

John Dovey

Missing Voices Project 14/02/08

	TAPE ONE SIDE A
Interviewer	Give me a bit of your background.
John	<p>I grew up in Maritzburg. My parents were divorced when I was 4, and my father remarried again shortly after, so I stayed with him. So I grew up there with him in Maritzburg. He was in the police for a few years, and then I think he spent a year in the traffic department. And then started working at the university where he worked till he retired a few years ago. I had a, I think, a difference of opinion with a lot of my friends. A lot of my friends were talking about ducking out of the army and that kind of shit. The typical kind of English speaking attitude here in Natal was very much one of we don't want to go, that kind of stuff. But from the first year that I registered, which was my standard 8 year when I turned 16, I volunteered for Spesmagte. And then the next year and the next year again, and when I got my call up it was to Spesmagte HQ in Pretoria. So the 10th of January 1985 I arrived in the train at Voortrekkerhoogte, climbed off the train at the sports field there, the typical thing, all thousand people arriving. And there was a corporal with a maroon beret who picked us up, into a vehicle, we went off to SAMS HQ, and they told us, because there were too many of us, not enough space, at Spes Kop. So we found out later there were just over 900 odd of us that had been called up there. We went through a two week process of pre-selection. What happened is that I got off the train at 10:10 on the 10th of January 1985 and by 11 I was running in an overall and boots around the water car. And I'd been issued my full kit issue. So 15 minutes from off the train to full kit issue and I was already running with boots on. And then we spent that week doing a whole bunch of things. We did a bunch of physical tests, the classical stuff, sit-ups, push-ups, pull-ups, route march, running, blah, blah, blah. And then a whole lot of psychometric tests, psychological tests, a whole bunch of stuff. Then what they did is they selected a number of us, there were just over 90 odd of us that they'd said had passed pre-selection and that they were going to put us through basics and we'd do selection after we had done basics. So we climbed onto Wit Olifante and off we went to Bloemfontein. I don't know how many millions of hours that was, we travelled to Bloemfontein. When we got there we went to 1 SSB and they dealt us in, ten of us into each...what do they call it...troop of the squadrons, with all the other guys there that were going to be armour, we were dealt in there. And then second day they were there we were introduced to a guy who was wearing a Three Two Battalion belt and beret and what have you, and he was a captain that had come down from the border and he was also going to go on selection. But they'd said to him that he must then take us through basics, or preparing us for selection in addition to our basics. So Captain Doybie (??)</p>

	<p>Coetzee, who's currently the Chief of Staff for Special Forces Brigade. What we ended up doing is, we did the normal basics, from five o'clock to half past four-ish. But we'd go up two or so hours before the other guys and do stuff. We'd do things that come to mind. Next door to the parabats, go do their obstacle course, we did that a couple of times. We'd take poles and do a 21 kilometre run with poles. Or we'd go do PT on the field or whatever. Whatever the captain decided we'd go and do. And then after hours the rest of the guys knocked off, then we were at it again for however many hours he wanted. One of the things I remember about that specifically was, he introduced us to Bergens. I don't know if you've ever encountered them? They've got these horrible wire frames, it's a thin wire frame and he issued each of us a sandbag and a Bergen. Alright, fill the sandbag up, wet it, fill it up again, wet it until you've got a full sandbag, put that in the Bergen. And he weighed them until they all averaged out at about 40 kgs each.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Just for the record a Bergen is a backpack.</p>
John	<p>Yes, it's a backpack. At the time there was still the old generation webbing, the almost canvassy type webbing and there wasn't an actual backpack for general sort of issue. There was only the grootsak which was a small bag. The Bergen was...I think it has a British origin, similar to the modern H-frame but much more crude design. And I remember the first time that we did that was the second or third day that we were there, he told us, right, backpacks are now ready, your Bergens are ready, put them on, left turn, forward march, and he said to us, we are now going to walk from here to De Brug and back, it's 52 kilometres there, 52 kilometres back. And we got about I would say no more than four or five hundred metres out of the base where the guys were practically falling apart. Stopped everybody, sat us down and he spoke to us. Said right, the reason you can't do it now is because your heads aren't right, and that's the point of selection. We're going to go back into the base and we're going to talk about this and we're going to approach differently and we're going to build up to it. But by the end of basics that's what we're going to do. And he proved, he taught, gave me a huge lesson right there and then about how if your head's right the rest of you can do it. So we went through basics doing the normal basics but then doing all kinds of extra tricks that he came up with. For example, at the time the armour, we were the only ones who were slinging their weapons. We had R5s, we slung weapons across the chest. And that was the rifle drill we learned. What the guys learn now, that's the way we did it. Whereas the whole infantry and we had green berets where the other guys had black, but the old rifle drill, the R1 drill. And he pulled us aside and said, no, no, you guys are infantry and he taught us rifle drill because he thought that it was something we should do. Yes, that was basics. The end of basics they had another selection board and in that selection board they divided the guys up. The guys that they thought were suitable to go on to do selection and those who weren't. And the guys who</p>

	<p>weren't got sent off to 5 SAI, and the guys who all went, went down to selection. So I ended up at 5 SAI. And you when you got there the rest of the guys were still busy with their second phase...no. The end of their basics. They were doing COIN urban, crowd control, that kind of nonsense. So they didn't know what to do with us, so they sent us off to another deployment. We went off to Dundee and Glencoe and we were (<i>inaudible</i>) in a Saracen. We did township duty. Here we come straight out of basics, I think we did a two weeks township duty, and then we came back at the end of that. I remember there was a big boxing match at the time, and I remember listening to it, it was a big thing. Anyway. Then we came back from that. And they said to us that they would essentially give us carte blanche to choose what individual phase we wanted to do. If you want to be a driver, you can be a driver, if you want to be whatever, you can choose. We don't know you, you haven't done basics with us, but you have made it that far in what you've done, so you can choose. So I chose to do section leading. I thought yes, I'm going to get some rank, it's well paid, etc. So we were assigned to the section unit company and the company sergeant major was Sergeant Major Rooibaard Oosthuizen. Who was renowned for being a...how do I say it? A tough man. And I remember I had two personal encounters with him. The one where he asked, <i>moenie vra of jy in die kak is maar net hoe diep</i>. The other one where he came right up close to me, grabbed me by the ear and lifted me up on to my tip toes and his mouth was about four mm away from my face, and he said to me...and this I only worked out what it meant about three hours later...he said, Dovey, <i>ek sal 'n koei se does oor jou kop oortrek so 'n bull jou brains kan uitnaai. Hoer jy my seun? Hoer jy my?</i> And I just said, yeah sa'majoor and fucked off. <i>Laughs</i> And now as a sort of party trick, I'll say it in English and I'll say, I'll pull a cow's box over your head so that a bull can screw your brains out. And it doesn't quite capture it. But I literally had to go and ask an Afrikaans speaking friend of mine what the hell did he say to me? And when he stopped laughing, he explained. I didn't now, I was quite innocent.</p>
Interviewer	Also the delivery of sergeant major yelling that four inches away from your ear.
John	<p>Spittle sort of landing on your face. Absolutely. Anyway, I come back to Sergeant Major Oosthuizen, because he taught me some good lessons later on as well. But anyway. So then off we went, we went to a (<i>inaudible</i>). And I handled it fine, I was very fit, I'd run for cross country in school, I was very fit. In fact my best 2,4 time that I remember doing was twelve and a half minutes, and I remember that being exceptional because we'd been busy with a long day's training. At the end of it we got back they said, right, run the 2,4 as you are. And we were in battle dress so we had <i>staaldak en geweer</i>, the whole bang shooting match on. Hang on, this is after I'd joined the company and I was carrying the LMG, and I came second in the company at the end of the 2,4 and the person who came first was one of the loots who had just</p>

his browns and his boots and not even a rifle. So I was very proud of that. Anyway, I was fit enough, wasn't a problem, and I cruised through it and right at the end we had a braai function right at the end of the section leading. The whole way through I'd had a real problem with a Sergeant Blom. Very saturnine looking PF sergeant who was very expert in what he did and knew what he was talking about, but I just had a...I don't know...I don't know if you can have a personality clash as a troop with a sergeant but that's what it seemed to be. Anyway so, at the braai, he started giving me all kinds of shit and telling me how...I wasn't going to make it as a soldier and this and that and the next thing. And that I wasn't tough enough and all kinds of crap. Because I'd given him some hassles too. So then I told him you can take this rank that you just handed me, take these two lines and shove it up your ass. He said, yeah! I'm going to make you carry an LMG. I said, no, no, you're not. I'm going to go and get it myself. And I stormed off to the tent, grabbed all my kit, my *balsak*, which is packed to go the next day and rejoin the company as a section leader, walked that 300 odd metres up to the Delta Company base, I reported to the company sergeant major, told him I was there to carry an LMG. He said, fine, join platoon 5 Charlie section, LMG gunner. Which I did. And the next day the section leaders joined us and the two days where the section 2 IC, and that was fine. Then we went on, we did our third phase, our conventional phase. And right at the end of the third phase we had a pass. We were supposed to go off on pass and then come back and then start with our combat readiness training to go up to the border. And we got all dressed and shined up and everything, rice headbands on, in the Samils, and they were taking us out to the road to go and hitch home, and while we were riding out there we saw the *garri*, the duty *garri*, come racing out along the road after us and we thought they were on the way to 5 SAI. They came and they pulled in front of the Samils and stopped the whole convoy, said turn around and go back to camp. And so we were highly *bedonnerd* about this because we were on our way on pass, and we got back to camp and they said, no, pass is cancelled, we've got to two sergeant majors from the British army who are coming here, they've been training the guys at infantry school in COIN, urban, and they're going to take you through two weeks training and you're going to be deployed on township duty because of the State of Emergency. So it was around about July, August, thereabouts, I forget the exact dates. It had just been announced in parliament a State of Emergency, etc, etc. So we were told we're being deployed. We had no telephones there, we had no way of letting our families know. Our families were expecting us from pass. They had no way of knowing. We just didn't arrive. So that was a whole issue. And we were also *bedonnerd* because the Cape Town guys had left the day before, as they used to go earlier. So they all went off on pass and we didn't, we had to stay there. Anyway, so then these two sergeant majors took us through, they were still...what they were teaching was to become doctrine later on. Which was interesting because

	<p>we heard from the horse's mouth some stories that I got parroted back ten years later, somebody telling the stories as if it was real. Anyway, besides the point. So we spent about two weeks on that. And then just before we deployed, it was the last stage of that, we got issued with new generation kits. All the new helmets and H-frame and chest webbing, that kind of stuff. And off we went to Port Elizabeth. Got down to PE and we stayed at the base right next to that valley, the Happy Valley, I think it's called, whatever. We had the best food we'd ever eaten in the army the first day we were there, because we ate in the...I think it's the navy mess. And we started there going through sort of familiarisation etc. And what's interesting, which came back later was, there was a company there of guys, of campers, from CTH, from Cape Town Highlanders which...anyway...so then we started, it took us a couple of days to settle in and get to the know the area what have you, and we started patrolling. And we were patrolling in New Brighton, a little area called Soweto, and one or two little peripheral sort of areas there. And our job was literally area domination, as always is. Then there were issues of curfews and enforcing curfews and bullshit, bullshit. All that normal kind of stuff. What we hated was the SAP. SAP created shit in that township that was so unnecessary...all kinds of things.</p>
Interviewer	In what sense?
John	<p>Well, all kinds of things. For example we had enforced curfews and we would stop guys that were on their way home or whatever, and we'd ask them, where have you been? Where are you going? And our instruction was that we had to arrest people that were out after curfew. And we decided on our own that that was just unreasonable, unfair. So if someone had a legitimate kind of thing, I'm hurrying home, my bus was late, whatever. We'd give them a warning and let them carry on. Someone who reeked of alcohol or whatever, one of the guys would wind off and give them a klap and say, that's naughty, don't do that kind of thing. you know that kind of thing. Literally to protect the guys. And the reason that we did that is because at first we would pick the guys up and arrest them. Men, women, whatever, they were late after curfew, and take them to the police station. Until about the second or third time we did that. And we went to the police station taking somebody in and we heard screaming and stuff coming from the cells. And we figured out and what have you that it was the policemen abusing people in the cells, and we decided that was just not on, not for something as arbitrary as being five or ten minutes late, whatever. So we did what we wanted to do.</p>
Interviewer	When you were deployed there, were there police with you or were you separate?
John	<p>No, no, at the time, under the State of Emergency Act, we had policing powers. We were briefed on the law and we were briefed on the fact that we had powers of arrest, that we had powers of detention, etc. We'd been through the whole minimum force thing and it was explained to us very simply. Minimum force is: you</p>

	warn somebody to stop, if they don't, you shoot them. We were told you're soldiers, that's what you do. We had specific briefings about road blocks, about if somebody approaches a road block, turns around and drives away, you're allowed to shoot them to stop them, etc, etc.
Interviewer	But all your briefings and all your commands came from military people?
John	Military. In fact, when we were patrolling we would patrol as a platoon, but we'd break up into sections so each section on a Buffel and we'd meet together probably two or three times over the twelve hour period. We were staged out at what we called Sun City, which was the police station there, but they were not in our chain of command whatsoever. And in fact when it came to operational stuff, the corporal on the ground commanded his section end of story. There was no question and a policeman could not tell him what to do. The only way a policeman could give us instructions was through our chain of command. And the way it worked out is that on the ground the corporal was in charge, end of story. And on two or three occasions I saw fairly senior policemen telling us what to do and the corporal telling him just to fuck off and die. We're not <i>sleg</i> cops. And they'd take an exception to it and our lieutenant backing us up and saying fuck off and die, go through me, and etc. They were supposed to literally go through our company commander who we never actually even saw, but anyway. <i>Tape turned off</i>
Interviewer	You were talking about the Eastern Cape townships and stuff like that. At the time, what was your feeling, you were trained as a soldier and you were trained as an infantryman, trained to use heavy weapons, you're used to carrying machine guns, yet here you are on...
John	Well I must tell you, what happened is shortly after we got there, not only that, I also had a political problem with it because my feelings have always been a mixture of very liberal and conservative at the same time, one of patriotism, defend the country, blah, blah, blah, but at the same time, I'm humanistic etc. And I actually went through a chain of command, went to my platoon commander, demanded to go on orders with the company commander. So I got to an appointment to go on orders...this is probably a week or two after we arrived in PE. And got marched into the office by the RSM, you know, " <i>links, reg, links, reg, halt</i> ". Sort of thing. And I opened my mouth and I started saying, the reason I'm here is I've got a problem about being...he said, stop! <i>Vat hom uit. Links, reg, links, reg</i> . He says, alright. Now come and have a social visit with me. <i>sluip in</i> . Walked in, sat down. Says, right, tell me your problem. I said to him, I've got a problem about the fact we're in the townships, I don't think it's legal, never mind anything else, and blah, blah, and I think it's wrong, and I think what the police is doing is wrong, and the army shouldn't be used in townships and this whole sort of philosophy. And he says ok. He says the reason

	<p>that I brought you in here, now to <i>sluip</i> in here, is because you're not on the record. If you come back in here, I give you the choice. Either you go out, fuck off, do your duty. Or you can come back here, officially, tell me that same story officially on the record. And he says, I have no choice but to put you in DB for three months. Then you can start again. Up to you. I've got no problems with hearing that philosophy but the consequences are the following. So I said, thank you very much captain. And I went out and I had a bit of a moral dilemma and decided, no. And I went off and I did the thing. He spoke to me quite frankly and said, listen if you feel that you're concerned about abuses and what have you, he says, then you're more use being in your platoon and being an observer and saying to people don't do that if you think they did wrong, etc. He was quite reasonable about the whole thing. He says, but the way it works...and I can never remember the Latin one, you know that one that goes to encourage the others, that Latin phrase. And he quoted that Latin phrase and then explained to me what it meant, which was quite interesting. He says, but those are the consequences, because that's the system. Because if we allow you to get away with it, the next thing I know, I've got fifty, a hundred other guys who are coming in here, who don't have the same convictions but want to have the same results.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Did any other guys in your unit sort of express the same views to you privately?</p>
John	<p>There were a couple. Mostly the medic types. For some how or another <i>boom-rooking</i>, guitar playing okes, landed up as ops medics and did a damn fine job, but they tended to be the liberal kind of guys. There were quite a few guys that were more liberal but there was a general sort of attitude of...at the time there were all these funny things like, why not just put a fence around the townships and let them fuck each other up. Because the idea was more that they were fighting each other. They were destroying their own future, burning their schools, blah, blah, blah, so why worry? If that's what they want to do, let them do it. So there was that feeling of we shouldn't be here, but for those reasons rather than anything else. And then there were a couple of guys...and it was interesting, people often make this an English Afrikaans divide, which is not what I found. I found that there were a number of Afrikaans guys who were very liberal...liberal in their relationships rather than their politics. In the sense that, they'd come off the farm or whatever, and they were used to working on a daily basis with black people, they'd interacted with them, they understood the culture, etc, and it was not that much of an issue for them. They understood where they were coming from. And I found that there were some of the English speaking guys, most from the Cape...there were two that I think of. One called Bird and the other one we used to call Moose. We used to go, M, O, another O, Sa, Moose. He was as thick as two bricks. That I remember as being particularly prone to violence. At the slightest provocation wanting to use their rifle</p>

butts on people and that kind of stuff. And they were English speaking. The divide wasn't English and Afrikaans as much as people make it out to be but there was definitely a tendency on the part of the Afrikaans speaking guys being more conservative in their approach and more bending to discipline and the English guys to actually ask questions about why, why are we here and why not? There was very little actual resistance though. It was a matter of well we've got to get through it, we're 12 hours on, but we're 24 hours off. We had Happy Valley. There's the most beautiful girls in bikinis we'd ever seen in our lives 300 metres away from where we are. Of the 24 hours we got like 16 of them we were off, so we could be out of the base, and that proved to be the case. A lot of the guys got involved with a lot of the girls, and had a jol and drank a lot and all the rest of it, and then used that I think as an escape valve. So there we were, involved in patrols etc, all the other bits and pieces, and then in September...I don't remember the exact date, we'd been on duty from 6am, we were coming off at 6pm...and I was in Charlie section and our platoon sergeant was in our vehicle. We called over the radio to the other platoon...there was sort of an adjacent sector and we'd been playing soccer with a bunch of the kids in one field, which we did regularly. And this other platoon sergeant came over with a section that he was with, and the two platoon sergeants were talking about how...we're off in just a couple of hours. Both of them were corporals, both were PF. A couple of hours we're going to be off for the weekend, a couple of beers, blah, blah, we're going to go out, where are we going to go? That kind of discussion. Ok, last little tour around the township and then we're off back to Sun City again, and that was the conversation. So off they went and we went off our way. About 20 minutes, half an hour later, we got a call over the radio saying that they were in trouble and so we went racing because we knew what their sector was, because we swapped them out, and we went racing off into their sector and drove up and down in the streets. As we were driving we saw down the side streets, a whole bunch of...kids I suppose is the word...probably about sort of 12, 13ish kind of an age on average, all gathered together in the street all looking at something. So we turned down the street and drove and as we got there they all bailed over the fences and between the houses and what have you. Left lying in the road...and I jumped off the vehicle...was Corporal Schoeman. And I went down to him and he was just covered in blood. And first thing I did was dislodge an axe that was embedded in his forehead. And then I removed his penis and his balls from his mouth. And I helped him to hold his intestines into his stomach because he'd been castrated, disembowelled, and later we found out, stabbed 75 times. And he had an axe embedded in his forehead. And all he could say to me was that he wanted to die. And I held him in my arms and they called for an ambulance, and before the ambulance could get there he was dead. Anyway, so climbed back in the vehicles, and we were told to go, and we got back to Sun City, to the police station where we were staged, and

	<p>we sat and we waited. And about an hour and a half later, the company sergeant major stood up to tell us, listen I've got bad news, you guys might have heard rumours going around, but Corporal Schoeman has died of his wounds. And that whole company...and it was a large company, 240 odd of us. There were five full strength platoons of 35 odd each, etc. And the whole company stood up almost as one man and there was this noise – I'll never forget, it makes the hair on the back of my neck still stand up, it was like a growl – and we all had all our weapons and all the rest of it and the guys were cocking weapons, and we started walking towards the vehicles, the whole company. And that man stood there and by the force of his personality stopped that company, pulled his firearm, his 9mm, and he stopped the company right there, and told us to go back, sit down, etc. Which we did, and we sat there and then the platoons sergeants were tasked, they came around and collected all the ammunition, etc, etc, and we sat and we sat, and they put us back in the vehicles, took us back to base, fed us, the whole lot, and nobody was on duty. They pulled everybody out. Nobody was on duty. Pulled us all the way back to the base and fed us, told us just to chill. And we chilled there for like 8-12 hours, and while we were doing that, the CTH guys were put into our area that we'd been patrolling.</p>
Interviewer	CTH?
John	<p>Cape Town Highlanders. That was a camper company, a Citizen Force company. And then they, via the chain of command, we got spoken to. So our platoon commander basically called us together, no, people, you can't revenge anything, etc, blah, blah, blah, bullshit, bullshit. And another 12 hours later we got put back in to the township again. Different sectors but we carried on doing our job. Out of that came a number of lessons learned. Because the story that we were told afterwards was, that the section had chased after somebody, and Corporal Schoeman left his weapon in the vehicle, because he jumped out with this section, was running with them after some guys, and they got separated. And so there he was without a weapon and he got then attacked. A couple of other guys got their weapons taken away from them by different crowds of people. And that's why now you'll still see the guys wear a chain or a piece of rope on the weapon. It comes from that incident. Yes, exactly, from then, it's so that your weapon can't be taken away from you. I still battle with that. I still...you must go look at my Wall of Honour on the website, I posted a dedication to him.</p>
Interviewer	It sounds like had it been left to its own device the unit would have gone out and caused mayhem in revenge.
John	<p>I think so. I mean, nobody can say. People talk about the Bisho massacre. And I laugh. 30 people dead. Excuse me, that's bad fire control. That's badly trained troops. One troop has got 35 rounds in a magazine and you've got a platoon of them of 30 or 35 guys, and you only kill 30 people! Excuse me, there's</p>

	something wrong with your training. That was not a massacre.
Interviewer	It's bad shooting.
John	You hear what I'm saying, it's bad shooting. I'm sorry. It's a duck shoot. That was not a massacre. Ok, I think that we came very, very, very, very close to having something really, really bad happen.
Interviewer	On your sort of travels at that time, were the people in the township generally aggressive towards you or did it depend on...?
John	That's so difficult because...ok, we were continuously playing a cat and mouse game. For example, you look at Buffels now, they're not much used anymore but you'll remember they've got this piece of metal that's attached to the front of the vehicle that goes up above the level of the roll bar. That was also something that was a lesson learned with us, because what happened is that the guys stretched wire between the houses to catch the guys around the neck, so we put that hook up there to catch the wire. So these things happened. So there was that one. Then a new tactic was introduced that we had to do patrols standing in the vehicles, you weren't allowed to sit down. I remember my 18 th birthday present was that my corporal allowed me to sit in the vehicle while we were on patrol for the whole 12 hours of my birthday. I didn't have to stand. And the idea around that was you stood in the vehicle so you don't develop a (<i>inaudible</i>) mentality so you can see the ground around you and observe and you're alert and all that kind of nonsense. Otherwise guys end up sleeping, the normal kind of story. But in general we drive around and what will happen was that we'd go two or three duty times sometimes, nothing would happen, and then we'd find there'd be kids on the road, laaities, eight-10 years old, and they'd whistle. When they whistled, then from behind the houses...so from a row of houses away, then we'd have things thrown over the houses at us. Stones, bottles, shit, all kinds of things. Very, very seldom petrol bombs, because they also knew, just as well as we did, that for stones and bottles that we weren't allowed to retaliate but if we saw somebody throwing a petrol bomb it was an immediate danger, we were allowed to shoot them. So they were very clear...I think I got the idea that they understood that. Both sides understood the rules of the game, what the other side was and wasn't allowed to do. So that would happen. There would be odd incidents and then we'd bail off and half the section would go around the house this way, and half go there. And you'd get tangled up in barbed wire that they'd put in long grass, or you'd fall into a hole full of shit, etc, etc. They'd set you up and draw you into traps, so it was like cat and mouse game. Very little actual contact between the two sides. We had funny things. We had the bloody INT wienies, who'd come up with funny ideas. Like they'd say, everyone wearing a black beret, if they're wearing the beret inside out, it means they are a street organiser. So we'd stop everybody with an inside out beret. So what the

guys would do then, is everybody would then turn their berets inside out. *Laughs* So they were all like that. And then was the story about, no, no, they've got an identification thing, so you search them for ID and there's nothing on them but if you take their hat off and you look on the inside of their hat, then they'll have some kind of identifying marks. Then we stop everybody wearing hats. Stupid shit. It was a constant cat and mouse game. Who knows how many were enemy and who weren't? I mean... I think we caught the start of a UDM movement, the mass mobilization movement. So even worse we were getting this information via the intelligence officers etc., that was telling us about ANC and about MK and this and that, and we knew that was not what was going on in the township. They had actually no idea, as far as we were concerned, what was going on, because for us we saw the graffiti, and the graffiti, there was maybe two ANC things in the whole township area, and about 57 million other ones like UDM etc. So we understood that they were just plain wrong. Then we would do things, we would get tasked to do cordoned searches, and the big cordoned searches which was the worst possible bloody thing, because then you'd go and there'd be 3000 troops surrounding the whole bloody township, whatever, and you have to stand one man facing in and one man facing out, and you have to wait for literally 6, 8, 10 hours while the police and stuff went through. The plum jobs then would be protection for the police. Because then at least you were busy doing something, otherwise you literally had to stand on your feet and do nothing for that time. And one particular time was when they actually... they didn't do it after that... was when a bunch of the guy got gyppo guts. Now you're standing and the okes are walking two paces and having a shit every five minutes literally, until the guys were falling down from lack of fluid, dehydration, and all the rest of it. So then they learned their lesson that they need to actually relieve us once an hour, once every two hours, and that kind of nonsense. We hated those. And then we'd have small scale ones as well, where there would be reported incidents or a suspect whatever, and we'd go in this platoon strength, we'd surround a house and the police would go through it and search it. We were under very strict instructions about entering premises. We were told that the law still applied, there were certain procedures we had to go through, etc, etc. But if we had to we were allowed to do it, but only if we were in pursuit of somebody. And even then we had to be careful about damage and we had to make sure that we were always accompanied by somebody else, that we asked permission for various things, that we didn't search anything but we instructed the owner of the house to do it for us and we watched while he did the search, etc, etc. So all those things was rules of engagement. But then of course there were incidents where the guys would go and have a mock sort of (*inaudible*) search of a shebeen. Just happened to walk out with a number of beers. These things happened too. But there was a quid pro quo. The guys who did that knew that they would have a certain amount of leniency because the guys could

	get beers and that kind of thing. So that happened both ways.
Interviewer	In your training at 5 SAI, you say here, intelligence said, well this is the ANC provoking this and stuff...in your training at 5 SAI because you were straight conventional I presume, counterinsurgency but conventional soldiering...
John	COIN role.
Interviewer	Was the focus then on SWAPO, Soviet expansion and things like that?
John	Absolutely.
Interviewer	So the ANC didn't feature at that stage.
John	Not at all. ANC, MK was actually not an enemy to us whatsoever, not in any political military social nothing. It was an absolute non entity to us. And as far as I'm concerned it never was. During all the time I spent in the townships it never was an issue...
Interviewer	Except intelligence seemed to think so.
John	Yes, they did, absolutely. In fact I think the only time we ever encountered ANC at all in the townships was much, much later when I was doing camps with the Carbineers, where we played peace keeper between the ANC and Inkatha. But otherwise they just were not an issue whatsoever. And we disregarded the intelligence wienies completely because they just had no idea what was going on as far as we were concerned. What did happen is that they laid a requirement on us to feedback intelligence etc. Which we just didn't. What we did instead is we had our own intelligence. Within the platoon simply a matter of...we would tell the section leader we'd seen something, he would then tell the platoon sergeant and the platoon commander, and every now and again we'd get together and talk about stuff, with each other, everyone would have a say or stand up and say listen I saw this thing, I wasn't sure about that. And the example that was used was the one that the two British NCOs, they gave us that training in 5 SAI. And that was the example they gave, was some British troop on patrol in Ireland who spotted on the doorstep where there were normally three milk bottles, there were now five. And they went and raided and the guys were housed there. So those were the kind of things that we'd been taught to look for, and which we did. And when we did tell the intelligence types, they were not interested in the kind of thing that we saw. So we would do it for ourselves. And we had a fair amount of success. When we didn't involve the police, and we didn't involve the intelligence types, what we'd do is we'd call in and say, seen something suspicious, we're going to search the house. Meanwhile we'd been keeping an eye on the house for like weeks. And we'd go in and we'd find weapons. We'd find AKs, we'd find pistols, etc, etc. So we had a fair amount of success like that as long as you didn't involve anyone outside of our sort of environment. And that became sort of the way we

	worked. Very little trust between us and the SAP and very little trust between us and the MI type guys. We believed firmly in conventional (<i>inaudible</i>) terms we believed that firmly. I have some friends since then, who are MI, who take great exception to me saying that but I just chuckle quietly to myself and believe what I believe.
Interviewer	So that period, that was the Eastern Cape, that must have been towards the middle of your training.
John	Yes, was from September I think until through February the next year. And during that time we spent most of the time in PE, and then we spent a period of time of about three weeks odd up in Dordrecht, Queenstown, which was absolutely brilliant. Some farmer had an unused farmhouse that he allocated to our platoon. And we moved in there and we harvested potatoes and we fished his dam and we had an absolute jol. We had to run roadblocks people who were coming from the Transkei into the Eastern Cape. And after the second day they knew, if they got there with an arm of dope, then they'd go through without getting the car searched. Then that was it, so we had an absolute jol. <i>Laughs</i>
Interviewer	Now this whole time, you're in the military and you've seen these things but you're getting the occasional pass and you're going home and doing whatever you did on a pass. How does it affect your mind? Because a lot of people at home didn't actually realise what was happening in the townships.
John	I had met Shireen in the December that I finished school.
Interviewer	Shireen is now your wife?
John	We went up to the Berg, (<i>Drakensberg Mountains</i>) up to...I forget now the name of the place. And as a family the last time we were going on holiday together, because I was going off to the army, blah, blah, blah. And the caravan next to us there was this girl and I spotted her, and she spotted me, we started talking, we got to know each other and all the rest, during the week while I was there, and I started writing to her when I went away. And the first pass I got I came down and we started going out together. So she's been through this whole experience with me. Anyway the point is, she was living with her parents in Everton, and later when I was doing a camp, I did a camp where we were in Waterfall which is literally three kilometres away. Where we hauled an average of 20 to 30 bodies out after a weekend.
Interviewer	Were you working in Mpumalanga?
John	No, just the Waterfall area, very rural, rolling hills...
Interviewer	The Valley of a Thousand Hills.
John	Exactly and (<i>inaudible</i>) So that's a classic example, literally a three kilometres separation, not this separation Natal Eastern Cape but the same thing applied all the way through. There was

	<p>an absolute denial. And one of the things that I've maintained all the way through is that people spoke after '94, but before that as well, about this escalation of violent crime and all the rest of it, which I've never believed. Because I saw exceptional violence that I never saw in any media here, in any newspapers or TV or radio whatever. And you saw the gaps in the paper because of the censorship but that's all you saw. So the general...I remember getting back from PE, I think we had only one pass while we were down there...I remember getting back and having an absolute disbelief...well first of all an unwillingness to talk about it. Secondly when I did start speaking about stuff actual disbelief. Shireen only found out about Corporal Schoeman getting killed probably years later. I couldn't even talk about that, because it was such a difference in environment.</p>
Interviewer	<p>So essentially...if I can use a bit of a hackneyed phrase, but two worlds in one country.</p>
John	<p>Yes, absolutely. Without a doubt. It was in fact interesting because I'd had very limited contact with any black people whatsoever up until the time I went to the army. Simply that was the way our lives worked. The only black people that I knew their names were the garden boy and the...and that's what we called them, garden boy and the maid. And then while we were down there we started actually seeing...well I started seeing for the first time, real conditions, and people living in the most amazing conditions. I remember the area called Soweto was a shanty town. And there was abject poverty, and yet we went into some of the shacks and they were sparkling clean, well decorated, some of them had really good furniture in them. Obviously that's what they'd chosen to spend their money on. Good families. Some areas not. So you started seeing real people in a real environment. Going right across to the other end of the spectrum where there were some obviously really wealthy black families living there as well who had five or six cars, because they weren't allowed to own property so they invested the money in cars, etc, etc. So we saw the spectrum. There was one...no that wasn't then, that was later on, where I got to see inside a disco, nightclub whatever. That was the most incredible thing I'd ever seen. The best laser show, the best lighting, the best sound system I'd ever seen in my entire life. And it was the middle of this deserted township sort of environment.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Now through this whole period you're in the military, you've obviously got a fairly sort of educated outlook on the world...</p>
John	<p>You want to know how I felt? Let me read you something I wrote at that time. I wrote this poem, it's called Soweto, but it wasn't the Soweto up in Transvaal, it's the Soweto of the Eastern Cape. It's titled Soweto and it says: "It sits, it waits. There is fear and hunger. I am a stranger, an object of hatred. I am one in the midst, inside the jaws of the beast. I am white, they are black. Between us an infinite gulf. The steel shutters of their eyes, the deadly, the implacable politeness. The sprawling (check</p>

	<i>wording in original in archive)</i> of hate, sordid town of fear. The beast sits and waits.” I think that gives you an idea of how...
Interviewer	And that comes from that book of verse that you’ve...
John	Yes, Soldiers Verse. I wrote something, I literally wrote then sitting in a Buffel, in that place, looking at the people, looking at me...well standing in the vehicle, looking at the people, looking at me, and it expressed it exactly, I think, how I felt at the time.
Interviewer	And then your National Service comes to an end and you...
John	No, no, not yet. Then we got back and they took off platoon 1-4 to go up to the border.
Interviewer	Now this is after Queenstown?
John	Yes, yes, yes. Platoon 1-4 were told...we were all told that we were going to go deploy, so there was a two week refresher course and what have you, and while we were busy with that, they said, no, no, no. Platoon five, we’ve got another job for you, and they took two of us and sent us up to Pretoria. They housed us in the military police barracks in Voortrekkerhoogte. They put us through a little training exercise where we had to learn a bunch of procedures and stuff, and we had to write an exam on it, signed that we agreed to all the procedures, and we started guarding what we called the six Hotels. A number of generals and admirals and ministers and stuff. And that was a disaster. Absolute disaster! I remember vaguely, the entire platoon literally leopard crawling up the stairs and back into our bungalow the one night, trying to get back, and we were all drunk. It was just the wrong environment for us. Completely. We had to stand inspection every single morning, with all the spit and polish you can imagine, etc. The one interesting and amusing story that I can tell about that is that I was standing beat at General Malan’s house, he was then Minister of Defence, I think. And I was at the gate and there was a roaming guard and there was a guard in the little hut, near his garage, in Waterfall Pretoria. And about three weeks before military intelligence had run a little scam operation against the guys there, where a blonde in a Beetle had broken down with her little short white hot pants on and what have you, and asked for help. So the gate guard obviously let her in, took her through to the corporal in his little guard room, he let her use the telephone and go to the toilet, she wandered around the whole place took photos of everything that she could see without being accompanied, got back and pulled a firearm out of her handbag and held it to the corporal’s head and said, right call your chain of command you’re going to DB. And the three of them went off to DB for their negligence. So now in the light of that, and the light of what we’d been told there’s a procedure, now I’m standing beat at the gate, General Malan’s house. Up pulls this black car, and in the front is the driver and the bodyguard, and in the back is the minister. And the minister was in a hurry, you could see it by the way the tyres squealed as he sort of arrived there. And so I started going through my

	<p>procedure, halt, who are you? Climb out the car please, show me your identification, etc. And the bodyguard started giving me shit. So I broke the seal of my magazine, and I racked a round up into the chamber and I pointed it at him and said, right, reach into your jacket carefully with your left hand, remove your firearm and put it on the floor in front of you. this whole routine. And then the bodyguard and then the driver jumped out as well, and they started screaming at me, <i>Weet jy wie is in die motor jou dom fokking troep!</i> Blah, blah, blah, and all that nonsense. And I just continued to maintain calm and refused to let anybody in until I'd been show ID. They jumped back into the car and they disappeared. And about ten minutes later I heard a siren coming woo woo, off in the distance. And it was this big 4x4 MP vehicle, with a Staff Sergeant Wietz (??) Steyn, who just by the way, tangentially held I think, two or three world records.....</p>
	<p>END OF SIDE A (<i>counter at 558</i>)</p>
	<p>SIDE B</p>
John	<p>...so out came Staff Sergeant Wietz Steyn and he went through all the correct procedures, grabbed me by the ear and chucked me into the vehicle and replaced me with another guard and off we went. And they convened a court martial or board of enquiry, or whatever the hell it was, I don't know, it was a bunch of colonels and majors and captains. Even the tea boy was a captain. And hauled me in front of it. And I got marched in, please explain yourself, etc, and I played dumb, played that I could only speak English, because it made my life easier. And they started questioning me, I told them I went through procedure and my procedure says that I'm not allowed to let them in. They said, but don't you know better? And I reached into my pocket and I hauled out the little booklet we'd been given while we went through our little training that I'd signed, they'd signed, everybody had signed. And I said, hold on a second if you don't mind, colonel, I just need to quote from here, it says, under no circumstances is anybody allowed in the gate unless they have the correct identification, blah, blah, blah. And the way I understood this, the way I was taught this was, that is under no circumstances is anyone, irrespective of what uniform they're wearing, whether I know who they are or not, etc, that's what I was taught. So are you telling me that this is nonsense, that I can actually disregard the whole book? Or I don't understand, what's the problem, what have I done wrong? Can you explain to me what I've done wrong? I sat outside on a bench and I waited for about an hour and a half, while people went in and out and he went in and out and it was buzz, buzz, buzz. Got called back in and told, yes, you did the right thing, we're giving you a weekend pass, <i>maar doen dit nooit fokking weer nie troep!</i> laughs So yes that worked out. Then after that we went back down to 5 SAI and that was a couple of months that we were there and then we went back down to 5 SAI. Sorted out our kit and we went up to the border. We skipped Oshivelo, thank god. And we landed up</p>

	<p>at Oshikati. There we did Romeo Mike stuff for a couple of months. And then we did two or three, I forget now, escort jobs, where we took guys in and dropped them off, there we were just the muscle. And then we did sweeping operation where a bunch of engineers had to sweep a bunch of roads into Angola, and we had to sort of escort them and walk patrol what have you. And then we did a whole bunch of other patrolling as well. Then we got revved at Okanjero. We had a bunch of 81 mortars that came in that came into the camp.</p>
Interviewer	At night? When you were in your base?
John	<p>There's that scene in Platoon...I think it's Platoon...no, no, Full Metal Jackets...no. It might be even be Good Morning Vietnam, but there's one of those movies where the guys are lying in the base and they hear the mortars going and suddenly goes, oh fuck, there's mortars coming over. Well we had one of those moments. Where every night, they shoot fire plan, and when the mortars fire you can hear that, koom, koom, that hollow echo noise from the base plates. And that would fire at all kinds of times, at night...it was absolutely normal. And then we were lying in the tents and we suddenly heard this doof, doof, and everyone, you could see, suddenly got sort of uneasy and then somebody woke up and said, no base plate, there was no sound of base plates, and then someone started shouting, bunkers! And we all ran out to the bunkers. And on the way there some rounds started coming and I'll never forget, Chris van de West, he was my number two at that stage on the MAG and I turned around looking for him, looking for ammunition, and I saw him get picked up by the scruff of the neck, into the air, still running, put down again, he didn't even realise that he'd been off the ground, and come bailing in. And the round had landed then behind him. Apparently the 81mm mortar has got a 45 degree deflection of the shrapnel when it lands. So he was lucky. It missed him completely. It landed and the blast picked him up in the air and put him down. And then obviously a follow up operation after that. And we did lots and lots of walking, and 21 day patrols and what have you. I've got another poem I can read to you as well after an incident that we had. I dealt with my feelings there about various things. Let me just read this to you quickly. This is called 'The Damage is Done'. "A tear rolls out of the staring eye, glides down the skin, weaving in and out of the individual hairs of his brown chin. It breaks a trail of dust and eases gently to the ground. The sticky blood screams its frustration and I marvel that it's just as red as mine. His feet bump, bump as I drag him across the hot white vampire sand sucks deliriously at the thick red meal, buzzing black scavenger flies join the banquet. There's no room in their tiny heart for the hatred or regret. I can only stare, perversely fascinated by the sight of grey brains liberally distributed for the industrious ants to carry away."</p>
Interviewer	And did you write that at the time?

John	Yes, I wrote that after we got back from patrol. It's difficult to talk about, that's why I read the poem because that was written then. I don't know how to talk about it now.
Interviewer	You wrote poetry, a lot of the guys simply drank more.
John	I've never been a drinker. The only time I drank was for a couple of months after I got out the army, when I drank myself paralytic. But other than that I've never been a big drinker. I'm sitting drinking coke now, that's what I do. That was the way I dealt with that. I used to listen to Pink Floyd and various other things. It used to transport me in different ways. I used to read...I always used to read a lot but I used to read exceptionally. All the time.
Interviewer	While you were there did you sometimes think to yourself, well what am I doing here? What am I doing in this...?
John	I had absolutely no doubt that I was doing the right thing, that I was in the right place doing the right thing. Absolutely no doubt! I ascribe that now after 20 odd years to a combination of intrinsic belief that it was the right thing, that we were defending our country literally.
Interviewer	Against whom?
John	No, no. But on the border, standing on the border. There was a Mongane Wally Serote poem that's called 'The Border', which I read shortly after National Service which got inside my head. Which started eating away at me a lot. I forget the whole poem but there's a two line piece that goes 'the border is as far as a black man who walks alongside you.' That kind of started attacking that sort of belief. But at the time there was absolutely no question in my mind whatsoever that we were in the right place, the right time, doing the right thing. And it wasn't Swart Gevaar, Rooi Gevaar. It was somebody's literally attacking us. And I don't care what colour they are, I don't care what their philosophy is, they're shooting at us. And if I don't stop them here, they're going to be shooting at my family. And that was the bottom line. I didn't have any real knowledge of the geo political and the Cold War and...none of that shit. That stuff I've learned after the fact by reading about it and all the rest of it. But at the time I had no...I just knew...I'm in the right place doing the right thing. And then I had a book with me at the time as well, '100 War Poems'. And which I used to read obsessively. Looking for...I don't know...inspiration, solace, who knows what. And there's the one...I forget what it's called now...that speaks about the different reasons that people go to war. Some go wanting killing and decide otherwise, etc, etc. And a conclusion I came to on my own, which I've subsequently seen all over the place is that, you end up fighting for your buddy next to you, and not for any greater scheme of things. And that I think is very true.
Interviewer	So you spend all this time travelling on the border, into Angola and so on and so forth, you get mortared, did you ever fire any

	shots yourself in anger?
John	<p>Yes, I did. We had a number of occasions where we were on reaction force, where we got called out. And that was fascinating in itself. The one time we got called out because of a PB woman who...a plaaslike bevolking woman who was having a baby, so we went racing out to the village, go pick her up, we're coming back and she had no English, and she stopped us by gestures and sounds and what have you, stop, stop, stop, so we stop. She climbs out of the vehicle, crouches down, leans back against the wheel and proceeds to have her baby, with me standing, crouched in front of her, what do I do? I'd never seen this in my life, thinking that she's going to die, because there's so much blood, meanwhile, (<i>inaudible</i>) and then finishing all that, doing the whole thing, getting rid of the afterbirth, and then indicating to us, no, no, she's fine now, she's going to walk back to her village, she's had her baby. That was one. And then ok, cool, we've been on this call out, back we go, and then three hours later we get another call out, there's an escaped POW. And off we go to go now chase them, and there's a whole operation with bloody helicopters and those bok boks dropping flares. In the same night. So that was a complete mind fuck as far as that was concerned. And on one particular occasion we were involved in a follow up operation. We picked up a spoor and the (<i>inaudible</i>) were with us. We had an Ovambo tracker with us. And he was hanging off the bumper of the vehicle, and he indicated to us, five mins, four mins, three mins, then he bailed. And we were always told if they bailed you're going to hit a contact now. And we went and we drove and we could now see the spoor what have you, then it disappeared. And because I was MAG gunner, I always used to sit in the bin at the back of the vehicle with its own view. And I was looking out to the side, 90 degrees from our line of travel, line of advance...axis of advance if you want to get technical, and I saw some bushes, and we had developed our own little tactic of reconnaissance by fire, and so I put a couple of rounds into bushes when we were in that kind of situation...I put some rounds into a bush and we heard some shouting and two guys bailed. So I walked my rounds and took them out. And that's where that poem comes from. From that. and then one other time as well we were walking patrol and we picked up some shots and we went the whole sort of full scale section battle drills, dashed down (<i>inaudible</i>) fire, the whole thing...win the fire fight, fire and movement, blah, blah, blah. All we found were, I think, one abandoned shoe and one AK47. And we chased the spoor for a long time...I don't remember how long any more...chased the spoor and eventually caught up with one guy who'd died of his wounds, and I actually brought his cammo pants back and I think that they were either FAPLA or Cuban. I suspect they were Cuban. And then we got taken over, relieved us and somewhere else.</p>
Interviewer	During your time on the border did you encounter the guys from Three Two, the guys from the Recce units?

John	Yes.
Interviewer	Koevoet?
John	<p>Koevoet we hated with a passion. Because we would be called out or we'd be on a spoor, we'd pick up spoor whatever on patrol, and if we made the mistake of calling in, they would listen to the radios and we'd be walking on the bloody spoor for two days and they would be the cowboys who would come riding in, wave at us, throw us empty beer bottles and drive past, have the contact, load up the kills and go back. And we'd be sitting there with our thumbs up our asses. That happened to us, I think, three times thereabouts and we hated them. We got our revenge back. I remember the one night we were sitting in our tents in Oshikati, next to the runway, and one of the guys in platoon 3 or 4, I forget, came bailing over the <i>skietwal</i>, dived into our tent and lay on the beds soaked in sweat and saying, I'm in your platoon! I'm in your platoon! And behind him came a whole bunch of obviously reasonably well-liquored Koevoet types. <i>Laughs</i> with all kinds of weapons chasing, waar's daai fokke! Waar's daai fokke? They'd been out somewhere and they'd got back and they'd pulled up in their Casspir, dropped one oke off at his house, and as they did that this oke had bailed out the back window after he'd been with the oke's wife. <i>Laughs</i> So they were chasing him. So we had that. Then on a couple of occasions we got called to take some of the Spes okes and go drop them off. And I'll never forget, we had all this talk from about how when you're out on patrol you must be quiet, hide away, and we took these guys out and there were, I think, six vehicles. The guys said, right, night time, we build a bonfire. We're like, what the fuck, are you crazy! No, no, we're telling you build a fucking bonfire. So we make a fire. No, no, no, you don't understand. A bonfire! Chop down that tree and that tree and that tree. Literally, trees. Chop them down, pull them in, we had like three or four big trees and made a huge fire. They said, right, now the okes know we're here. They're going to walk around us, not going to fuck with us. And they went and slept. <i>Laughs</i> Completely different philosophy. Completely different. so that was that. Never saw Three Two at all. Didn't see them, hardly even knew of their existence. They were still I think at the time very quiet about who they were and what they were doing. But definitely the SF guys we obviously knew about from having done...then what I did as well, myself and Johnny we were best friends, we were buddies, and we did another pre-selection in Oshikati. They put us on a Flossie down to Waterkloof, plane down to Durban and we came and we did pre-selection here again. No, came and did selection here. Whatever. Here on the Bluff. Tried a second time. And I got all the way through until the last interview, there were a bunch of majors and what have you doing the interview, and I went through the whole interview and right at the end they said, ok, dismissed. And I did an <i>omkeer</i>. As I was doing the <i>omkeer</i> the one says to me, what are you going to do next year? And I swung around and I said, I don't know, or I said, I'm going to work, or I don't know what I said, but it wasn't</p>

	I'm going to be a Recce. He said, right, this is obviously not what you think you're going to do, we don't want you, go away. Anyway so I climbed on the train and went back up to the border.
Interviewer	And so altogether, how much time did you spend up on the border?
John	Oh geez, I don't know, probably about 8 months thereabouts.
Interviewer	And then that took you towards the end of your National Service.
John	At our last...that poem was written on the 22 nd of December 1986. 24 th December 1986 I <i>klaared out</i> in Ladysmith. We came off that patrol, Romeo Mike, whatever you call it, back into the base and we got min dae. And that afternoon we packed up, that night we slept over in Ondangwa. We had a fight with a rowe Parabat company that had just landed at Ondangwa and we fucked them up six-love. Literally. I think there were 8 or 10 of them that had to go, they had to be casevaced out back to South Africa. Irons in pillow slips and <i>tokkeltoue</i> and all that kind of crap. They were stupid. You don't take on a company of ou manne. It's just different mindsets. Flew back down to Durban, in the trucks and stuff up to 5 SAI, <i>klaared out</i> and then on the 24 th had a <i>klaar parade</i> and we got out.
Interviewer	And then you spent a bit of time drinking for a while.
John	Well, interestingly enough, I had all my danger pay from the time I was up there, probably about four grand or something, which was a shit load of money. I probably could have bought a car. And the folks picked me up, was Christmas Eve, and they said, listen the whole family's getting together down in Scottburgh with my aunt and them...the whole clan sort of got together, probably about 30 of us. And I was sitting there and I was literally four days out of the war and I just couldn't adjust. Everything was just bullshit. I mean, my folks picked me up, and met them, went and got my kit and I lit a smoke on the way back to the car, and I got told, oh you can't smoke, put that out! And I was like completely flabbergasted. And I laughed. I'm your father, I'm telling you put that out. And I said, well, listen fuck you, first of all. Secondly, I killed a man three days ago, who are you to tell me I must put this out! And that was my re-introduction to civilian life. Then Christmas day I was in Scottburgh and I lasted till about ten o'clock in the morning, and I just couldn't stand it anymore, so I just packed my shit into my bag and said to my folks, listen I'll see you when I see you, and I fucked off. I climbed on the road and I hitched up to Joburg and I partied for two weeks with a bunch of friends. Then I got back and early in January I started with Edgewood (Teachers Training College). Because what happened I'd been sitting up there, right near (<i>inaudible</i>). Doer en gone in the middle of (<i>inaudible</i>). And we get a re-supply of rat run. Comes in, drops off post. And I get two things. I get a birthday present from my folks...was a single, a bloody record. And I look at this and I think, excuse me, where do you think I am? And we played Frisbee with that for about 20 minutes. But I

	<p>also got a letter from the folks saying, what are you going to do next year? Got to think of your future and all the rest of it, and I sat there and I said to my buddies, what the fuck am I doing next year? I don't know. I don't even know if I'm going to make it till next year never mind what am I going to do. One of the guys said, listen I've heard about something cool. What's that? Edgewood teachers' training college, there's 600 chicks and only 100 okes. Cool! Great idea, I want to be a teacher. <i>Laughs</i> Wrote back to the folks and forgot about it. And when I got back they'd arranged it. They'd applied for me and I'd been accepted and everything, so they'd arranged it. so I got back down from Joburg and I started early in January at Edgewood, in the hostel, whole big shooting match, and the second lesson that we had there was science. And the oke had some or other thing with a Bunsen burner and something else. As he was busy doing his demonstrating what have you, it made this <i>whistling sound</i> and I didn't even know what was happening, I was under the table literally and I was covering my head with my hands and bullshit. And the okes like, what's your problem? I said, no, no, I've just come back from the war. Sorry I didn't even know. And he apologised to me, but it was like a bit of a joke. But there were...during Fresher's Week, (<i>inaudible</i>) houses, I arrived at Edgewood, and the deal there was you got there, you did your registration, signed all the things and you walked through the building to a courtyard, and all the second, third and fourth years were all on sort of stands sitting around there, greeting the freshers arriving. And I'd while I was in Joey, I'd put an earring in my ear, and my hair was quite long, the whole rebel against the army thing. And so I walk in, and you had to come to a microphone, introduce yourself, say who you are, what you're going to study, etc. So I get there, I get to the microphone and I say, I'm John, I'm going to be doing, whatever it was, technics something blah, blah, and one of the guys there, Andy, walks up to me, and he was a third year. But now for me, third year meant that he was the same age as me, means he finished school the same time I did. But now he thought he was just a big larney and he had...also had an earring and walked up to me and said, first years are not allowed to wear earrings! And he reached out and he grabbed the earring. So I head butted him, and when he was down, I kicked him and I broke three ribs. Because you don't fuck with me...it's something...and some of the guys, in fact two of the Lang brothers pulled me off him and they'd been at school with me as well, they knew me. Told them, no, no, relax, relax everybody, chill, chill. And needless to say, the Fresher Week initiation they had a chair for me on the side and the rest of the guys carried on with their thing. <i>laughs</i> So it was a huge adjustment. And then while I was at Edgewood I drank a lot. The only time in my life I ever really...</p>
Interviewer	When you left 5 SAI they didn't sit you down and debrief you or anything?
John	Oh please! Please! In fact while I was at Edgewood I recognised

	<p>that I had a problem. I broke up with Shireen on Valentine's Day. And I was just not coping with the whole thing. And I recognised I had a problem. And I phoned Natal Command, I said, listen, I finished National Service now in December and I'm having a problem readjusting. Is there someone I can maybe speak to? Because I didn't have any money or anything like that. And the oke said, <i>jammer, die army skiet hulle piel met jou</i>. I know now, that that was not policy. It was probably some dickweed who answered the phone, but as far as I was concerned the army had betrayed me. And I carried that burden for a long time. Anyway.</p>
Interviewer	<p>But then somewhere along the way you get a call up come do a camp.</p>
John	<p>Christmas that same year. I got called up to the Carbineers. They told us we had to do a student camp. Which was over the holiday season obviously because all the students couldn't do camps during academic year. So we had probably about 30 or 40 of us of which 90% were officers. And we went to Durban North Command, we were based at Durban North Command, we did patrols in KwaMashu. And it was fascinating because you'd have a section which was supposed to be commanded by a corporal, commanded by a two pip loot. With a section two of us are two pip loots. three or four of the troops are I and two pip loots, and the other two are like corporals or riflemen. So it was a jol. It was an absolute jol. And we did a job and it was fine and everything but it was a lot more relaxed than I'd been used to. Then I did camps every year after that. I got out of some of them, got deferment for some of them, but I was relatively willing to do them because the first proper camp that I got through wasn't that one, it was the next one that I got. And we got called up, and I arrived at that drill hall in Maritzburg and the RSM at the time was RSM Snell who's now chief of traffic here in Natal. Needless to say there were a lot of traffic officers as NCOs in the regiment at the time. <i>Laughs</i></p>
Interviewer	<p>Surprise, surprise.</p>
John	<p>Yes, surprise, surprise. And I remember very, very clearly arriving there and him immediately starting the whole RSM move, rah rah, rah, getting all the guys lined up. All of you need haircuts, blah, blah, all that kind of nonsense. And then the platoon sergeant drilling on the field. And one of the platoon sergeants had come out of National Service as a Infantry School qualified police sergeant, so he was a two liner during National Service but he got promoted, got his third stripe...he arrived, just before the camp started, got his third stripe, now he's drilling us. English speaking guy but he's drilling us in Afrikaans. And giving us little commands in Afrikaans. So the RSM calls him, sergeant come here! Sir! Which I still have major problem, for all of us was the whole thing of Sir to a warrant officer, we didn't know that stuff. And says to him, sergeant why are you drilling in Afrikaans, this is an English regiment. It's not an Afrikaans regiment. Sorry RSM. Don't call me RSM, call me Sir! Sorry Sir, I don't know the</p>

	English drills. Corporal, join the squad. New corporal, come here, you sergeant carry on. <i>Laughs</i> So that was my introduction to the Carbineers.
Interviewer	It's like chalk and cheese.
John	Completely and utterly. And the Carbineers turned my whole head around about the whole thing because I'd become very negative about this whole thing because of (<i>inaudible</i>).
Interviewer	That was the question I was going to ask, because just a while back you'd felt that they'd betrayed you. Was it because they were (<i>inaudible</i>) guys, they were not...?
John	No, it was very simple, it was that the regiment's a family, and the regiment was a whole different ball game. When I got to the Carbineers it was, you're now joining a family. There was an initiation thing that everybody went through. It's fascinating. They call it seeing the colours. What happens is that on the first camp that you do that you haven't done before, no matter what your rank, so we had with us loots, corporals, sergeants, riflemen, whatever, about 8 or 10 of us that did it when I did it. And the senior rifleman in the regiment, happened to be a guy who was I think, about 47 odd, and he was still a rifleman. He then got given the company commander's rank. He put that rank on and then he chased us for like three hours. Serious <i>opfok</i> . And the officers took real strain. So they knew the guy was a trooper and now here he is acting...but anyway they chased us and then there was a whole little ceremony that you went through, and then you were now part of the family. And it was a big secret and you don't ever tell anybody, and even now, literally, I can't tell you if I want to, it was such a big sort of thing. And it's really trivial but it's a big thing. And you were part of the family. And you knew that if you had any problems, any welfare problems, if you had any hassles, the regiment would help you take care of it. And the approach was one of, gentleman we've got a job to do. We work hard and we play hard, and we work together and we play together. And that was real. I remember doing a...we got called up to do the centenary parade in Ladysmith. We got there, the regiments were all over the place they were there, and the colonel officer of 5 SAI said, nobody goes out the town. So we finished our drill practice whatever for the day, and our colonel rocked up in the bungalow and says, right gentlemen, get dressed, fall in outside. All we go, he says, there's a bus, climb on. Took us out, said right, here's the beer tent, got three hours to get drunk. As long as you can crawl back on the bus it's fine. Carry on. There we were, in uniform, beret's on, into the beer tent, with our colonel all the way down. Did our thing, back in the bus, back in the base. Nobody else went out. Other people put on civvies, sneak out, AWOL. No, Carbineers as a unit, out, in. And we went out and played together, next morning up, work, no problem. And that approach and that whole attitude was for me eye opening and made a huge, huge difference.

Interviewer	You say that was a centenary celebration.
John	It was the freedom of the city of Ladysmith. It was talking about the siege but it was a couple of years before it was the actual centenary because there was this suspicion that with all the changes happening in the company it might not be allowed to be celebrated, blah, blah, blah. So it was probably '89, '92 that kind of period.
Interviewer	Now is the unit still called Natal Carbineers?
John	Yes, Natal Carbineers. They're the senior regiment of the country.
Interviewer	And what role do you play there now?
John	No, no, I was in the Carbineers for ten years. I did camps nearly every year, I did number of parades with them, etc. I did my sectioning course again, while I was there, and I got promoted to corporal. Then I moved down to work at Stellenbosch, I was assistant director of the library down there. And I was down there a year and I realised this isn't going to work. You can't have a long distance relationship with a regiment. And I was enjoying what I was doing. So I got invited to an El Alamein parade or dinner...I forget. That the Cape Town Highlanders arranged. While I was there, their RSM he invites me, says listen we've got a corporal's mess, you're a corporal, come around on a Tuesday night, come and experience it and see. And I got there and I saw the way the whole thing was organised and I applied for a transfer and I got transferred there. And in the six years I was there I converted to Mechanised Infantry, I got promoted to lance sergeant immediately...well almost immediately. Then to full sergeant, then I became a candidate officer there. Then I moved back here to Durban and I decided instead of going back to Carbineers, because they're motorized, go to DLI because they're mechanized, I wanted to stay mechanized infantry. So I transferred to DLI. Been there about four years on now.
Interviewer	So you moved back to Durban when?
John	In 2003.
Interviewer	And now you're sort of involved in the military because you enjoy the tradition, you enjoy the...
John	I'm the training officer for the regiment. And that is my passion. Well I've got two passions. One is a company command type role. I would love, and I've been...you've got no idea how tempted I am to accept the role as company commander and I'd be taking a company up to the DRC now in April, May. And I've been very tempted...because they offered me the 2 IC post and the company commander post has come up now as well. So even though I'm a little bit under rank for that, they would probably give it to me if I ask for it. I'd love to do that, I just can't afford it with the business and with my young family. So I'm the

	<p>training officer so I arrange and organise most of the training and I do a lot of it. But what I do...the formal courses that the army runs are fine. Send a guy off and he goes and does platoon commanding course or he does a driver's course whatever. And they're fine. We found that the level is very pathetic and the pass requirement is pathetic. But that's fine. They go and they do the course and they come back. And then what we do is we do a lot of in-house training. And that's where I focus. And I focus on two areas. One is junior leader development, primarily. That's the primary thing that I do. And part of that is the whole mentoring process of, this is what it means to be a soldier, and this is what it means to lead men, and this is the responsibility that's involved and the duties that are involved, and etc, etc. And then the other part is arranging a fuller training that imparts real skills to the guys, not just the rote kind of training that they get from the former forces.</p>
Interviewer	And what does your wife feel about it?
John	<p>Before we got married, she gave me an ultimatum. She said to me, right, I'm not prepared for you to be Permanent Force. Anything else, fine. I'd said to her, I will do minimum of 30 days a year in the army. And she said, that's cool but don't do 300 days. And that was our compromise. So she's quite happy. She used to love CTH particularly. We used to have quite a few events where she would be dressed up in that typical black dress and me in my kilt and all the rest of it, and we'd have dinners and parades and that kind of stuff which she loved. And she knows how much I enjoy the whole field thing. We used to go up to the army combat training centre, Lohatla, once a year for an exercise. And I just love that stuff. So she knows, and I go away all aggressive and I come back all passive for at least 6 months. It gets to a stage where she says to me, it's time for you to go away again. You need to take your aggression out on...</p>
Interviewer your commanding officer.
John	Absolutely. My mother says, that the highest rank in the army is a pretty civilian woman.
Interviewer	A lot of soldiers would agree.
John	<p>She got things right, my one step father was the RSM of a regiment up in the Transvaal, and she rocked up there the one day and when he got back from whatever he was doing, the commanding officer, RSM Young, your wife is organised, go, you're booked in there, you're spending the weekend, go. She's sorted.</p>
Interviewer	I've covered the basics of all I want to talk about your military...is there any aspect of it that you...?
John	<p>Yes. I had this debate now, because I'm now involved in the SANDF, I had this debate with all the old farts. The GOFs, the grumpy old farts as we call each other. That have these rose</p>

coloured spectacles on about the SADF days and how we were the greatest army in Africa and how any SADF soldier that shat it smelled of roses. And they refused to acknowledge any of the fuck ups involved in the organisation what have you. But that aside, I had these debates with them and I say to them that, I will take a platoon or company of my soldiers now, these Zulu soldiers that I have in DLI up against any one of the platoons or companies of National Servicemen of the old days, and we'll fuck you up six love. And they don't believe me. And I say to them, no, no, what you don't understand is, first of all they are completely volunteer. Now who were the only other volunteers then? All the specialist units. These are completely volunteers, number one. Number two, they are young, they are well educated, they're all under 24 years old, they've all got at least a matric certificate, they are fluent in English or we just don't accept them. Never mind that, they are tough as shit, because their lifestyles are tough. They go through shit that I could not imagine surviving as a national part of life. The environment that some of them come out of is appalling! For some of them, we literally are feeding them the only meal...if we are having a weekend camp, we are feeding them the only meal they have in a month, that's actually a full complete meal. We have actually found that...we had the guys in deployment down in Cedarville beginning of last year for the swine fever border control. And we discovered one particular troop who for every month that he was working...he was deployed, he was supporting 12 families for a year on that one salary. Other words, three or four people in a family, his whole community he was supporting, every month he gave them enough money to survive for a year. And there's this incredible dichotomy that we have about abject, abject poverty that people just don't understand. Ok, anyway, what I'm trying to say is that I have great soldiers. Absolutely brilliant soldiers. Make no mistake, a troop is a troop. A troop will do as little as possible, will fuck anything that moves, will drink anything that is vaguely even liquid *laughs* that's the truth. I don't care what country it is, what colour skin it is, whatever, that's the truth. And we have that. So which is why I focus on junior leader development. I focus on section leaders and platoon commanders to develop that whole, your job is to keep them motivated and doing the job, focused and play when they have to play, but work when they have to work. That whole kind of thing. And we're working on that and we develop that. Some are better than others, some are brilliant. Some of our guys we recruited...when I came here I got here and I went to go and visit the Carbineers, standing in the mess I got to speaking with John Hall, who's the ex RSM there, is now major with them. And he was saying, they need a platoon commander to do a monthly on Salisbury Island, to take a platoon through basics. So they put me on detach duty to then...I came down here and I took a platoon through basics here. And while I was here the company sa'major was from DLI, and it was a composite. It was Carbineers, DLI and Durban regiment, composite basics. And at the end of the camp he turned around

	to the now commanding officer of the DLI and said, we want this young officer. He must come to us. Anyway. That basics, out of the platoon that I had there, call it 35% of that platoon are now officers.
Interviewer	That's a very high percentage.
John	And of the rest I would say there's only about 15-20% that don't have any rank at all. All the others are starting to make their move up, one, two stripes, some of them are coming up for their third stripe already. But we were an incredibly tough basics. We pushed them incredibly hard, and we got good results. And the reason we did it at the time, and the selection criteria at the time, each of the three regiments had over 2000 applicants, and each one had to select one platoon to go on basics of 35 guys. So they picked the best applicants. That's why the percentages are so high. They're selected for leadership and for long term and what have you. And one of the guys in particular that was in my platoon on that basics, is now a full loot and is on a track to commanding our regiment. I believe that he'll command our regiment within 10-15 years. He's got the right mind, he's got the right ability...when you see him, you'll know, officer type. And I did, I spotted him straight away, and I've been his patron...I can't think of a better word...because I reckon I have that ability again. And he has already taken a platoon away to Burundi, they were nine months in Burundi, that he commanded a platoon. And he's currently taken the company to our C position now. The company that's going to the DRC. So good quality troops and enthusiastic and what have you. And there's a lot of criticism and negativatism, blah, blah, which I discount. Good leaders, the good leadership, and you've got good soldiers. And I attribute all the shit that we see with the PFs to pathetic leadership. Simple. Pure and simple.
Interviewer	You mentioned some of the guys, the old school...not all of them, but some of them, refuse to see that there were flaws in the old SADF.
John	Absolutely.
Interviewer	Your business now is publishing and you do quite a bit of militaria.
John	Yes.
Interviewer	Why do you think it is now...and this is the second aspect of what we wanted to chat about...why do people now, South Africa withdrew from Angola in 1989 so effectively, it's 18 years later, or 19 years later, why do you think now there appears to be a trend that people want to start telling their stories?
John	Very simple. The guys are now in their forties, they've got children who can now understand, and they're saying, what did you do daddy in the war? It's that classic, classic, classic thing. I see it all the time. Not only the guys publishing, they're also

	<p>buying. I know that what I'm selling now there was not a market for this five years ago. There's all of a sudden a market. Look at that horrible book, I won't even mention his name, that's gone with the best seller lists.</p>
Interviewer	<p>I know which book you mean.</p>
John	<p>Why? Because there is now all of a sudden a hunger and a thirst to look back. Because everyone is hitting their mid-life crisis, they're looking back on their lives and they're saying what did I do with my life? And one of the, I believe, defining experiences for a lot of young white South African men was going to the army. And what I'm finding is that, it's less people wanting to tell their stories as people wanting to read stories. Because there's this demand for it, people are encouraging each other actually to write the stories. There are one or two who are vanity type stories, oh I want to tell my story, but generally the guys who are doing that are bullshit artists anyway. But the guys who are coming through...I've got one book that I've published which is a Cook's Tour of Duty. And Peter Chapman did his National Service in, I think, '78, '79, volunteered for the medics got there and they stood the oke in a line and said, right you 30 are going to be chefs. And he was a chef. But he did a full basics and he's quite proud of his service. And his father was on the ground crew in Korea. And his son has just now gone through military training. But this for him was a defining life experience, he wanted to write it now because his son was making noises about going to the army. He wrote his father's story down and gathered his father's friends and comrades and their collections. Then he wrote his own story, because of his son who is now approaching military age. So I think that's the trend. That's the one thing. The other side of it is the whole issue of secrecy. All of us were...we had our heads bashed in about the idea of secrecy. And I think that as the trickle started...first kind of books started happening, with the most sensitive units, now all of a sudden people realised that they can...Peter Stiff first of all spoke about operations in detail that blew a lot of stuff wide open. Because he did that Paul Els put together We Fear Naught But God. And he took a lot of risk doing that because no-one had published photos and spoken about some of the things there before. And that opened another whole crack in the dam. Jack Greef, I'm re-doing his book as well, bringing out a new edition of his book, and when I spoke to him about it he was saying, the only reason that he could tell his story is because some of the detail that he thought was too secret to speak about had already been brought up by Paul and by Peter Stiff. So now he could tell his story. Now when these start happening, now the other guys say, but shit I was just a chef, who cares? So if they can tell it, then I can tell it.</p>
Interviewer	<p>That's interesting, and as you know most army careers involved huge amounts of boredom and short months of excitement. In some cases if you ended up as a storeman in some particularly boring place, you might have had two years of boredom.</p>

John	Absolutely.
Interviewer	But certainly with the guys who saw action...your corporal story out of the Eastern Cape townships and other guys have got similar stories coming from Angola or South West Africa. Do you think there's an element of the guys ,also for the first time in their lives saying, well now we can speak about these things and they're trying to change their memories to a degree?
John	Absolutely! And the best example of that I think is Clive Holtz. He wrote a book At Thy Call (We Did Not Falter). He was involved in Cuito Cuanavale and I don't know if you know about the whole denial issue that's going on with the Polokwane...making a decision, they're going to celebrate that battle as a defeat of the SADF. Which we know is patently false and is going to be an absolute embarrassment to them because the facts do not support their illusions. But he was involved in that and he was going through that and processing that, and I've spoken to him, and he said that his book arose out of his...therapy. Literally, that his therapist said to him, you need to write this down to expunge the feelings ad thoughts and emotions and what have you.
Interviewer	Do you know anybody who got any kind of counselling in the military after they had either been in action in the border areas, in the townships, or anywhere?
John	I had a huge fight with Barry Fowler about this. Barry Fowler was a Permanent Force psychologist in the SADF, had joined the military late eighties and him and I hooked up by email in about '95ish thereabouts. And one of the first discussions that we had was the whole issue of PTSD, post trauma counselling, the whole story. because I said to him straight, well if you were a shrink at the time, it must have been a big policy change to...because he was talking about debriefing and all the typical sort of things. And I said, well bullshit. I said, there are two things that are bullshit. First of all we didn't see medical types at all unless you were in the sick bay. And we didn't know there were shrinks there. And secondly, nobody was interested in listening to our stories and we were in fact discouraged talking about anything. And he was...was arguing with me and saying, but much earlier than that, in the early eighties already, there was protocol and a doctrine in place for debriefing and an acknowledgement of PTSD etc. And we've had a long discussion over the last, however many years, ten years or whatever it is, ten, twelve years about this, and we've come to a number of sort of conclusions. Over a beer conclusion. Not anything we can back up. And one of them is that possibly there's a whole macho South African male kind of that soldiers don't cry...well not maybe, that's a fact. The second one is that maybe the whole issue was so sensitive because of the political sensitivity and then confused with all of that was, how can you have a debriefing or a psychological approach without giving away operational methods...methodology.

	END OF SIDE B TAPE ONE (<i>counter at 519</i>)
	TAPE TWO SIDE A
John	<p>...so him and I have sort of concluded that there was this whole mixture that wasn't very well articulated but that there was a definite damper put on any idea of anyone looking for therapy. I know that I personally looked, approached a number of mental health professionals, where I <i>spits</i> spit when I say the word...over the years and if I went into a psychiatrist's office, as soon as I opened my mouth they wanted to shove pills into it before they even spoke to me, so I'd walk out, literally. And psychologists just didn't have a clue because they just didn't have the background to deal with it, most of them. I eventually, in the late nineties, came across a doctor Seedat who was at the mental health clinic in Tygerberg, who was running a trial and a research project to PTSD in the townships of people who had experienced violence in the townships at the time we were going through all that nonsense there as well. And had been through it and she was looking at PTSD and looking at it from the approach of the chemical change in the brain, etc, etc. And I went and I spoke to her and she put me on...she diagnosed me with PTSD. We had an interview, she diagnosed me as a classic PTSD sufferer, put me onto a six week program of an SSRI with scans to monitor the change in the brain, blah, blah, blah. With interviews happening at regular intervals etc, and at the end of that process said, right ok, the process is don't take any more drugs and you've been part of the thing, I recommend that you do sort of a group therapy type thing after that to deal with it. which I didn't do. But I found that whatever...and it's apparently they're all one family like similar to Prozac. Whatever it was made a difference to me. I found that I found definite improvements in certain areas, like short term memory loss improved, and an extenuation of the whole nightmare story and etc, etc. All that kind of stuff I'm improved. But I found the best therapy for me is coming to a place like this where the people that I'm speaking to are ex soldiers or current soldiers and I can talk about politics, or I can talk about rugby, I can talk about girls, it makes no difference what I talk about, but the understanding is that I don't have to watch my mouth. And the people that are around me come from a similar experience. I found that to be therapeutic. That and then being involved in the army as well, it's therapeutic. One of the reasons why I'm so passionate about training is that I believe that I can give back in the way that I teach people to deal with things, all kinds of things. Sure, tactical issues is what we focus on, at the same time it's about mental approaches. One of the things that I try and introduce without making it a part of the syllabus, if you know what I mean, and it sort of has a secondary effect, is to teach platoon commanders how to deal with their platoon to handle issues before they become issues. And to teach them...I teach them under the excuse of gathering intelligence, to do debriefings after contacts. But if you look at the literature about battle stress, or PTSD, whatever you want to call</p>

	it, that's what they say, is the sooner you talk about it after the events, the less likely it is to develop into a psychosis.
Interviewer	Which is the exact opposite of what happened back in the eighties and the seventies.
John	Exactly. Because then it was, suppress, suppress, don't talk about it. Now it comes out 20 years later.
Interviewer	And now 20 years later this is a military regiment <i>pub</i> (<i>where the interview was being conducted</i>) ...as you say, most people have got some kind of military understanding so you feel comfortable...
John	Absolutely. I feel I'm in the family.
Interviewer	You mentioned nightmares. Did you go through long years of nightmares?
John	Jissus, I went through many years of literally not being able to sleep more than three hours at night. And then I would stay up as long as possible so I was as tired as possible so that I could get rest.
Interviewer	And I mean...
John	All the symptoms.
Interviewer	And your wife was aware of it?
John	Oh yes, 100%. All the symptoms. When I was speaking to this doctor, I still didn't believe her, I said, well yes, ok maybe, but I don't think I really have PTSD. She said to me, what provision have you made for your retirement? I said to her, none. Except what is deducted from my salary. Said, right there, you've got PTSD. That symptom itself...because PTSD sufferers literally believe that they're not going to survive. <i>Laughs</i> And that was a complete eye opener for me and that made a big turnaround in my head about how I looked at the whole thing.
Interviewer	But you managed to work your way through it, possibly through your wife's support and your own intellect yourself.
John	Exactly. It's been my wife and it's been going back to the army and being involved in the army, and having friends and what have you support.
Interviewer	But you obviously spend a lot of time talking to military people, you read about it a lot, so you're well informed. As I say your intellect and your wife's assistance have helped you work through it. In your experience are there lots of guys out there who don't have that ability for it, actually hitting the wall but don't know what to do?
John	My cousin...I'm not going to mention his name...but my cousin he's exactly a year younger than me. We're both born on the same day of the year exactly 12 months apart. And he's still a bachelor. He's come close to marriage probably three or four times but he just can't get there. He drinks too much. He knows,

	<p>he acknowledges it but...and I know for a fact that he is a PTSD sufferer. I know it one hundred percent, no question, no doubt in my mind. Another guy that I know that happens to be one of my authors, I told him the other day, listen dude, you need to go and speak to somebody and he was with parabats and he was involved and all the rest of it, and he is in denial, completely in denial. Because he's involved in the fashion industry he's got to maintain his machismo I suppose. So that's yet another reason not to talk about it. So I encounter people like this all the time. There are lots of people out there that are suffering I think.</p>
Interviewer	<p>And do you think that was exacerbated...we touched on it earlier on...because of the political transition in '94. After '94 to suggest that you were in the SADF and involved in whether it be Cassinga or Cuito or whatever...some circles would have been frowned upon.</p>
John	<p>I've got a lovely story about that. Let me answer the question with a story. This is about...let me thing...'97, '98. I was still with CTH and this friend of mine, Steve, we had done a sergeant's weekend and at the end of the weekend on the Sunday lunchtime we were starting to go. We're dressed now in our cammos, we now had the new cammos, South African flag on the arm, and he said to me, listen some friends of mine who are having a braai out at Clifton, do you want to come with me, we'll go out and have a couple of beers with them. So I said, cool, let's go. And we get there, we walk in there and we're in uniform. And they were very much the long hair brigade, the classical Moscow on the hill, UCT, ECC campaign, etc. And one of the guys there was one of the ECC type organisers during the late eighties. And I've always had the opinion, from that time, at that time, and now too, that guys who'd experienced the army and then become ECC, End Conscription etc, you've earned your spurs, great. But guys who haven't, I've got a bit of a question about their... <i>laughs</i> what their motives are. Anyways, so this guy...and we were just there to visit, there was no agenda...and this one guy started taking me on about all the normal crap about the army and baby killers and blah, blah, blah, bullshit, bullshit. And I got to a stage where he just had triggered my temper and I started taking him on. And I said, yes, so you were in the ECC? He says, yes. I said, so did you go to the army before you joined the ECC or after? No, he never went to the army. How long did you spend at university? Seven years. Are you a doctor? No. What did you study? He did a BA and he did a B.Comm. So you're a coward? He says, what do you mean? I said to him, right, first of all you stayed at university so you could avoid going to the army, and so you could avoid going to prison for your principles. Yes? No? I don't care, but that's the (<i>inaudible</i>) fact. You stayed at university to avoid the army. In that period of time you were encouraging other people to do the same thing, but you weren't prepared to, to pay for your principles. The reason I say you're a coward, and that I know you're a coward, is that now, if your principles were, you don't go to the army because you disagree with the political</p>

	<p>system. Now it's after '94, in fact it's a long time after '94, I'm wearing a uniform that's got the new South Africa flag on, I'm serving the government of the day, you if it was truly principled would have volunteered for the army because you knew that you had got out of it for those other reasons. So I tell you right now you're a coward. And he sat there gob-smacked and everyone burst into laughter and he got up and he walked out. So It's fascinating because I really, really, really firmly believe to this day that the way that it does work, it must work, it has to work is the following: I serve my regiment, the regiment serves the army, and the army serves the government of the day. The only time that I'm allowed not to serve is if I believe it's morally or legally objectionable. And then I must be prepared to accept the consequences. And it's become more complicated for me since I've become commissioned. So I don't have a choice. If the president of the country decides that we are going to invade Ops Boleus whatever...Lesotho. Ops Boleus, it wasn't only a raid on Maseru it was a lot more than that, but yes...I don't have an option to now decide is this right or not. My orders are go, then I must go. But, if during that operation I'm told shoot those prisoners, then I am obligated by my personal morals and also by the code of conduct that I have signed, not to obey what is an obviously illegal command.</p>
Interviewer	<p>And once many years ago, you did question commands when you were in New Brighton.</p>
John	<p>Exactly. And I wasn't prepared to accept the consequences then, now I am. Now I think I'm more mature and more aware of...more firmly embedded in my convictions, etc. But the point is about the loyalty issue. I firmly, firmly, firmly believe about that that is the chain. That your loyal to your regiment, because that's the only real loyalty, is people you know. The regiment is loyal to the army who serves the government of the day. Because then you avoid the whole political issue completely. It's not a concern.</p>
	<p>END OF INTERVIEW (<i>counter at 111</i>)</p>

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