

Peter Williamson 14/02/08

Missing Voices Project Interviewed by Mike Cadman

	TAPE ONE SIDE A (<i>counter at 7</i>)
Interviewer	Can you give me a brief idea of where you grew up, the size of your family, English, Afrikaans?
Peter	<p>I'm a South African boy, brought up in Kokstad, I'm a farm boy from Kokstad. I'm probably the only non farmer in the family. I've gone into business since and my whole life I wanted to be in the military. My greatest passion was to go to Sandhurst. And one of the problems was, in 1962 I think it was, or '61, we went into a republic and we were no longer in the Commonwealth so my opportunity of going to Sandhurst was over. In 1970 I was selected by my school, in 1969 to go to the Army Gymnasium in Heidelberg as an officer, to junior leader's course. Probably one of the better experiences I had in life. In those days I think the army was known as, I think a lot of the Permanent Force people were known as sort of not probably the best type of guys in society but in the Army Gymnasium they obviously were the cream of the crop. And I went to Kearsney College which was a private school with all the sort of private type aspirations of the right thing to do and the right to be the best and the cream of the crop. Fortunately for me by going to the Army Gymnasium I think I hit the South African Defence Force with also the cream of the crop instructor force. My first six months at the Army Gymnasium was made up of, I believe, very highly talented and competent instructors. Who I think they whittled us down from 2000 applicants down to about 500. And they had two streams: one was the officer's stream and one was the NCO stream. As much as I was disappointed to get into the NCO stream, in later life I believe the NCO stream probably was the right way for me to go at the time it was a very practical side to go and very much with be able to handle the troops and get involved with troops. I qualified as an instructor and I extended my service from the normal nine months to twelve months, and then I was sent to Danie Theron Combat School in Kimberley, where we did some recruits training for commando soldiers, commando troops, which was the three week intake, train them, send them out to look after petrol depots and I got involved with a huge amount of different types of people in South African society, which was from the dregs of society to the pinnacle of society. University students down to the absolute lowest of the low. But a great experience. And then the second year after that I was...my commander was a general by the name of Captain Quinton Smythe VC. He won a VC during the war. And interestingly enough, my father's platoon sergeant in the Natal Carbineers when he won the VC. He got hold of me and said to me that as a Williamson who came from a horse racing and polo family, did I know anything about horses? I said, yes, I did. He said General Hiemstra, who was the chief of the Defence Force wanted to form a mounted infantry unit to see</p>

	because we had a problem with the terrorists which were doing shoot and scoot operations and we could not catch them, and we needed something to be able to cut them off. So they wanted to go back to horses.
Interviewer	Would this...was for use in South West Africa?
Peter	<p>In South West Africa. But we started this in Kimberley as an experiment. 25 horses, 20 soldiers, myself as the infantry instructor who could ride a horse, and a riding instructor by the name of Sergeant Major Dirk Grimment from the artillery who came from the equestrian side of...the military used to do things like opening of parliament and that type of thing. He trained riding and I trained infantry tactics. The situation with that was we didn't fight with horses as cavalry, we only used horses to get us into position and therefore we acted as normal infantry. An interesting phase. That unit went from 25 to a full time, what the Afrikaans call a bereede. Mounted infantry moved to Potchefstroom and became a full battalion and I believe today is still operating as a horse battalion in Potchefstroom. It became in South West Africa, at a base called Eenhana with great success in the terrorist war. However I had nothing to do with that. By that stage I had left the Defence Force and I went to the Rhodesian army and I applied to join the Rhodesian army, the Rhodesian light infantry. I was accepted. I had to drop down a rank to a lance corporal and I went on an orientation course and I was selected to become a trainee officer at Gwelo infantry school. I then was sent home to South Africa, back to Pietermaritzburg, told to report back in three months time when the course started at Gwelo, and I found a civilian job which suited me better in the trucking business. However I stayed in the South African Defence Force, in the Citizen Force and in the Rand Light Infantry...I actually ended up in the Rand Light Infantry in Johannesburg because I'd been transferred to Johannesburg. I spent from 1972-1979 and I took a commission in '73 and I became a lieutenant, I think, in '73. In '72 I became a candidate officer after a month, in '73 I became a second lieutenant. In 1976 we went to South West Africa. We were based in...we started in Oshivelo and we did our training in Oshivelo...our pre-training, refresher courses in Oshivelo and I was sent to Ruacana. For a very interesting period of my life I became basically a platoon commander then later on, in fact a 2IC of a company and I was put in a charge of an area between what they call beacon one and beacon three and a half, which was a front on a jati, and basically my area of responsibility went south for about 40-60 kilometres and in that area I was actually in all essence the governor, the magistrate, the law. And these all the local chiefs used to come to me to sort out their chief problems and all those type of things. Probably learned more about social governance or local government than I ever could have learned anywhere else.</p>
Interviewer	And you were a lieutenant.

Peter	I was a lieutenant.
Interviewer	In charge of how many men?
Peter	I was in charge of at that stage about 35 men. And later on I became 2IC of a company and was in charge of three platoons of 35. I started a scheme with a local school and medical where I was giving the local of a Himba tribe, I was giving them medical attention and I was getting a lot of information coming through from these people, they were giving us a lot of on-the-ground intelligence. It was a quiet period in 1976. One of the areas that was in my area of responsibility that was very interesting was the Portuguese refugees coming through. They were coming through from Angola and in Ruacana they were placed in...what do you call these huts...prefab huts, and we had a number of them and there was a full camp of these people, and we were told to take responsibility for their administration. One of the problems was they were not looking after themselves at any stage. What we did is we landed up picking up all their refuse, sorting out all their sewerage, sorting out everything and eventually our troops got tired of this and there was a complaint and the troops said they refuse to do this anymore, and we had to actually get very hard and say you guys have to do your own thing.
Interviewer	Were these only refugees of Portuguese origin or were there black Angolans as well?
Peter	Mainly white and Angolan. Quite sad. One particular incident. Young girl came to see me, probably in her late twenties, early thirties, asked me if I had seen a little boy dressed in denim jeans and a t-shirt with takkies. She'd been coming south and about a week before that he'd gone missing and it was her little son and could I help her in finding him. It was a very difficult time because I was 25 years old, I'd just got married, I was the oldest guy in my platoon. I was considered old. Most of my platoon were between 17-21. And I was married, but even that didn't prepare me for that time.
Interviewer	And you're still at Ruacana?
Peter	That was at Ruacana, yes. Then we came back from Ruacana and we came back to South Africa, one of the sadnesses of coming back...when we left for South West Africa we got on the train at Milpark, at the cattle loading point of the old Milpark showground. We actually got on the train. Going to South West Africa. And I had heard about my father in the Second World War and how people marched down the streets and they wished them well when they went to war. We went to war like a kind of under...like we're doing something wrong, and we got on these trains late at night and we were shipped for five days, it took us to get up to Grootfontein. And when we came back after having done all these things, and I must say, not too much action but a hell of a lot of work, when we came back, and people mustn't assume that the action was the only issue here. We were still in

	<p>the same danger, there were mines, we had a couple of vehicles in our area hit by mines and so on. But coming home again, we still were brought back to the Milpark cattle offloading point, instead of the Milpark Station, and I felt sort of like kind of let down that we'd done this and it was a secret we'd done this and none of the politicians or anybody acknowledged that we were doing anything. And the most sad thing is when we went to a braai and talking to guys, is that we go to a braai and they say, did you enjoy your camp? And you'd say well actually no, we've been in a foreign country and we've actually been in a war, and nobody actually believed us. And fortunately for me I didn't see horrific issues. I saw some death unfortunately amongst the civilian population. While we were there, there were ambushes that were sprung and those ambushes unfortunately most of the time, the deaths occurred were in my opinion were as much as the SADF tried to cover it up, at the end of the day I believe they were civilians. They weren't true terrorists. We had one particular incident where we thought we were getting to terrorists and myself and...there was about five of us, we were on a recce looking for an ambush position, and we saw four people and they had what looked like rifles on their backs and we went into an attack mode. Fortunately before we opened fire we actually found out it wasn't rifles on their backs, it was sticks, and they were actually black refugees running from Angola south. So yes, that was what it was. But we had all the other dangers. But the main issue was when we came back, we came back with our tails between our legs in my opinion. Nobody admitted that we'd done anything, and nobody understood that we'd done anything. And I think with resolving issues with refugees, keeping the place under control, at the time we were out there they'd moved all the conventional equipment south, there'd been a feinting attack from Cubans and I'd been put in charge of a rear guard action where they were about to attack us at Ruacana. Fortunately for us they did not attack us, but they did come within one and a half kilometres with armoured vehicles and other quite dangerous equipment to come and take us on with. And all I had to defend was, I had two E90 armoured cars, and I had two E60s, and I had 3.5 inch rocket launchers and one company of troops. And that was our unofficially called Operation Bog Roll <i>laughs</i> for obvious reasons. But fortunately I didn't cross the border, but we did not...the idea from their point of view is the Cubans wanted to come south and they knew we didn't have the conventional equipment to stop them and they wanted to come down for 60 odd kilometres into South West Africa and then they would...sorry, the South African idea was to let them beat us, come south for about 60 kilometres and then hammer them and cut them off, so they couldn't go back. But fortunately and unfortunately for the South African Defence Force they actually didn't come across. And then after that I came back to South Africa and I was transferred to Durban at that time...</p>
Interviewer	Was this seventy...?

Peter	<p>'76 I was there, I was transferred back to Durban in fact in '74 but '76 I was still with the RLI. And then I transferred to a local commando unit here, the South Coast Commando, and I was appointed as a training officer. Because it was my local unit and I fell under Natal Command Group 10 and I stayed in that particular position for a number of years until about 1980-81, the township issue started and we did a lot of township duty ostensibly in places like Umlazi, KwaMakutha, Umbumbulu, Umgababa, KwaMashu, the major areas. It could be very difficult because we didn't really know who the enemy was. The peace-keeping operation. We worked in the day in our civilian capacity and we operated sometimes two or three times a week at night. Sometimes with no sleep. Roadblocks. In that period of time I was involved in a roadblock on the Umbumbulu road where we had switched off the lights of the roadblock because we had been shot at from the hills of near Umbumbulu two or three times during the night and there were very few cars coming through and what actually happened we switched the light on, and we switched the lights on when cars came through, and a car came through and our policeman went in front of the car, the car refused to stop it kept coming and we thought that the car was going to machine gun us or drop a grenade on us. So I opened fire...I actually fired two warning shots behind the vehicle and my troops shot behind the vehicle and the vehicle still did not stop and I got my staff to shoot the vehicle. We hit an Indian lady in the back, not sure whether it was drug related or politically related, but I was defended by the army. I had a personal fax from General Kat Liebenberg to protect me, and it was very well done and I never got into trouble because I had followed all the rules of minimum force. But those were the type of things that we had to take. I had to take a decision in seconds which armchair warriors might have taken hours, years and months to take.</p>
Interviewer	And at this stage you're still a lieutenant?
Peter	<p>No, by then I was a captain. I'd been a full lieutenant from about 1979. And then I went to work for Colonel Heap in Group 10 as a staff officer in the operation called Ops Paal and Ops JC. And Ops JC was an operation in the southern Durban region covering Umgababa, (<i>inaudible</i>), Umkomaas, that area. And we had regiments from Free State, the De Wet, the De La Rey Regiments, we had 5 SAI, we had Cape Corps, we had 121 Battalion, we had the DLI. There was a huge fight between MK and the Inkatha in the south and my job was to co-ordinate for Colonel Heap all these different units and also to do a lot of co-ordination with the Jocks, the Joint Operation Centre of the police. I worked with the Public Order Policing, POP. I worked with a guy by the name of Hunter...his name was I think, I can't remember his rank, I think it was Major Hunter. And I worked with a number of policemen. To a greater and a lesser degree I believe the police were not trained for the operation that we were doing. There was no doubt about that. They did not have the expertise to run what they did. They didn't have, in our opinion,</p>

	<p>proper military lines of orders, they didn't know how to deploy in an ordered fashion. And I think it was unfair to some extent to allow policemen out there. Unfortunately the law of the land said that the police have to take the first part of it. It wasn't right.</p>
Interviewer	<p>So they had to take the first...</p>
Peter	<p>The police in essence were the leaders, they were meant to take responsibility of the whole thing and we were in assistance to the police. But what in real terms happened is that in some instances where police were more reasonable and understood we had better training, they would actually follow us. But in some instances the police didn't do that and we would have problems. Because when we would go out on operation we were used to getting an appreciation of plan and order. They would just pitch up, and they'd be sent from different police stations – they'd come from Brighton, they would come from places like Berea, and all these different police stations, and they'd just be told just report at Group 10 headquarters, and they'd arrive there with no rations, they wouldn't know why they're there, nobody would tell them. Unlike the army. So in some instances my OC at that time was Colonel Heap, and later on Colonel Van der Merwe became General Van der Merwe, the same guy I spoke to you about earlier, managed to try...he accepted, one thing I will say, he did understand that the army could teach the police something in those areas. But we had differences of opinions on the deployment of troops. I particularly had a serious disagreement with the OC of Port Shepstone police department, police section...I don't know what they would call themselves, I can't remember the guy's name...about were we put troops. Where I wanted to put the troops was a very quiet area, I said, that's exactly why I wanted to put them there. Because in my opinion if it's quiet there was something wrong. Because obviously they had been over-run by one of the other party. Subsequently to that within the month of not putting troops there...of being overridden on that, it became a very hot area. And so we had our problems with the police. And right on the ground on the constable to the soldier not too bad, but remember one thing about a soldier. A soldier is trained in an aggressive manner. He's told...a soldier is trained to be aggressive. A policeman is trained to be passive. The policeman waits before he reacts. He waits for an incident to happen before he reacts. A soldier is pro-active, he shoots before that happens. Now the problem we had with especially the young officers was to understand the concept of assistance to the police and the minimum force that we had. The minimum force was a huge problem to us because we would have to wait for somebody to shoot at us before we shoot back. as soldiers this was totally against our nature. We even got to a stage which used to irritate me to a huge extent, where we had soldiers and I'm talking about NCOs referring to our soldiers as members. Now members of the police force is a police method. He's a member of the police force. You are not a member of the SADF. You are not a soldier. A soldier is a soldier, you're not a damn member of an</p>

	<p>organisation. But we'd got to the stage where we had become so integrated that we actually did not know whether we were fish or flesh. And our soldiers struggled with that. Especially the hardest part of that war I believe was on the soldiers of the young NCOs, and the young officers. And many occasions they were blamed for things which I believe, and I personally...I was charged at the age, probably 30 years of age, after being a managing director of a company and having a huge amount of probably world experience compared to a 19 or 20 year old corporal, I was still charged and still questioned about my, what you would call it, my summation of the problem. And at the age of 30 I believe that I had a hugely more mature way of looking at things.</p>
Interviewer	Why were you charged?
Peter	<p>I was charged for attempted murder because I ordered somebody shot. And I had done all the right things, ok. But because of the law as such, if you did injure somebody or shoot somebody, automatically you would be charged. It was in your...it was up to you to prove that you were innocent. Not for them to prove that you were guilty. And there were issues, and they were actually quite technical issues. How did you set up the roadblock? Why did you do this? And how did you follow the elements of minimum force? Minimum force was the big issue. Now, minimum force used to be explained to us in various manners. Minimum force was explained to us, if there was a guy who was bigger than a girl and he had a baseball bat and there was a young girl, she could shoot him. But if he had a baseball bat and you were a big guy, you couldn't shoot him you'd have to fight him. So they weren't quite sure what minimum force was.</p>
Interviewer	When you say 'they', is this the SADF?
Peter	The SADF.
Interviewer	Would the same rules have applied to the police?
Peter	<p>Absolutely. Not always taken that way. You must also understand, at the time that it happened, was 1992 when this particular incident...around about that...unfortunately I've just thrown away the whole testament that I had on it...but what actually happened, at that time, the SADF and the police were at logger heads. The police were trying to curry favour with the new government that was coming into power. And let me tell you this is now...I'm not saying this is off the record, I'll tell you straight what happened...I was investigated by a guy by the name of Detective Sergeant Manus Erasmus. He became a very close and dear friend of mine. Because he was one of the few honest policemen that I actually came across. He investigated because of it being, what they call a criminal offence, they send the police in to actually even check the army guys. You don't have MPs come there. The MPs come but the MPs and their legal officers like stand back and wait for the police to their thing. And what happened is, Manus Erasmus came to check this out. Manus Erasmus called me into his office and he phoned a Colonel</p>

	<p>Kitching...I don't know whether Colonel Kitching is still alive today, but Colonel Kitching's words to Manus Erasmus, while I was sitting there, <i>ek wil daai army kaptein se fokking kop he</i>. That's what he said to Manus. And I was sitting there when he said it, and Manus said to him, Colonel, <i>ek kan niks teen die kaptein doen nie, omdat hy was reg in wat hy gedoen in sy optrede</i>. So in essence those who don't speak Afrikaans to understand, Colonel Kitching said, I want that army captain's head. The Detective Sergeant that was doing it said, Colonel, I can't give it to you because what he did was correct.</p>
Interviewer	<p>But now why do you think the colonel wanted that, was it just rivalry?</p>
Peter	<p>I believe that he needed to prove a point against the army. At that time they were jockeying for position in the ANC. They saw the writing was on the wall. And I think this is a world issue, I don't think it's...I think it happened in Nazi Germany, I think it happened in many countries, where they can see it starting to fall amongst the security forces. And I believe this is where it started to fall. And it was interesting that I was involved in this. Second part of this was that I got a fax sent to Natal Command by General Kat Liebenberg, who's dead today, who said, <i>daai army kaptein moet verdeerdig word teen alle koste</i>. What they did is they got an advocate from Pietermaritzburg to actually take my statement. Didn't even allow a policeman to take my statement. My statement was probably 20 pages long. They took measurements...fortunately I'd been a sergeant for a long time and I had done my whole thing pretty correctly. I'd done it right. But they did protect me. The army did. But the police wanted my head. And as I say, that's what happened to me...but that was sort of...and then later on after that I was given the task of becoming the OC of an operation called Operation Checkmate. Checkmate meaning check your mate in the farms. What happens we were subjected to a lot of farm attacks. There were a lot of farmers in the Group 10 area. The Group 10 area that I was in charge of was from the Tugela River just north of Stanger down to the river in Port Edward down to Harding.</p>
Interviewer	<p>That's a fair proportion of KwaZulu-Natal.</p>
Peter	<p>It's huge. I can't remember the amount of farmers but it was over a thousand farms. My job was to see that these farmers were issued with weapons and trained, right down to their children, even though their children were not allowed to be in the army...their mothers and fathers could be...they gave them army numbers to cover the basis that they could get a weapon. They needed to belong to the local commando. They didn't need to train as a local commando, they didn't need to do drill, they didn't do any of that. All they had to do was to learn how to shoot and to protect their homes and to do, what we call a cell system, which is based on cells within that area.</p>
Interviewer	<p>So a husband and wife could be issued with weapons because</p>

	they were part of the commando system...and you say children, down to what age?
Peter	Well what they did was, that was unofficial, but what we actually did was when we went to a shooting range, we taught the kids how to shoot.
Interviewer	So I presume that any kid over 18 was considered an adult?
Peter	Kids, I'm talking about 10, 12. We were issuing them with R1s and later on with R4s, and the ladies most of them at that time we issued them with HMCs, SMKs, you know those Uzis? And yes, basically it was just sensible that they could pick up the weapon if the next one down the line...I mean, going back to the Voortrekker days at the end of the day, if they came and attacked you in the lager you keep shooting. Fortunately we were in an area which we had a couple of farm attacks but nothing to write home about, it was fine. And then my other job was obviously to give them advice on walling, security things such as practical things like electric fences. The only problem I ever had was telling the wives to cut down local shrubs because of the lighting and these guys would hide behind it. They really took umbrage to their shrubs that they had to take down, but...
Interviewer	But at this stage you're Permanent Force or Citizen Force?
Peter	Citizen Force.
Interviewer	Doing this in between your...?
Peter	I did that and I was doing between, probably doing up to 8-10 days a month. Because I had my own business I could do that. I was using a 560 SE old Mercedes Benz to drive around, free of charge. And I didn't wear a uniform too often. I used to go to the sales days, I used to go to the farming agricultural days. I was a friend of these guys and I offered them a service. The service was to protect themselves. And what happened is that if a farm was attacked, they worked on a ten minute system. It was worked on a 10 system, 10 minutes reaction, 10 kilometres. We would have what you call a micro cell and a macro cell. You'd have ten micro cells within one macro cell. And those would be within 10 kms of each other. So what would happen is if you had an attack in a micro cell, those people would react to the farm attack which is based on the Marnet military system. Which was like AgricAlert in Rhodesia. This was a radio system which was into Group 10 here. Military Area Radio Network. It was actually quite a sophisticated system because you could actually talk in an individual basis on it. It was not an open radio, you could actually talk to an individual on it. It actually could select a line. A little bit like a cell phone to some extent today. And what would happen is that they would react to the farm attack within the 10 kms and all the time that was going on in the farm attack, they would come together. But all the rest of the people would then go to pre-designated areas, "Ops" (<i>observation posts</i>) old people for instance, guys that were older, couldn't really move around, they

	<p>would go to observation posts. The farmers would then go out and set up roadblocks, with uniforms, without uniforms, with their rifles whatever, and they would try and block the area. In that time, we would get the reaction forces in. The reaction forces then would take over, but the reaction forces couldn't be in in the quick time that these guys could be in. So the idea was to block the area, and say it was an expanding situation, you had your 10 kms situation and you had your macro cells made up of a lot of micro cells, which would then blanket an area. So that was the idea. It worked very well, it was very good. It worked very well till about 1994 where we had reaction forces based at the navy base here, and also at the airforce base. Didn't work very well after that because they didn't see it as a priority. As we got further in, and I think you must talk to Peter Williams about this tomorrow because he ran a number of these things in the Piet Retief area, and what actually happened later on is they took the commando away, I mean they've now disbanded them, and tried to put police in their place. There's no ways they'd be able to do that in the same way. Because this particular system was simple, it was very effective, it really was very cost efficient. It cost a rifle, probably two per family, and sometimes the farm labourers...we also trained the farm labourers. We also trained...and I was asked to speak to the parliament at Ulundi, and I actually personally spoke to parliament in Ulundi, I went with Colonel Heap, and explained the commando system to the whole of parliament there. Because they also wanted that same system within KwaZulu-Natal.</p>
Interviewer	<p>What year would that have been?</p>
Peter	<p>That would have been 1988, around about there. I felt uncomfortable with that. I felt very uncomfortable. I spoke to Colonel Heap about it yesterday. He said I shouldn't be. I said, I'm uncomfortable because Gatsha Buthulezi was at the parliament and I felt we were arming IFP. Because I said we needed a certain amount of volunteers within this area and we would arm them and train them, to be able to protect the area. In the same way as you protect the farms. The people we were told to take, in my opinion, were allocated IFP people. I never felt totally comfortable. But my particular job there wasn't that onerous in that my job was to explain what the commando system was about. And the reason they used me, because I was a civilian soldier, and I could explain to them how the commando system worked. I felt that I was selling my soul to one of the parties. And right throughout my military career I had this, maybe naïve, probably a British thing, because I'd spent a lot of time...I had huge admiration for the British and the British army. I always felt it was a neutral issue, you fought for the government in power and that was it. But I do understand it, that particular issue happened. Maybe I'd prefer you not to talk to the Colonel about it because it's a little bit of a bone of contention between the two of us. In that...and again, maybe I shouldn't say this but I would hope you would use it in the right context...I was taken out of the</p>

	<p>parliament building and we went to his office, and there were certain connotations made about a radio service which would be set in place, which was going to pump IFP propaganda. Which made me more uncomfortable as a Citizen Force soldier. I felt I'd crossed a line from being a standard soldier and I'd gotten involved in a political issue. And the colonel was obviously, it's his area, he was a very old friend of Chief Buthezi because the colonel started 121 Battalion and 121 Battalion's only colonel was Gatsha Buthezi. So yes...I think there was a close thing and I think that, as I say, I'd rather you didn't mention to him but that was one of the issues I had a little bit of a problem with, because we were now going into the realms of politics which...and it was elections and those type of things, which were not, I believed, in my area of...I was quite happy to keep the peace but I wasn't there to take sides. And then when I, as I say, later on in life this carried on, in the late '94. After '94 it started to peter out, I wasn't getting the support from my group. They were cutting back on budgets, they were doing everything in their power basically to undermine the commando system. I think as much as I don't like the Scorpions, they didn't like the commandoes. The commandoes were effective. In certain areas hugely effective. If you speak to Colonel Heap you might ask him tomorrow...probably one of the most effective, as I said to you earlier, one of the most effective parts of the Defence Force in the internal strife we had here, the conventional units were not even close because they didn't know how to operate out of the conditions that we did. We operated right within our own areas, and we operated...and I did both. I was in the conventional unit, I was in the Rand Light Infantry, which was very conventional. I was in the Permanent Force, very conventional. And then I came into this. And I realised that these guys were very...they could move very quickly, they were very flexible, and by knowing the area and being able to operate within these areas, we were good at what we did. And we did it without...and we had a passion because we were looking after our own area...</p>
Interviewer	<p>In a nutshell, commandoes were comprised of farmers and citizens generally? Apart from their own specific...</p>
Peter	<p>Farmers and citizens. But they were basically militias within their own area. And some of those militias were led by pretty good officers. I mean, there were guys, say myself, I came from a pretty good background, I'd been well trained, and I had some harum-scarum guys but they were pretty well led, in my opinion. They were pretty well led and very flexible. I mean, they were type of guys that would jump in their motor cars and go and do something. They weren't worried about waiting for military transport or military rations, they'd bring their own sandwiches and they'd carry on for three days. They didn't even bother to claim pay. That's the type of guys they were.</p>
	<p>END OF SIDE A (counter at 480)</p>

	SIDE B
Peter	I speak five African languages. I speak English, Afrikaans, and I speak the three Nguni languages, Swazi, Zulu and Xhosa. And I speak them in the true sense. I don't speak them because they're Nguni that they're similar, I can actually talk them all. So I believe I'm a true white African. My father was born here, in Durban. My grandfather made the huge mistake, why I can't get an ancestral visa. He was actually born in Shed number one at the Point. His mother got off the ship and instead of having the birth on the ship, she had it at Shed Number One Point, which makes him a South African instead of a Brit.
Interviewer	That's the Point in Durban?
Peter	Yes, the Point in Durban. So I'm a third generation South African. And interestingly is that it's sad for me trying to understand that I'm not considered in the land of my birth and my ancestors, to be a true South African. I have a business, I employ directly...in my one business I employ 200 people. In the business I have a shareholding which I was part of in starting I employ another 500 people. So I employ close to a 1000 people. Of that 1000 people I would probably find that they are...they are probably beholden to ten outsiders. So we're looking at probably nine-10 000 people out of our organisation. But I'm still considered an outsider. It scares me.
Interviewer	But who considers you an outsider, do you think?
Peter	I get that feeling...every time I head in to any sort of government organisation or anything like that I just get the...maybe my body language is wrong, but everything, all the press, all that comes through, seems to indicate that I'm not welcome here. That I'm different. And I'm tired of being guilty. And I am guilty, there's no doubt, I enjoyed apartheid. I was born 1951, I became an adult probably around about 1965, I enjoyed apartheid from probably 1965-1994. I saw through it probably by 1975, but I still enjoyed it and I didn't have the guts to take it on.
Interviewer	When you say enjoyed it, you enjoyed the benefits of it.
Peter	I enjoyed the benefits of it. I travelled a lot overseas, but I found it very difficult to defend the indefensible. Found it very difficult. And I did understand that. I understood I couldn't defend it. I had some gung-ho attitude about it, probably...yes, maybe, I had some gung-ho attitude about it. We're going to fight some war, we're going to beat these guys and we're going to have our own little part in Africa. But I think my business sensibilities told me that there was no way that you could fight the tide forever. Four and a half million against forty-five million, didn't work. The numbers didn't work. That was the fact of it. We'd win every battle but we'd lose the war. And as I said to you earlier I think we lost the war the day that Chase Manhattan pulled their money out of South Africa, I think that was 1982. And as a senior manager in business, I'm very aware of that and I understood it. I

	<p>understood it and probably acted like a good German soldier would have acted in the Second World War after probably the defeat at Moscow and Stalingrad, when they realised the Germans were on its way out. I think I was fighting more for a loyalty to a possible regime, I don't know. But I was fighting for the government in power, but I did understand we were going to lose. And I knew we were going to lose. But at the age I was, and the young people around me, I didn't show that I knew we were going to lose. I knew we would win the battle but we'd never win the war.</p>
Interviewer	<p>So do you sit down sometimes and think, well why did I do all that stuff, given where we are now, South Africa changed dramatically in 1994, Mandela became president, do you look back and say well all my military service was for nothing?</p>
Peter	<p>Yes, to some extent maybe...I don't know...at the time no. I think at the time...it's actually damn difficult to answer that one, a damn difficult question. I think from my point of view...yes...I would fancy myself possibly as a fairly intelligent, mature business person. I do a lot of travelling, I should have known better. But maybe over that I had loyalties to maybe my regiment, maybe my colleagues...I don't know. But I just carried on. And there were certain elements, for instance, when I told you about my farm protection issues. There was a real problem there. There were innocent people being attacked. So therefore, I actually didn't see that in terms of a political war. I saw that in terms of saving a couple of lives, where in a lot of instances were criminal acts, and I don't think they actually...in fact I don't think at any stage, as much as the propaganda tried to make it that way, that they actually were at any stage, political. I do believe in Rhodesia they were political. But I don't believe in this country they were more than...I think that they were maybe encouraged politically, but I think most instances they were criminal. And I'm not making this as an excuse, I'm saying that I did it because the okes, and people, were getting killed, and I felt that I could make a difference in that area. But in that particular area it never occurred to me that it was part of trying to win the war. All it was, is trying to save local lives of colleagues and friends. Really, that was it. I don't know, I was sensible enough to know that we were not going to win this thing. But then if you had to speak to a German officer...and I think we as an officer class have to take that responsibility. If you had to talk to a German officer probably end of 1944, 1945, probably have similar reasoning. I mean, he knew that the Russian tide was coming. The Russian tide was going to kill a lot of his people, so all he could do was hold the tide back, and maybe he was sticking his thumb in the dyke to some extent. Maybe that's what we were doing, but I think you've got to be very careful about that. I think in the last few years it was not a political issue. I think it was a huge amount of criminal issue and I think a lot of it was pure and simple, trying to save lives.</p>

Interviewer	You spoke earlier on about, you were doing quite a lot of your work as a part of the commando system and so on and so forth, in areas very close to where you live, your home. And you would go out in the sort of early evening and come home at 4 o'clock in the morning and jump into bed to grab a few hours of sleep, and your wife would say, are you home? And you would say, yes, I'm home and safe, but you were actually fully aware that there was a very different world just around the corner from your urban world here.
Peter	Absolutely.
Interviewer	How did you manage to balance these two worlds that were so far apart yet so close?
Peter	That's a very interesting part. I don't know how we did it, but I think if you go back in history, if you take the Second World War and the Blitz in London, if you have to talk to anybody in the Blitz, how did you handle the Blitz? The Blitz was handled as something that happened and something you had to deal with. Now I think that's what happened the same here. We would go out and we would do some strange things during that night. We would probably do roadblocks, we'd imprison people, we would hold people up, we would search, we'd do cordon and search operations, we would go into people's houses and look for weapons, we would get to a situation where on occasion we'd be driving through some of the areas, especially in the Umbumbulu area where we would take fire from mountains, hills, above us. That type of thing. So we actually would come under fire. Then we would come home, but I think one of the issues when we did come home, was interesting is that I tried to come to terms with the normality of this. So what I did is this is...I actually have pictures...my job was in fact liaison officer, when things were getting fairly hot I was liaison officer, and you might see it on my board there, I was liaison officer for the Six One Mechanised Battalion, which came down here when things were very hot with their Ratels, and I was in charge of liaison officer, I had to take them around and guide them. And we had a situation where we went on operations where we found dead bodies, we were involved with death and people getting shot, and we had pictures, and I took some pictures. And I took those pictures and I went in 1992 I decided that I would like to look at New Zealand as an option. I went to New Zealand, I had two friends in New Zealand, who I had backpacked in Europe with in the early seventies, and I took these pictures and I showed them my pictures. And the interesting thing...I want to tell you about my day...I was a business man, I was an MD of a company, I was also a liaison officer at that stage with Group 10 and my day went something like this: I started in the morning, I got up, I went to my office to see that my business is on the run. I then went to the operations room of Group 10, and I met with Colonel...
Interviewer	Where was that?

Peter	<p>That was in the centre of Durban, in Baker Street in Durban. I went in to the operations room and I saw Colonel Heap. He then said to me I must go to the tactical headquarters...I just want to tell you an example of a day...the tactical headquarters of Six One Mechanised Battalion in Mfuleni. Mfuleni just north of Isipingo. I arrived there, it was one of these quick jack caravan type operations. I went in there, there was a colonel there. Unfortunately I don't remember his name, a very good friend in fact during the time, he was very good to me. And I walked into his office and he said to me, Peter we have a problem, I have no officers, and I need an officer to do a cordon and search operation. I said to him, Commandant I will do the cordon and search for you. I will take your troops out. However I have a luncheon date with one of my customers at the Royal Grill at one o'clock. He said to me, please man, sort this out. I took the troops, I did a cordon and search, we found weapons in a house, I took a platoon of soldiers, I did that. I came back, I got in my car, I drove to the Royal Hotel in my uniform and I went to lunch with one of my major clients at the Royal Grill, in uniform. I then finished that, I went back, reported to the headquarters at Baker Street, Group 10, I went home via my business, and at half past six I watched TV with my wife. So that was my day. That to me was abnormal I think if you're sensible about it but it wasn't exceptional. I told that story to my New Zealander friends and they nearly died of fright. They said, that is not normal. So that's what we'd got to. And that is not normal. So I agree. It was not normal. And in one particular day in my life, if you check with Colonel Heap, that's what happened. I went out, checked my business, go to my business, go and do a cordon and search, pull out, go and have lunch with one of my clients, and then go back and come back, that's not normal.</p>
Interviewer	It's unusual.
Peter	It's unusual. And that's what we did. And we did not see that as exception. What I mean is, if you had done that in a place like UK, you'd probably go onto Sky News. Exceptionally.
Interviewer	Did you ever chat with your wife or your daughter about some of the things that you'd seen, even in...?
Peter	<p>The only time I had a serious problem was the night as I told you...with the shooting, which is up the road from here. I explained it to them what happened and the newspaper came out and it was in the Mercury newspaper. And my daughter went to school, and some of the kids said to her that your dad is going to go to jail. And she was very upset about that. And I tried to explain to her that I actually sorted it out. But I will say from the point of Natal Command, they never allowed my name to get into the paper, so that was one thing. I don't think so, no...you know what, I never had, in the whole time I was in the army, I never had this Vietnam Syndrome shit. I might have had to some extent...I did have a Vietnam Syndrome towards the end of my</p>

	<p>career from the point of view of saying, I don't think we're doing...I don't actually want to get killed doing this. Because I don't think it's a good idea, because I think we're actually fighting a lost...when I first went to the border, I was keen as mustard. I'm fighting for volk en vaderland. I wanted to kill anything that moved. But really it was like an adventure. But I never at any stage got to a point, and to my luck I never got into a situation where I had a huge amount of death and destruction around me. My war was in many instances quite academic. It was more managerial than it was dangerous. I've had my dangers but they were minimal compared to certain colleagues of mine, and friends. But they were...no different morally...the moral courage required was definitely there. There was definitely moral courage required, but there was never...I don't think I needed to say, I'd been shot at a few times, but I was never in a situation where I felt that I was exceptionally at risk or psychologically at risk. My wife tells me that when I came back from South West Africa that I used to talk in my sleep and I used to jump up and start running around the room and doing things like that. But that I think is maybe just normal because we accepted that, that was sort of like what happened in the night. We did, we had a few mortar attacks, those type of things, but they were not things that I was petrified about. I used to get nervous, and we were scared, but not out of this world. And I'm sure there's colleagues that you're going to talk to that had far worse experiences that I had. But my experiences were positive, my business today is run on military terms. I run everything on military terms. I use military principles, I believe that military principles haven't changed since Roman times. The principles are one and the same. The disciplines are the same, the way you give instructions are the same, nothing changes. It's just...the only thing that changes is the technology and stuff. The principles never change. And I've used them, my management training has never been better than what I got in the army. In my NCOs courses, officer's courses, they were some of the finest. One of the things that I did find, and I did say to you...and I actually spoke to Group 10 about it...I tried to set up a course, which never really got off the ground. I tried to set up a course once I'd become a civilian, to talk to the soldiers, especially the young NCOs, and tell them how much their NCO and leadership training could benefit them in later life. And that was never done. Because nobody ever took the military management system, converted it to civilian. And it is very easy to do. And it is very, very easy to do. Because if you take a look at my particular business, we look at every day, and the guys laugh at me, and a lot of guys...Javelin is known for it, we have people known...I don't know if you've ever heard....</p>
Interviewer	<p>Sorry, just for the record, it's a trucking company and you move stuff great distances to different parts of southern Africa. So you were saying, you're known for...?</p>
Peter	<p>Our operation rules and everything, are known for their military way of handling things. We do military appreciations on how...if</p>

	we look at a place like Angola, if we look at a place like Malawi, we'll look at the route, we'll look at all of the groups, routes, observation, undercover, non passables, distance and time. We'll look at military principles. When we give the instruction or the situations, missions, executions, admin and logs, command and signals, we'll look at those things. In fact that's the way I train my people to look at how you look at a problem. And those leadership principles, if our guys die...one of our managers, we'll go to the funeral. It's a military principle. If your soldier dies you follow him. And we have good success with that. I have people working for me for 22 years. In fact if you work for Javelin less than 5 years, you're sort of like a misfit. And we have hugely long...in fact when (P.....? – <i>needs confirmation</i>) took us over they said there are people who have been there too long.
Interviewer	This is interesting because throughout certainly the latter half of your career you were a civilian soldier or a military civilian, I don't know which way you prefer to look at it...
Peter	One or the other.
Interviewer	But you said at times you sat on the JOC which was...
Peter	JOC (Joint Operations Committees).
Interviewer	...which was a whole series of committees comprising of police, military and then various government departments, i.e. civilians, who were assigned to, what, oversee certain regions.
Peter	They were assigned to oversee basically certain regions. We would go to the JOC – there were sub JOCs, mini JOCs, there was a whole lot of JOCs. And I can't remember there was O-coc, no coc, and all kinds of coc, but let me tell you at the end of the day...similar to the Rhodesian system. The Rhodesian system was: police, airforce, army, and the...the guy's they used to do the black affairs.
Interviewer	The equivalent of...the guys who ran, the district commissioners.
Peter	Yes, the guys who had those Aldeamentos type of guys. I've forgotten the name of the guys. But anyways, those were basically the ways, that was very simple. The Rhodesian system was simple, very, very successful. People became friends, people couldn't work...when they tried it here, there was a little more to it. Because you're in a city like Durban, you've got things like military, police – that's the simple part – airforce, that's also simple. Even the navy, that's also fairly simple. Then you start getting into PWD...
Interviewer	That's Public Works Department.
Peter	Yes, you get into municipality. You get into Home Affairs.
Interviewer	Did that draw on education?
Peter	We get the whole pile...there was a full room of these people. And a lot of them were absolutely...absolutely, in my opinion,

	<p>incompetent. Didn't say a word, nobody spoke. The people that spoke in those meetings was military and the police, and to some extent sometimes, the municipality, they spoke. The military, I'd say sometimes the navy, but the navy really spoke with the military and the airforce. The airforce were different, the airforce was there basically to say we need helicopters to move here and here and here. They were not really there to tell us how to do things. The most important was Bantu Affairs, those type of people, that had to solve the township problems. And they didn't do that. And that made it very difficult for us because we would go into a township and there would be problems with toilets, there'd be problems with roads, there'd be problems with electricity, there'd be problems with buses, be problems with that. And those were the problems that created the fermentation for the war. That created huge animosity. And we would walk in there with guns. And what we did is we would say, you accept this shit or you don't accept it, because we've got the guns. Meanwhile, really down the line, we actually as an army, actually understood that. That we actually didn't need the guns. But the only problem we had the guns, because they would start to riot and we would need the guns to control this. So all we were doing was keeping the pressure cooker of the pot down. Was completely the wrong way to do things. We were working from the top down instead of from the bottom up. That was really what we were doing.</p>
Interviewer	<p>And your sense, your and clearly the military officers that you worked with, that the civil departments, as it were, didn't understand this. Didn't understand that if you gave people toilets and better facilities there might be less frustration.</p>
Peter	<p>Didn't understand it. And it was always my contention, and all the times I was there, and any time that I did a certain...when they gave me an area, which sometimes they did, they would give you an area, say like KwaMakutha or whatever, a certain section, I would say the best measurement of success was if you had no incidents. Now the Vietnam or the American type measurement of success was body count. Now that was exactly the opposite. I say body count was not important. Incidents, the lower the incidents the more success you've got, in my opinion. Because here you were doing what in my opinion is correct...from a point of view if you have to dominate an area, you patrol it. You patrol it to dominate it. If you're patrolling it successfully, domination means no attacks. People don't attack you. But what seems to be in the military and the police type of thinking...police specifically are reactionary. Police work out how many times they have an incident, that incident they react to. The army can't understand reaction. They will pro-act rather than react. But that was taken away from us. So really what happened, we weakened us because we became policemen. You send a policeman into an area, what does he do? He monitors the situation. You send a soldier into an area, and he cleans the area out, if you let him do his job. But now we actually became policemen. We now became</p>

	<p>monitors. We monitored the situation waiting for somebody to do something wrong. Then we ran in. And you tend to over-react in that circumstance. Whereas I always felt if we patrol the areas, we did all those things within the JOCs, we did that right. If we had done that right, if we'd got the soccer fields right, the toilets right, I mean simple things, lights, roads, those type of things, getting people to hospital, really trying hard to give people a service, we would have done a hell of a lot better. I don't think we're doing a hell of a lot better right now. But those days people got shirty about it actually started shooting at you for it. And that's where I think we went wrong. Big time wrong. But I don't ever regret one single minute of being there. I think it was a hard war. It was a shit war. Probably the shittiest war that anybody can fight. Because we had no real enemy, we had no real ally, we had nothing. We were really wandering around, ham in the sandwich between ideology, three ideologies: black on black ideology, maybe two if you make it simplistic, two. You take away the PAC and all that type thing. Where you take UDF, ANC, and then you take Inkatha, especially where we were in Natal. I don't know the other places. I think it was two ideologies, and then you take our ideology, which was, we were trying to support a dying system of apartheid which I think died early in the eighties. I actually don't believe it continued. I never felt that the true petty apartheid really carried on much longer than probably '85, after that it died. But I think the Nationalist government, their past gave it no credibility. So there was no credibility. And at four and a half million against forty-five million, no way there is a hope in hell, if you're sensible about it. And we were basically on the outskirts of Berlin waiting to be taken. Thank God it wasn't the holocaust that they had, but we lost. We lost the war and we never lost a battle, but we lost the war. And I knew we were going to lose the war, for ten years, I knew we were going to lose the war. Because of my training in business. I knew we'd lose the war. But I was a good soldier. I think. I was a good patriot in a system...I did think we might carry on a little bit longer, but I was a good patriot and I learned a lot. Jesus, I learned, and I met great people.</p>
Interviewer	Are you still a patriot?
Peter	<p>Yes, I think...I think I am on this point. I'm less proud than I was a year ago of being a South African. One of the interesting things was that I was very...when I was...I used to go overseas a lot. In 1990 and prior to that, I used to pass myself off as an Australian in the UK. After that I started to become proud...I think Mandela made us proud, there's no doubt about that. I don't know why, but he was an icon that made us proud. And a very interesting conversation I had, I was driving through Wales, it was raining, it was about 8 o'clock at night, it was dark, and my daughter who was about at that time, probably about 14, and my wife, we were tired and we didn't know where to go and we were passing a place called, (Bulethwal? <i>—needs checking</i>) in Wales. We saw a notice board for a hotel. And off we went to this hotel. I turned off and we went through this...it was actually quite ghostly. We</p>

	<p>arrived at this hotel and there were no cars outside, I think there was one car, the owner's car, and we stopped, and it was quite a smart place. We walked in, there was a young girl there and she said, yes, we're not open but we're not closed either. This was in winter. And she says, but we can take you in, but we can't give you anything you want to eat, we'll just give you what there is and you can have a room. And it was very nice. Anyway we went for dinner, and the meal was very good and a gentleman came up to us who was the caretaker of this hotel, while the owners had closed the hotel ostensibly but they'd gone away on holiday and this guy was like a friend who was caretaking the hotel. And this guy came up to us and he said, where are you from? And we said, we're from South Africa. And he started on me and he started asking about South Africa. And he asked me about black people and whatever, and I said, yes, I think with this new thing we're going in a pretty good direction. And he said to me, how do you handle the black people? I said, we get on...at that time I was personally trying to make myself in a point where I felt we had to have a rainbow nation and we had to make it right. And after about half an hour he turned to me and he said, you know what? Where I come from we call them kaffirs. And I said to him, excuse me? He said to me, we call them kaffirs where I come from. I said, where do you come from? He said, I come from P.E. And I said to him, when did you come from PE. He said, ten years ago. I said, well I don't know if you're going to fit the bill anymore. It doesn't work quite like that anymore. He turned out he was a wine editor for a wine magazine living in the south of France. Showed me how to drink the best Bulgarian wine I've ever had in my life. But, I was very proud of the fact that he was trying to trap me into going into a racist mode. And I didn't do it, and I was very proud of that. Because I'd been a soldier with black people in the eighties. In the eighties more and more black soldiers were part of us. And Indian soldiers. Had a lot of black soldiers, especially in the commandoes. A lot of black and Indian soldiers, used to come in. I had a lot of problems with Indian soldiers, I will tell you. It's called (<i>inaudible</i>) Brigade, they were a little bit soft and little bit passive. They're a very passive nation, very difficult to turn them into aggressive soldiers. But nevertheless we did. So I was very proud of that. That I was proud of, that I'd actually passed the test. I think I passed the test. As a white African. And I don't know the last six weeks...</p>
Interviewer	You're referring to the Eskom power situation.
Peter	I'm a business guy, I really believe this was the hardest smack we've had and I'm seriously punch drunk about it. I don't know where we're going. I don't know. I just hope we're not...
	END OF INTERVIEW (<i>counter at 383</i>)

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