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## TRANSCRIPTION FAX SHEET

CLIENT	: University of the Witwatersrand – Historical Papers
SUBJECT	: Willy Ward/Jan Breytenbach
IDENTIFICATION	: Tape 05
CONTACT PERSON	: Michele Pickover

DATE: 30 November 2008

Please note:

1. When typist is unsure of names, speakers will be identified by title.
2. Transcriptions are typed verbatim, and typist, when unsure of jargon and industry terms, will do phonetic spelling followed by (unsure)

**INTERVIEWER**: Okay carry on.

**WILLY WARD**: There was this bomb shell between us and I heard him scream.

**INTERVIEWER**: Who was it that was with you?

**WILLY WARD**: One of my black troops, shouted Mata, Mata I have been hit....so I ran across to him and his whole arm was just hanging on bits of flesh and skin and I took his weapon away from him and bent the barrel....I wasn't going to carry the weapon, I mean I have got my own weapon and we just had fighting packs on so we didn't have big packs and so on, so I grabbed him and I threw him on my shoulder and as I threw him on my shoulder this bloody hand came out and hit me in the face and an arm full of blood you know, so I am running and then they open up and the machine gun bullets were squirting here next door to us NR4 and I hit the deck and this oke is screaming, so you can imagine it must have been so sore for him...and then I also hear the tank fire, and you hear it coming, it comes across and then I go to ground again so I keep on going to ground...so I must have run about 3 kilometers with him...it could be a bit more but I was tired, but I think the adrenalin was pumping and we were fit, I mean there is no getting away from it we were bloody fit and when the adrenalin pumps, I think the adrenalin pumps a hell of a lot when somebody is firing at you, you can outstrip a bullet I think. Jan had seen there was problems ...Jan van der Merwe ...and he had come back, he turned around and came back with a vehicle to come and fetch me...and then he saw me and said "o God is jy raak geskiet" are you wounded, and I said no, no, no, this guy is wounded come on lets go. So I lay him down on the back and we went to Baishu Longa and the trucks have all been loaded now and they were already moving and I said Jan take the

position on the other side of the river on the high ground with the mortars and if anything comes engage them, we will blow the bridge and then we can move back about 30 kilometers and we will lay up there again. Anyway Gideon Nel and I went down and we didn't have any more electronic detonators, all we had was safety fuse and PE4 so we took his Mark 7 anti-tank mines and we stick the plastic explosives into it with a safety fuse and he is sitting that side of the bridge and I am sitting this side of the bridge with the Bic lighter and trying to light these things. Brand joune... hy sê nee... brand, ek sê nee Jesus ...okay then they take. A safety fuse takes a bit of time but in the meantime Jan has engaged these guys now, so now they are fighting each other across the top here.

**INTERVIEWER:** And you are under the fire trying to blow the bridge.

**COL. BREYTENBACH:** We are under the bridge, there is no fire coming near us because it's all at the top, we are down at the bridge. They are fighting a rather long range battle between each other, its more mortar bombs and machine gun, anyway we gapped it out there and then we moved back about 30 kilometers and that was that scrap that...this was about five o'clock we had gone on since early that morning when we got there so we lay in ambush and for the next few weeks I just rested them and kept them so that the guys in Mapupo[unclear] could start moving out....

**COL. BREYTENBACH:** We still had people in Mapupo that, especially families.

**WILLY WARD:** So to make it- safe for them to move out.

**COL. BREYTENBACH:** We had to get the dog, we had to go and fetch them, some of them walked and so on. So that was the main reason why, I agreed with them, in that respect I agreed that we should move the families out of the way because they

were family. But maybe the whole lot...but we want to stay we are fighting troops in that part of the world and they said no you steer clear of any one.

**WILLY WARD:** But you know strange enough just as a matter of interest, that concrete bridge to Kuito Cuanavale that I said, you must also realise now that I am pumped up you see, so I radio to the Colonel and I say look I have blown this wooden bridge and I am going to go and blow this concrete bridge now too, so the Colonel says hang on a bit and then I get an order “don’t blow the concrete bridge we are preparing a much larger operation to go and blow this concrete bridge”, eleven years later that bridge cost South Africa quite a lot of money. That was when Kuito Cuanavale scrapped the big Kuito Cuanavale.

**INTERVIEWER:** Is that when the bridge eventually got blown?

**WILLY WARD:** Well they kept on trying to blow it [interjected].

**COL. BREYTENBACH:** No that’s the other one, that’s the one at Kuito Cuanavale.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay.

**COL. BREYTENBACH:** The one going from west to east across the river at Kuito Cuanavale across the Kuito river ...that was actually ...it was built by the Portuguese and it spans, it appears a lot of them, that was on the Kuito, this one that he is talking about is on the Longa river it was more to the west nearby Bashilonga

**INTERVIEWER:** Can I pass for that.

**COL. BREYTENBACH:** The next thing after that I am trying to get myself...after that, while they went through, this time I am talking about FAPLA went through and we went back all the way to where we were before by Bashilonga, Mavinga, Calundo, we went all the way back again because they couldn’t stick it out there,

because it was a law of logistics. Then they came down a second time and this time they came with three brigades, it was in the late 1976 we were still very summer...they came back there with three brigades, one along the Cubango River and one along the Kuito River and one via Mavinga towards Cuidado Macusso and I think they were trying to get through to the border with the South West Africa and in the vicinity of Boekoshoek ...through [inaudible] there and they wanted to have three brigades, one at Macusso, one at Greco and one at Kabadi not kabadi, Pongaad.[unclear]...anyway so I still had three companies, one in Mavenga and one in Baishu Longa and one at Caingo. I had a fourth company in Savati and this time there were more and more FNLA coming out and there was a company in Savati which FNLA company in Savati which I was now joined us and are now being trained again, but this time not by paratroopers but by ordinary infantrymen which I managed to get hold of and a major what's his name again, I will remember his name shortly...he was in charge of that ...this is a rather funny incident that happened now...well okay lets start, lets work from east to west. In the east one of my troopies, one of my Lieutenants went forward from Mavenga to go and make contact with the FAPLA's coming down towards Mavenga, Danny Rosher was still at Mavinga...this chappie got to this particular place, I forgotten the name of the place now, stayed there and went the next morning to go and wash at the river with his Unimog and they ran into FAPLA tanks at this particular place while he was washing and the radio operator was staying at the base at the overnight base and saw this happen and he came up and he said to me that Lieutenant so and so had been captured with his patrol by FAPLA, he saw it happen. So I thought now what

the hell do I do now because if there is something really put a nail into it then I must now report back to the chief of the army General Viljoen that one of our guys, one of our offs have been captured and he is now been taken away up to Luanda and he is going to be paraded in front of the World News and so on and so forth so I decided that I will just, I said to this chap are you sure, yes he is so...and so I said right what is happening is now is can you see what FAPLA is doing, and he said as a matter of fact FAPLA is now beginning to surround them they are now sitting in the middle and in the end we ended up being surrounded by FAPLA and I had to say to him alright you had better take charge of the platoon and try to get out. What on earth is this chaps name...Sergeant...his name was Sergeant the chap from the score [?] I got onto Mavenga and I said to Danny Rosher this chap had been caught with his patrol and the rest of them had been surrounded so I have ordered them to try and fight their way out during the night so see if you can help them from outside. Anyway so off went Danny Rosher to go and help them but by the time he got there he had run into them, they had already broken out and they all recovered but now we still didn't know where this other chap was. I couldn't be sure that he had been captured because of course the Portuguese and English is not too well and we couldn't interrogate, I couldn't interrogate him properly but he, the impression that I got that he thought that he had been captured and low and behold probably a day later up pitched this chap as well with his men and they went through to Mavenga. Now I had a Major who was commanding Katlovinga[?] ...Danny Rosher was, sorry the Major was commanding at Luengi south of Mavenga. So Mavenga was basically an outpost run by Danny Rosher and he was now coming back from Mavenga back to

Luengi followed by FAPLA. So I was again ordered by General Viljoen that I must withdraw all my troops because they were now advancing on all three different lines, three brigades and my three companies I had to stop them obviously so anyway I ordered the company at Luembe to come back ...they moved back towards Cuidado Macusso and from there they were going to go south back to Buffalo...through Macusso and then back to Buffalo. They ran into an ambush pressed by FAPLA behind them, between Luengi and Cuidado Macusso. The [inaudible] is fine but the Unimog that was driven by Robbie Robeiro's brother young Robbie...this Unimog was carrying two tons of explosives, so you can imagine what will happen if you hit that with a RPG7 the whole lot just disintegrated, the Unimog the driver the lot, that was the end of young Robbie. The Major in command panicked and they scattered into the bush and they basically ran away, everybody for themselves. So I couldn't make communication with this lot, I lost communication with this company of mine...I was sitting in Rundu at that time, now down the Kuito River came another brigade and this company was coming back also falling back, the one from Washamarra [unclear] through Mapupa and back. The other chap Barry Roper he was my transport officer so he was actually taking up the role of logistics to [inaudible] in a truck and on the way up he was attacked my Migs...so Barry Roper decided this is not the place to be in the truck when you are being attacked by Migs so now he can't go any further and what he will do is he will go on foot to turn back to Buffalo, but he didn't want the truck and its load to fall into the hands of FAPLA so he dug a huge hole and they buried the truck in this hole.

**INTERVIEWER:** A whole truck?

**COL. BREYTENBACH:** A whole truck yes, talking about sand, they dug this hole and put the truck into this hole...he took off the wheels there and dug another hole for the wheels and they covered it all up with sand.

**INTERVIEWER:** How long did this truck burial take?

**COL. BREYTENBACH:** I don't know, I ...don't ask me I never asked them, but it must have taken maybe the whole day but anyway he dug this hole and now he covered up the whole thing with sand, unfortunately he went ...he made one big mistake, he didn't take any ...he did try and locate precisely where the truck was buried, but we never found the truck again ever...we went back...so that truck is gone.

**INTERVIEWER:** It could still be there.

**COLONEL BREYTENBACH:** Yes its still there under the sand somewhere. This old bugger he walked back with these men you see, so actually what happened there is this particular on the Kuito River, this is now we are coming now westwards now, on the Kuito river and the whole thing started off there with the Major who was in command of this particular company, Wilhelm Amada...went from Myshi longa we had an outpost to Kuito Cuanavale ....and we decided to give the FAPLA garrison there a rev with the mortar, an 8mm mortar. We drove up there in a Unimog and the deployed this mortar and shot at Kuito Cuanavale and to his huge surprise a whole bunch of tanks came out of Kuito Cuanavale and started chasing him, so unfortunately he lost a sizeable mortar of skills there but now he and Sergeant he was now going with him and a couple of black troops FNLA troops they were now resting in their Unimog back towards Myshi longa and on the way when they bailed



out when they were attacked by Migs he bailed out of his truck, and broke his ankle. So from then on he had to sit in the truck while they all bailed out while receiving it from the Migs...but their shooting was so bad I think he was much safer in the truck than he was...than he would have been after he bailed out. So he had to be evacuated with Casuvac...so we casuvacted him and Charlie Hoghardt[?] went, one of my other majors he went up there eventually and he got to take charge at Myshi longa .... and he was just in time to drive out of Myshi longa and then they came south...by that time Barry Roper had buried his truck and people from Mapupa were evacuated and so forth, so that was now to the ...in the centre, I will go further west along the Cubango or the Okavango River starting at Caiundo..... the company at Caiundo I had just left Caiundo and I had a company at Savati...one at Caiundo is commanded by Lieutenant Greeff and the one at the Savati I think is commanded by Major Gobbler if I remember correct. So they were all to come back as well because we had been recalled and must now come back, meanwhile the chappy Greeff had antagonised the [inaudible] patrol of Caiundo itself....to see what was going on and the patrol came back and their eyes were as big as saucers and they said to Greeff if there is something in the bush to the west of the track coming from Caiundo all the way south to Katichwe[?] on the border. He said Lieutenant Kanente as they call him, there are a lot of tanks there and a lot of helicopters and a lot of BRDM's are there at Caiundo and as he said this the first tank ran past him, on his way south to Savate...so they were supposed to meet up with the company at Savati and they were waiting for him there and the company commander at Savati meanwhile had taken his troops into the bush but he had come back into Savati itself ...its a town

with an airstrip and all, so he had taken...he had gone back into Savati and took about four or five guys with him to wait for Greeff because they were going to join up at Savati...and he also heard like Willy heard Wha-wha-wha....and I don't know how he could have misjudged this thing, thinking it's a Unimog but heard this noise, it was something in one of the buildings, in one of the houses there when this thing came close and he looked out of the window the first P54 tank came rolling past, and in came FAPLA...and they were sweeping through the town and they were in there so they had to go down into ...scatter and go down at the leopard crawl, I fooled FAPLA to get away from them, then went through the river, the Kuvango River which is now the eastern side of it, and put the river between him and FAPLA...but no radio...again the radio operator came onto the air and said to me that the major had been caught. So now another story again, the second time now a guy who could pitch up in Luanda you see...this time a major PF Khan [?] ...and he said ...so the other guy got back so I said I will give him a few days as well to make sure whether they had been caught or not...anyway Greeff was not coming south with the rest of these chaps which he had sort of dumped them, but they were in the bush and while they were moving along the track they were sort of alongside of them moving through the bush and keeping their eyes on them. By the time...this was a ...this brigade was very strongly, you can almost say strengthened by Cuban elements, tanks were all Cubans...artillery and all those things were all Cubans ...by the time that he got to Katichwe[?] the Cubans got there as well, and there were South African...Katichwe is on the border ...a South African patrol was there and this patrol had actually gone in into Angola because they thought for some reason or

other that this [inaudible] battalion but meanwhile it was Cubans you see. They got in and started picking up an argument with the Cubans, the Cubans were complaining because they could see down the fence to the west there were people climbing over the fence and the people climbing over the fence they wanted them back because they were Niasberain [?] and they wanted the CPO8 [?] to sort it out you see because they were Angolans and so on, and this chap said I beg your pardon I can't see a thing...but anyway meanwhile Greeff is on this, he is observing as well and he is reporting back to me that it looks like the Cubans have caught one of the South African Army Patrols, and it looks like they are going to come across the border. Right so I said to them you just head south ... you see the Kuvango river bends there to the east of that point at Katichwe...it comes from the northwest and it bends and I ordered them to stay in the bush, heads off, don't come...to get out of the way because by that time I realised they were after my guys because we are FNLA according to them you see, and so they headed south. Every now and again Greeff would come up and give me a log stamp, and said he was now there ...5 kilometers south of the border and so he went on and on, and then he turned left to the east and came towards ...our headquarters would ...suddenly Colonel...they called him Muller...Hans Muller came storming into my headquarters and said the Cubans are across the border, he was at Katichwe and he was going to stop them...so I said with what...he said anything that you can get hold of but go and stop them because they are now invading South West Africa. I said alright, okay I climbed into my Landrover, I had nothing to stop them with so I went off to Kulukulu...which is fortified base not far from Katichwe its opposite Conga

[inaudible] and there was a platoon of commandos...the commando system that we had for protecting farms these farmers, they were there. Not real commandos but they were the other commandos, so I picked up the [inaudible] and I said to these chaps, we got these berms all around these places and I stood on top of this sand wall and so I fell into the commando platoon, about 30 of them...they had 81mm mortar there as well. I said I have got news for you and they said what, I said the Cubans have invaded with a brigade, they have invaded South West Africa and we are going to stop them. They looked at me as if I was stupid ...they said how are we going to stop them....i said with you...

**INTERVIEWER**: Did they know who you were?

**COL. BREYTENBACH**: Yes they knew who I was, everyone knew who I was after the war and I said who are the guys who fire this mortar the 81 was sitting there and this chap came forward, but he wasn't the commander I think he was a service man or something so we worked on the fire plan with this mortar and how we are going to stop them.

**INTERVIEWER**: One mortar...you were stopping the invasion of FAPLA into South West Africa, okay.

**COL. BREYTENBACH**: I had another chap by the name of Reagan, he was a Captain and he came across from Cuango just opposite...he came with a ferry across in the Unimog and he had 8 troops with him and they had a RPG7...they came to pitch up...they said I am so glad to see you, and I said I want you to go up the road about 5 kilometers and lay ambush there because the Cubans are invading us and lay in ambush there ...a detain ambush and shoot the hell out of the

tanks...they say with what....I say with your RPG7....anyway so he trundled off and I started getting log stats from Greeff ...he has now turned east and he said he was now here, and then I got, every time I get a ciplep or an inclep [?] from a sector 10 [inaudible] from the intelligence officer there ...he said well the Cubans are now there, you see this is the liaison officer, they are intercepting him or what I don't know but he told me exactly where they were you see. But they were right on top of Greeff so I said to Greeff are you being chased by the Cubans, can you see them...he says no I cant see anything ...I said can you hear them...he says I cant hear anything...anyway so Tobie Vermaak he was the intelligence officer so, but they were deep into South West Africa already, about 5, 10, 20 kilometers in already ...the Cubans were innovation. This is now a late afternoon I forget the date now, so the Cabinet had an emergency session in Cape Town because Parliament was sitting at that time. Emergency session because the Cubans are invading South West Africa, what are they going to do about it, meanwhile they brought all the Buccaneers to standby, bombing up and so were the Canberra's because all we had to stop them with, I didn't know but Tobie Vermaak got the Canberra pilots and crews out and the Buccaneers' pilots and crews up in Pretoria, they were now bombing up and they were going to bomb the hell out of the vehicles, how could you stop them. I mean I have got a platoon of commanders and I have got Greeff and 81mm mortars ready with this RPG7, that's it. Anyway so this went on and I suddenly clicked and I said but every time Greeff gives me his log stats then Tobie Vermaak will come up a few minutes later and give me a log stat for the Cubans which are right there where Greeff is...so eventually I got onto Tobie and said Tobie,

where the hell did you get your information from about the Cubans, and he says no he is listening out on my net, on my command net and every time Greeff gave me a log stat he made the assumption that they were still being chased by the Cubans...meanwhile the Cubans are still north of the border here, so I said you stupid idiot this is Greeff giving me his log stat that's all...so anyhow needless to say old Brian Reagan was very relieved that he could stand down from his ambush and so were the commanders and they were relieved when I told them the punch over, but what's also very sad there for me that same...it was very funny but also very sad because that same day the other company had come down to the east.. via Mavinga and Luengi got ambushed between Mavinga and Outundo, but that of course I knew about the report and these guys were missing ...and I had what the Major pitched up at or some of the troops had pitched up at Buffalo and this was now, and I always gave them a rev on the radio, I said you will go back now and get the rest of my troops out of the bush because you abandoned them, you go and get back...and the first thing you do is you go and blow the bridge at Derigo...Derigo lies on the Kuito River...now the brigade coming down the Kuito River they were going to Derigo...but they had this bridge which they could then swing to Macusso and join the other brigade, now I didn't want, I wanted to keep them apart I didn't want them to join up so anyway so he went back, left with his company and in the company was Danny Rosher, Robbie Robeiro and they were riding in what you then called a Wolf...which is a forerunner of the Buffel, an anti-mine vehicle. So this chap, he was pushing way ahead in front of him and he brought up the rear, this major. They were moving along when Danny and them drove over a mine...A Busov[?] mine and this thing

overturned, Robbie was thrown clear and Swear was badly ...his head was almost crushed and he was still alive and the thing fell on top of Danny across his midriff, this heavy vehicle. Robbie Robeiro ran back and he got to the Major and told him what happened, the Major turned around and drove back to Buffalo.

**INTERVIEWER:** Leaving these guys there.

**COL. BREYTENBACH:** Yes, leaving these guys there. Of course I asked Hochapfel was a pick up times and he informed me and I remember I was livid with rage at this point in time and so then I asked the rest to get the chopper to see if they can get the guys out in an Alluette and Hochapfel got some guys together so they can get these chappies out, and anyway so they went to the southern side of the Okavango River in other words in the Okavango he went along the opposite place where more or less this thing overturned and the chopper refused to go over the river ...it stopped there in a Muhango field and stayed there and Hochapfel went through with a Makora and they got there and by the time they got there Rosher was dead. They say that the last thing that he spoke ....he smoked his cigarette and he died and they then picked up Swearer to pick him up and bring him back...carry him back to the Makora and on Makora they crossed Mahangufield ...the chopper refused to come closer in there and a Landrover came down and Hochapfel's Landrover put in the back of the Landrover over this field dodging up and down quickly onto the chopper and by the time he got to the chopper he was also dead. So now Swearer...two of my Portuguese were now dead...right so they were evacuated the two boys were evacuated to Rundu. Van der Bijl went back to Buffalo and the next morning I flew out with a chopper to go and speak to Robeiro because

his brother had been killed and so he was in a bad state and I said Robbie I am sending you home ...getting yourself to your mother...because it was only the two boys ...he was in a bad state so I said okay we will do that, take leave and off you go ...he came the next morning, he took a Landrover and put some of the wounded from this escapade of theirs in the back of the van and drove off to Rundu and he was driving it and from the opposite side there came a convoy of trucks, now there was a dirt road ...throws a lot of dust and this from maintenance units ...61 maintenance unit...now there is all Mercury's [unsure] Lloyds trucks, big trucks, ten tonners a lot of dust. You don't overtake in convoy, you don't overtake in dust anyway, you always drive into the dust because if you are left on the side of the road you will go head on into a truck who is trying to overtake a truck in front of him, so Robbie Robeiro was killed and all the chaps in this Landrover was killed by this truck, so I lost three of my four Portuguese fellows.

**INTERVIEWER:** Within two days.

**COL. BREYTENBACH:** Yes within two days so I called it our black week [inaudible] of course I was very upset about the whole thing and so forth but anyway the FAPLA then moved down and they were also in Cuango ...we blew up...okay we got this other chap Kenardt this Major also climbed over the fence and three days after that Savati, so I was very glad to hear that and I was very glad to hear that [interjected]

**INTERVIEWER:** This was the one who was captured, who you thought was captured.

**COL. BREYTENBACH:** I thought he was captured.



**INTERVIEWER:** He is who you thought was captured, and [interjected]

**COL. BREYTENBACH:** Yes he came out, he just followed the hill ...it was straight opposite the river and he went through the river near Katichwe and climbed over the fence there and there he was okay, so we planted some mines on the road between the bridge across the Cubango River a little bit further up and Cuango...we blew up their commanding officer of the brigade and he was killed in his BTR so at least we had some results. But anyway that was when we were out of Angola, and then the, of course we stayed for a while and we went back again but meanwhile our whole focus of our operation had shifted to the South Kunene Province against SWAPO, that's where I sent in the platoons, I gave each platoon a 10 kilometers wide and as far as they can go in to act as gorillas to shoot up SWAPO and lay ambush at the water holes and plant mines. We had these automatic ambush devices which we used which were basically Claymores set up in a mine, say on the footpath and you leave two guys there and as SWAPO come walking down the footpath you already blow them up and that's it, you see. On one of these things we killed 18 out of 20 soldiers.

**INTERVIEWER:** Claymore mines?

**COL. BREYTENBACH:** Claymores yes, you only need two guys, we had quite a few of these things, so in other words we terrorised and ...[interjected]

**INTERVIEWER:** So at this stage your main target is mainly SWAPO?

**COL. BREYTENBACH:** SWAPO yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** And was this a significant shift do you think?

**COL. BREYTENBACH:** Well this is originally why 32 Battalion was formed really

was to fight, the counter guerilla role against SWAPO. FAPLA wasn't really our enemy, you see we were keeping, we were fighting against FAPLA to give UNITA space because we were also supporting UNITA because FNLA disappeared off the scene by then, and so we wanted to keep the Kwando Cubango clear of FAPLA.

**INTERVIEWER:** It sounds like you had been engaging a lot more with FAPLA than you had with SWAPO up until now?

**COL. BREYTENBACH:** Yes up to then we were but we were running, you see we were also running other operations against SWAPO to the west and there we had initiative on our side...you see because as I put it, we were only operating platoon strength which is what I wanted to do right from the beginning which we should have done at Kwando Cubango as well, but they wouldn't let me from task force headquarters in Grootfontein. Every time FAPLA moved they warned us out of the way. I suppose politically it was the right thing to do, our fight wasn't supposed to be against FAPLA anymore, it was supposed to be against SWAPO because that was our real enemy...in that way I suppose they were right, but I still think that we could have kept FAPLA away much further to the north. Its so easy because as Roy said the communications lines were bad, just basically the track down the Kuvango River which is a bad track...the track down the Kuito River which was even worse and the track via Mavenga, Kutabe Macusso and Darto Macusso which was even worse than that...I mean so all we had to do was lay ambushes you see....I mean nobody would have moved along those and our ambush field guys with RPG7 ...a couple of RPG7's and machine guns and if a convoy comes through you shoot the hell out of them and you shoot and scoot, that's the whole idea. You see you shoot as many of

these guys as you can and they wont use those tracks anymore you see, so then they will start maybe using helicopters to bring in stuff...so we had already captured a few of these strollers [unclear] you see and we could have done some harm there as well. In fact we did shoot down a few, one or two planes but not with [unclear] with small arms fire. But we could have made it so difficult for them that they would have left quite sooner than they did, because in fact they basically left not so much about...I am talking about the FAPLA brigades...they left eventually, not because there was, they were interfered with by UNITA but because of the bad communications...they couldn't get enough food through for them or whatever, so they were starving so they had to leave anyway you see, so we didn't have to do much to just help them along.

**INTERVIEWER:** But what about the Cubans at this stage, I mean weren't the Cubans a bit more organised, or were they susceptible to the same logistical problems?

**COL. BREYTENBACH:** The Cubans would come in and do the job and then they would go back...because now FAPLA is there, they are sitting in Cuangar...the Cubans don't want to sit in Cuangar I mean its far nicer in Luanda than in Cuangar so they leave the FAPLA's there and that's it.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you capture any Cubans at any stage?

**COL. BREYTENBACH:** We captured Cubans, not there but we captured them in other operations ...Operation Protea we captured, in fact we also captured the Russians and we captured some Cubans.

**INTERVIEWER:** How do you think they felt about being there, fighting a war in

Africa?

**COL. BREYTENBACH**: The Cubans?

**INTERVIEWER**: The Cubans and the Russians?

**COL. BREYTENBACH**: I don't think they were too happy about that at all. I think they were most unhappy about that, I think the Cubans particularly were most unhappy about that, the Cubans are very much overrated as fighters, I have found anyway that the SWAPO's were the best, they were far better fighters than either the FAPLA's or the Cubans.

**INTERVIEWER**: Did this have anything to do with ideology and commitment, I mean several people have commented to me that the defense force never ....you never really had anything like political commissars like SWAPO and the FNLA did, I mean ...why do you think there was this difference, I mean you didn't, you obviously didn't need any form of indoctrination of your troops, I mean what role do you think this played in that?

**COL. BREYTENBACH**: Well they had the Commissars, they had Commissars right down to platoon level they had Commissars, so they kept them....but they were also a bit frightened of their hierarchy because you get shot there if you step over the line. But on the other hand with the SWAPO they are Ovambo's...mostly Ovambo's you see and amongst the Ovambo's there are mostly Kuanyama's...the Kuanyama's are a real warlike tribe so its almost like the Zulu and they love fighting you see, they love to stand and fight...a gorilla is supposed to shoot and scoot...by the Kuanyama's like to stick about a bit and to give you what for, that's why I have a lot more respect for them than we had for the others.

**INTERVIEWER:** So they were more formidable opponents than the others.

**COL. BREYTENBACH:** Absolutely, because they loved their fight, they are almost like the Zulus in that way, but the ...we then as I say operated against SWAPO but SWAPO then were so intimidated by all of this that they just left ...between beacon 20 and about beacon 35 which is on the western side of the Kunene Province, on the western side of it. They just left which meant that they couldn't operate in that part of Ovamboland and unfortunately we always had problems with our own hierarchy, they didn't understand this thing about gorilla warfare, counter gorilla war, but basically you must be a better gorilla than the gorilla is...they didn't understand that concept...they couldn't understand that a platoon of well trained troops, battalion troops who were well lead troops, can do far more damage to an area where you find between 200-300 SWAPO which are basically half a battalion ...what they do is they look at the figures ...there are 30 troops there and there are 300 SWAPO's so these three troops must lose the battle you see, they couldn't understand that it's a whole new fight.

**INTERVIEWER:** Conventional thinking.

**COL. BREYTENBACH:** Yes conventional thinking and this unfortunately is what happened at Grootfontein at Task Force Headquarters...you see they have all these guys always worried so when I left 32 Battalion.

**INTERVIEWER:** So tell me what happened when you left 32 Battalion?

**COL. BREYTENBACH:** So when I left 32 Battalion then this whole thing about fighting platoons, the gorilla fashion was...it disappeared, the whole concept disappeared fairly rapidly because in the next command this platoon is too

vulnerable, I must put a whole company there, so now you start becoming visible ...

**INTERVIEWER**: Who took over after you, it was Deon Ferreira...

**COL. BREYTENBACH**: No, it's Gert Nel, then after him it was Deon Ferreira.

**INTERVIEWER**: Okay.

**COL. BREYTENBACH**: And then eventually this whole battalion and so on, and so that was where the problem came in...of course its...gorilla war is a long thing you know, time is also a thing which becomes very important factor...the longer time you have the more you can rip the enemies because you have got time on your side and he hasn't, especially...SWAPO is very conventionally organised as one stage, what actually...they really were fighting a semi-conventional war almost all the time you see. They were making themselves vulnerable for gorilla operations. When they were inside, and I am talking about inside Angola in the gorilla base area, when they were inside [interjected]

**INTERVIEWER**: Sorry where was their main base, the SWAPO?

**COL. BREYTENBACH**: We called it the gorilla base area, it was the whole area north of Cunene Province, north of the cutline, is what I called the gorilla base area, they had their bases their, big bases there you see where they were conventionally organised, the base protected, they got you know like "hekkie" for instance protected by machine guns and B21's and you name it...Waters and Sarna [?] it's a concentration and they moved around these companies but when they infiltrate across the border then they were gorillas you see.

**INTERVIEWER**: Okay.

**COL. BREYTENBACH**: But on their side they were not gorillas, they were

conventional so we put them on the back foot by coming in as gorillas you see, and we gave them all a rough time and inside their base area that is why you must be ...the kind of gorilla war you must go into their base area and sort them out because they have got to have logistical supplies and its got to be in bases, you see you concentrate on that and they have got to have communication whilst we were logistics forward and so on, so you hit them there. So then they withdraw, they go further away to the north in this case which takes them further away from South West Africa you see, and takes them longer to get there. They have got the gauntlet to run past my gorillas before they can get into South West Africa so by the time they get across the border only about four or five are left you see, and so on. So that's how we operated in the Kunene Province which was very effective. But somehow I just didn't sink into the minds of the people in Grootfontein....they couldn't see that.

**INTERVIEWER:** Tell me when did Koevoet come into the picture?

**COL. BREYTENBACH:** Koevoet started, I think it was towards the end when I left in 1977...Koevoet was just beginning.

**INTERVIEWER:** And at that stage they were the South West African Counter Insurgency?

**COL. BREYTENBACH:** Yes they were task force people, they were the task forces in the police...I am all clued up but they had, they ...it was almost a gorilla type of approach as well for this whole thing you see, fortunately the Kasper gave them a lot of capability to move faster and to move over a very wide area and to move suddenly. The Kasper was actually a wonderful, or still is a wonderful vehicle...so they were very successful in that you see...but they relied extremely, very much on

trackers which were Ovambo's from local Ovambo which they had recruited, and the Ovambo's are very good trackers...we recruited from the rural areas and basically they just follow the spoor until they run into a contact...that is why they had this armoured vehicle with machine guns on it and so they could do that. Of course they had with their vehicles they were close to their own logistic supplies, I mean they had fuel and stuff available fairly freely, but we couldn't do that first of all we didn't have Kaspers and secondly we didn't have the means of getting them re-supplied over a distance, we had to operate on foot. Later on we actually used donkeys and so on to take our logs in and so on. And supplied logs by air for our guys but they stayed in, but what we did is we put guys in an area for three months at a time and that's where they operate in this area...whereas Koevoet went into an area where they heard there were SWAPO and they would pick up the spoor and go in and sort them out and come back again. We stayed, that's the difference. We had to stay we had no other, we couldn't move around all that much, we had to stay where we were, we operated within the area and moved around a lot but we never stayed in one location for more than one day, we had to move around ...we didn't want to be picked up by SWAPO either you see, because once you are picked up by them you get sorted out.

**INTERVIEWER:** Tell me how did you feel about the ...I mean were you aware of the political situation in South Africa at the time and were your troops aware ...I mean for example you know we are often told that the objective of this was to start the spread of communism and what was your perception of the threat of communism, did you ...



**COL. BREYTENBACH:** Of course we thought about that, I mean I must say that in some respects the army was far more advanced on the political side than the politicians were...they could see it more clearly. Look there was a threat from communism ...lets face it otherwise what were the Cubans doing in such vast numbers in Angola and backed up by Russians and all the Migs...most of the Migs were flown by Cubans or by East Germans and that sort of thing you see. What were they doing there...especially towards the end when we came to Kuito Cuanavale battles where they deployed the whole division of Cubans were deployed across the border from Ovambo Land....the 50<sup>th</sup> division and that division consisted of about 5 or 6 brigades, they were there in vast numbers so they were pushing for Southern Africa was on the threat you see, the communists wanted to get control over South Africa because its strategically...its a strategic position and also the strategic minerals and so on. But you see where the army, I think the role of the SADF ops structure, their top structure, their command structure was then different from the politicians ...they kept on telling the politicians that we cant fight this war militarily, we must bring in all sorts of other things as well...bringing the hearts and minds of people etc. The idea ...what the general said and especially Constant Viljoen said to them this war cannot be won by us because we are a small country, we cant keep on forever and ever fighting against the Communist China lot which had everything behind them at that time you see. Your job is to change the politics of South Africa from this apartheid thing that you have got to something that is acceptable in the eyes of the world and the black people and all the defence force can do is to give you a time frame in which you can work ...to keep them off your

backs, that is what we are there for, not to defend South Africa but to give you time to change your whole bloody political philosophy.

**INTERVIEWER**: So you were basically creating a strong bargaining position for.

**COL. BREYTENBACH**: We were giving them the time and space to do it you see, but it couldn't last forever obviously. I mean you can only go up to a point because you economically speaking we ...South Africa we were small economy wise, we were small on economy we couldn't carry this...now fortunately for us, very fortunately for us there was a guy by the name of Reagan ...and Margaret Thatcher and the Pope who came onto the scene as well...

**INTERVIEWER**: I didn't realise the Pope was involved.

**COL. BREYTENBACH**: Yes he was, of the last one because he started the ball rolling in Poland which collapsed the, eventually collapsed the Communist Empires, and it started in Poland and he was supported by Margaret Thatcher and especially by Reagan, so also right at the end of, when they were coming to the end of their tether they, we had to do with a guy by the name of Castro...renegade sort of against communism in those days because he didn't want to give it up and he put in his last push into it as well, by which time we were on our back feet and those were...they deployed the 50<sup>th</sup> division but ...of which I blame our defence force for...our top structure. When Willy and I were fighting this Cuban war up there, we also, I mean we are not stupid we also can see which way it was going, and we, South African Defence Force support UNITA...in the Cuando-Cubango that was UNITA's playground so we put in there annually R400 million to spend on supporting UNITA and we often went to assist them because they would be attacked by a

FAPLA brigades and then they would start running away, cant cope with it, they would withdraw towards Mavinga and off would rush old Savimbi to see PW Botha and say I need your help, I need your help and then we would send some troops in and before we know who we are we are embroiled in a situation in the Cuando-Cubango, Cuando-Cubango is strategically nothing...its just bush, for us its nothing, we are fighting in the wrong area. What was happening was that we were tying down our own troops, we were tying down to it because of UNITA in the Cuando-Cubango, 1977/78 Cuito Cuanavale situation demonstrates it tremendously well ...there was a brigade, super brigade, brigade plus of South African troops were tied down in Cuito Cuanavale which was one hell of a long way from the Ovamboland border. We were tied down there, we didn't have any other troops to spare ...there came the 50<sup>th</sup> division from Cuba, fresh division came deployed just across the border with the brigades spread all over the place facing Ovamboland now with being denuded of troops except for about four or five [unclear] battalions and that's it. All the other troops were in Cuito Cuanavale...we were in Cuito Cuanavale....1500 kilometers away. Now I will come back to Reagan...I remember I went back to, by that time I had left the army, I was tired because I was still up on the border and I went to Sector 10 and I spoke to old Swartime Serfontein and he wouldn't speak to me. He said Jan this is the problem, see what we have got, what must I do to stop this blooming division, if they come across the border I have got nothing to stop them with...they will run all the way through to Windhoek. So I said well what have you got and he said I have got four or five Migs, four or five [inaudible] battalions and sitting with a 4000 light battalion...with Buffels and rifles

and a few machine guns that's it, spread all along the border with nothing. So I said I tell you what, he was doomed, he had to start learning very quickly how to fight a gorilla war you see, so we had to stop them and of course we were not trained for gorilla war you see. Reagan saw the same situation from that distance, and of course that's were Castro won, he wanted to come across the border so he sent Chester Crocker who was a very clever guy to come and start the negotiations going and of course the first thing he wanted to do was with Chester Crocker on the scene the Cubans must pull out of Angola, we don't want the Cubans in Africa because now Reagan was getting alarmed about these things, he didn't want the Cubans in, he wanted them out of Angola. By that time the Russians were having huge problems with Afghanistan and having huge problems in Angola and they were also on their last legs but of course we didn't know that...at the time, so they were standing away from it, it was only old Castro who was still going for it you see, but they wanted to get out as well. So they were ready to negotiate as well and to tell ...to rein Castro in. Of course economically speaking Reagan and the Pope and Thatcher sorted out the Russian Empire, they are falling apart so they wont pull back as well, so the moment was right but if it wasn't for old Chester Crocker who came with some sense in his head and demanded that the Cubans must be out ...if the South Africans get out then you see we would have had the Cubans sitting in Windhoek and so on, so we fought with that, that moment in time and that took me a long time to realise because when we pulled out we said we are going to pull out now we are going to leave this...I was most upset, I really was, I sat under a tree for about two weeks every day to ponder this situation ...there in Western Caprivi there

was a huge Pot Mahogany a beautiful tree, the biggest one I have ever seen. Every day I went up there because I had time, I would sit and ponder this whole thing until eventually I realised what was really happening so I thought that we had done our bit, we had bought time ...the South African Defence Force had bought time, time was there, the politicians didn't make use of that time like they should have done. It was actually Reagan who introduced Chester Crocker who provided the political initiative which we should have been provided long ago and we would have been far better off if we had long before put in a political issue, not as far ....we are talking about the political side now...this is how I saw it and I think Willy could see it the same way as well.

**COL. BREYTENBACH:** Yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** Any comments on that Willy?

**WILLY WARD:** No...that's how we saw it...you know we as soldiers we left the politics to the politicians and we fought for our country and one of the big things I always maintain in a lot of circumstances maybe I was not in a situation where a lot of these people find themselves in where it was difficult ...I would have maybe been a terrorist, but I would never have sided with the communist regime because I saw what communism did in Africa ...I remember Brian and I riding from ...when we had come from Belanova and we were coming across to Nkulunkulu before we went up to Lolo's [inaudible] there and Bonga...we had ...no not Bonga...Dondo...we were coming across and the woman and children were running on the side of the road, the stalls had been emptied, they had been given all the food and they just didn't know where they were going and I said to Brian, I said these are the people that are

suffering ...these are the people that are suffering, woman and children and they were the ones that were, and you could see what had happened and beautiful countries...I mean you lived in Mozambique...I have been to Rhodesia a lot, Angola also had some beautiful farms at that time, all wrecked.

**COL. BREYTENBACH:** Of all those, of all the countries in Southern Africa and I include ...I am talking now about black countries who were part of South Africa, more European than African I suppose...through all the countries of South Africa I think Angola had the most wonderful opportunities, far more than Mozambique has got...beautiful country and the nature and so on, animal wild life and so forth...beautiful. I know Mozambique to some extent not as well as you do but it was a country which you could already see wherever you go just misery. Misery, misery and misery, and that's Africa...because below a certain level in the black structure ...in South Africa as well, obviously you get the super rich Black but below that level they don't seem to give a damn about their own people, and those were the ones who were running around and if you go into the bush in Africa like we did in Angola...you go into a village, they are so glad to see you, we were often behind the lines, behind enemy lines where you will go in and say ...you will end up that they welcome you but now you are only there for a specific reason, you don't want to blow up enemy vehicles or whatever...or lay ambush or you want to do a recce or whatever, you are only there temporarily and when they see you they think relief has arrived at last...then you go away again and then those guys are upset because we are going away again, because they get robbed by FAPLA, they get robbed by SWAPO they get robbed by the Cubans, everybody robs them and they rape the

woman and carry on like that. Here comes South Africans and they don't rape them, they feed them, they talk to them and they are friendly people, they couldn't understand that...it's the first time that they come across a military force that doesn't bloody well shunt them around you see. So they are happy to see us, to see the people coming in that are also why I am very strict in the battalion telling them about their behaviour towards the Povo...they call them the Povo, the locals. We had a very strict MDC with a disciplinary code...if anybody is caught looting or raping or whatever, he just gets shot that's it...my troops we only shot one who was caught raping and that was the end of that, you see they never did it again. But you are not there to exploit the people, you are there to fight the battle against the other buggers you see, but the internal refugee system in Africa is something tremendous because ..especially Angola where they are called refugees because they are not going across the border into a refugee camp but they move from place to place inside their own country because they have been shunted around by their own people. That's what I felt anyway in Angola and after the war when the war finished it was even worse ...because UNITA would beat them up and then FAPLA would beat them up and the Cubans would beat them up and it was getting even worse. You could almost say the whole population, the rural populations were refugees, and they all congregated in the cities and left the rural areas you see. Because of mines and everything all over the place as well... [inaudible] and so forth. Quite frankly I have never come across a recipe of someone who is so little concerned about their own people as I found these in the wars in Africa from the black people, they are not concerned about their own people. We are at least concerned but they are not...we

are concerned about them let alone our own people...

**INTERVIEWER**: Shall we take a break; shall we pause here until next week, and talk a bit about Cassinga?

**End of recording**



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