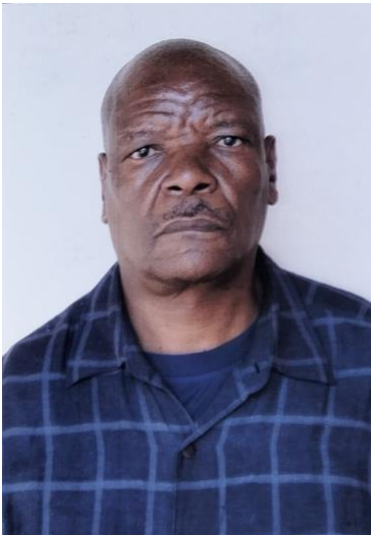
With other people who would come and go.

**Were you told exactly what the role of Special Ops was as distinct from other MK units?**

Yes, MK had to have a Special Ops unit to keep the profile of MK high, to update the quality of operations, which had to be better than the ordinary MK operations. The selection of targets was very important, we had to carry out high visibility operations. And who you recruited into Special Ops was important – you have to be satisfied that his is really someone who can add value to our work.

**So you had to be quite selective in the calibre of the person you recruited?**

Correct.



**Victor Kgaladi, recently**

**Which of the operations Special Ops carried out do you think were the best and why?**

I would say the '83 bombing of the Air Force HQ in Pretoria. Also the Koeberg operation. I'm saying that because of the high level of sophistication. The Voortrekkerhoogte rocket attack was also very important. Sasol obviously.

**Why do you say that the Pretoria Air Force bombing was one of the best?**

Because it hit at the heart of the enemy. It was so sophisticated, and it also dispelled the myth that the apartheid army was invincible, that you can't reach certain places of the enemy, and because of the morale boost effect that it also had on the people and in MK camps.

It encouraged people who might have had doubts as to whether the enemy can be reached, engaged and hurt.

**Were you aware about any controversy about the Pretoria bombing within ANC and MK ranks?**

No, not that I know of.

**About the death of civilians, particularly black civilians, in that bombing, do you have any views or not?**

You know comrade, I never had problems at that time. In the mood we were in at that time, the only thing that we were thinking of was war. We knew that there would be casualties and in certain instances innocent bystanders might just be caught in that crossfire. It never really arose as an issue, maybe some will say we had a cavalier and reckless attitude, but one accepted that you now in a war so both sides tend to lose.

**Why were you so impressed with Koeberg?**

I remember that first and foremost, it was a big project of the apartheid government, something that they would brag much about. And then we hit them – and they were not expecting it. They realised that we could get to them anywhere – and they were worried.

**Why were you impressed with the Sasol operation?**

Well, because of the security around the place they thought that they couldn't be breached – but the comrades were able to get right in there. Victor and others did it – and they were referred to as the Sasol battalion. It had a big morale-boosting effect because of its high profile. Remember, that it happened a long time after the Moroka Police Station and some other attacks on police stations by the G5 unit. There was a lull – then came this big boom. Thereafter there were quite a number of attacks. That's why I rate it as one of the most impactful operations.

**Did you have anything to do with the Gordon Webster-Robert McBride unit?**

We assisted them with ordnance but we operated on a need-to-know basis so we didn't know what the materiel we arranged for them was used for. But anyway we were constant replenishing them.

And I assisted in training Gordon Webster when I was the Commander at the Pango Camp.

**Was that before you got to Botswana?**

Yes. After his extraction from the hospital and he was withdrawn from the country he stayed at the house I was staying in Emmersdale in Lusaka with Gibson Njenje.

### **What do you think of the operations they carried out?**

There are people who received full-blown training and did so little, and McBride got only a crash course, but he and his unit outperformed many of the units who received full training. His level of organisation was super for me - and their selection of targets as well. Their success rate was very commendable.

### **And the Magoo's Bar operation?**

I keep to the same view, but, of course, it's unfortunate that we also had to lose some civilians – but the reason why that place was attacked was because it was patronised a lot by the Special Branch people who dealt in a very brutal way with most of our people who were arrested.

### **Comrade Rocky Williams, who was in MK, later suggested that there was some resentment of Special Ops among other MK units because they felt that you got more resources as you were under the direct command of Tambo and Slovo. That these other units could have done what you did if they were also favoured. Did you hear any such comments about Special Ops?**

(Laughter) Yes. There was that perception that Special Ops was more resourced than other units, but in my own view, I've tied it more to the calibre of leadership we had in Special Ops under Comrade Rashid. As I said, the amount of work that went behind pushing stuff, making DLBs in vehicles, using different types of vehicles and how all that was done caused Special Ops to be successful. If other units requested the same resources because they were doing the same amount of work, their requests would also have been acceded to.

But we had people who were very visionary, very organised and could forecast how to do a job at hand. What accounted mostly for the success of Special Ops is the amount of work we did.

Yes, there were people that had that narrative that we were favoured, but there would be certain comrades, even if they were taken out of the camp they would not go to a particular machinery, they would say, no, I want to go to another one, this was not what I was expecting. Like I said, I didn't know when they came to take me out of the camp where I was going, but I was just

went...But that wasn't the case with some comrades. But we didn't have those issues in Special Ops – that's also why people were impressed with us.

**So, what happens to you when you come back to the country after the ANC's unbanning? What's been your role?**

After I came back in 1990, nothing happened until when we began to integrate into the new army in 1994. Before that we had to wait - and it was not all of us who were absorbed at Shell House.

I went into the SANDF. I'm a Sergeant Major and Warrant Officer. I am working with General Shoke.

**How do you see where the country is now?**

Comrade, I would say, first and foremost, I've got a lot of huge disappointments in how we handled ourselves on certain things. We were very haphazard which has led to the current state of the movement. We are so factionalised today to such an extent it's like we have just come to a stop. We don't tell people about how disciplined we were outside the country and when we try, they say they don't want to hear about the past, we are talking about something they do not know.

They just look at where the movement is currently – different comrades just doing what they want. We could've achieved much more had we been as disciplined as we were outside and focused on the set objectives of the movement as we did when the struggle was being fought.

**If you knew then what we would become as an ANC and country now would you have still done what you did and risked arrest or death?**

You know, I would say yes, even though I had never thought it would turn out like this. But what I would have done is tried to better my academic qualifications so I had more opportunities now. As to whether I had a choice, well, one had no other. The other option was to just cross the line on to the wrong side – and that was not something I could do. But I have no regrets.

**Which Special Ops leaders stand out for you and why?**

I was exposed to Rashid and JS as the most senior, but Rashid was responsible for running Special Ops. Others I did not have the benefit of being exposed to. But Rashid, in all seriousness, his meticulous planning, his no-nonsense attitude, his being a very honest, open person who would say the way he wanted things done and wouldn't mince his words – he stands out.

JS was also a very open person who would, when he briefed us on an operation, actually say – don't take this as perhaps something that will be a walk in the park, it's going to have dangers, and you might sometimes fall into a situation that might lead to you losing your lives. He was not a person who would want to sugar-coat things.

**Why Two-Six? How did you get that name?**

My Tswana name is Mothusi and people would always call me Thusi. So, in the North West province where the majority is Setswana-speaking, people call you Two-Six if your name then is Mothusi.

**And you had a Take Five in your unit as well?**

Yes.

**I like the colourful names you sometimes gave yourselves and were given in MK...**

(Laughter) Yes.