

Brian Rogers Parachute Battalion 17/04/08
 Missing Voices Project Interviewed by Mike Cadman

	TAPE ONE SIDE A
Interviewer	Tell me about where you grew up and about your family.
Brian	I grew up in Pietermaritzburg. I had a brother and a sister. My brother did military service in about 1969, I think he did about a year. and if I recall correctly his military service was about building the airstrip at (Ochavanga?? <i>Need to check this.mcc</i>), which funnily enough I came to use many years later.
Interviewer	You went to school in Maritzburg?
Brian	I went to school at Alexandra High School in Maritzburg. I was generally sport mad, cricket, rugby, tennis, athletics, anything I could lay my hands on, that was me.
Interviewer	And then like most young white South African males of that era, when you were about 16 you were required to register with the military, and in return they sent you some call up papers, probably in your last year of school. Was that the situation with you?
Brian	Yes, it was. I don't know, it was almost a sense of anticipation and what's going on, where you going to go, who's going to go with you, and whatever? My feelings about that at the time were probably just like anybody else, absolutely focused on the army and absolutely nothing to do with politics or anything else, you were going to the army and this was going to be your future life.
Interviewer	And you had an older brother who'd already been, so he must have told you some stories about his experiences and stuff like that.
Brian	Yes, absolutely, I'd even gone to visit him at Potch. He was at Potch when he did his training and I'd seen him training and being seven years younger I even tried the obstacle course out when I was there.
Interviewer	So when the papers arrived there was no doubt in your mind that this was firstly the law of the land, and second, you were going to go off and do it.
Brian	Yes, sure. And I got a posting to 1SAI in Bloemfontein. Duly reported for duty at the station, along with everybody else with a stupid grin on my face, and looking at these guys called corporals which my brother had told me about, and we got on a train and off we went to 1SAI.
Interviewer	What year was this in? Were you a January call up?
Brian	Yes, I was a January call up, 1975. That was one of the wettest Januaries they'd ever had and I remember we were in tents, they

	didn't have enough accommodation for us and we got soaking wet the whole time.
Interviewer	Alright, so you arrive there and it's the usual, as you say, the corporals were there and they suddenly take control of your entire existence, and what transpired? What were your first few weeks like?
Brian	Confused. I mean, you're absolutely and totally confused. For a guy who'd never lived away from home or boarding school or whatever it was total confusion. I remember getting depressed after a few weeks and waiting for everything and not knowing what to do and etc. But at the same time you sort of knuckle down because everybody else is like that. Made friends with a couple of other sports people and managed to duck off to go and play some cricket and stuff like that and whatever, kind of make a life for yourself within what your confines.
Interviewer	And being a sportsman, the physical side wasn't overly concerning for you?
Brian	No, not at all. Not in the slightest. I think the most intriguing thing was meeting people for the first time. Coming from an English speaking background in Pietermaritzburg, I played rugby against various guys and whatever, but the totality of the guys that you met, some older who'd finished their varsity and were now with you – and I specifically recall one guy who was there who had no education whatsoever, an Afrikaans guy, he had absolutely no schooling whatsoever! They had found him with this no schooling – and it was just a huge eye opener to me the total scale of people that I had to meet.
Interviewer	Your corporals, were they English speaking or Afrikaans speaking?
Brian	A bit of both I think.
Interviewer	And most of your instructions, what language were they in?
Brian	Pretty much Afrikaans I suppose.
Interviewer	Alright, so you get there, you get lots of instructions, you do lots of running around and you get messed around quite a lot, how long did you stay at 1SAI?
Brian	Yes, I stayed there but I kind of wanted to do everything. I wanted to be a pilot like my father had been, and he put a big dampener on that. I applied for the PTI course. I then applied for officer's course and apparently passed quite well. Then the Bats arrived one day and we'd seen them running up and down from down the road and whatever and whatever, and I was kind of intrigued by this and a buddy I'd made said, come, come, come let's go. And we tried out, and we passed for that. And I got into a hell of a lot of trouble because now I'd been accepted for officer's school and whatever. But my company commander...I can't remember his name...was hell of a nice about it in the end after kakking on me

	and whatever, he said, ok, go to Bats, that's where I think you want to go, and go. I'd signed for two years by the way.
Interviewer	In your intake it was still one year, that was the standard duty.
Brian	You had an option right at the beginning. It wasn't a later thing, it was an option to go two years. And I'd signed for two years. To just elaborate on that right now so we don't forget it, after Angola I took the option to opt out of the two years. So when we came back at the end of January '75 we were given an option to opt out and because of the service that we had done, I think, and I opted out.
Interviewer	Alright, I'll revisit that later on in more chronological order, but thanks for pointing that out. How long had you spent at 1SAI when you volunteered for the Bats and then were accepted?
Brian	You've got me there...I'm not too sure, it was a couple of months anyway, because I know you did your month's basic before you actually got your thing. It was probably six weeks, two months I think...I don't know, it wasn't very long. Because then you're transferred to do your training down at Bats which wasn't difficult, it was just down the road. Except you had to carry everything yourself, because they were Bats, they said, no, no, no, no trucks. You had to carry it all yourself. <i>Laughs</i>
Interviewer	So you say goodbye to 1SAI, you walk down the road with everything on your back, and then you get to the Bats and I'm sure the reputation of the Parabats had sort of preceded itself. What was it like when you got there?
Brian	Well we got to the gate and we met what I now term this magnificent human being because at the time <i>laughs</i> we hated him. Staff Sakkie Marais, he went on to be an officer somewhere along the line. He was a formidable character and we got there and I absolutely crapped right in my pants right there and then, Sakkie screaming at us, we had everything, I couldn't believe we could carry so much and they were running us up to the top of the hill, whatever, and from that moment on everything happened at a pace ten times faster than anything we'd done at 1SAI. We got settled in, into bungalows, and we started on our next level of training. We had an interesting year at Parabats, because that was the first year that call up was done, whereby they actually called guys up to Bats. It was a disaster, and I think something like ten percent of the guys stayed. So the rest of us were then...we were the new batch in. We had an interesting year as well because we also had a slight break in tradition. We did all the pre PT test trials, we didn't do the actual PT course for a week as it was done, but we heard later because of the looming Angola conflict we did it in conjunction with our conventional warfare stuff. So we would stop conventional warfare and have three hours of PT every single day, of the PT course. Now some guys say, oh you didn't do the PT course. Well I can tell you I think it was a bloody lot harder the way we did it. <i>laughs</i> Because we did that for two weeks flat. So it was a bit different

	<p>and because of the mix up I think because of guys not coming in, being called up there and then us coming in, whatever. To me it was a fantastic experience because, I again, met such a variety of people, from...and I'm not being disparaging, Kippy the boilermaker, I'm not being disparaging at all...to two guys who were running in the top five in Maths Olympiad. And we soon realised very quickly at Bats they wanted a couple of things: you had to be of medium height and medium build, not too tall and not too short; and primarily what they were after was, guys who could work together and obviously had a physical endurance. And through that working together system and whatever, I really enjoyed that and I really enjoyed the challenge that that set up in terms of meeting it. I think they were also quite fond of naughty guys, not that criminally minded naughty, but naughty guys. The more nonsense we got up to, the sort of more we got recognised. <i>Laughs</i> So during when we were doing our PT course and our conventional, I was actually on CB at the same time, so I did have a pretty tough time. <i>Laughs</i></p>
Interviewer	What was CB?
Brian	Confined to barracks. We had gone AWOL one night and we were caught by Sakkie climbing over the fence to get back in with a few beers inside us <i>laughs</i> so we were in a lot of trouble.
Interviewer	So naughty equals spirited.
Brian	Not in terms of any other way.
Interviewer	Now your initial training is how long at the Bats?
Brian	Well...if I'm correct, I think our training ended at the end of July. We were then sent...we actually got relieved and then we came back and we were sent to do a mock operation down in Port Elizabeth, East London area whereby we were the terrorists and the local commandoes etc, were the guys who'd have to catch (<i>inaudible</i>). A heck of a stir in the papers at the time. Our uniforms were described as sort of blue overalls and things like that and it was actually a very, very eye opening experience even back then. We had to blow up post offices, obviously just with dummy stuff and whatever, and we had to go and take out one of the lights at the Kei Mouth. We attempted it twice. The second time we got there and we claimed we go it, they claimed they ambushed us. There were a whole lot of other things that were happening. I was a mortar...but I was actually trained as an OP, as an observation post guy, trained under Captain Bestbier at the time. That's Frank Bestbier, the former Springbok hooker, and a man that I really enjoyed and I thought he was an extremely good trainer. I spent days and days and days just with him, with me crawling along and him walking next to me. But we used mortars, we developed a mortar pipe and shot flares and stuff over these guys. But I think one of the really interesting stories from that is, on our first attempt actually to take the Kei River Mouth we were intercepted by the Durban...the ship SAS Durban, and they took us captive. And I think that once they had taken us captive they

	<p>thought the games were over, but not the Bats. We got ourselves undone, and we attacked the bridge and we nearly took it over but then they claimed that they recaptured us. And when we got back there were crowds and crowds on the wharf waiting for us and we got let off and we got put into the back of these army jeeps, and they were driving us helter skelter through the town, we stopped at a traffic light and myself and another guy dived off the back of this thing and went running through the town. And I got into a building and a black guy called me and he said, hide in here. <i>laughs</i> And I hid in this electrical cable unit. And eventually he came and knocked on the door and said, it's ok, you can go now, and off I went. And I then retreated to our base and declared myself free. So that was quite like an interesting game. <i>Laughs</i> It was something that happened to me. I know another time we were completely and utterly lost, so we pretended we were electricians up a pole working on something and we stopped this car and this lady and her daughter in it, and we said, look man, just not to make you afraid, but we are these so-called terrorists and we need a lift so we're actually doing this whole thing, we're taking over your car. And she just laughed, and said fine, where can I take you? And she gave us a lift, part of the game. It was actually quite an interesting side, but we'd become so sloppy to be totally honest, by the time we finished this, so that when we met up with Sakkie again, he beat the hell out of us for a week before we then went on to go and do what we would call a glamour jump for Matanzima in Grahamstown, outside Grahamstown. And it was quite an experience because they had to drop somebody and we were in the first flight, and the winds were far in excess of what we were supposed to jump at, and they dropped us at 400 feet, and I remember coming out the plane and taking out one of those tall cactuses you get down there and landing straight on it with a thorn up my bum. And the guys were laughing at me and they pulled down my pants and pulled this three inch thorn out of my backside. And ironically I met two people later who'd seen this through their binoculars. But anyway there we go. After that it was...</p>
Interviewer	<p>Sorry, can we just go back a bit. You say you were captured by the guys from the ship, SAS Durban. Were they marines?</p>
Brian	<p>No, they were from the actual ship. We were using private ski boats and they intercepted the private ski boats, searched it and found our weapons and doing it all formally. To us it was a bit like a jolly patrolly, it was actually a whole lot of fun, it was like playing cowboys and Indians to be totally honest.</p>
Interviewer	<p>So after your experience with the cactus which was a <i>laugh</i> glamour jump, you were going to tell me...</p>
Brian	<p>Then if I recall we were sent on leave, we came back...I'm sorry if this is not chronological but I did forget when we did our jump course they gave us a week's leave before the jump course and I was very ill and I realised I had German measles but there was no way I wasn't going to do that jump course and stay with my</p>

	guys, and horrifically about ten guys got German measles. Whether I was the spreader or somebody else was the spreader I don't know. But I did that jump course in our smocks with German measles, I'll never forget it.
Interviewer	This was in Bloem?
Brian	In Bloem, yes.
Interviewer	What does a jump course involve, just very basically?
Brian	You start off with hangar training on the mats, and then you graduate to various things and you jump out of what of the <i>aapkas</i> they call it, which is apparently at a strategic height, and if you can't get out of that you'll never get out of an aircraft. And I had one bad jump out of that <i>aapkas</i> which took the front of my nose off. Not that I had to have it operated on but it made a huge scar, and funnily enough I was then interviewed before our first jump by the press, and there's a photograph of me in that press article with the tip of my nose off. <i>Laughs</i> Then you go and do your first...oh that was our second jump. You do your first jump and second jump...or was it your third jump? I'm terrible about this, but your qualifying jump, your eighth jump, and your parents all come up for the day and they come and see you jump out and whatever and it's all like a fun day and you qualify and you get your wings.
Interviewer	And in those days you were jumping out of Dakotas or C160s and C130s?
Brian	Dakotas and Flossies. As far as I know and tried to verify this, but apparently we had the record for clearing a C130, nine and a half seconds. And I remember I was at the back and we were sprinting, sprinting. We were a hell of a good crew of guys, we really were. There's another side to Bats which is traditions, and I'd never been in major traditions in school or anything, and I'm not sure whether I liked it or I didn't like it, but that was the thing where your seniors could vasbyt you, and that meant that you had to stand on your trommel, and they would give you a punch into your solar plexus. Obviously you were above them so they would hit you from below. It's something we never practised. I know that we never took it out on our juniors, mainly because there wasn't too much time to do it. I know some of the guys did but I just remember I never took it, and I remember when we came back from Grahamstown and we went to the coast the C Company returned and despite the fact that we had our wings they woke us up on the middle of the night, jump on our trommels, and whatever, and they were going to do this to us, and I suddenly thought, excuse me, this is not on. We've got our wings and the whole thing, and as the guy approached me I smacked him in the nose and broke his nose and all hell broke loose and one hell of a fight ensued. But ironically he actually ended up joining us up in Angola and we became quite good buddies, which is just that kind of thing that happens. It's the kind of stuff that goes on between young men, and I know all that kind

	of stuff is banned today and whatever at schools, no initiation whatever, but in some forms I think initiation was good. Although I didn't want to practise it myself. I didn't like the idea of hitting some defenceless guy.
Interviewer	Speaking of the traditions, wasn't there also some animosity between the Bats and the other units in Bloem, notably the 1SSB?
Brian	<i>Laughs</i> Absolutely. I mean, it was years and years long. I mean, to get a Bat beret was highly prized. And during our time I can't really remember us ever really initiating anything ourselves, but if a guy's beret was stolen the honour was that you went and got it back, under any circumstances. And we would go over the wall and into SSB and go and get that beret back after having found out who it was, and it wasn't simply, please can we have our berets back. <i>laughs</i> But once again, and we'll get to it, when we served with SSB up in Angola, we became the biggest of mates. And yes, it was just that kind of thing. Oh yes, of course when we came back from that, we'd come back with ten or twenty SSB berets and then that was the kind of thing. Why? Were we that much better physically or whatever? I just think it was just part of the tradition and Bats could never lose, and so it just had to happen and so we were far more determined in those situations than they were.
Interviewer	So your corporals and officers sort of instilled in you this belief that the Parabats are something special?
Brian	Yes...but I think that kind of tradition goes from troop to troop. It was certainly never encouraged from the sergeant majors and the guys who were with us and whatever. I don't remember it really being encouraged by that except I suppose they would have frowned on it hugely if we hadn't done it, but no, it kind of was a tradition that was amongst the troops.
Interviewer	So after your sort of coastal escapades did you go into a more intensive form of training or specialised training after that?
Brian	No, we'd finished our training, and I think I made a comment to a guy the other day, I think that we were really well trained infantry who could jump out of airplanes and things. Special Forces training...maybe the guys will be cross with me for saying this, but I don't think we were really Special Forces trained. We were trained to a level of fitness, endurance and whatever, and selection that went beyond any other infantry unit, that I'll say. But I never learned hand to hand combat and stuff like that, that you'd learn as a British paratrooper, an American airborne, which is a pity, but maybe it was just a certain...maybe other guys did it.
Interviewer	Just going back a bit, in your basic training as a parabat, wasn't there a tradition about running around carrying either a heavy rock or a heavy...?
Brian	Yes, the marble, it was a 20 kilogram concrete block. You had to

	do marble exercises and whatever, especially as part of the PT training course. And with poles. Either punishment was also meted out with those. And I think the worst was...that was when we were caught doing AWOL, you were dumped at De Brug, which was about 20 kms out, and you were given the thickest pole that they could find and a marble, and two of you, each had a marble and a pole and you had to get those back to camp by daybreak. And I guess that's a hell of an exercise. You try just carrying...and in full kit...try carrying a pole and a marble. It's bad enough carrying a 20 kilogram concrete block, but you try carrying a pole as well. But you do it. And it was part of, hey, I did it. There were many guys who actually didn't do that, ok, because they didn't do that, they were kind of envious after a while. Hey, we did it, so... <i>laughs</i>
Interviewer	So it was slightly different to the infantry guys who also did pole PT and also had full kit and stuff, but they never had their marble.
Brian	No, they never had their marble. The speeds that we had to run, the 2,4 and the other endurance tests and everything that we had to pass, they didn't have to come anywhere near that. And we were incredibly fit. And very hard. And that vasbyt was all part of the fitness by the way and all part of the hardness. I mean, I don't think...any civilian had tried to hit me in the stomach, just really it was as hard as rock back in those days.
Interviewer	And in that period of training you're getting physically fit, they're trying to build you into a unit where you work together, you're obviously getting weapons training, was there any explanation of why you needed to be in the army and who was the army going to protect South Africa against?
Brian	I found no indoctrination like that at all. It was all about being a parabat. No formal political indoctrination or stuff, if that's what you're referring to at all. It was about pride and being a parabat and that was it, finished and klaar.
Interviewer	So you didn't have lectures talking about the Rooi Gevaar or the Swart Gevaar or anything?
Brian	Look it did occur that there were some but not overtly, it was really just part of what it was and combat, but I really don't think it was that strongly at all. The Rooi Gevaar was the red beret on our heads. <i>Laughs</i>
Interviewer	So after that initial period of training, then what happened to you?
Brian	Well, then we got shipped off to the border. My dates, I'm not one who's great at dates, ok. But we went up and we were sent straight to Rundu where we did some acclimatisation work and stuff. And we kept being told that there's something big on, there's something big on, something big on, we tried to pick up rumours but like all army guys, there's rumours, rumours, rumours, rumours, we didn't know. And one day it was very much a life changing thing for everybody, although we didn't realise at

	<p>the time. We were taken into a tent, we were told that there was a major operation on the go, that we didn't have to go, but we would have to volunteer. And that was a very easy thing to do, to ask us to volunteer because here these 17, 18 year olds, who really they've been trained and want to go and now feel the excitement of war and all of that, and whatever, and of course you're not going to say no because you've also been taught to be a team person. So they said ok, now file out from this tent and go into the other tent, and actually there was a gap in between, and in that gap in between they took every single thing away from us. Our boots, our socks, our uniforms, our rifles. We didn't have our berets, I remember that, because we must have had steel helmets on...oh, we had to go there in full kit, that's right. They took all of our stuff away. And I had a St Christopher from my girlfriend which I stuck under my tongue, but they took all jewellery away from the guys, everything. Which was a little confusing but the guys are still in a bubble of excitement and you go the other side and they gave you this really terrible kak green uniform, what turned out to be a West German FN, having great pride for us in our folding butt para rifles that we now had to give up.</p>
Interviewer	Which were also the FN, or did you have the R1?
Brian	We had the R1. No, no, it was the FN then, I'm sorry. It was the R1 later. Sorry. But it was a great sense of pride to the Bat that you had that folding butt, from what we always were debriefed is that the other side, the terrs, as we called them, and I will continue to call them because that was the lingua franca, I always had this huge respect for the folding butts when they were coming.
Interviewer	So now you don't recognise the weapon you've been given, you don't recognise the uniform.
Brian	Nothing.
Interviewer	You're given something completely strange.
Brian	Strange, and some green cloth cap to put on. And we were confined to this tent and we were told that we were going to sleep there and whatever and then we're going to get loaded onto things, and our rations had been laid out on...we were told to stand guard over our rations. And we're going to go at any time. Well, one day went past, two days went past, the second day we were standing guard over our rations and we started not to believe what was going on...and that's just part of being a Bat. We while standing guard, snuck off with a whole load of cases and pears and condensed milk and whatever, and went back to our tents and proceeded to dig a hole under the tents, bury the pears and the condensed milk, and our berets. For some reason, who knows why, but later on in the story I'll tell you how important it was that we'd buried our berets. We took planks and we put them on top and we buried it under those tents. Leaving all our other personal possessions in our locked up cupboards, which

	<p>wasn't very secure, but that's where those things were. Eventually then came and we flew in on a Flossie and we landed in Sa da Bandeira...I'm not sure what that's called today, but Sa da Bandeira airport, and here we were in the war zone.</p>
Interviewer	<p>I think it's called Menongue. <i>(This incorrect. It is now called Lubango. Mike Cadman)</i></p>
Brian	<p>And from there we were split into two groups. Our group stayed behind in Sa da Bandeira and the other group went on ahead. Our job in the rear was to...in no particular order...collect all and every bit of fuel that we could find anywhere that could be transported in drums, and in that case also travel along the train line which went east, and go along there and we did a couple of trips on that train line and see what activities were there. We were then also to find whatever Land Rovers or suitable 4X4 vehicles, which was only the Landie back in those days and fit them and furbish them with RPG rocket launchers and 20mm Browning machine guns.<i>(more likely Browning .50 or .30 machine guns. Mike Cadman)</i> In other words we were making our own assault vehicles.</p>
Interviewer	<p>So you're scouting around the town and surrounding area just looking for vehicles that are left there by civilians or...?</p>
Brian	<p>Were donated by civilians as well and given to us and that sort of thing. And in Bats you had all sorts, so we had tiffies part of us, we had gunsmiths, all part of being Bats. So they worked on it with us, they put those things into place.</p>
Interviewer	<p>And at that stage were you still encountering Portuguese people or had they all fled?</p>
Brian	<p>No, there were definitely Portuguese people there, especially in the country areas. Savimbi came to the airport while we were there, I met Savimbi. And I was now a two stripe corporal so I was terribly important. We went down to...I've forgotten, the coastal port which is on the parallel of there...I can't remember what it was called, it begins with a C.<i>(possibly Mocamedes now Namibe)</i> Also it's changed now so I tried to look it up on the map book the other day. And I just remember going over this pass which was one of the most magnificently built roads, done by the Portuguese, it was just so steep when we were going down. Getting to the harbour there...I can't even remember what our main mission of going to the harbour was there...but seeing these renegade troops all over, grabbing these vehicles, these little yellow 4X4 vehicles off the thing, driving them, and then driving them into the ground. We found these things abandoned all over the place, and they'd wrecked the gear boxes and whatever, they didn't know how to drive. Oh! We had to get aircraft fuel from there. That was the job. there was aircraft fuel that we had to go get, which we brought back to Sa da Bandeira. And then our other job was to train FNLA troops...not UNITA...FNLA, I remember. I know that other guys trained UNITA as well. And these guys were starving, so we gave</p>

	<p>them...I remember giving them fire and movement from 200 metres up to the herd of cattle and they wounded one cow, so we had to shoot the cattle for them to give them some grub. But it was frightening, these guys were not properly trained as, just thrown in to have a uniform, and that's training. There's none of the start slow, build up, build up, build up stuff that you get in a proper military thing, and some of the action that we saw with them it was quite frightening because they would be there one moment and run away the next. So it was quite scary. But I don't hold them...they just weren't properly trained, they didn't know. I guess later on with huge amounts of experience they didn't do that.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Now you say, you run around finding fuel, you're training these guys, didn't it strike you as strange that here you are, you're trained as an elite soldier, you're trained as a parachute battalion man, you're meant to jump out of aircraft and fight like special infantry, and yet here you are being odd job people dressed in a uniform you don't recognise, carrying a weapon you weren't trained with, didn't you guys discuss and say, what the hell is going on?</p>
Brian	<p>Absolutely. We were told we'd only be there a few days. But I think things didn't know where and whatever, and when the guys hit Ebo then I think they quickly needed us up there. I think that was like a big fright when they hit Ebo. I obviously wasn't there, I was back in the south and they'd call us up. What had happened...I think we were there for two weeks...after about three or four days, we'd thrown that stupid green uniform away, because it was awful to wear, it was scratchy, you felt like a prisoner. We just commandeered whatever ammo we could find, Portuguese stuff...oh, we'd go to the Portuguese army barracks, we lifted...we got rations from there. Rations weren't coming to us properly. Like all troops of course, the Portuguese rations were much better than ours, well it was only because they tasted different, had some fish oil and stuff like that. I'm sure they weren't better than ours. We learned to eat cabbage and stuff and whatever we got fed. We got fed by some of the Portuguese people there – black, white, coloured...Mulatto they call them. But at that point in time my dress became and it remained so until the end of January, was a pair of cheap basketball shoes, shorts and cut off shirts. Green shorts, camouflage shirts cut off at the shoulder and a cammo jacket for warmth. And that's what I had. I probably had one cammo jacket and two each of the rest. I didn't have a single pair of socks to my name, nothing, that was it. That's how I dressed. And we didn't shave, so the beards started to grow. And yes, we were confused, we'd see pilots from time to time, come in and talk to us. I had one particular experience: we had to collect all weapons and things and there was some Mausers, and there was one beautiful Mauser, the yellow wood on it and whatever. Anyways these pilots told us that there was a scheme whereby they could register these rifles on our behalf, if we gave them to them with a little docket. Well I gave them these</p>

	<p>rifles. Months later I sent back a letter with a guy who was going home saying, hey mom and dad, have the rifles arrived yet? He didn't post that in civvy street, he posted it in the army thing, they picked that up and the MPs arrived at my parents place thinking that they were going to come across these gun runners. My parents...my mother collapsed because she thought I'd died. It was quite a time and my father placated them because Eddels, the shoe factory he worked through, were one of the contractors to make the army boots. <i>Laughs</i> So he took them along there and showed them. Anyways that was quite an interesting thing. And today I know that there's a huge military police file on me, and what I understand is that it was about this investigation into running guns by some of the pilots and/or some other guys.</p>
Interviewer	But these were bolt action rifles.
Brian	Yes.
Interviewer	And these days would be viewed as collector's items.
Brian	<p>Beautiful rifles. Beautiful! Because I fired it, it had been somebody's personal weapon, it was beautiful. A very, very interesting story happened, which I really want to tell. Because...first of all let me say this. In future chats and whatever, if I say anything remotely makes me come across as thinking what we'd call an Audi Murphy or any kind of a hero, I say absolute rubbish. All I know is that there is fear, adrenalin, and training/experience. And those are the only things you have as a soldier. And fear pumps adrenalin, adrenalin triggers your training, and everybody can react differently in certain circumstances. So I don't think there is such a thing as heroes, there's circumstances, and the rest just works. I'm not saying that I do think of myself as a hero or anything, but there are some things which we'll talk about later that I just don't want it to come across that way. But this hasn't got anything to do with being heroes, it becomes naughty boys. I had taught myself now to be a radio operator because I was now bored with running around doing things and whatever, and our official radio operator was a guy by the name of Tim Carey, who was one of my closest friends. So Tim and I took shifts on the radio and the only news that we got was by tuning in to BBC and to CNN, we actually found out what was happening. We began to realise listening to...</p>
Interviewer	Surely in those days it wasn't CNN, it was rather VOA, Voice of America?
Brian	Yes, Voice of America. Absolutely! Thank you. And we would listen to...what was the South African broadcasting thing, the special one that used to go...?
Interviewer	Radio RSA.
Brian	Radio RSA, yes. I mean, the story with RSA and what was going on with the rest, was like two completely different things. So that

was actually how we gathered our intelligence and we kept telling the guys what was going on and whatever and whatever. Anyway what happened was we got briefed that a bunch of bank robbers was coming to Sa da Bandeira. And that we had to go and stand guard on the bank. And we stood guard there for a couple of nights without anything happening – maybe they heard that we were there or whatever. This is part of the story but...anyway then after these few days of standing guard, we were asked to go and...Tim and I were asked to go into town as two responsible people, go into town and collect Lieutenant Colonel Louis Heap, who we'd seen from time to time but was very distinctive and we heard he was doing political stuff in town. He lived in town, we didn't see him. He had nobody else with him as far as we could see, he was kind of like on his own. Anyway we had to go to this hotel and collect his stuff, and we go there and...I remember this whole incident so clear in my mind...we get to the hotel, we pack up his stuff, and these two...I have to say, beautiful, black, slinky chicks who were probably prostitutes approached us and whatever they were going on about...anyway there we are...I'm sorry, you have to imagine this, Tim and I in our takkies, our shorts, and our cammo cut off things, and we had Uzzis with us as opposed to the...I don't know when they'd come in but Uzzis were issued to us as well...so we had Uzzis, because we thought it would be easier to manipulate them, and here we are, and we're seeing all these guys in uniform and this and that and the town...and then Tim and I say, no, no, come on, this is not...we had taken his Taunis, like a Cortina, into town, and we'd filled it up...which is part of the story...and we decided no, we've got to go and check out the night life here. Well, we didn't know where we were going, how we were going, and we checked a red light. So we thought a bar sort of area. So we went into this bar. You've got to look at this thing, 18 year old guys, dressed as were, Uzzis on our shoulders. The Colonel's stuff locked in the boot of the Taunis and we go inside there, and yes, it's a bar brothel. And immediately Madame, who's name was Nathi, saw us. Now I would describe her as a very overweight Elizabeth Taylor. She was a beautiful woman but fat. And she said, what you want? Her English wasn't very good. We said we want a beer. So she said, beer, beer. She showed us to a corner table and said, sit here. It was a bit like Wimpy red leather. And there was this guy passed out there, a guy probably about 45, 50. So she wakes him up by grabbing his crotch and rubbing his crotch awhile, and says buy these two. So he comes out with some Escudos and buys us a beer. So we're sitting there watching all this going on and in there are civilians, guys dressed in all forms of cammo, it is like a spaghetti western at this stage. So we put down our Uzis and we both cock them, because now we're actually like a little bit nervous. There are weapons everywhere. And we're looking at this thing and we're enjoying this beer...I can't remember what it was...and Tim gets up and he goes to the toilet. Now he leaves me with his Uzi, so I'm sitting with one on each side of me, and this guy comes up and he is at least, I'm

	<p>telling you, he must have been near seven foot. Think of that guy who's in Jaws, the guy with the teeth, or Goldfinger, one of those Bond things. He was huge and he comes up and he gives me a beer. And fortunately for me, as I understand it, I still hadn't finished the other one. And I was just about to reach for this and Nathi comes to me and says, who give beer? And I pointed to this ou. Well she picked up this beer and she threw it at him across the bar, and he was ducking and we were ducking and she screamed at him and he just laughed. And she said, make mad, make mad, take you outside and rrrr! So obviously it was drugged. Tim gets back, Nathi gets the drunk guy to buy us another beer each. We're sitting there and then suddenly the doors open. And in walks Robert Redford, Portuguese style. He was like blond haired Portuguese, exceptionally good looking man, maybe late twenties, thirty, and the rest of the guys looked like Bud Spencer and the Trinity lot, I promise you! With any kind of garb on but with bandoliers over them, with rocket launchers, with flipping grenade launchers and LMGs and the whole thing. They've come to party. And hey, and everybody, and the girls go mad because obviously these okes are heroes somewhere along the line, and we're just sitting there watching this whole thing wide eyed. And Blond Man sits down and everybody arranges them around him. He's obviously the hero. And the girls are all over them, him specifically and a couple of other guys are getting lucky and whatever, this goes on...suddenly he sees us. And say says something all in Portuguese, and on and on this goes, he buys us a beer, and now we decide, ok, it's about time we have to go... oh, first of all Nathi does a dance...I have to tell you this, and during the course of the dance where she took all her kit off and this really fat lady and she took the MPLA flag and she inserted it inside her and pulled it out, oh it was chaotic! We decided it was time to go. So, we left, this guy didn't want us to go...we left. And we're driving the Taunis home and the bloody thing went drff drff. What Tim and I didn't know is the Taunis was a diesel and we'd filled it up with petrol <i>laughs</i> Anyway, that was our story. And we though that was it!</p>
	END OF SIDE A
	SIDE B (<i>counter at 11</i>)
Brian	<p>Then the next day...ok the Sergeant Landman who was with us, he wanted to know where the hell we'd been and whatever. No, we just said we'd got this meal, but we were reeking of booze and whatever. And that afternoon we are called and we have to go down to the petrol area and whatever, and these guys are coming and Landman tells us no, these are the bank robbers that are coming. But these are the bank robbers but they're being sent to the front. Now they must go to the front, ok. And what we have to do is stand, we have to all have our rifles cocked and ready and if they try anything we must just shoot them. Those are our orders. So we're waiting, waiting, and these guys come in, in their <i>garrie</i>, their jeep, there's about six of them all hung over this</p>

	<p>thing, coming for petrol, and who would it be is but blondie and his mates. They get off and we're standing in a circle around them and they start filling up the petrol and Landman is shouting at them in Afrikaans, they couldn't understand a word he was saying, and they couldn't care a damn, and goodness gracious, blondie recognises me. And over he comes running his arms out wide, shouting to me that I'm his friend and whatever and whatever, and Landman is going, <i>skiet hom</i> Rogers, <i>skiet hom!</i> <i>Laughs</i></p>
Interviewer	<p>And of course Landman doesn't understand that you've already met.</p>
Brian	<p>And he runs up and he gives me a kiss on each cheek and Landman says, <i>moenie hom soen nie, skiet hom, skiet hom!</i> And I see Tim up in the radio tower nearly falling out with laughter <i>laughs</i> I couldn't do it and Landman wants to go and whatever and another guy Piet Coller says, no you can't shoot him, let him go. There's obviously something we don't know about. Anyway these guys get on their vehicle and whatever, sure as nuts they blew themselves up with a hand grenade, these same guys. Some hand grenade fell out. But then Coller and myself...to go back to the marbles, we were chased by Landman, in the middle of a blooming war zone with a box of ammunition around it until eventually we'd had enough and we threw them on the ground, we told Landman where to stick his stuff. But yes, that was another part of being in this army!</p>
Interviewer	<p>But this seems quite odd. Where were you staying at that stage, in tents or...?</p>
Brian	<p>No, in the airport building.</p>
Interviewer	<p>So you didn't have formal barracks or anything else.</p>
Brian	<p>No.</p>
Interviewer	<p>And you're wandering around dressed in shorts and a cut off t-shirt, you've got these bank robbers/FNLA/bandits, whoever they were wandering around, it strikes me that it was lawless.</p>
Brian	<p>We had military discipline in that we were properly posted, we had the guard duties and everything on this thing and whatever. Yes, it was a sense of...lawless, ...strange, strange, not organised anyway, certainly not organised. But you know we played soccer against the FNLA guys <i>laughs</i> South African soccer match on the tarmac and things like that.</p>
Interviewer	<p>And now you've prepared your vehicles, you've got them with RPGs, you've got all sorts of things mounted on them, yet you're still not in a formal uniform. So you're in the town of Sa da Bandeira getting ready to go north?</p>
Brian	<p>North, yes.</p>
Interviewer	<p>And at this stage had anybody mentioned Operation Savannah to</p>

	you?
Brian	We knew nothing about what our name was...oh, we did know we were Zulu Force because...we were Zulu One, I think, Zulu One or Zulu Two...I don't know Zulu One and Zulu Two, that's who we were. So we were Zulu Force, we knew that. No, Operation Savannah was a name I only heard years later.
Interviewer	Look in most operations soldiers don't know what they're called anyway, you're just doing an operation. But ok, so you had heard of Zulu Force but you had no idea of what the implications of that were.
Brian	Absolutely not. The next thing was that we were shipped out and for the life of me I can't remember if we flew or we...but we went up north, and we joined up with our other guys, and we were given three days of training by the Recces...to expand their operations. That is what we were trained to do, to expand their operations. And it was very tragic because the three guys who trained us, my group...they'd been training us all day, and that night they were killed. Bar one guy who was very badly shot up, and he major, major war story stuff, and he dragged the two bodies of his friends home. I heard he died later. It was just incredible stuff, so it was very sad. I remember we were in a church and I remember our Lieutenant setting off a shotgun cartridge through the roof which got everybody extremely jittery. We were living in this church, and this one Recce got really sort of <i>bossies</i> about the whole thing and he started shouting the odds, and whatever and whatever and I remember standing up to him, and some very, very sort of dangerous altercation was subdued by everybody and let go. But it was quite a fascinating experience because the Recces were allowed to sleep on the stage, the (<i>inaudible</i>) and everybody was just watching, nobody was doing anything as him and I were squaring off to each other. And it was serious squaring off. But it was the nature of that, that his buddies had just died and I was just a stubborn youngster who didn't want to be told that I was useless and whatever and whatever. So that was then my first operation from there was to take an OP post. And not sure actually, to tell you honestly, where we went to, we were dropped off and we had to get to the top of this mountain, and we got to the top of this mountain there was this battle going on between our armoured cars and armoured vehicles of theirs. It was hard to see which we reported back on.
Interviewer	And at this stage 'their' is the MPLA? Or FAPLA?
Brian	We were assuming that those were Cubans, that our guys were fighting against. Armoured vehicles and whatever. We had been briefed the Cubans were primarily the thing, but it was MPLA/Cubans, that's what we were told. And we then had a horrific experience with a lightening storm, there was a lot of iron, I think, in the rock. And the lightning...I got struck by lightening, well not directly, it hit the water and the iron and threw me at least

	ten metres into the air. How we didn't die I don't know. I'm not a religious man but we did all sit hugging the bible after that. <i>laughs</i> One guy's bible. We then had an experience which was really frightening and annoying, in that when we reported in the next morning, they didn't know who we were. And they said they weren't going to talk to us and because they had no record of us.
Interviewer	They being the regional command?
Brian	Our command post that we had to...and it was very frightening. I'm sure I was Zulu Two on that operation. And it was very scary. And I then decided that I had to take my troops out, because they wouldn't listen to us anyway, and so nobody would come and help us if we did, and I took my troops out and we walked out for three days.
Interviewer	How many guys did you have with you there?
Brian	I had four guys with me, so it was a group of five. And we found these guys, and this blustering, stupid, idiot there, whatever, captain, arrogant and..... and still argued and whatever and whatever, and I said, well this is me, you were talking to me. Anyway we then moved off all of us under Lieutenant Blaauw who was a great officer. He was one of the Blaauw brothers. His call sign later became Blue Boy but that's part of the story. We were sitting in a...there's a Portuguese name for it...it's like a semi circle of houses and it's communal living, and there are cows and everything grazing, and we were living on this and it was fantastic because there was fruit on the trees and whatever and whatever, and we made this as our base, and then the guys...ok, ja, sorry...and from there under Blaauw we were told that we had to go on this recce, and I wasn't sure where we were. All I know is that I ultimately ended up, we were about 90 kms from Luanda, that's basically what I know. And our job was to go and plant mines. And here's a big regret, because we definitely planted mines that killed civilians and blew off legs and stuff like that. We didn't know what we were doing, the implications of and whatever. But we did that. But what actually happened is that we set up camp. We were taken in by vehicle and dropped off and then we walked in, and we set up camp, and...I'll gloss over it, but we took captive a Cuban and had to kill him. And which caused me major nightmares later, that with a knife that this could be done. But we had walked right into a brigade of Cubans and we were in their brigade. And we dug ourselves in and that's when you realise that training about digging yourself in, in camouflage, was there. We dug ourselves in, we didn't sleep the whole night obviously, and fortunately there were a lot of leaves, and dug ourselves in to the extent that we were covered with leaves, and only one guy was allowed to move around, that was our Lieutenant, not Blaauw, the other Lieutenant. And we could see them walking through the trees and around us, and it was horrendous. A hell of an experience. They never found us. Oh, there was a commotion which made us think that they'd found the guy that we'd killed. We then snuck out in the middle of the night,

	<p>not knowing where and how many there are around us. We went through there and got to our destination road and mined this road with heavy duty mines. And I remember lying there with an American bazooka, which I'd never fired and whatever, they'd just told me this is how it hitches up and just pull this trigger. And this vehicle coming up and us lying in this mealie field and we're thinking that they're going to come and take us out. And I've got this bazooka and I've never fired it and I just know I've got to point it there and shoot it. Anyway it stopped and came...because we'd cut the telephone lines. We'd found telephone lines and everything. Anyways we then started walking out and somehow we got identified, it was quite a moonlit night although there was a lot of bush, and they started, and they started with those 120mm mortars, and chasing us, and we ran. The distance was 20kms on the map. Guys, maybe it's exaggerated ran 30, maybe 40 I don't know, but we ran all night with our equipment and everything, and I've never been so grateful for being fit, because when they started to find us there then we changed direction again and we ran in another direction, kept running, kept running to our ultimate destination. And we hadn't been fired on for about an hour and a half and it was first light and Blaauw said, forget this, forget it! I'm making tea. And we sat down and made tea and he'd just made his tea when a mortar bomb landed about a hundred metres from us. <i>Laughs</i> So we were up and we were all running with our tea, <i>laughs</i> because we wanted tea. We hadn't eaten now for 48 hours because we'd lain there the whole night without eating, and the previous night and everything, for 36 hours or anything. I've never been so pleased to see the SSB boys come around the corner and we just jumped on the top of these things, and they didn't know where we were at this stage, it was kind of like chaotic. I suppose normal war stuff, there certainly wasn't GPSs in those days and we jumped on their vehicles...</p>
Interviewer	Which were Elands in those days.
Brian	<p>Elands, yes. And they took us out. And then the Five Fives had come in and the Five Fives were going, but the Five Fives weren't close enough but at least were laying down things because apparently the infantry were then after us as well, and weren't far behind us. So they were doing it...so we then got back and during the course of this I cut my legs really badly and I had a bit of blood poisoning, and it was my turn to take an OP post up to another place. And I asked the guy who was on the roster behind me, I said...because he hadn't gone on this op with us, could we swop, and he said fine, he would swop, and he went up there. Well it had been a bit of a disaster and it had been under the command of a K.O. (Candidate Officer) Wiley, and I don't mind saying that he's the <i>kakkest</i> officer. He was the...and I say it straight, because he didn't make his officer training course, he was allowed to come to Bats as a K.O. Why I don't know. they wouldn't make him a corporal, they wouldn't make him a K.O. His father was the Wiley who was the MP guy and whatever</p>

happened to him. And this was the third time they'd landed the guys in exactly the same spot for the OP post on the chopper. Well what do you expect? And the chopper got shot down. I know the pilot broke his leg, I know they weren't seriously killed, and there was a fire fight and my mate Mally Wolveson got separated from the guys, and as it happened we were told. And again, we were like just lying around, waiting around, whatever, and Blaauw said, let's go, let's go. And this was the time that I saw the military work with efficiency, because as we drove, we were joined by Three Para mortarists, and by armoured cars. Ok, we were in our *garries* now and whatever, and we got to what was known as the Pont. And I can't tell you where the Pont was now today, whatever, and Blaauw was reluctant go over the Pont at night. And we did have news that our guys were now not under fire, that it had settled and that they were in danger but not under fire. And he said, we don't know our way, we don't have anything, we don't have a maps, whatever, and that's when he took the call sign Blue Boy. Because they hadn't given us a call sign, and they recognised Blaauw Blue Boy. And that was Blue Boy, and the next morning we went over the Pont, just before first light, and went in there, and we had a bit of a skirmish with them and we moved them off, and then I took over the blooming observation post with Wiley. And the next day they were moving in on us and went down to the river and called in the Five Fives...now this is what I'd trained to do all my blooming training, and Wiley took over the thing and he completely got it messed up. When you're an observation post, you report it as you see it, and they plot it, reverse it around from the plotter, but he said it as if he was the plotter and whatever, and I met the guys who were on those cannons those days and they were so furious. Anyways he was just such a useless asshole, he really was, and I don't care if he sues me for it. we had a couple more skirmishes there and then we came back and down. I kind of don't remember other things that happened from there. Minor things off and on and whatever, and then we kind of withdrew to a base and I remember them buzzing us with Fokkers. And our anti aircraft guns couldn't take them out and it was infuriating us. I mean, they had all the OP posts and these guys were blooming useless on these anti aircraft guns. And then we heard...and whether this is right...that the MiGs were coming and were cleaning up our Mirages, this is what we hear, because remember I was also operating the radio from time to time and this and that and whatever, although it's very confused, and that were now...oh, first of all, no, there was going to be a big push! And then it was no, we're going to pull back, and then we're pulling back in stages and blowing bridges and pulling back, pulling back, pulling back. And it was during one of these things that I had a very interesting experience. Just briefly, my beat was midnight, and with a guy, Viljoen, we were standing on this beach and it was hot, hot, hot, hot, we're talking late January, 27, somewhere around about there, and suddenly became extremely cold. And I said to Viljoen, listen, the hut was just 50 metres away, stay here, I can see you all the way, you

	<p>can see me all the way, I'm going to go up there, get our jackets and come down. Got our jackets, as I came out of the hut, I looked up and there was what I can only describe as a UFO, and it was a bit like crystal shaped, lights and everything, it was moving slowly in circles, I've read whatever I can read about it, it's impossible that they had technology like that that didn't make any sound, made absolutely no sound, moving backwards and forwards, Viljoen was transfixed, and the next thing this thing just took off at one hell of a rate and disappeared. We got down there and within ten minutes it was hot again. It's a very, very strange experience, I've spoken to some guys who were on the navy ships and they said there were a number of similar types of reportings that they picked up on the thing. That was weird! But anyway, we then pulled back and we were amongst the last guys to come back, and we got to this big camp and it was very strange because now we were meeting guys who were Civilian Force guys, campers, coming up, and we were meeting them in this big camp, and here we are looking like scruffy whatever and whatever and these guys all... anyway they decided to keep us to one side and we kept to that side, we were happy with that, we didn't want to kind of... and we got back to... was it Ondangwa or Otjiwarongo I can't remember... I know there was a big camp, and like there were 5000 troops and it was pouring with rain, it was muddy, it's everything, the first thing we wanted was our kit, so we sent a group of guys to get our kit, and guess what, everything had been raided and the only guys who got their berets back were basically us who'd buried them under the floorboards. And they came back with the pears and they came back with some kit and whatever. I had my beret. This made the guys intensely angry that day, that they'd been violated, the whole thing... their berets had been taken, I wouldn't have used words like violated or anything in those days. The guys were angry. We got hold of beers and an MP looked for kak with one of our guys, he hit him, and the next thing it erupted. It erupted everywhere. Oh! He didn't, he looked for problems with the mortarists from Three Para, or something... either that or SSB, but they had become our mates now, we had lived with these guys. And it just went beserk. And I remember...</p>
Interviewer	So you had a riot?
Brian	<p>Yes, it was a brawl like you cannot believe. And the more MPs they sent in, the better it was for us, just send them in, just keep sending them in. And the next morning they put us on parade and these MPs arrived in truckloads, and as they got off they started pointing to a couple of our guys and they said, can you identify, and they started walking towards our guys, and we just all moved forward in rank. All moved forward, all moved forward. And they then turned in fear and jumped on their vehicles and went away. And it was that day that Magnus Malan came and talked to us and there we were still this motley group of 70, 80 guys, plus these Three Para guys, plus the armoured car guys, I don't know, call it 200 guys of the 5000 still dressed in this strange garb, and</p>

	<p>he's going on in his political wah wah, and it was the first time that I saw Afrikaans okes say, screw you, up yours, forget about it. And the guys just started walking out the tent, the MPs went to go and stop them and saw who it was and we just all walked out of that tent. And I think they decided to get rid of us then and there. They said we're going to go and train in Windhoek. We asked for permission...I was mates with two Suid Westers and they said, could we go to the farm and then join up with Windhoek, and they gave us permission, we went to the farm, their father came and picked us, we went to the farm that night, we came back to Windhoek, we were still looking like this. We had at least had a bath and a shower and whatever, and a great meal. Put us back and we're still in this kit <i>laughs</i> or had we been given Browns by then? Yes, I think we had been given Browns by then...I don't know, but we still went in full military uniform. They took us back to Windhoek and again this is another thing that made the guys intensely angry. They wouldn't...you know when a Bat comes home, and he has his passing out parade, that's his pride. No passing out parade, no nothing, they treated us like criminals. They took us into the camp in small numbers, we went into our lockers, we were under guard the whole time. Under guard! The whole time. We collected our belongings, we were taken to an isolated area, until everybody had been finished, we were then put on trucks, taken to the station, kept on the trucks until our trains were there, put on the trains and sent home.</p>
Interviewer	Did any senior officer ever explain to you what was going on?
Brian	No. From one moment to the next we didn't know what was going on in that sending us home.
Interviewer	And then they send you where, back to Bloem?
Brian	No, no, home, Maritzburg. This is now we've been taken from Windhoek to Bloemfontein, kept on our train, not allowed to move off the train, then guards came, MPs, took us in trucks to the base at night, under guard, in small groups, we were taken to our bungalows to collect our stuff, in the middle of the night. This is midnight. Taken away again in small groups to a collection area, and then put back on trucks and taken to the stations, or some guys to fly, the <i>Suid Westers</i> to fly, and we were not allowed off the truck until our train was ready to leave, put on that train and sent home.
Interviewer	And did they say, well that's it, you're going, or you're coming back in six months time, or six weeks time?
Brian	Nothing. I guess this is 1 st , 2 nd of February. I arrive home, no cell phones in those days. I did manage to phone my folks and say, I'm on my way home. and they picked me up at the station, and there I was, home. Next thing, varsity had to start on 9 th or 12 th of February and...
Interviewer	But what kind of impact did that have on you psychologically?

Brian	<p>Well at the time, seemingly nothing. I mean, first of all I got smashed every night. That probably all varsity students as well did that and whatever, and girls were a fantastic thing to see and whatever. Certainly didn't pass my first year at varsity, it was a hell of a year. But it came out 30 years later. And in fact it was amazing how it affected all of us at the same time. And that's what we found. It started coming out 25, 26, 27, 28 years later, and we got together for a reunion after 30 years, and we'd all been divorced, every single one of us, all of us had had up and down lives, all of those things it affected, all of us were really angry about what had happened to us. All of us were angry that we'd never been able to talk about it. Many of us had gone on to do camps and done things and whatever. So the psychological effect had been huge, there's no doubt about it. And we're talking about three years ago...I'm now over that, but it was a horrendous blow to me. But I want to add at this stage that that became repetitive behaviour. Being a Bat you never got two months notice that your camp was there, you got a week's notice or something that you had to report to duty. That was your camp, that was when you're going. You then started to switch into mode, you put that brown uniform on, you became a completely different person. Started to psyche yourself from that moment. You were sent to Murray Hill, later on...I don't think that first couple of years we were sent there, we were probably sent to somewhere else, I can't remember, then became (inaudible) at Murray Hill. Then to anything from one day to five days battle training. You then, a week later, you're in action. Whether you were there for a month or two months or whatever, the same, you come out of your op, you probably spend 24 hours getting cleaned, you're put on a flight home, and you go to Murray Hill, you're disbanded from Murray Hill or from wherever, and you're home. And I'll admit to it, I was involved in breaking up trains on two occasions, ok. Ask me why did I want to break up a train? I could never even tell you this, but I think the only reason is now that I understand it, is that I actually wanted to get rid of my frustration and anger and all of those things before I got to my wife and child, and my mother, and all of those things. Because this huge, huge pressure that went on year after year, and I did 12 years of that, was that I couldn't tell anybody, by law, and it wasn't the right thing to do, it wasn't 'the thing' to do, and you got back into civilian life and nobody cared a damn!</p>
Interviewer	<p>So you're living a kind of schizophrenic existence whereas at one hour you might be in combat and 72 hours later you're scrubbed up and clean and having to use the right knife and fork at the dinner table.</p>
Brian	<p>Ja, yes. It was amazing. Now I know that a lot of armies have faced it, I know the Israeli army for example have, but I know that also they've put things into place, as well. There's no debriefing, there is nothing! They encouraged us in Natal to be part of Four Bn (Four Batallion) and to go down to the thing and be part of that and to whatever, but there wasn't really a great incentive to</p>

	go and do that, unless you wanted to be seen as kop toe. I loved being a parabat, but I didn't want to go on courses and stuff like that. I eventually became a sergeant, promoted in the ranks as it were.
Interviewer	Can we rewind back to Angola a little bit. Quite often you spoke about you were very delighted to see 1SSB and that was understandable, but you spoke about your guys all the time. They were all dressed just like you were, the 1SSB guys, the Parabats, everybody was dressed...
Brian	And the mortar guys, yes.
Interviewer	So nobody was carrying anything recognisable as South African, except for perhaps the guys working on the five five cannons...?
Brian	The mortarists had their own South African pipes. We had a couple of pipes, little 60mm pipes, but with no base plates and everything being trained as mortarists and I don't even think we took them in with us, I think we got them along the way somewhere. But no, there was nothing. Nothing. Many had accumulated AK47s along the way, felt very comfortable with those. Some guys had been issued with Galils, which...sorry, un, the Portuguese one, the Portuguese G3, and we were very scared of those things. <i>laughs</i> Oh, oh! But we found all sorts of weapons. I fired a Tommy gun there. I had a Tommy gun there which I shot on the range. A good old fashioned Tommy gun. And we accumulated all sorts of weapons along the way. revolvers, pistols, the whole thing.
Interviewer	So just so I can get my mind around this, when you were down at Sa da Bandeira and you were running around in Louis Heap's Taunis, did you see any action at that time?
Brian	No.
Interviewer	So this only started happening when you moved north?
Brian	We had a stand-off with FNLA troops on one occasion but that was it. But no, there wasn't any action until we moved north. Our other group, the split group, saw action all the way up.
Interviewer	And your commands were coming obviously from your direct superiors, but to your knowledge your commands were filtered to you through Parachute Battalion?
Brian	No.
Interviewer	Or were they coming via Jan Breytenbach or those guys?
Brian	No, we had a command centre...um Zulu...Zulu group gave us our orders.
Interviewer	But you didn't know who Zulu group was?
Brian	Absolutely none. There was another course I'm just trying to remember. There was Zulu group and something else. But Zulu

	group that was...who they were we didn't know.
Interviewer	And that incident when you were sent forward to observation post and you decided that you had to walk out because your commanders, or on the radio they wouldn't recognise who you were and they wouldn't help you. You walked out, it took you three days. Were you walking through enemy territory?
Brian	Yes.
Interviewer	So you were moving very cautiously probably at night most of the time.
Brian	Yes, very cautiously. Yes, doing all the proper manoeuvres and things. We weren't exactly hiding from bush to bush as we went, but we were going very cautiously. And we had no rat packs for two days because...
Interviewer	I was going to ask you that.
Brian	No, nothing. <i>Laughs</i> So we were quite hungry.
Interviewer	And you decided, once you were walking back, you didn't contact them by radio again and say, listen we're on our way back?
Brian	No. Nothing. They were very surprised to see us and could not identify us when we got there. And yet the same guy debriefed us when we got there. It shocked me completely.
Interviewer	So there was a breakdown in command I suppose?
Brian	Absolutely. Not the only one I saw in my many years but anyway.
Interviewer	Without going into too much detail if you don't want to, the incident with the Cuban that you took prisoner, why did you guys feel you had to kill him? Because he would go back and identify who you where...
Brian	Absolutely. Our scouts who had run into him, had reported huge movement...and...yes...he was brought back to Blaauw and myself and...it wasn't a nice incident. I mean...nobody ever trained us to cut a throat.
Interviewer	And did you ever speak to anybody about that professionally in later years?
Brian	Yes, many, many times. I also spoke to Blaauw about it. Oh Blaauw came to me about...after the incident and he said to me...he had his knife with him, the knife that was used, and he sat...Blaauw was 23, he was an old man as far as I was concerned <i>laughs</i> But what a hell of an officer. But he sat there, and he sat and talked to me, he said, Brian I can't throw this knife away but I can't keep it. I don't know what to do. And he sat and talked to me, and we talked about it for ages and he said this is like...and I often wondered what he eventually decided to do with that knife. He said, if I throw it away it's like I haven't dealt with it. If I keep it, it just keeps me awake at night. And this was a man

	that I idolized. And yes, it wasn't so nice.
Interviewer	When you were...I'm still talking about the far north...your radio communications were they in English or Afrikaans?
Brian	English.
Interviewer	So after that whole period, you mentioned much earlier on that when you got back and after that incident with Malan and all the rest, and the MPs, and you decided that you wanted to opt out, that was out of your two year...?
Brian	Yes, it was somewhere, probably about December, ok, of '74. They were actually trying to encourage guys to come stay for two years, and the guys were saying forget about it, whatever. And I don't know, I can't remember exact timing but it was before we came back and they said to us, what they were trying to do is encourage guys to say, and I had applied to opt out...sorry, I had applied to opt out before we'd gone up. And they said they'd grant it and somehow I was given an extra stripe, extra pay, and I had to sign till the end of February and we were actually paid till the end of February, although we were let go at the end of January. Gosh I can't remember more than that. signed a piece of paper, signed a piece of paper...
Interviewer	But nevertheless you had started at 1SAI almost 14 months earlier. So you served more than one year.
Brian	Yes, 13 months we served, yes. ...
Interviewer	When you got home, and sort of you had called to say, listen I'm coming, how did you deal with family life?
Brian	I just think I carried on, you know...met quite a few guys that were Rhodesians that were at Maritzburg varsity and you kind of had brief discussions and I was very friendly with one who was later killed, but you kind of just got on with life. Yes, just did it. Went to varsity, became part of varsity. I'm not conscious of being upset, traumatised, anything at all.
Interviewer	But your mom didn't say, behave yourself now, you're at home.
Brian	When I said, pass the fucking butter please, yes. <i>laughs</i> But yes, it was only much, much later. I don't remember being...
Interviewer	And then your camps started and you were living this sort of...you get short notice call up and you grab your stuff and disappeared. How long were the camps?
Brian	I became a perpetual student because I kept failing...so I lived for five years with a student battalion...I served with Two Bn, (two Battalion) Three Bn and Four Bn. Everybody was Two Bn at first, and then it became Three Bn which was more Natal-ish whatever. Then it was Four Bn Natal but Two Bn became varsity...I can't remember. And funnily enough there's certain camps that I can't recollect what we did and where we did it. So it's strange. Maybe it's because the others are so intense in my

	<p>life. And the first one that really is...oh I did the Cassinga training. Everybody was called up to do Cassinga training, and we were hell of a excited about doing that, but the varsity students were left out of the final battle basically because they were scared of a leak I guess. And I remember us going before Professor Schreiner and...</p>
Interviewer	Who was the vice chancellor of Maritzburg.
Brian	<p>What a wonderful man. Because we were so nervous, he was varsity, this was military and whatever, and he said, you boys must do your duty and you must follow the law and you must do whatever, ok. And the university will accommodate you, but you have to pull your finger. Just the way he said it, he was a wise man, I can't really remember his words but I just remember the wisdom coming out of that man. He wasn't encouraging us to go, he was just saying, you must do your duty and whatever, it was very wise. So yes, I remember going and doing that and whatever. I did go every time. I think '79 is what I remember as the next big one was Rhodesia. Where we got flown into Rhodesia and we were flown into the Chiredzi area. We were trained to work OP post stuff with Selous, by the Selous. And it was a very interesting...that was when the whole Zimbabwe Rhodesia...it was already Zimbabwe Rhodesia already there I think...and the guys were coming back, filtering back and whatever, and stuff was going on.</p>
Interviewer	What uniforms were you wearing?
Brian	South African Browns. But we had no berets, we had no insignia. No berets, no nothing. So what were we wearing on our heads? I don't know. But no insignia.
Interviewer	And did you get involved in fire fights during that period?
Brian	<p>Yes. There are a couple of stories from there, one is that there was an American with us, a Lieutenant I think. a loudmouthed Yank that he was, and he had come over to join us, kind of made out he was a real Audi Murphy type oke. Very interestingly enough I heard years later that he was the first guy whose chute never opened. First parabat to be killed with a chute never opening. The rumour went around heavily that he was the CIA...I throw that in for whatever it's worth. It's hearsay, ok. But interestingly he was the first one that had ever worked for. There were others later. Anyway the one story that I really would like to recollect is that, we were sent in as an OP post, we were working with 2 RAR. I had one radio op with me, plus two LMG teams. One of ours, one of theirs. The radio op was ours, so there were four South Africans and two...we infiltrated the area, and we sat watching, we took notes as we'd been trained to do by these guys. It was very different to what we'd been trained to do in South Africa, what to look out for, and we saw a classic case of what they call a 'pungwe', a party happening, food being brought in, into a clump of dense bushes and whatever and whatever. I had taken sleep, I came on duty at about three in the afternoon, I</p>

	<p>read through all the notes, that had been going on in the last two hours, I called in to 2 RAR to fire force and said that I was now convinced that it was that, and they...oh, and at that time, probably two kms away, maybe a bit longer distance wise, no, maybe longer, five kms away, but in clear view of us, a fire fight was going on, where our boys had gone in, into a 'gomo' or a rock area. There was napalm and frantam being thrown by Harvards I presume, into the area. It was the first time I'd ever seen napalm used, or frantan as they called it, being used.</p>
Interviewer	<p>That was the Rhodesian version of napalm.</p>
Brian	<p>Anyway the order came for me that I must go because I'd called in fire force, and I said, I can't! We descend into this area, we go through a stream, come up into 600-800 metres of clear open mealie field before we get to this area. to get around that it will take me four to five hours and it will be too late anyway. They said, no, those are your orders, you have to go, so orders are orders. So I decided to leave my radio op in the thing, and they said oh the Lynx was going to come in and support you. So I was concerned because there was quite a lot of blind area before we actually got on to the mealie field and I decided to leave my radio op in the OP post, and it was maybe a bad decision, I don't know. Because when we got to the top of the ridge, I told my guys on my signal that we would run. And that immediately fire started we would hit the dirt and return fire, because we've got two LMGs here, we can open up with very heavy fire power. And the Lynx started coming in and I saw the Lynx started coming and I said, let's go. And what happened is all hell broke loose. People broke out of this bush in front of us and started running in all directions and particularly in our direction, women, men and we were running hell for leather, no fire was coming our way and I never, ever saw any weapons on any of those people. The Lynx came in and I saw him come and I thought he's going to go and take these people out, this is all happening very, very fast. To cut a long story short, our dumb radio operator said, it's the ones that are running, and didn't identify us properly. And he identified us. We had Day-Glo on the top of our heads...anyway, to describe the Lynx, it was a Cessna aircraft, it had 20mm Browning cannon, and frantem. Twin engine Cessna...I don't know. It came in, it was no more than 150 metres from us, top of tree height, only one tree in the middle of this thing, and he opened up on us from 150 metres, opened up with those 20mm Browning. I don't know how I'm still alive. I can still feel the bullets whistling past me on either side and that distinctive blue colour of them coming past. It's almost like they're in slow motion now in my mind. And they were exploding shells. That was the blue ones, they're exploding shells. And they exploded underneath the 2 RAR LMG guy, blowing him into the air without him being hurt at all. He blew into the air, his number two was blown sideways, and he was completely blown into the air, and he then came down. That was the last I saw of my LMG pair, and to this day I really hold it against them. They dived into a ravine and we never saw them</p>

	again.
Interviewer	END OF SIDE B (<i>counter at 542</i>)
	TAPE TWO SIDE A
Brian	<p>The story...yes, I don't know, that's Parabats, Parabats stuff, and I won't give you their names. They then...these women and men without...no it was actually now just men in front of us...the LMG guy was staggering to his...they wanted to shoot and this is maybe why I cautioned you about this thing, I just instinctively made a decision to stand between him and those guys who I saw as civilians, and he was screaming and I was screaming at him not to shoot, not to shoot, not to shoot, and we took these three guys captive, and...I could just imagine what it was like to be that RAR guy. He really...interestingly he was Matabele and his number two was Shona. And we took them to the hide that night and it was just three of us, the guys were taking shots into the mountain the whole time. I'd very carefully taken a hide with an entrance exit kind of plan with whatever, it was a very good hide.</p>
Interviewer	When you say the guys were taking shots into the mountain...
Brian	<p>Yes, just from the dark, we were being shot at, guerrillas. They knew we were up there somewhere. We...my radio operator arrived on the bloody scene and I gave him a fat earful, a klap. Sorry, sorry, I missed out a very important part. Now this is going, he wants to shoot the guys and the Lynx is coming around again, and I'm thinking, he now like twilight, I pulled out a roll of Day-Glo and I was holding it, I was praying, I was absolutely praying, because I knew in my heart of hearts that he had his finger on the frantan now, and that that takes out 800 metres, 100 metres wide in that open mealie field, we'd have had no chance. I was just going, don't, don't, don't, don't, and in my mind I can still see this thing above, I can almost see his eyes. Anyway, now we get back there, my bloody LMG team arrive in the morning, they nearly got shot by us because this guys on thing whatever, but fortunately we identified them. Anyway we hadn't used the radio at all because I didn't want to give away our position. I contacted the thing, said we had three prisoners, and they were told to go to a particular road. We went to this road, we offloaded our prisoners, our orders were to stay there that night, it was a miserable bloody night, everybody was a bit grumpy and whatever because of what had happened. I was grumpy with the guys. We were then ordered to go to 2 RAR base, we arrived there the next night, and it was a lekker story because we got there and this was enormous Matabele sergeant major. Huge. And he was pissed. Now we were these white soldiers and there was this very interesting interaction between us. I was this white sergeant and whatever, and I kind of described to him, I'm a bit hardegat and whatever, and I was proper military protocol addressed him properly, he sort of slouched to his feet and whatever, and he was giving me a hard time about being a South African being there and whatever. And his RAR guys were sent away, my guys</p>

	<p>were given some rations, a couple of beers and he told me to stay. And I said on condition that one of my radio operators stays with me. He said, aah fine, whatever. He didn't want to stay with me, he wanted to be with the other two guys. But anyhow I said, stay with me. And he was giving me a really hard time, and then eventually he brought a case of 24 Rhodesian Castles and he said, let's see who can drink. And I finished my 12 and he finished his 12, and I have to admit I don't know how many he'd had before him, but we passed out at the same time. <i>Laughs</i> We then went back, we were then taken the next day back to our base in Chiredzi, and the first thing that...well, as soon as I'd finished my report to our commanders, I went looking for that pilot. And he was within the Selous Scout base, and which we were not allowed to go into, but I told the guy the story, he said, go, go and find him. Found him, and he said, you're here, and he took a bottle of Scotch and he squeezed the...there's a lot about alcohol in the story...squeezed the top of the top and said, you and I are going to sit here, and he told me the story from his side. And he said he definitely...he said, I'm absolutely right. He didn't know why he didn't fire the frantam first time out. Because he did see guys coming from both directions, so he thought, which was which? And he said the machine guns were better, and he was very grateful that nobody had been killed or even hurt, and he said, you're absolutely right, I didn't see your Day-Glo, I didn't see anything, and you're absolutely right, I had my finger on the button and I do not know what made me pull it off. He said, for all intents and purposes you were the enemy, this was what it was, and he said, I don't know what made me pull it off. That lieutenant I heard eventually flew that Lynx out of Rhodesia.</p>
Interviewer	Do you know his name?
Brian	<p>I did, you know I'm terrible with names and dates. I really am. So that was the one story there. The other thing that I remember very distinctly about that, was Christmas Eve where the farmers held a party, Christmas Eve and invited us along. There were some strange South Africans there. Don't know who they were, but what it was, was also a mask, they were planning to take their stuff and get out the country and all sorts of things like that, that were going on. But I remember the kids getting together and singing Christmas carols, there wasn't a dry eye in the place, it was terrible. It was very, very sad. But there was quite a lot of animosity between us and the Rhodesians and a lot of it was, I'm telling you that they saw us as...I'm talking about the white farmers, the racist South Africans and that they did things the right way in their country and whatever. It was a conflict especially between the Rhodesians and our Afrikaans guys. That's all I can really describe about it. But there was a lot of tension at that party, between some of those farmers and some of our guys. I didn't feel the tension at all, I wasn't closely involved in that, but yes, they didn't see us as being the greatest thing since sliced bread.</p>

Interviewer	And this was in '79 just before the 1980 election which was in March?
Brian	Sure.
Interviewer	And you were on a camp so you were there for what, a month, two months?
Brian	I think I was on that camp was about a two month camp, seven weeks I think. Something like that. A little bit of time beforehand and the rest of the time...I think we were in Rhodesia for about five weeks. In that whole Chiredze area.
Interviewer	And how many Parabats were deployed with you at that stage?
Brian	A company. Being a student company the number would probably not have been absolutely defined as a proper company level. I think the other thing is...and funnily enough some things block my mind and I don't know why, but I'm sure it was there, that it happened that I have to tell my story of Colonel Breytenbach. We were going on fire force...it was there. We were going on fire force, I had my stick, he arrived, I came to attention, there's no saluting, you're already in battle mode but we're about to leave on the air strip, and he said to me, sergeant, permission to join your stick. And I said, permission granted colonel, please take over my stick. He said, no, I want to be your wing man. So I got one of our guys to stand down, he came, I was absolutely crapping myself that I would do something wrong, whatever. We did the operation, it was a clearing operation, major, there were a lot of troops involved. He remained my wing man throughout. At some point in time when everything had quietened down he came to me and he said, sergeant, permission to leave your stick in order to take over the battle ground. Colonel, permission granted. You know, Bats, we worshipped that man. There's not a man that I know who doesn't. I'm not talking about PFs and all of that, I don't even want to know those guys. I'm talking about the guys who, National Servicemen that whatever, did all of their stuff. And that is the reason we worshipped that man. He wouldn't give you two inches if you were slack, but he was by the book, he respected you absolutely. He respected me, the sergeant that I was trained to run that stick, that was my job, I knew what I was doing, and he just wanted to be the wing man. To be in the battle.
Interviewer	During that, you say it was a clearing operation, did you come under fire, were you shooting yourselves?
Brian	Yes.
Interviewer	So there was action all around?
Brian	We personally were only under long range fire, and returned long range fire. We didn't have very close action fire.
Interviewer	But nevertheless the colonel had joined you.

Brian	Yes.
Interviewer	And he could have been commanding the battle from...
Brian	He could have. He just took his place as a rifleman would do.
Interviewer	Now this camp takes place over seven, eight weeks, whatever. You've been under fire quite a lot, you've done some shooting yourself, you've nearly been killed by your own forces, or the Rhodesian forces but they're the same side as you...
Brian	Absolutely.
Interviewer	You've got between a man with a machine gun and some unarmed civilians and you've saved the civilians' lives, and a couple of weeks later you're back playing varsity league cricket and going to the pub on a Friday afternoon and trying to date the prettiest girl in the class. Isn't that extreme schizophrenia? Once again, your mind must battle to handle these two different worlds?
Brian	Absolutely. I know that it inculcated, now having seen a psychologist and everything, and that it inculcated certain behaviours in me that were extremely unusual behaviours. I would get very weepy, parties I would be there as the life and soul and then I would just go off into a corner, I would just go off somewhere to sit with a beer, cry, didn't know why, depression, all of those things, those things manifested themselves very strongly with me in later life. Certainly didn't link the whole thing up, just couldn't...and didn't want to tell anybody about it because I felt a bit screwed up about it, but that's how I used to behave. And I think a very fast temper developed within me...yes...that also manifested itself with me and things would trigger me off, and you know, I mean, I promise you...and this went on way after I finished my last camp in '86 that an explosion would happen, I'd hit the deck. I'd hit the deck and roll. <i>Laughs</i> It could be just over there. Guys used to laugh. But some guys understood it, so you'd be so embarrassed but it was just absolute instinct. It doesn't happen any more bow, but I can tell you this, that there are times when I can imagine myself in that uniform in action again tomorrow, today, to this. I don't say that I am motivated to do it, I'm saying it comes to me quite clearly, that I feel the exhilaration, and the adrenalin in it on occasions. It comes back to me.
Interviewer	Is there an element of also being young and fit and also belonging? You belonged to the Parabats.
Brian	Absolutely. Absolutely. I know this from a friend of mine who was with the US navy seals, and about this belonging, contextually that sense of belonging, that sense of wanting to go back to be with the guys, you know them, you trust them, you would work with them again. There were some guys like those two guys I would never want to be with them again. Ok, they dropped me really badly, we could have had our asses shot off. I think it was cowardice, that kept their heads down, whatever they did. But

	nevertheless, and there were a couple of other guys...but predominantly my buds from back then, the mortar group who were a fantastic group of guys. Mortars were your additional training in Bats. You were trained as a rifleman and you were trained then as mortars, and I was trained as OP. We had a huge rivalry amongst us, huge competitiveness amongst us, but today we're very close as mates. Now that we've met up again. Very close. And all of them have been through their nightmares but you know, tomorrow Kevin and Andy and Mallie were together and we had our uniforms on and they said old dad's army go, we would be happy going together, just as simple as that. Why? Because of the bond.
Interviewer	Yes, the bond, first initially you're trained but then having nearly died together.
Brian	Sure.
Interviewer	And that's interesting, you belong to this unit and you experienced, I suppose, terrible or frightening things together. You come out of your camps, you go back into a university campus and at that stage South Africa was becoming very politicised, there was big political change happening, you've had the '76 uprising, and then in the early eighties, stuff started happening in the townships, many universities were fairly politicised, in fact your Chancellor Schreiner, his daughter joined the ANC and was jailed for it, how did you deal with that? Were you surprised at what people were saying about political change and the political climate in the country? Or did you think that, well I'm a soldier and I'll play cricket on Saturday or rugby, and I won't worry about that?
Brian	No. I was very curious about things. Maritzburg we had a lot of black students starting to come on to campus. It was interesting, we started to interact with them, mostly in the arts colleges and things like that, I must admit. And in my third year I decided to run for SRC. But I didn't want to be a political activist. I ran for SRC and I don't know what the portfolio was called now but it was like Student Affairs, you used to look after things that students needed who were coming from overseas, whatever, you had to look after Student Affairs, it was the portfolio that I'd actually plumed for, that I wanted to go for. But I also joined the NRP under Vause Raw. I was inspired by the farmer, Gerrie...he was a farmer who was inspired and turned by...was it McGovern?
Interviewer	In the US?
Brian	Yes. George McGovern. He was the guy that was in the wheelchair, was he? Was it McGovern. Whatever. And doing American style politics...Gerrie...Gerrie...anyway he inspired me and I then decided to start up a Maritzburg youth NRP league, and I worked for him because Maritzburg was going to be his constituency, I worked for him, I set that up. I billed myself as the NRP youth leader in Pietermaritzburg and on campus. And I confused the hell out of everybody because they didn't know

where this oke was coming from...everybody knew I was a Parabat. Here's the NRP, he's talking openly, fairly, squarely, encouraging black guys to come and join his thing, and I know...there was the old bugger there, he was definitely a BOSS agent, there was another guy who was definitely a BOSS agent, or if not BOSS...suddenly my military police file came to light, the military police came to visit me, stuff like that started to happen, I started to get interviewed by.. well strange people used to come up to me and start talking to me and whatever, it was a very strange and interesting time. I was elected, I duly went to NUSAS Congress, I was a very naïve guy, I got introduced to lesbianism, with a serious level, and all sorts of other things, student leaders, whatever, and a guy who really cornered me and who really wanted to get hold of me was the guy who shot Colin Eglin. Um... David Beelders...he was head of right wing student things on thing. English speaking, you'd never know it! I thought he was quite a gentle kind of a guy. Very much strongly wanted to recruit me and whatever, but I was an individual. That's why I went and became an OP post guy because I always liked to be on my own. Anyway, it was a hell of an experience, NUSAS and whatever. But you know, NUSAS Congress, and a couple of weeks later I was on a camp. *Laughs* I can't remember where we went in '78, but yes, the NUSAS Congress and then I'm in a blooming uniform again. So I don't know, maybe you say to yourself...I also became very friendly at varsity and if I'd spent more time with...I'm a curious person, I was curious about everything, Auret van Heerden. I'd like to find out what happened to Orette. I know that Auret was one of the most intelligent human beings I'd ever met in my life. His labour studies and whatever that he was doing, and that he got taken in, he got back to us six months later a shadow of his former self. I heard that he might have died. He'd been beaten and shocked and whatever, and whatever. Anyway I'll say this right no, Auret was no subversive, he was not anything, he really believed in stuff, he was one of the most liked guys on campus, although not kind of...because they were so different and so intelligent. But anyway...so yes, me as a person, I'm mixing as well. I'm mixing with the Zimbos, or the Rhodesians who think, I play rugby for goodness sake, I'm mixing with all sorts of guys, I had sort of liberal leaning politics...NRP in those terms was extremely conservative, but I mean in the light of the things I certainly was encouraging myself to mix and get to understand black students on campus. I was just living the life of a student and then I'd be in the army. But that didn't worry me! When I was a soldier, I was a soldier! I didn't look at the political outcomes, although as it got closer and closer, and in 1986 and the guys were called up to do township duty, I refused to do the township duty and I spent time at Murray Hill, and at that point in time I was approached by a number of Afrikaans officers and talked to, I was asked to go and join them in the officer's clubhouses, and they talked to me and whatever, and they wanted to know if I was interested in joining a particular new thing that was being started up, and about being...they'd seen my

	record, and they need guys like me, they needed COs like me, and this was not official but they're going to start this whole new thing, whatever, and I told them to fuck off. The next night I was made to be a waiter to the troops in this thing, I was ordered to do that. And that was my punishment. So be it.
Interviewer	And were you were called up for any more camps after '86?
Brian	No, '86 was my last one. And the thing is I was in the office, I wrote my file out as well. But I had done my genuine 12 years and that was it, so I was finished.
Interviewer	And you decided that you didn't want to serve in the townships because...what actually pushed you?
Brian	Well by that time my feeling was I had now gathered an understanding of...I understood the world, and as far as I had reached in my conclusion we were South Africans. What we were doing over there was stopping Communism. That that was what we were fighting about, that was whatever, and this was now a different story about my country which I did not fully understand at all, I can assure you. 1986 I'm now 29 years old, but I still don't fully understand my country's politics at all. But I just felt, no, this is not what it is. And there was some stuff that went on in those townships, I'm so glad I wasn't there. I'm so glad. I would not have known whether I could have done the stand between the guys and the situations. I mean, there was some stuff that went on, but anyway. I'm just glad that I never did that, never did that.
Interviewer	And when you meet with the other guys you say that there'd been this hiatus for many, many years and you hadn't met and then you got together, and you say, many of the guys had been through similar things to you they'd had tough times thinking about the past, they've had the nightmares, they've been to see the counsellors, and so on...
Brian	Well no, nobody had really been to see counsellors and stuff, until 25 years plus later, they started to do that. the guys, it was prompted by one of the lieutenants who never went on to go and do camps. We then talked about it as far as we were concerned...he went on Carte Blanche and we happened to be watching Carte Blanche...I mean, I broke down, I was on my own, and I just broke down, I started hysterically crying and whatever...I couldn't believe it, I saw it was Mark on the TV so it wasn't so bad, but what he was telling was exactly what I'd gone through. That he would talk about punching doors. I would put my fist through doors, right through doors. I would smash my head against walls. And it was just lightning thing. I never hit my wife or anything like that or whatever. A couple of guys got into that kind of stuff but it was never there. I used to take my frustration...and he talked about this and he talked about the things that would happen to him, the strangest things and he couldn't explain, that eventually one day he stopped, he talked to his wife, he told her. And I was already divorced by that stage and whatever, and he wrote a whole lot of articles which I posted on to my ex wife and

	<p>said, here, maybe this explains my behaviour or whatever bizarre things that I used to do. And it was only that that we started talking about it. My immediate relief was because my buddy was an ex US navy Seal, 33 months in Vietnam, had turned psychologist and he and I went on a 72 hour drinking binge. And he put a lot of early thoughts into my head about how to explain the stuff to myself, and to whatever. And then got hold of Kevin Vos, and then Andy Prew (??), and then we got together for this reunion. Which was really great, and one of the greatest tragedies is that my dear, dear friend Chris Mouton who I'd seen a few years after we'd done '75, met him that day, he'd come down from Namibia, I was so happy, we saw each other, and two weeks later he said, I'm coming to Joburg, he's got cancer and he died a year later. Like a hard thing those. But there's a 81 story I want to tell you about. Yes, that was Oshi hell hole. We had been called up, and in a sense of anger, I can't remember the Commandant's name, Monty somebody...</p>
Interviewer	Bret?
Brian	<p>Monty Bret, yes that's his name. Because if he did this he needed this camp, and he...I think that was his name...anyway, and the he was going to get promotion and whatever, so they just called us up. And we were taken to Oshivelo and Oshivelo had had a yellow fever scare and they put us in this temporary camp and we called it Oshi hell hole because there was no latrines, we had to dig our own latrines, these were the Bats, we used to having everything done for us, whatever, whatever. I remember us having competitions with flies with little cotton tied to their legs, we wanted to go and train, they wouldn't train us, so we sat on our bums, we were getting angrier and angrier and angrier. And then they made us stand guard at water towers and stuff, and the guys were getting really pissed off and very slagpat and it was very hard to keep them under control. We had an ex Recce with us as well...a couple of ex Recces, Kevin and Mike and I can't remember what their surnames were, and it doesn't matter...and everybody is getting really frustrated and then the next thing they dropped us into southern Angola to patrol, and then we were told from there we were going to do butterfly ops. So we were lifted from place to place, we had some skirmishes with some small groups of Cubans. And then I remember I was called to be part of a leader group thing, there were Three Two Battalion guys and we were told that this was a big hit, and Three Two Battalion stuffed it up because this wasn't a big hit, this was a major hit. They dropped us on a brigade...sorry, where I said earlier the Cubans in '75, it wasn't a brigade, it was a battalion. This was a brigade they dropped us on. All formally conventional warfare stuff with forward trenches, the whole thing and whatever, and whatever. It was absolute hell. Our guys dropped in to those things, they had those zeroed in with their mortars. Thank the lucky stars of the Bats, only one guy was killed. That's where the chopper pilot got his second Honoris Crux...come on, what's his name?</p>

Interviewer	Walker?
Brian	<p>Walker. He got his second Honoris Crux there. He was absolutely mad, I nearly got my head chopped off by his blades. He was fantastic, he was such an inspiration. And I guess he was driven by adrenalin and he was brave and maybe he was a hero, but he went and got our guys out, he went and got that chopper out, got the guy's body out and a couple of...yes, I mean, he was a fantastic pilot. And he anyway, now it's getting towards nightfall, and our dear commandant, I'm sure it's Monty Brett. he says, no we must now dig in for the night and...there was one of those classic things I'd read in the comics when I was a kid, and this other airforce Colonel says, when did you get your Colonel's pip? He says there and then I got mine a month before you so I'm now in command, we are taking your troops out. And I remember Walker going on the radio, yes, please, we're going to get these guys out of there! We'd have been slaughtered. Because it was their trenches, their forward positions, their everything, it was all properly built, everything, we would have just been slaughtered during the night. And we couldn't have any air cover, anything, because they wouldn't have know, the choppers couldn't have helped us anyway. Anyway they lifted us all out of there, and yes, that was a hell of a thing. Was that '8? I get my camps mixed up, so if I've got that one wrong and the dates, and I might well have got that...but I just remember the whole thing and I remember I was going back and the Canberra bombers going over and we could hear in the distance they were just blowing this place, but then the MiGs came and they took out a couple of bunkers. All we wanted to do is get home. I'm so silly and I apologise to everybody that I can't mix up the two, but it might have been that, or that might have been completely different to the other one in '81. But what I remember is the other thing is now, my buddy Fer, had been a Portuguese guy, and he was 31 years old, we got back to Ondangwa...which was Bat base?</p>
Interviewer	Ondangwa.
Brian	<p>Sorry, Ondangwa. We got back, we hadn't bathed for six weeks or something, and our buddies were waiting for us there with cold beers and everything, and we're standing around on the tar strip and whatever and we've got our beers and I'd finished one and I had my second one in my hand and rah rah, and what it was, was Three Two Battalion was down and they needed a search and rescue to go out – as a sergeant you always volunteered. That was just the way it was done. And I then asked Ferdi, the Portuguese oke if he wanted to come with me, and he said, yes, he would come. This was definitely '81. No, he said, he wouldn't come. He didn't want to come because this was his last camp and he was going home. We got in the aircraft, we went in there, there was not a shot fired, there was nothing, we brought the guys home. Early the next morning, I got back, my company commander was waiting for me, my bag was packed and he said you're getting on the next flight. He said, Ferdi's already left. I</p>

	<p>said, what do you mean Ferdi's already left? He said, he went out for a wee in the middle of the night, and a drunk guy in a vehicle who's now under lock and key...so don't go there, Rogers...ran him over. And he's barely going to make it. And we flew back to One Mil, I eventually got on the next flight Flossie back, and I still hadn't showered or bathed or anything and I got to One Mil, I bathed and showered there. And this is what opened up my mind, because this is the part of the story that I really want to tell. is, I then had time to wander around, we were waiting for Ferdi's folks to come, I had to phone them and tell them, and what was happening and whatever, and waited for them to come. And I went walking around, and I noticed all these guys had legs missing and stuff, and whatever, and whatever. And I'm going, but where did this all happen? And these were combat guys. And I started talking to them. Yes, they'd lost it in combat. And I'm talking hundreds of guys! Who'd been in combat situations. These weren't just sick, lame and lazies. And I was shocked! I was absolutely flabbergasted! And the great tragedy at the end of the story is that Ferdi died before his parents got there. It was not nice. And I went home from Pretoria, again, on my own, lonely, another one of those...left him behind, whatever. But there's the contrast, is that until I went home and got lonely the camaraderie was that my captain knew that I would want to be with Ferdi. That he had sent me there and I was also under orders though to be there and to accompany them as a sergeant and whatever. And that's how Bats looked after each other, that's what they did. And that was the difference. I then met up with the head of One Mil and I can't tell you who he is...it wasn't Wouter because he was the thing...it was the head of One Mil, I was a consultant to Europe Assistance at the time and with their medical rescue and he was doing some job for them as well, and I confronted him on this. And this guy, the head of One Mil, and I said to him, but one day that story has got to be told, china. And I'm talking about 1997 probably...this guy was visibly petrified about telling this story. And he said, absolutely not, he'll never open his mouth anywhere. His words were, I'll get taken out, in Afrikaans. Those were his words to me. And yes...be that as it may.</p>
Interviewer	<p>So the suggestion there is that the casualties were much higher than the general public knew?</p>
Brian	<p>Much higher than I knew. In Bats we never suffered a lot of casualties. And I think one: is we were protected in our operations, i.e. protected in that we got given specific operations to do, specifically and whatever. Two: we were highly trained, and three: we didn't want to die. We knew what it was like to be there and whatever. But as I've gone on in years I've met many guys, and thing is you just disperse to parts of the country and you're left off there and nobody knows. Then I hear about this guy, you meet a guy, and you meet a guy today and his eye is shot out or his fingers are shot off or this or that, or shrapnel in his butt. You know you meet them. Those casualties were much bigger than we were ever let...I don't even know what figures we</p>

	were ever told?
Interviewer	And that's an aspect of this whole war, at times your operations would have been secret, would have been secret that you were in Rhodesia, would have been secret some of your cross border raids into Angola, didn't that ever affect you when you came back and you were struggling with the emotions of battle, but you couldn't talk to anybody because it was a secret war?
Brian	Without doubt. Without doubt it was a secret war. When you were there it's not secret, when you come home it's secret. And that's what made me angry. I tell you who else I became angry at, and this may be unfounded, it may not be. But I got angry at MOTHS. And my reason for that is, I went to one MOTH hall and they really weren't interested in us. And they are people who went through war, who got organised in order to support each other, and they did nothing for us. They had the ability. They made not have had the funds, but we were young and energetic and could have raised the funds. But they did not see it, whether they were blind to it, blinded by it, I don't know, they made no effort. No effort. Some guys say, they went to MOTHS. I said, but whoever invited me to MOTHS, where did I ever see this? I'm there 12 years, nobody ever says to me, come to the MOTHS, this is it, come and talk about things. Nobody ever. I got the impression they actually didn't want us. I never heard of any parabats going to MOTHS.
Interviewer	So essentially the seniors in your society, the guys who'd served in the Second War in Korea, your sense was that the seniors in society who had actually seen combat, actually had abandoned you, let you drift.
Brian	Absolutely. Absolutely. And I'm saying, that they should have done...and I know that they saw terrible times, and I know that the wars that they went through are probably, from a battle point of view, worse than the stuff that I ever saw. Because they probably saw more and they probably saw it for a longer times, and they probably saw it whatever. They didn't face the psychological pressures of in out, in out, in out, that we went through. And becoming a different thing, and it's skirmishes, and it's this and it's quick and it's hard and it's fast, that was our war. But I know that they went through absolute hell, but they could have recognised that there would be problems for us. I don't know. I don't that why. I would love one day to find out why? Why they didn't?
Interviewer	And also along those lines, ok that was pre '94, in '94 South Africa changed and there seems to have been a reluctance amongst people who had served in the SADF in the nineties to talk about it, possibly because the new government had come into place. But it seems that people are talking about it a lot more now, there's a lot more websites and a lot more books and so on...and in fact we're doing this project...has any of, in your various business encounters, sports encounters, have black

	South Africans said to you, hey, did you fight in that war?
Brian	Yes, I've had a coup of contacts with people, not a hell of a lot. <i>laughs</i> And funnily enough a crazy thing happened is that a black guy hit on me in a pub...yes, absolutely, and he told me that he was Umkhonto we Sizwe, and we started chatting and I told him I was a parabat and eventually he put his hand on my leg and he said, listen, he was a big guy, listen we got to go with men and whatever because there were no women and you look kind of nice <i>laughs</i> This was an interesting experience. And I met a guy, I'm trying to remember his name...Rashied, he was an ANC operative quite high up and he's now...he's with the Reserve Bank or something, head of security, I don't know, an Indian guy, Rashied or something like that, and I made him very angry because I told him I was a parabat and whatever. I'm politically pretty liberal and I actually have voted ANC. I see myself that way. I see myself a forward looking person. I have talked to many black guys about their part in the struggle. I tend to keep quiet about what I do now, what I've done. Most black guys will say, yes, I served and that's it. They don't want to tell me more about their situations. Don't know how to take it further.
Interviewer	Brian, I have asked most of the questions I wanted to, and we could always speak further in the future. As we sit now, you'd said earlier, that under the right circumstances you'd go back into that uniform tomorrow, not for political reasons but because of the unit, because of the parachute battalion.
Brian	Any day. Any day. It would give me immense pride to stand next to Andy and Kevin, despite the fact that we aren't quite shaped like we used to be shaped. <i>Laughs</i>
Interviewer	But you don't look back and say, hell we fought for the defenders of apartheid, you fought because you wanted to be in the parachute battalion, is that right?
Brian	Number one. Number two, I did rationalise Communism. And probably have rationalised it quite...thing is that was pretty much our role. I think that the government of the day actually wasn't fighting Communism, it was fighting to defend apartheid. But actually higher up or bigger globally Germany, USA, Britain, were actually fighting Communism. So they were using the government that wanted to defend apartheid to fight things, so actually who was I fighting for? The USA or Germany I suppose, I don't know at the end of the day. And yes...so yes, I didn't fight for politics, I didn't fight for apartheid, I...I went there, I was a proud Parabat, I was proud of my military training, I was proud of what we did, I can honestly say on this tape now, I never, ever...although there were occasions where I could have made certain decisions, I'm very proud that I'm a proud soldier and I just served with distinction and that there was never...I was never party to any abuse of any civilian, any prisoner, any time, anywhere...apart from the guy's throat we slit, but that was life or death for us. That was in a conflict situation.

Interviewer	And that wasn't a civilian, that was a soldier too.
Brian	That was a soldier. No, no, he wasn't a civilian at all. He was a Cuban soldier. And I still think today how terrible it is for his parents and who he was and whatever. It would be magnificent if you had some guy who's actually worked it out and I could meet his parents, say sorry. Love to do that. Love to say sorry to his parents. <i>(emotional)</i>
	END OF INTERVIEW <i>(counter at 462)</i>

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