

Colonel Paul Fouche South African Infantry 15/04/08
 Missing Voices Project Interviewed by Mike Cadman

	TAPE ONE SIDE A
Interviewer	Can you tell me a bit about where you grew up, what your family was like, was it a large family or a small family and so on?
Paul	I was born in Namaqualand, actually Koekenaap south of Namaqualand, then my father moved to the mines in Namaqualand. We are 7 children, five boys and two daughters. And I grew up in Namaqualand.
Interviewer	Were you the youngest or were you in the middle?
Paul	I'm the oldest of the crowd. And at the end of my school career in Springbok, finished matric I decided to go to the army. I didn't do any National Service those days as we were 'looteling', what did we call them those days, but I went straight into the army to the infantry and I was then trained as an instructor.
Interviewer	What year did you go the army?
Paul	January 1967. And then I went to Oudtshoorn to the infantry to be trained as a non-commissioned officer instructor. I then did my officer's course in 1971 and got promoted to lieutenant in 1973. And as I got promoted to the rank of the officer ranks I was transferred to Danie Theron Combat School in Kimberley where I then became involved in training. Those days you can remember the commandoes were then trained en mass to enlarge the army and I spent lots of my time training them in COIN operations as well as in conventional operations. Then there really my interest in the conventional side of warfare was awakened. And I then, you can almost say, concentrated on that for the rest of my career basically, on the conventional side of warfare. By 1979 I was transferred to 1SAI in Bloemfontein because I was very much interested or wanted to be trained in the mechanised side of conventional warfare.
Interviewer	And this is when they introduced the Ratels.
Paul	Yes, that's my introduction into Ratels came. And I then, whilst I was at 1SAI I did my army staff course in 1982. And I then at the end of that I got transferred to the army battle school in Lohatla and appointed as the infantry branch commander...officer commanding infantry branch. And there I got really involved with training the Citizen Force conventional contingent. As they were those days all the brigades from 71 up to 84. I got involved training them, and then got transferred by the end of 1985 I was transferred to Ruacana at Five One Battalion as the battalion commander.
Interviewer	Now who made up Five One Battalion?

Paul	Five One Battalion in those days was mainly made up of companies from the Coloured Corps in Cape Town, as well as an artillery battery from the SWA Territory Force.
Interviewer	The South West African Territory Force.
Paul	Yes, and then there was also the armoured car squadron from 1SSB in Bloemfontein that was stationed there, but these companies they rotated right through the year. They've got even companies from the Bushmen companies from SWA, operated in my area, or in the area of responsibility of Five One Battalion from time to time. Then in the end of that year, 1986, I was then transferred and promoted to colonel and transferred to Potchefstroom as the officer commanding 82 Mechanised Brigade. And by the end of that year, 1987, I was then ordered to take over the brigade in southern eastern Angola which was by then still a National Service brigade composed of 4SAI, 1 SAI, Six One Battalion group, Three Two Battalion, at (<i>inaudible</i>) big components there and the artillery etc, etc. And that's where I got involved with Operation Modular.
Interviewer	Before we talk about Ops Modular, throughout your training and your promotion through the ranks, you were seeing an escalation in the war. Initially in the sixties there was just a few small fire fights, then in '75 you had Savannah and then '78 Cassinga, and then the more conventional operations started, I think in '79, you had Operations Rekstok, Safraan, and then they started escalating. Were you directly involved in any of those or were you not?
Paul	The first operation that I was involved in was 1981, June, which is commonly called as Smokeshell but was actually Operation Sceptic. I was involved in that.
Interviewer	What sort of happened there, what was your experience? What role did you play and what was your experience there?
Paul	I was a (<i>inaudible</i>) team commander with a Mechanised Company from 1SAI if I can remember correctly. And that operation specifically was mainly directed against SWAPO. So we fought SWAPO out and out.
Interviewer	How big was your battle team, then how many men roughly?
Paul	It's a complete company plus elements of an armoured car squadron. Or was it an anti tank...I can't remember that clearly laughs it can be anti tank group as well.
Interviewer	So we're looking at what, 250, 300 men?
Paul	Yes, about 200...the company itself is about 180, and then the rest of the elements attached to it, you can say about 250-300 men.
Interviewer	And the fighting that you encountered there, was it mainly small arms or did you encounters anything bigger than that?

Paul	Our biggest threat there was the anti aircraft guns. The double barrel guns which the Russians had supplied to SWAPO in those days.
Interviewer	Is that the 14.5?
Paul	Yes, the 14.5 and the 23 mm, especially the 23 mm double barrel gun. It was a horrible sound to listen to those guns when they're firing at you.
Interviewer	So SWAPO were using an anti aircraft gun but in...?
Paul	The ground role and in the anti aircraft role as well. Because that's where they shot at the helicopter which was evacuating the troops...injured personnel.
Interviewer	And then after Sceptic?
Paul	After Sceptic I was also involved in Operation Protea as a...then I was the adjutant of a battery group under later General E.M. Dippenaar. Dippies. I was his adjutant in that fight.
Interviewer	And now was Protea also aimed at SWAPO or did you encounter FAPLA in that one?
Paul	That fight was directed at both these organisations but we were mainly involved in the fights at Mongua and Ondjiva. And those elements I would believe mainly MPLA troops deployed there. And there we encountered tanks, mines, anti tank weapons etc.
Interviewer	So this was conventional war?
Paul	That was an out and out conventional war against a conventional enemy.
Interviewer	And all your training over the years, both at Oudtshoorn and later at Danie Theron, and then at Lohatla, had it equipped you properly to deal with this conventional war?
Paul	Yes, I'm quite sure of it that our training was of the best. I also did a course in Israel where we learned their techniques and we applied their techniques and we discarded some of their techniques because they were not suited to our (<i>inaudible</i>). What I'm trying to say is we were able to design our own tactics and battle handling skills to such an extent that we could operate against any enemy in this type of terrain that we encountered. We were up to it.
Interviewer	The terrain in the region we're talking about is particularly sandy, there's thick bush.
Paul	Sandy, high trees, big bush, very difficult to drive through in most places.
Interviewer	And visibility?
Paul	Visibility - anything from 25 metres, maybe sometimes up to a 100, on the open plains with the shonas, then the visibility was up

	to a kilometre. But that was very limited in the complete context of the area, the space that we operated in.
Interviewer	And as these operations were preceding and you're encountering more conventional warfare, tanks and so and so forth, I presume that you were adapting your plans all the time to meet new circumstances?
Paul	Yes, sure.
Interviewer	Were there any lessons that you learned from these where you got a fright and thought, well we need to revise the way we do things?
Paul	No, not...I didn't personally experience any of those things, but we did learn from experience overall. Especially that the conventional tactics as they were explained in the books those days were more orientated towards open area like they've got in Europe or some places in America etc. But we quickly as an organisation learned to fight on a narrow front because of the visibility problem and to control...and the one thing that I think we managed to do in the end and decided on focusing on is to keep close control over elements in the area without compromising or neglecting the ability to operate on a wide front. But not with wide open formations. Operate on a wide front but with using narrow needle-pointed formations moving through the area and operating in the areas.
Interviewer	In other words battle groups, but you could have several battle groups over a fairly wide area.
Paul	Wide area but they're not in close contact. And especially on ground level we had to control our personnel directly to make sure that they...because in that environment if you're going to have a lot of casualties, the political problems you will get from the base will be tremendous, so it was one of our focus points not to lose personnel, and in the endeavour not to lose personnel we had to control them and keep them closely watched all the time and make sure that they understand their drills and that they do the right thing at the right time without taking unnecessary risks, without hampering the initiative of the leader groups specifically.
Interviewer	So essentially the politicians had pressure on you, you had to achieve your objectives without losing any men.
Paul	With minimum casualties. That was always a limiting...or a guideline, I won't say it was a limiting factor but it was a guideline. Always aware of the fact that we don't lose too many men in these operations.
Interviewer	And at that time you'd be fighting these operations with National Servicemen but I presume you'd also be backed by the professional soldiers, Three Two Battalion and perhaps in later years, 101 Battalion and units like that?
Paul	Yes, there was always a mix of these elements but we didn't

	necessarily mix the units up that you've got a company from this, from 101 and a company from Three Two and a company from 1SAI in the same unit. They normally fought their operations as their own units but they were strengthened by other units attaching small elements from other National Service units or Permanent Force units to those battalions.
Interviewer	Now you've got these two different...they're different but they're the same, but Three Two for example are professional soldiers, that's their job 365 days a year, and National Servicemen are only in the army initially for two year periods – the first year is usually training and then second year you might be used in an operational area. Was that a difficult thing to find a balance between your professional soldiers and then your non professional soldiers, if I can put it that way?
Paul	No, I don't think so. There was...let me put it this way, I've had lots of experience with young lieutenants and young troops and I've got experience with the more older troops like with the Citizen Force units, the older guys, older personnel. And I'll tell you that the young chaps in from 1SAI or 4SAI, those young leader groups, 18, 19 years old, they acted like old professionals by the end of their term because they were trained so intensely and extensively trained in everything that they had to do and must do, that they did their job as best as any other guy should. But there was always a case of one or two people that can't come up with the necessary skills and do the thing the way a really professional soldier should do. But I don't think there was any problem between the levels of these two components.
Interviewer	So all I was trying to ask is, you didn't have to scratch your head occasionally and say we better fill this gap now and pull in some professional soldiers. Your guys were...
Paul	No, no.
Interviewer	Even though they were National Servicemen they were highly trained.
Paul	I do think that if on the higher level of command, when a battle design was decided upon, they did employ the people that are trained for that specific type of job or type of terrain or type of scenario. Rather you say, let's put Three Two Battalion into a close contact area with the...Angolan troops where they can understand the language, they can listen to what the guys are saying, whereas if you put a National Servicemen in there he won't understand because he can't understand Portuguese or whatever the case might be. Or they're not trained when the conventional soldier was not trained for guerrilla operations whereas Three Two Battalion mainly was a guerrilla force. The same with 101. They were trained using their Casspirs. They've got their techniques, they know how to do it and they operated well from those vehicles. So if you can use them in a certain area better than others, then they were used there in that context.

Interviewer	Then in Protea you say you encountered tanks and this was real war, how did the Ratels cope with the tanks in terms of fire power?
Paul	A Ratel was never supposed to tackle a tank. It was not built to tackle a tank, and so a Bradley is not built to fight a tank. There if you want to fight a tank you use another tank. So the tactics used where they did encounter tanks is when a scenario developed where they encountered each other, or a tank encountered the Ratel, or the Ratel the tank, in close contact where it was almost a surprise development, if I can put it like that, so it was never planned that they should tackle a tank. Therefore the tanks or the Ratel 90s or the Eland armoured cars were used to encounter or to battle them back.
Interviewer	But if they did have to open fire on a tank, was that 90mm gun adequate to deal with it?
Paul	On a short range, yes. You must remember, as we said just now, visibility was anything from 25 to a 100/200 metres in most cases. And up to 1500 metres a 90mm anti tank projectile can take out most tanks. So the enemy use an older type P34, D52 tanks, it was possible to destroy a tank with a Ratel 90.
Interviewer	During Protea did the Angolan airforce attack you?
Paul	During Protea we didn't encounter the airforce from...I don't think they had the ability those days.
Interviewer	Not? Ok, and then you go through Protea and Protea would have been what...?
Paul	1981.
Interviewer	And then any other major operations?
Paul	Ok, after that I've not taken part in any of the operations. That was my last one before the Modular/Hooper/Packer story.
Interviewer	And then for Modular, that was 1988...?
Paul	1987.
Interviewer	From your understanding the lead-up to those big operations around Cuito, initially the South African objective was to stop the FAPLA advance on UNITA in the south east?
Paul	Yes.
Interviewer	And it was meant to be purely designed to turn them around to make sure that SWAPO couldn't infiltrate from the south east. It turned out to be quite a serious fight, the G5s were moved up, there were bombing runs and then eventually the tanks were moved up. Can you take me through your involvement in that whole operation, or era.
Paul	You see, I was at the end of the fight at the Lomba, the forces were now in the process to be changed over, and the person had

	to put in new fresh personnel. So in that sense, or in that case, I was then ordered to organise a brigade headquarters that can go up there and relieve the one that was in place by that time. And some of the units were still in place so there was a battalion from...a battle group from 4SAI, a battle group from 1SAI, Six One Battalion, although if I can remember correctly they were taken out at that time. But anyway there was an element from Three Two Battalion and Reconnaissance elements from Five Recce and all those. They were then. So I went up then by the end of the November of 1987. I was then ordered to go up there and then I took command over those units and we were then ordered to push the FAPLA elements that were still on the eastern side of the Cuito River, to push them across the river onto the western side, and then destroy the bridge over the Cuito River, which was used as a...on the logistical effort from FAPLA to supply the troops on their side, on the eastern side.
Interviewer	At this stage, by the time you've been given your command to come in and replace with new troops in the area and so on, what was your understanding of what had transpired in the lead-up to your having to replace those guys?
Paul	I'm not clear...
Interviewer	Ok, when you took over you were told that you went up with elements of 1SAI and so on and so forth, what had happened in the fighting up until then? In the months before you got there?
Paul	Ok. Well...my perception or the information that I had at that time, was the information that I was briefed with by the officers commanding in place at that area and that time, and the information that I got from talking to the personnel that's been relieved. Guys from Bok Smit who was the battalion commander of Six One Battalion was one of the main elements at the fight at the Lomba. Caused the most damage onto FAPLA. From a direct point of view. So as I understood it by then the advance from the FAPLA brigades was stopped at the Lomba while on their way to occupy Jamba, as they couldn't, and then they were driven back. And they retreated back to the eastern high grounds on the Cuito area around the Tumpo area.
Interviewer	And their casualties at that stage?
Paul	Well I can't give you the figures but I've seen the photos and the stories that were there and they were given a hell of a hiding at the Lomba. I think it was Two Five Brigade, I can't really remember.
Interviewer	I think it was also 47 Brigade.
Paul	47 Brigade was another one there. So they were almost destroyed, because if they hadn't been destroyed they wouldn't have fell back onto the high grounds of the Cuito River.
Interviewer	And to your knowledge at that stage, and certainly throughout

	that campaign, South Africa's casualties were relatively low?
Paul	Yes, relatively low. I can't give you the figures but for a fight, for an operation in that type of terrain, weapons they encountered, it was relatively low.
Interviewer	So when you get there, they've fallen back, they've taken a pounding, and you now take over command. Can you tell me sort of what happened in the period when you first got there and then in the sort of weeks ahead.
Paul	Ok, what we did then, we'd taken up...also I moved the forces up to the front and we deployed on the eastern side of the high ground from the north all down around in a semi circle sort of down to the southern portions of the high ground at the Cuito River. So we sealed them off against in the high grounds. And we infiltrated the high grounds with the UNITA battalions that was also deployed in that area so that we could keep a close eye, visual contact with the enemy on the ground, the FAPLA units on the ground. And we used that December period mostly to do reconnaissance and form a picture of how these units were deployed, what their strengths were, where their tanks were deployed, where their defensive fire task for their artillery was, etc, etc. And in the same time we launched some harassing fire tasks against the enemy using indirect fire as well as troop movements and direct fire on their flanks to create a sense of uncertainty onto the troops and demoralise the enemy troops. And in the same time keeping the activity on the other side up so that we can keep the morale of our own personnel up so that they don't sit and think about home and not doing anything. Keep them active. And in the same time we then carried out several attacks against the bridge using the airforce. Those days that was the first time in the history of South Africa that we used a...what you call it...a guided bomb...
Interviewer	A smart bomb.
Paul	A smart bomb against the bridge. The first one wasn't a success but later on had some success on it.
Interviewer	Were those laser guided or did they use early GPS technology?
Paul	Geez you know, I did know but I can't be sure of...I don't want to make a statement. It was guided by camera. It was guided by joystick. It wasn't laser guided.
Interviewer	But that was aimed at the bridge. At this stage during your December you were assessing the strength of the enemy, where they were and so on, what were the numbers of the forces that you estimate deployed against you by comparison to your numbers?
Paul	That's a difficult question to answer, I can't remember. <i>Laughs</i> It's such a long time ago, I can't remember.
Interviewer	But my understanding is that the SADF had at no stage more

	than 3000 people involved in the fighting.
Paul	Yes.
Interviewer	Were the FAPLA, Cuban forces ranged against you many more times that number?
Paul	Yes...gee I'm guessing now...I would say they were about at least two times the strength than we were, but I must really say I'm not sure at the moment, it's too long ago to remember.
Interviewer	So you launched some attacks against the bridge and so on, and other attacks, can you explain to me sort of, ok you plan your attack, you've got your battle plan, can you explain to me how it happens. You send your men out, how close do they get before the enemy start firing at you? Do they fire with artillery first...?
Paul	Well, you see...we always moved, we always planned to use the weather as a protective screen, so we tried to launch our attacks when the weather wasn't clear so that their aircraft can't fly. Because we had to keep their airforce out of action as long as possible, so we used the night to move in and we used the weather as best as we could. As I explained previously we advanced on the narrow front from different directions, and contact was always made at a hundred metres. Then we realised we're on the enemy trenches now because of the terrain. We always started our battle, or our part of the fight with a preliminary bombardment, using aircraft first then followed it up by the artillery. Soon as the artillery was...or the men were inside the danger area of the artillery, their own mortars took over. Enemy fire was in most cases, in the two fights that... I was involved in the fight the 13 th of January with our first real attack...that's now 1988, we didn't encounter any preliminary fire in advance from the enemy. Only when we were right upon them did they respond. So in that fight for instance we didn't have any casualties from by enemy fire. I had only one casualty of a guy who got shot in his leg by accident. I think we encountered landmines – there was one or two, nothing more than that.
Interviewer	And was the weather good to you in that occasion?
Paul	In that occasion the weather was good in the sense that it kept the enemy aircraft at bay for most of the day. Later on in by lunch time the 13 th of January we did experience an attack but they were flying so high that they couldn't determine the targets on the ground, they didn't have any forward air controllers. So they were just bombing in the area. And we managed to shoot down one of them. Ok, that was basically what happened with that first fight on the 13 th of January when I was involved. The last one I was involved in was the last attack against Tumpo which ended up as a sort of a stalemate in the end.
Interviewer	My understanding of Tumpo is that the Angolan troops were dug in, in trenches in a small area on the Tumpo River, it was about one kilometre by four kilometres, whatever it was, but it was a

	smallish area?
Paul	<p>At Tumpo? No that's not true. Tumpo was a large plain, then there was 22 Five brigade was there, 8 Brigade was there...I think 47 was destroyed...but there was another one, but there was about three or four brigades of the enemy deployed in that area from the Dala River...I think the Dala River was in the north...right down to the southern tips of that high ground. They were deployed in defensive localities, there was about...I can remember thinking back, I can visualise one, two...yes, Five Nine Brigade was the other one. So it was 25 in the south, Five Nine Brigade was in the centre to the east and then Two Five Brigade was...then 8 Brigade was their reserve, as I can remember correctly, they were in the centre around about the bridge, on the eastern tip side of the bridge and I can't remember what the name of the other unit is. So they were deployed over a large area facing an all round offence. So it was not a small area.</p>
Interviewer	Can you take me through what your tactics were and how the battle developed? Or the attacks?
Paul	<p>Well on the 2nd of January 1988 we had deployed a lot of armoured cars and tanks to the north of the Dala River if I can remember correctly, and we harassed the enemy for the whole night firing at them trying to get them to move and to withdraw from their positions closer to the bridge. But that was mainly a psychological exercise against the enemy without getting our troops involved directly into a fight. So we were just firing at them with using tanks, using artillery, using mortars, and using ground-shout (<i>Ground-shout vehicles were usually Casspirs equipped with speakers and other broadcast equipment, used as part of a psychological warfare programme</i>) equipment with horrible noises and that stuff to create havoc in their minds and get them to withdraw from their positions. But that action wasn't really a success so they stayed there. So we launched an attack on the 13th of January with two battalion battle groups leading the attack, because we had only two battalions from the SADF point of view – we had 4SAI and we had Six One Battalion. And they were the main attack forces. And they were supported by Three Two Battalion and UNITA, a lot of UNITA battalions. And we attacked right through the centre. Just to the north of the high ground, of the Tumpo high ground, we attacked through there, to the northern area, north east of the bridge. And in that process, the attack started at about 12 o'clock that night, and by the afternoon of the next day we have pushed that enemy forces which were deployed to the north completely out of their positions. We destroyed a lot of tanks, we destroyed a lot of multiple rocket launcher vehicles. And by that evening we have taken up positions against the Dala River just to the north and we held that position till the next morning. Then the next morning there was an indication of a counter attack by the enemy especially using 8th Brigade which consists mainly of tanks. But they were stopped at the Dala River by the elements of Six Two Battalion, especially</p>

	<p>the anti tank weapons and we destroyed...there we made heavily use of our own rocket launchers, called the Vorster Orrel (<i>The Vorster Organ, named after former Prime Minister John Vorster</i>) in those days, later they were called the Valkiri, and we caused havoc, and we killed a lot of enemy troops at that specific counter attack...of their counter attack. We repulsed that. So by the afternoon of the second day the enemy basically in that area was wiped out. Our main problem then was that we couldn't advance forward because we didn't have any diesel left. So that was our biggest problem in that war, was the logistical side of it. Because of the long distances, the terrible terrain, I mean, a conventional force uses a hell of a lot of diesel trucks, especially tank trucks, the sand just grinded up to a space. We replaced tank trucks almost every 200 kilometres.</p>
Interviewer	What is a normal tank truck lifespan in ideal conditions?
Paul	I'm not an armoured guy so I don't want to say that...give you a specific answer on that.
Interviewer	Ok, but you know it was difficult.
Paul	It was very difficult for us.
Interviewer	And your diesel normally would have been driven by...trucked from Mavinga.
Paul	Yes, all the diesel came up from Mavinga and even from Rundu, straight up from Rundu up to our positions at the high ground.
Interviewer	And how long would it take to get diesel supplies to you if you sent an order for diesel?
Paul	Well, it will take about five days. If the trucks don't break down along the way. So about five days to get diesel up there.
Interviewer	And there was lots of rivers and marshy land around there so was water an issue? You could use water out of the rivers?
Paul	We used water out of the rivers, the engineers had the ability to clear water and it was safe to drink. So water was not really...and it was rainy season as well. So every day there was about a shower <i>laughs</i> and there were lots of [rain] showers available to wash and to drink.
Interviewer	And as with the diesel, did you have difficulty particularly with ammunition for say the 155mm G5s and G6s?
Paul	There at some stage we did develop some problems in getting enough, especially artillery ammunition to use because the expenditure on artillery ammunition was quite high, because we used a lot of that. And once again, ammunition had to come in from Pretoria so it was quite a distance.
	<i>Break</i>
Paul	Just after the attack on the 13 th of January I was informed by army headquarters that my brigade, 82 Brigade in Potchefstroom

	<p>is going to be mobilized to relieve the guys that are present on the ground. All those battalions now are going to be relieved by 82 Brigade. So I then requested to be relieved of my job in Angola as soon as possible, to go oversee the mobilization exercise in Bloemfontein and Potchefstroom. General Kat Liebenberg, he wasn't too much impressed by that request but in the end General Willem Meyer from SWA Territory Force, he also supported me in that request so I was then relieved. And I handed over to Pat McCloughlin as commander and he then took over the force from me and he was then involved in an attack on the 23rd of February against the Five Nine Brigade where they destroyed Five Nine Brigade. So he is then the guy to talk to about that part of the exercise. He was there then. So I then came back in March, by the end of February, came back with 82 Brigade, the Citizen Force Brigade. And we then prepared for the last attack on Tumpo, which was...what date did that take place? Let me just confirm. I can't remember all these things, although I've read through these things the other day. <i>Looking through notes</i></p>
Interviewer	But still, it was a long time ago.
Paul	That other brigade that I couldn't remember is Two One Brigade. Of FAPLA. Two One Brigade.
Interviewer	Feel free to add whatever you want to out of your notes and stuff at any time.
Paul	The last attack was on the 23 rd of March.
Interviewer	So that's 23 rd of March 1988 was the last attack.
Paul	That was the last attack that was launched, the final attack. That was done by the Citizen Force Brigade.
Interviewer	And that was 82 Brigade and you were commanding that.
Paul	Yes, I was commanding that.
Interviewer	So you asked to be relieved of your position, General Liebenberg didn't particularly like it but nevertheless it happened. And you went back to your brigade, went through the training exercises...but where did you train?
Paul	<p>We didn't do any real training exercises for that mobilization because we'd done a brigade exercise the previous year in October. Oefening Donnerslag as I can remember, in 1987. So the brigade was then basically mobilized within 6 months twice. Once for a training exercise for a month and the second time around for three months in the bush in Angola. But we mobilized in Bloemfontein, went up through Rundu to a training area just north of the border where the unit spent about a week where they took over equipment from the units that was withdrawing, mainly Six One Battalion, 4SAI, etc, we took a lot of equipment from them, Ratels and cammo nets and whatever we needed and then in that area there was a short period of training as well as...what</p>

	<p>was interesting about that little bit of training is that we took the gunner complement, the artillery guys from Regiment Potchefstroom University, took them straight to the gun positions at the Jambinga high grounds where they were trained on the guns, firing at the enemy. So real time training. So that was a very short training exercise, so they basically went straight in to the battle without real training.</p>
Interviewer	<p>That's really being dropped in the deep end isn't it. You get there and your first rounds that you're firing is you're firing at the enemy. Can you take me through that attack?</p>
Paul	<p>On the 23rd?</p>
Interviewer	<p>Yes, from your planning through to the actual, what actually happened in the attack.</p>
Paul	<p>Once again we planned this attack to coincide with weather conditions which will keep the enemy aircraft on the ground for a long period of time...most of the time, and we also decided that we won't use South African infantry in front in the attack but make use of the UNITA infantry. So the UNITA infantry was basically supported by our tanks, which were then the tank...Regiment President Steyn's tank regiment under command of Gerhard Louw, he was a Permanent Force member...he's still a Permanent Force member, if I can remember correctly. He was their commander. Because by that time the enemy defences was concentrated at the bridge, just to the east of the bridge and to the west of the bridge in the Cuito town area. And the feeling was that because they were cornered and there was no place for them to move except for moving westwards, we felt that we don't want to press them too hard like Mao Tse-tung said, or somebody said, don't push a desperate foe too hard. But anyway...so the attack was basically launched by UNITA supported by our tanks with our infantry as a backup, and our artillery and aircraft bombardments preliminary to the attack and during the attack. Ok, the advance went well up to a stage where we encountered a huge minefield. These attacking forces were supported by pre-development phase mine bridging equipment – a Plofadder, they called them. And I think I remember we had four or five of them. And out of the four or five only one detonated as it should to create a bridge through the minefield. The rest didn't work because they weren't qualified for operational purposes as yet, so it was a trial run, if you can call it like that, so they didn't work.</p>
Interviewer	<p>What was the principle of a Plofadder?</p>
Paul	<p>It's a rocket, it's just pulling a string of explosives in a shoot, whatever you want to call them, across the minefield, and when it landed it gets detonated and then via the shockwaves of the explosion, detonates the mines in its vicinity creating a bridge of anything from four to six metres wide, that a vehicle can go through. Now those things they didn't work so we encountered heavy fire from the enemy, artillery wise and tank wise but mainly</p>

	<p>artillery fire. Because not one of our vehicles was every struck directly by a tank projectile. We lost three tanks and they all got damaged by...especially one, got damaged by a huge mine...it must be a boosted mine that blew off the complete suspension of the one side of the tank, so the tank was lying on its stomach flat in the sand, no way you could move it, and they were under direct line of fire from the enemy artillery. And in the process of manoeuvring around this fallen tank, two other tanks thrown their tracks off in the sand. And under those circumstances with the enemy fire they tried to fix the trucks but they couldn't. We tried to pull them. The battalion commander Gerhard Louw and another chap by the name of Captain Payne, they endangered their own lives to jump out of their tanks and try and help the troops to fix the tow ropes to the fallen, or stricken tanks, but they couldn't move them, they were lying flat on their bellies on the sand, so they couldn't move them at all. So in the end...well the other problem that we encountered is the weather now turned against us. The heavy fog and rain came down right on top even into the low lying areas so you couldn't see a bloody thing. so artillery observers which were positioned on the high grounds all around the area, they couldn't see their targets, so they couldn't adjust the fire anymore. Then there was one chap in the Dala River triangle which was driven out by a local counter attack by the FAPLA units in that area, so that position of observation was then lost. That was one of my main observations. So we couldn't adjust the fire so we couldn't see. And with these tanks almost destroyed, we can't move them out, I suggested to General Liebenberg that we destroy these tanks by using our own tank fire, destroy them. Take out the personnel, because we did remove the personnel and they then decided no, we won't do that, we'll try and recover them on a later date. So we left them there, but due to the tactical positions of developments during the next few days after we'd withdrawn from that attack, never arrived to such an extent where we could go in and recover those tanks, because the enemy took over that area and they drove the UNITA elements out there. So we couldn't recover those tanks and they stayed there for ever and they landed up in Luanda at the end. So that was basically what happened.</p>
Interviewer	<p>You talk about you came under artillery fire and so on, throughout the campaign it strikes me that the South African artillery inflicted heavy losses on the Angolans and the troops facing you, whereas the artillery fired against you didn't seem to have the same effect. Was that because of poor techniques, poor observation, or just...what was the reason?</p>
Paul	<p>I think it was a question of poor observation. They were just firing their artillery guns in the same manner as they used their aircraft. just flying over, dropping bombs where they think...for instance the aircraft were employed, or dropped their bombs at where you can see on the map two rivers comes together. At that confluence they dropped their bombs because they used it as navigational points in their movements so they accepted the fact</p>

	<p>that we will also use that and we might concentrate our forces in that area, and they might hit the target by dropping a bomb. The same they did with the artillery. They just fired in an area where they think...they know you are there but they don't know exactly where, and they couldn't see us. Whereas we used infiltration observers maximally, UNITA personnel as well as our own personnel from the Recces, or even our own artillery observers, which were trained very well in infiltration techniques, how to get right into behind the enemy lines if necessary so that we can spot their headquarters positions, reserve positions, logistical positions, and we dropped our bombs right there where it could hurt them. And that's the difference between our techniques and our training and theirs.</p>
Interviewer	<p>It strikes me as just a bit strange that they didn't also have their forward observers and...</p>
Paul	<p>No. We never encountered any. Hell, they never, never got one bomb dropped close to us except here and there maybe an aircraft bomb, which was by accident dropped close by us. Like I was involved personally, they dropped bombs off rockets in that case, about 250 metres from us, but that was just a fluke.</p>
Interviewer	<p>So they were just firing into the bush hoping to hit something.</p>
Paul	<p>Yes. (<i>inaudible</i>).</p>
Interviewer	<p>And as you say, your guys never encountered the Angolans trying to infiltrate observers behind the lines to mark you and radio back?</p>
Paul	<p>Never. Never.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Did that surprise you?</p>
Paul	<p>Yes, it did! It was amazing that they didn't do it. I mean, that was one of the things that was new to me as a trained soldier, and the other thing that was new to me but was very nice is not to be fed by a piece of paper or somebody up top telling you that the enemy is deployed like this, that and their guns are there, but by using our own preliminary actions to determine exactly where are the enemy, what are they doing, where's the arcs of fire, and by developing your own picture of exactly how they are deployed, and then at our attack on the 14th of January, or 15th of January, we got a map of their deployment...I think it was Two One Brigade...and that map indicated that our assessment on our own of their deployment was exactly correct. It was exactly the same. And that's why we had success.</p>
Interviewer	<p>In your intelligence gathering process, I understand that the SADF were monitoring...all armies do it...but the SADF were monitoring both Angolan and the Cuban communications through Spanish speakers and Portuguese speakers, and you could utilise for example with your ground-shout Casspirs and so on, you could relay information back to the Angolans to tell them what their commanders were saying about them or that there was</p>

	going to be a food shortage, whatever the case may be. How effective do you think that psychological sort of impact was?
Paul	Well I don't really know because I didn't have any feedback of what they were saying about our statements that we made. But I think it must have had an effect on the troops on the ground. But we must also give their leaders a little bit of credit, they're not stupid, all of them were not stupid, they could have prevented or countered the information fed by us to them by their own actions.
Interviewer	Sure. In your experience of these various battles there were clearly some good soldiers on the other side?
Paul	Yes...although I did not at one time get into contact personally with any one of them. We didn't take any prisoners. Not one. They were either killed or they ran away, but we never encountered any prisoners, that we took of them, in the period that I was there. And so in that same way they didn't take any prisoners from our side, although they claim to have taken a prisoner here, and especially there with those tanks that we had to leave behind. They immediately that night made a claim that they'd taken these tanks and they've taken X amount of personnel, I can't remember, but that's a bloody lie. But that's also their way of boosting the morale on their side, making statements like that.
Interviewer	But the actual physical reality of your guys coming under fire in the various attacks, their weaponry was pretty decent and you were in dire danger at times. It wasn't a cake walk.
Paul	Yes, for sure, it wasn't a cake walk. You should have been there to listen to those rolling barrages when they dropped these cluster bombs with their aircraft, although the aircraft is very high, the bombs came down, and they roll on like thunder. At a certain point you think hell, when is that thing going to stop? Is it coming your way, is it going the other way, where is it going to? So yes, it's not a nice feeling being there. After a battle you're always proud that you've been there and you can say, I was there, but when you're going into that attack you ask yourself a question, what the hell am I doing here? Why not somebody else? Where are the other buggers? Every time it's me!
Interviewer	With the enemy aircraft, you said they flew extremely high and they didn't seem to be bombing to any sort of particular real observation, they were just bombing roughly where they thought you were. The SADF and UNITA...UNITA had access to Stinger missiles, I don't know if your troops had Stingers as well...?
Paul	No, we didn't have Stingers.
Interviewer	What were your air defences? What were your primary weapons?
Paul	Primary weapon was the 20mm anti aircraft gun which we had in those days. Later on, during when we deployed the part time force elements in March, we also brought forward the...

Interviewer	The 35mm.
Paul	The 35mm guns. And we also had those missiles that the airforce got.
Interviewer	The Cactus.
Paul	The Cactus. But it wasn't really a success. Because those things they're not designed for that type of terrain. You can't get them there and when you do get them up there they're in bloody tatters. So it wasn't really a success.
Interviewer	The Cactus was driven on a small vehicle, almost like a small Eland.
Paul	Yes, yes. Built to drive on tarred roads.
Interviewer	But clearly the pilots flying the jets, whether they be Cubans or Angolans, were concerned about coming too low because they were concerned about your defences.
Paul	Yes, for sure, the Stingers drove them up, they were afraid of the Stingers. And you don't know where the Stingers are, they can be anywhere. Because it's a small shoulder launched missile.
Interviewer	Now in this fighting, you've had your attacks on the Lomba River and so on and so forth, your primary objective was to force the Angolans and Cubans back.
Paul	Yes.
Interviewer	At any stage had you managed to force them back across the river, were you going to chase them? Were you going to try and take Cuito itself?
Paul	The junior chaps like me and the others, we were always aggressive, we wanted to chase them, but the generals that was never their intention, I could gather, to chase them out of Angola and right back to Menongue or wherever. Because I mean, that would have taken...and although it's nice to think about that for a conventional soldier who likes to be aggressive. But to tackle a job like that in that part of the world you need lots of troops. And we didn't have the information on the ground, us juniors. We didn't have the picture that they had in Pretoria, where the decisions were made on strategically what the objectives of this battle will be. So it was easy for us juniors to say, yes, we should have done that, or why don't we do this, but it wouldn't have been that easy and I think the political agenda in the end or objective was only to secure the Jamba area where UNITA forces were concentrated and the headquarters were there. And keep the area north of Rundu clear of any SWAPO activities by occupying that area.
Interviewer	And that is what you did.
Paul	And that is what we did.

Interviewer	So after the final attack on Tumpo, then what was the situation?
Paul	Then we decided to lay down a huge minefield, very long, all along the Tumpo area from north to south, on the eastern side of the river, and we deployed a small battle group with the UNITA battalions that was in the area, and I then handed over to Piet... I can't remember his name, he was a paratrooper... we handed over to a paratroop battalion and they then remained in the area until such time as they called off that whole operation.
Interviewer	Now the parachute battalion, did you withdraw your Ratels and all those vehicles?
Paul	We withdrew everything, they stayed there on their own with the UNITA... their own anti tank elements.
Interviewer	During the campaign, I've read a couple of accounts where they talk about the air superiority of the MiGs as opposed to the Mirages, partly because the Mirages were at the limit of their operational range, they couldn't spend much time over the battle field. Also I understand MiGs had slightly different missile systems that were radar controlled, and forward (<i>inaudible</i>) whereas the Mirages only had heat seeking missiles. Were you ever in need of more air cover than what was provided by the airforce?
Paul	For sure, we could have done streets better if we had proper air support. But money constraints was what ruled the day. But yes, maybe with other priorities, everybody's stating after in the new South Africa that the airforce and the navy were let down in the past, they weren't given enough money and now all the money is spent on them. Whether that's the right way, I think maybe we should have had the money earlier.
Interviewer	But nevertheless, throughout the campaign the Mirages did fly bombing attacks on the enemy lines.
Paul	Yes. And they used the right techniques to attack with the support of the ground observation teams. Which the Angolans didn't do, or the Cubans didn't. They didn't deploy ground observation teams to guide their attacks, that's why they weren't successful.
Interviewer	And the techniques the Mirage used was pretty much "ver gooi", - - toss bombing.
Paul	Yes, toss bombing.
Interviewer	In which case they would fly low...
Paul	.(<i>Inaudible</i>)
Interviewer	Climb very sharply, release the bombs and withdraw.
Paul	Then 'maak gat skoon', as they say. Back to base.
Interviewer	So then you withdrew back to South West Africa, as it was then.

	And when you got back, I presume that you went through debriefings and so on...in your mind had all your objectives been achieved in the sense of stopping the FAPLA advance?
Paul	Well they didn't advance towards Jamba at all during that period of time. I mean, everything changed completely after the independence of South West Africa when our Defence Force withdrew completely out of the area. So I don't think we can be blamed for what happened after that, but up until that point in time where we were in command we did our job. although I think our localized success at Cuito bridge was not obtained because we couldn't succeed in driving the enemy across the river. That is more on the tactical ground but strategically I think we did the job. And then their claim to have won the battle is completely, utterly nonsense! Because I think the claim is made by people who were not there. They didn't ask me, who won the battle. If they asked me I could have told them that you didn't win, and we didn't really win completely. But you never...you were far away from winning this battle.
Interviewer	Were you in any way involved in the final sort of conflicts down near Techipa?
Paul	No. I was never involved in that.
Interviewer	Is there something you want to add about the battles on the Lomba?
Paul	Well unfortunately I can't mention anything about the Lomba because I wasn't there.
Interviewer	Sorry.
Paul	The only thing that I can tell you, I can give you some figures if you're interested in that. After Operation Packer, now that's the last battle...the enemy losses were only during that month of that period where the 83 Brigade was there, their personnel losses was 263, the stray equipment on their side was five BTR60 vehicles, one BMP1, two BM21 rocket launchers, and ten anti aircraft systems of the 14/16mm aircraft systems.
Interviewer	And on the SADF side?
Paul	On the SADF side only those three tanks that we lost. Then we destroyed some D30 guns and artillery guns, SU23 anti aircraft guns, three radar systems, and 14 logistical vehicles.
Interviewer	And that's in relation to the loss of three tanks?
Paul	That's in relation to the loss of three tanks.
Interviewer	And was anybody killed in those tanks?
Paul	None. Not one. I don't know whether...I've never lost one troop while I was in command by enemy activities. Own activities yes. I lost a few, but never ever I lost a troop, and that is now counting even my days at Ruacana. I never lost a troop. Well I don't know

	whether that's luck or what do you call that.
Interviewer	But so that entire period from when you first arrived there, in the...I'll just say, the greater Cuito region, to the time you were through, you never lost a single soldier.
Paul	I never lost one troop. I think there was a casualty or two when Pat McCloughlin during the period that McCloughlin was there.
Interviewer	And during that period, what sort of losses did UNITA take?
Paul	Well especially in the last attack because they were riding the tanks, they had a lot of casualties. Because due to the indirect fire that was brought down onto the tank force by the enemy. They had a lot of casualties. But we didn't really get into very close contact with these guys, because we mainly got contact with their officers commanding. You never saw these troops. Well I never did, because I my position I was never able to get to their positions specifically.
Interviewer	And when you say they were riding on the tanks, they were literally sitting on the outside of the tanks. Now in your military training would you have allowed your troops to do something like that going into battle?
Paul	Not if they can help it. That's why we developed Ratels to do that. To accompany tanks as close as possible with the necessary protection. But unfortunately they didn't have that means.
Interviewer	How come it was decided that the UNITA infantry would go in backed by your infantry? Was that just purely available troops or did you think that they could actually do the job better?
Paul	No, no, it's just available troops. They weren't really trained to operate with tanks. They only started in deploying tanks those days under their command, giving them tanks that we took from the enemy. They weren't really trained but it was their war.
Interviewer	Because in my mind that would have been a bit risky sending troops who weren't trained in that particular phase or that kind of warfare, in with the tanks.
Paul	Yes.
Interviewer	I mean, were they used as cannon fodder?
Paul	No, I don't think so. They made the decisions. It wasn't for us to tell them what to do. They weren't under our command.
Interviewer	How did that actually work? Would you contact their commanding officer and say, these are my requirements, this is what we...
Paul	It was by mutual consent. We requested them to the following, to attack this or to do that and that, and then they said yes they will or they won't.
Interviewer	Yes, I was going to say, did they always agree?

Paul	Yes, they didn't always agree and then even sometimes they agreed reluctantly but they didn't pitch, or they were late, or whatever. Because you will remember...well one can criticise them for being late but if you don't have the means of transport, you must walk or use a land rover, overcrowded but bearing 20 people, you must expect that they will be late, they can't move as fast. You shouldn't want them to. The losses for the 13 th , 14 th of January against Two One Brigade north of the Dala River, the enemy lost during that fight, they lost 11 tanks, two M46 guns which we took, and 250 men. Of which I would guess about a third were killed during that counter attack at the confluence of the Dala and the Cuito Rivers. And we lost as I said, one Ratel, that also was a mine casualty. That wasn't a big thing.
Interviewer	And once again, you never lost any men, as you said.
Paul	No. There was one guy shot in the leg by accident but that was it. Another thing that worked brilliantly during that period of time is our ability or the actions to mislead the enemy, especially with the flak traps that we deployed. We even indicated targets to their aircraft, then they bombed their own brigades on the ground.
Interviewer	Explain to me how you did that.
Paul	Well, as you know we were able to listen to their radio communication and we listened to their radio communications of the aircrafts and the pilots as they talked to each other. Then we assigned a 120mm mortar group detachment with phosphor bombs to zoom in on a headquarter position of say, Two Five Brigade. And as the aircraft is in the area flying all over, you could hear them, we fired a phosphor bomb onto the target and then as soon as they saw the smoke they attacked. They attacked their own positions. Not once, I think about two or three times that happened.
Interviewer	So it took them a while to realise what they were doing?
Paul	No, well they only found out later on that they attacked their own personnel, by their personnel complaining. So that worked well.
Interviewer	And you manoeuvred at night, did they ever manoeuvre at night? Did they ever attack at night?
Paul	No. They only operated during day time. The only elements that did operate during night were the aircraft dropping flares, that was it. But they didn't ever drop bombs, they just dropped flares, also I would think as a sort of a psychological action from their side against our troops.
Interviewer	Although it's not directly related to battle, did sickness play a role in affecting your troops' strengths, malaria...?
Paul	Yes, we had yellow fever...what do you call that thing? I'm thinking of the medical term now, but I can't remember what it is...it's like yellow fever, but we had quite a problem with that,

	which is basically mainly caused by water.
Interviewer	And Paul looking back now, it's 20 years since those battles, do you have any regrets about those battles? Do you have any sense that it was a waste of time?
Paul	No, I think I would...anything that happens, it happens because of a certain set of circumstances surrounding you or it in that period of time. I mean, the decisions I made because of influence that influenced that specific decision at that point in time. And I was trained as a soldier. I grew up as an Afrikaans speaking white in South Africa, and we were brought up in a certain way of thinking. And discipline was...especially on the Afrikaans side of South African population...discipline was very high priority. So if you were told that this is right, then we believed that is right. And told that this is grey then we believed that that is grey. So our thinking, and my thinking, was formed by what in the time and the factors that influenced the time when I grew up, and therefore if they tell me today that the same circumstances prevail then I'll do exactly the same as I did those days. And I think what we've done during those days was right and I still think it's right. And it will always be right. And so the other side of the opinion will have another idea of what is right and what is wrong because that is how they were brought up and what was taught to them of what is right and what is wrong. So I think we did the right thing in those days. We had to stop the spread of Communism and we did that. After the collapse of Communism things changed completely so there was no need anymore to defend South Africa against a Gevaar that was coming from across our borders, because it evaporated in thin air, so there was no need of doing that. So looking back at our operations I think we did the right thing. We proved ourselves as the best soldiers that were available, some of the best soldiers available on the earth, just as good as all the others, or even better as some, and I think we had the best equipment for those days available to us under those circumstances. There were sanctions and that and the other. And we did the best with what we had at that point in time. And I've got no regrets of what the generals decided we must do, what the politicians decided we must do, whether they were right or wrong that is for the future to determine. And that's it.
Interviewer	And as you said earlier on, those final battles in Angola, in your opinion, you achieved the objectives that your commanders had given you and when you withdrew it was with those objectives achieved.
Paul	To the greatest extent we did achieve that.
	END OF INTERVIEW

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