

Anton Oberholzer Ratel 20mm Gunner 17/01/08
 Missing Voices Project Interviewed by Mike Cadman

	TAPE ONE SIDE A
Interviewer	Tell me a bit about where you went to school and so on.
Anton	I matriculated at Dirkie Uys on the Bluff. Now of course, it's called something else. Back in '85, I matriculated. We of course had already by then received our papers and we knew that February we needed to report to Natal Command. I was to be shipped out to Bloemfontein. 1 SAI was my base. My brother, I think it was the same day, he was going somewhere else. But yes, grew up basically on the Bluff since I was one years old. Typical Durban guy from the Bluff. Grew up in a middle class Afrikaans family. My dad was a senior state advocate at that stage. My mom was a teacher. So typical white suburban guy. And then reported to Natal Command somewhere in February. New now of course, none of my school friends were shipped to the same base, I knew absolutely no-one and there we were.
Interviewer	When you got your papers, did you have an idea of what the army was about or was it just something you knew that you were required by society to do?
Anton	Yes, it was obviously compulsory. It was a big no no. There was a stigma attached to the guys whose family were rich and they were sort of sent to Portugal or wherever to gyppo the army. It was a stigma attached (<i>not to do military service</i>)... that as a white South African you had to go and fight for your country, and the Communist force was pretty strong and moving towards South West Africa...
Interviewer	So you go off to 1 SAI, and on the train you get on, you've got all these other guys with you, and are there corporals, are there captains, are there lieutenants with you, what happens?
Anton	A couple of guys going through your equipment, but they might have had rank but I didn't have a clue what a stripe or a star or a castle was, so you just have these guys going through your equipment, dogs going through your equipment looking for meths...because the guys were sniffing meths or drinking meths...looking for dagga and all that. So the dogs were just searching through your equipment make sure you don't have any...the guys who had meths to polish their boots it was obviously confiscated. And put on a cabin on the train with I think 3 other guys. And there you were, you introduce yourself to the guys. They were from Empangeni, I think the one guy was, one guy from Ballito. And there you were just with strangers making conversation.
Interviewer	So it takes you a while to get to 1 SAI and then what happens when you get into the station at 1 SAI?

Anton	In the station at 1 SAI there's probably some guy with rank, I can't remember what his rank was, pulling everybody together, putting us on trucks...must have been Samil 50s or something like that, maybe Wit Olifants, I can't remember...putting us on the trucks and the trucks taking us all in a row, a string of us...sorry I wasn't called up to 1 SAI...sorry...I was called up to 1 SDB in Tempe as well, because Tempe consisted of the bats, 1 SAI and 1 SDB. So it was
Interviewer	Special Services Battalion.
Anton	Yes...the Noddy cars...
Interviewer	The Noddy cars, the Elands.
Anton	So we were shipped to there, sorry,...yes. Landed there, took us all our, and you're all standing in a queue of course with your luggage and your bags and all your stuff you needed. And guys of rank, must have been someone quite senior, sitting on the side making comments of your weight, and why are you so skinny, and does your mother know you're here and that sort of thing. And how old are you? And you're basically going to do your medical. That was the first step, was to see if the guys were fit enough...it wasn't a medical to find out if you were K1, G1 or whatever the case was, it was just standards...some guys got injections or eyesight, that sort of thing.
Interviewer	Just to make sure that you weren't blind or about to have a heart attack.
Anton	That's it.
Interviewer	At school did you play sport? You talk about the guy saying, why are you so skinny? I can see you're a tall guy.
Anton	Yes, I was extremely skinny. Abnormally skinny. No, I didn't play much sports. I like shooting so I did a bit of shooting with the rifle at the rifle range at school. That was my sport, was shooting. And that's basically it. I went through the medical thing and immediately you are chased or you had to run to your bungalow to pick a bed and lock up your stuff.
Interviewer	This is the stuff you've been issued with, all your civvies and...
Anton	From there, with our civvy stuff they're starting to issue our equipment. It went so fast, I didn't even get one of these little bags that you're issued with...I can't remember what it's called...because we're still using the old webbing. We were issued with the old webbing, and this little pouch that you carried, a field bag or whatever it's called. I didn't even get that. Didn't even know that I didn't get it, so <i>laughs</i> you're shoved into your bungalow with your trommel, which is damn heavy, and you had to lock your trommel with one of your locks that had to bring with from civvies land, and lock your kas with your other lock, and the stuff couldn't fit, and you squeeze it in, and they're shouting at you to hurry up because you're wasting their time, and that sort of

	thing. And then you go stand out outside in your civvies for someone to come and talk to you and give you a briefing of why you're here, that sort of thing.
Interviewer	And this is the start of 19...?
Anton	1986.
Interviewer	And this is January, so it's hot, summer?
Anton	Feb. Yes, hot Bloemfontein. Hot, dry. I'm used to more tropical not so dry. So the Natal guys and the Cape guys, cracked lips and they weren't used to it.
Interviewer	And then you realise that now you're in the army and it's all starting. Your first few weeks were straight basics. Up early, inspection, lots of PT.
Anton	Yes, I think it must have been...I don't even think it was a month. Must have been 3 weeks or 2 weeks. 2 weeks in, the rumours started, as it does in the army, that we are shipping out to 1 SAI, the other end of Tempe, for whatever reason. And obviously some guys were starting a rumour and we were all called in and the captain came out and this and this and this, and one of the Durban guys stood up and, yes he wants to ask is it true? And he's, no, no, hogwash! Don't believe the rumours and whatnot. I think 2 days later they shipped us out to 1 SAI. <i>Laughs</i> So it was all true. So the rumour was that we weren't enough, and we weren't a lot of guys, that they were going to fill it with the June intake and we should join 1 SAI. And we were fearing for our life. 1 SAI, that's infantry, that's foot soldiers, we don't want to go there. Although 1 SDB (<i>1 SSB – 1 Special Services Battalion in English</i>) for me, that first couple of weeks was quite rough. We haven't even had our classification in terms of fitness and our mental stability and they were already chasing us around. And after a while someone told one of the guys, hey, hey these guys didn't classify, don't let them roll around in the dust, wait for classification to come out, but once the classification came out they continued, so I was obviously classified all clear and ready for...
Interviewer	That was your G1K1.
Anton	That's it. A couple of guys who were not made...a couple of guys that were there just up to it and we never saw them again, I don't know where they went. But the rest of us packed up and ready to ship to...and there we go with all our equipment to 1 SAI
Interviewer	So you've been in the army for couple of days, you've already experienced being chased around, you've experienced rumours...
Anton	And shouted at, and swore at. Guys cursing you and calling you all weird names, the old rowe, and the ou manne were the other guys we're not allowed to mess with them. We could see they were hardened guys. They were basically just a year older

	than us but they looked hardened <i>laughs</i> they looked much older.
Interviewer	On your first couple of weeks in the army, even a 19 year old looks older than you.
Anton	Yes, absolutely. Their hair was slightly longer, your hair was like cut off. 1 SDB guys cut their hair very, very short, so it was very short, and we got to 1 SAI and their hair was a bit longer. We don't know why that was, but we were in the same town but the haircut was different, the rules were different. The way you made your bed in 1 SDB was more strict the way you made...so 1 SAI was really slightly softer, and we expected worse. So when we got to 1 SAI and our beds must be like this and we were a bit more paraat. Even in only that 3 weeks, than the other guys. So we were a bit one up, that our beds were a bit more neater than those guys.
Interviewer	That's very interesting, when you say 1 SDB, I think that's One Special Services Battalion?
Anton	That's what Sarel (<i>a close friend of Anton's</i>) called it, but we weren't there long enough to actually know...all we knew is that we're going to drive Noddy cars and what a Noddy car looked like inside, and on the outside it had a big cannon on its front, because it was obviously taking tanks out. But it was a very small and compact little vehicle. And I now, years later, understood why they moved us out, because a Noddy car wasn't even used in Angola. It was absolute rubbish. It couldn't even get out of the sand. Because the Angola sand was so thick. So we never ever saw Noddy cars in combat at all. So wasn't surprised that they moved us out.
Interviewer	So you then get across to 1 SAI and then your basics continue.
Anton	Yes, basics continue the first three months of course, your strict basics, where you didn't see a civilian or home for the first 3 months. I think it's first 3 months...I stand corrected...from there they take you into...sorry, after, you get a first weekend pass...only a weekend, I think it was, weekend was Friday morning until that Monday. Very, very short, where you could go home. And when you come back, they warned you, you're going to go do De Brug, which was like in the field training, and they tell you these horror stories about De Brug and we were obviously scared for our lives of De Brug. So you don't enjoy your first weekend home. You basically take your dirty laundry home and get it properly cleaned and that sort of stuff and get your gyppo...your seam stitched in by your mother...
Interviewer	And just for the record so that somebody listening to this will understand...that seam is normally when you're ironing your clothes you're meant to put a seam into the pants, and the way around it was to actually get somebody to sew an artificial seam.
Anton	That's it. Yes, and everybody does it because that's the standard

	trade, so you can just...no creases in it, but the seam is automatically...it's easier to iron.
Interviewer	I mean how tough was your basics?
Anton	Basics for me was quite rough, coming out of a very conservative home and knowing not one soul. Not one soul in the bungalow you know. There's Afrikaans guys, there's English guys, there's...the bungalows were split in though, the Joburg, Free State, Transvaal guys, were in a different company. The Durban and Cape Town guys in a different company, and the more outer regions of the Cape and those guys, Kuruman and those guys, Kroonstad, they were at a different company. So they wanted to keep the guys in the same sort of...the coast guys in the same...so you knew guys were from the coast and Cape Town is better than Durban and PE...so you always had the guys with attitude and all that, so it was quite rough. You knew no-one, and there were some guys obviously trying to play the leader, the big guys, and this and this, and they knew the most. So those were probably the toughest times because you knew no-one, everybody is shouting at you, you don't know what you're supposed to do and what not you're supposed to do. You're always running. You're always waking up half past four in the morning. Going to sleep late. So you're disorientated and it's this damn dry heat which you're running into and they keep forcing you to drink water. So those were possibly, those three months we were...probably the worst out of a point of view that you basically didn't really know what the hell hit you.
Interviewer	Did you think to yourself at some time, what am I doing here? Why don't I just go home and become a surfer.
Anton	Yes, the rumours then started that some guys during that time would then go and commit suicide. So no-one in the middle of the night would go to the loo. Because you don't want to walk into the loo and there's a guy hanging from the shower pipes. So the guys were quite afraid of guys disappearing and killing themselves off. So that was a concern. The other concern was some guys were contemplating, let's attempt suicide, hoping it will fail, so that the guys can see this guy is maybe not suitable and ship him off home. So there's a couple of guys talking about that and all these things run through your mind, that maybe if you slit your wrists and you don't bleed to death, that they'll say this guy's not stable, let's send him home. But then the rumour started that they throw you in DB for, I don't know how long, and then they extend your service and they might just send you off to some hell hole which is worse to where you are. <i>Laughs</i> So you carefully think about those things.
Interviewer	Did anybody ever try any of those things?
Anton	Not in my...actually only in my second year. In South West Africa, Omatea, Six One Mech. Two numbskulls did do it. their mistake was, they were talking about it in front of other guys...I overheard it...they were in the next tent, I didn't know these guys,

	<p>from a different platoon, and then they went and put an R4 rifle and one guy put his hand over the barrel and the other guy put his left hand over the barrel and with his other hand pulled the trigger and then the 5.56 round would go through their hands and damage their hands and then they'll be sent home or something. It backfired in the sense where the one guy pulled his hand away, so it basically half took his middle finger off. The other guy, quite damaged his hand, because what these monkeys, they don't realise is when an R4 or R5 round hits bone it starts to twirl and it does serious damage. So these guys' hands and fingers were pretty bad. And what happened was, they interviewed and asked, did you guys hear these guys talk? Yes, we did. There was a hearing, I was called into the hearing, these guys discuss it...because they said it was an accident, but it was so poorly planned and you could see it was an attempt to go out. So these guys were...we didn't see them again, they were shipped off somewhere, I don't know where to but we didn't want to be in their boots. <i>Laughs</i></p>
Interviewer	I think the threat was in those days, you could be sued for damaging army property.
Anton	Exactly. That was the threat, yes. It's happened to me once...a cannon exploded, the F2 20mm cannon, and they immediately wanted to sue me for damaging equipment because it blew off all my hair here, my eyebrows, because of the heat, and they immediately said, no, I must pay the R75 000 back because I damaged it. To stop me from making some claim that I almost died and I'm traumatised. So they drop everything if they see you calming down and you just carry on with life. <i>Laughs</i>
Interviewer	That's the cannon that was in the Ratel?
Anton	Yes.
Interviewer	Going back to your basics...so your basics go on and it's tough and you're pretty disorientated most of the time, you finally get through your basics, and that's when you get your first pass to go home.
Anton	That's it.
Interviewer	And did you explain to your folks that, hell, this was a tough to do or did you not talk about it much? Did you just want to have a couple of drinks with your mates...?
Anton	Yes. It was obviously over the phone when you spoke to your folks, they're going to buy you a plane ticket to fly you down...because to take a bus or a train to Durban, it's going to take you the whole weekend.
Interviewer	You're allowed out at six in the evening on Friday and you've got to be back by what midnight on Sunday.
Anton	Yes, yes, something like that, that's right. And they keep a close tab on you so you don't want to be late. So when you get home

	<p>you tell them, it's rough, they chase us around and stuff like that, but you're sort of basically pre warned that you don't...if you go running home crying to mommy, they'll make sure they'll send you somewhere worse. So you weren't going to sort of shout off your mouth. And the shortly before or after that, my brother arrived and I think his ordeal with basics were quite worse, because he was dragged around and whatnot and ? to my folks, has that happened to you? Well, they slap you around and drag you or whatnot, but it happens to everybody. It's pretty bad but my main concern was going back and going to De Brug.</p> <p><i>Laughs</i> The worst was still to come.</p>
Interviewer	And then you get back to De Brug and was it worse?
Anton	Initially yes...at that stage I was actually unfit.
Interviewer	Even after your basics?
Anton	<p>The basics...yes, because...they don't really...the exercises you do...the drilling all that is not really to make you that fit. It's basically to get in shape that the guys don't hurt themselves. The pre warming exercises and all that. And I was still not fit enough to pass the pull ups and sit ups on the evaluation. I'm sorry...push ups and pull ups. The sit ups I'd kill. Because I was so skinny I was like going like a jack hammer. The guys would stop and I was just going. Unfortunately two out of the three I failed so that wasn't good. But when you go to De Brug, there's no riding around. You had to jog wherever you had to go. So field training shooting, you go jog there. So through the movement from one point to the other, I became very fit. So one positive thing from De Brug was, we got back to evaluation, I killed it. That was a dream. You don't realise how fit you become, just running around all day, doing what you were supposed to do. But e Brug was...what was funny for De Brug was, they always had to bring the food out in these containers or...I don't know what we used to call them. And the food for us was better because we got the food first so we got the best helpings. The guys who got the food after us basically got all the scraps. So we didn't know that at that stage but we all got all the great food...so we ate better and systematically got fitter. Then your problem was sleeping in a tent outside and the nights started to become extremely cold. And I wasn't used to that kind of cold, and the days extremely hot. So that was the worst side of it, you were basically out in the field for weeks on end. But De Brug is a pretty horrible place.</p>
Interviewer	But at the same time they're teaching you how to use small rifles...
Anton	Yes.
Interviewer	And because you're in infantry school was it light machine guns, stuff like that?
Anton	Yes, it was the R4 rifle. The R4 rifle was our main weapon that you're issued with and you have to carry it with you all the time.

	<p>It's when you're trained and how many bullets per minute it shoots, and the magazine capacity and...and there you do trench...so there are our trenches there where you go and train who's going to throw a grenade, how to throw a grenade, what do you shout when you throw a grenade. How to prepare a grenade, what to do, what not to do. Night marches. How to read the stars if you're in the middle of the darkness, how to find out where north, south was. So that you more or less know where to go. Map reading. And the night march turned out into a disaster. At that point in time you don't get a lot of sleep. So when you go do the nag march, you go out and you walk with your platoon. The problem is there's absolutely no light. There was no moon in the sky. So you couldn't see your hand in front of your face. So the guy's helmet in front of you, you could sort of see his staaldak and you're following the staaldak. And then you walk up to the koppie, because Bloemfontein is full of koppies, and they say sit, we're going to wait for instructions on the radio where to go. So your platoon leader will now wait for instructions on where to go to see if the guys get lost. The problem was I put my head down backwards on an ant heap and I closed my eyes and I was gone. I open my eyes and everybody was gone. Another guy started to scream, so he also fell asleep and he started running, and I ran after him to say, listen don't scream, if they catch us, we're dead. What we need to do is we need to go and look for them. And then just pretend we didn't get lost. Now the platoon leader made an error. When you reform to march out, he's supposed to do a head count, and he didn't, he just walked. So, in the distance we saw a Samil 20 lights and he ran towards the Samil 20. I thought, I'm running after this guy to stop him, to say, this is probably Corporal something and if they catch us we're in serious trouble. Anyway he stops the Samil 20...</p>
Interviewer	That's a truck.
Anton	<p>That's the Samil, very, extremely, bumpy truck, you sit at the back, it's extremely bumpy, hard steel seats. And this corporal comes out and it's my corporal, bad luck for me, and a corporal from another platoon and they ask, what are you guys doing here, and the guy just starts talking, talking, and he's talking gibberish because he knows he's in trouble, and corporal asks me, Oberholzer I want to hear from you, say it, tell me you were lost, I want to hear it from your lips. I'm like, yes, we got lost. They were thrilled, because they were waiting for an opportunity like this. So they radioed the platoon leader, let's do a head count. And the guy is silent, and they call him back and so what they do is they pick us up, they drop us off in the middle of nowhere and say, go look for them. So these guys had to come and look for us. So obviously after an hour or two they find us and I had to basically do dishes for that whole time I was in De Brug for punishment. So, that was the route march, was heavy in the sense that you had to go and navigate the dark, you're extremely tired and the consequence is you would fall asleep if you put your head down. So that's the training that you do is in a</p>

	combat situation is to handle yourself at night if you get lost, how to use a small arm grenade and what happens when you come to a trench.
Interviewer	And all those fire and movement, vuur en beweging, that sort of thing.
Anton	Yes. fire and movement was an integral part of infantry, so that is taught and re-taught and heropleiding till it comes out of your ears. It becomes second nature after a while because you just can't get enough of that.
Interviewer	And that's essentially how an infantry line moves forward with the guys shooting and some guys moving forward, other guys shooting and so on.
Anton	Yes, one guy would kneel down and fire while the other guys from behind is running, not obviously storming, but running at a slow pace forward, running past the guys kneeling down. You kneel down and start shooting and you show the guys back...so slowly you start moving forward and constantly keeping the fire on and the trenches.
Interviewer	So during any of this time were there any lectures about why you were in the army, what was the purpose of this whole thing? Who were you going to fight?
Anton	There were talks about SWAPO. SWAPO being the big bad guy in Angola, and Sam Njoma, that was the name they kept mentioning. And the songs while you're marching for PT or to church whatever, the song went that you want to be a Ratel soldier and you want to go to Angola and you want to go and kill Sam Njoma and you want to be an SA soldier, very paraat and basically you knew at the end of the day that it was basically us being white <i>laughs</i> democracy of course for the whites versus Communism. Communism trying to infiltrate through our borders through South West Africa. And that's what it was all about. We trying to stop Communism.
Interviewer	In 1986 a State of Emergency was declared in South Africa. Did anybody mention the ANC fighting in the townships, like Soweto and Kwa Mashu.
Anton	Yes...we were then...during my stay at 1 SAI, second phase or something like that. When you start doing practice, shooting for your skietbalkie (<i>shooting badge</i>)...there's 3 phases...
Interviewer	Your skietbalkie is your badge that you get when you've got a certain level of marksmanship.
Anton	Yes, that's right. So when you shoot very well at certain distances, moving, stagnant or whatever, you get bronze, silver or gold one. And we'd just finished the second phase of that and we were called out to Mamelodi, Pretoria township, because the ANC were bombing the black schools in the township. And we were there basically to make sure the ANC doesn't come and

	<p>throw bombs or whatever the case. So I didn't do that phase to get my recognition, because at that point in time the only thing that I was really good at was shooting. At De Brug, when you shoot poorly, they basically all hit you with a big stick...what's that thing that you mark...which you can split up and draw circles. You're basically whacked with one of those. It's got a copper handle, it's highly polished and the staff sergeant or the more senior staff sergeants carry that. And you would basically get whacked with that if you shoot poorly. And me a handful of guys, we were only a few of us really, really did well at shooting, so we were taken back to the base comfortably and the other guys had to stay there until dark and walk back that whole distance. So that was a bonus for me. I never really got punished for shooting because I shot really well. And it was a pity that we were called up for Mamelodi and I couldn't finish that course to get recognition for my shooting. So we were at Mamelodi then, sent to basically look after the schools.</p>
Interviewer	<p>What happened there? Did you just stand guard and just...?</p>
Anton	<p>Yes, we were based in some...it was a big field, I don't know who it belonged to. I don't know if it was in an industrial area, but you travelled a different route every second day not to have land mines planted or guys with RPGs blowing up your trucks, because there was a lot of sabotage going on at that stage. And we would leave early in the morning, it was freezing cold Pretoria, and you travel out, and they drop two guys off at a school. Each school gets two guys. You get a magazine with you, your webbing, your R4 rifle and you basically just walk around. And interesting enough then you really start integrating with young blacks the first time in your life. For something like, one bloke's coming up and saying, do you know why you guys are in the army? Or why we want Mandela freed? He's a criminal. Why do you want to free for? And the first time I ever heard someone explain, who's your father? We don't understand. He said, Hertzog is your father. This young black guy told me. I'm like, ok. And he says, you know who is my father? We say, no. He says, it's Nelson Mandela. And that stage we knew that this guy on Robben Island and they wanted to free him, that's all we knew really. And he explained that the reason why they wanted to free him is because he's our leader and we've got our leader, and that sort of thing. And we were like, whatever. And there was also police, SAP guys, placed there. We didn't get along with them of course. They had attitude, they had long hair, they had less training than us, and they weren't very neat, so we didn't really talk to them. But there were two cops and two army guys just walking around...and some guys throw stones at you, some of the youngsters. You just cock your rifle and they all disappear and that was it, but there were no real incidents at that stage because the military force was so big and massive in Mamelodi that I don't think the ANC would have tried anything, it would have been a dumb move.</p>

Interviewer	What did you think when that young black kid said to you, Hertzog's your father and Mandela's my father? What did you think about the sort of political implications that this guy fervently believed in, something so different to what you believed in?
Anton	At first I was quite shocked because he didn't sound like he was an idiot. This guy had something between his ears, him and his mate talking to us. He was probably the same age or maybe a bit older than us, and he was extremely passionate about...and he knew his history. Which was for us a little bit of a shock so we didn't comment much on it but I thought, yes, this guy's obviously serious. He believes that is his comrade and he should be freed because he believes it's his leader. But at that stage I thought, that guy's probably just been brainwashed like the rest of them, and in fact so are we. <i>Laughs</i> But you don't admit it that stage. We believe we are right and that sort of thing. So yes, that was quite a take back for me, I had quite a respect for the guy to come and ask me if I know who my father is, and I didn't know or give a damn and he knew exactly who mine was and his was. So that was quite a take back, yes.
Interviewer	Had you been to a township before?
Anton	Never, no. What we also do then is we walk through the streets and the older blacks were very humble and always take their hats off for you, greet you, we would go and talk to them, and they would say they would like to live this side of the mountain, and it's only the youngsters really that want to live with the whites and they don't feel the need for that. So we were like, wow, ok. There were actually some of them who felt that this apartheid situation is made...maybe because they grew up with it, at 17 years old that's all he knows, works, so why change it? So that was quite a change for us. Of course we weren't allowed to buy from the local cafés or from the street vendors because there were rumours that they were going to poison the food and stuff like that. but if you get away with it you go and buy stuff, you just don't get caught.
Interviewer	So how long were you in Mamelodi for?
Anton	I can't remember if it was one or three months, but it must have been maximum of three months...I can't really recall.
Interviewer	Did summer arrive before you left?
Anton	No. It probably was 6 weeks.
Interviewer	And then they took you back to Bloem?
Anton	Yes, back to 1 SAI to finish your training, which was I can't remember which phase, but a lot of theory now in terms of...now you need to be sub segmented. What's your preference? They all wanted to shove the guys with matric...if you had a degree of course, you came out of varsity, you go straight somewhere else, because they're going to give you some rank and use your

	<p>expertise somewhere else. Like last night I met a friend for dinner and he was actually in Three Two Battalion. I didn't know that. He says, no, but he came out of varsity, '88 intake...so he was a bit older than me...and they sent him to Three Two Battalion to teach English for the Three Two Battalion guys' kids. So he had to run a school there. Now I didn't know that, so that was...and did some family planning and that sort of thing, so they used his degree for that purpose. So they immediately obviously take I don't know, sort of matric, and say it's compulsory for you to go to MLV, (<i>in English MLG- Mechanised Leader Group</i>) Meganiste Leier Vluel) just above Tempe...I don't know what's it in English, it didn't have an English name. Basically what it is is, it's training the guys with...testing your ability to become a corporal, team leader, lieutenant or whatever. The other option is, the guys who want to go to Oudtshoorn to infantry school to be trained as a leader, platoon leader whatever...</p>
Interviewer	Instructor.
Anton	<p>Yes, instructor. The ruling was, if you fail the MLV, you can still go to Oudtshoorn, but if you fail Oudtshoorn you can't go to MLV, the criteria was a bit too strict. So basically there you fill out questionnaires and stuff like that and I opted not to become...I wanted to become a gunner. I was good at shooting, give me this 20mm cannon, that's what I want to do. And I don't want to be a rifleman or a signaller or a guy that throws mortars. So the guys were sort of frowned upon, you've got a matric, you don't want to become leaders, and we were like, whatever. So they let you pick, and I picked 20mm gunner, and the bigger guys with muscle picked the LMG, the light machine gun which you have to carry. And that sort of thing, drivers of course, guys chose to be Ratel drivers. And then when you (<i>inaudible</i>) they then just look for the criteria and then make it finalised, call out, you're a gunner, and you are then split up into your category. So you go to a bungalow – gunners, drivers, riflemen. So your mates who were with you at now, riflemen or whatever, you are basically taken away from them now and they go to their own bungalow. And then you go to NRV as well but for a gunnery course. And there is intensive training, the technical mechanical training on the F2 cannon. It's a French made cannon. At that stage, we were currently making our own at a price of about 22 thousand I believe, but because the machinery cost so expensive they were still making for about R75 thousand back then. How it works, all the nitty gritty's of the F2. You write an exam, we do an oral I think and a written exam. Of that the guys who do very poorly, I can't remember what happens to them, but I was with the guys who did pretty well, so you go on oporders, where you march off to some guy's office and he tells you well done, you get a certificate and you go back. So that was then the last phase which really was training on your specialise...you were now going to specialise in a specific field.</p>
Interviewer	Now when you're using this 20mm cannon, are you using the strip down version outside of a Ratel or is it in the Ratel itself?

Anton	It's both it's a strip down one on a desk where you walk around and they pinpoint this is called that, this is called this, this goes there, this is how you strip it. Then you go to a Ratel. This is how it fits in a Ratel, this is how you cock it. This is the button you press to fire it. If it stoors (<i>jams</i>) how do you cock it? So it's in and out, it's constant training outdoors, indoors, a lot of theory training, so you jog from one side to NRV, do your training and you jog back every day. It was a nice training because it weren't very physical, they don't punish you every second or wake you up early in the morning because they need your concentration to concentrate on the training and you write a lot of notes and that sort of thing.
Interviewer	And during that time I presume they taught you about enemy armoured vehicle tanks and so on, where to shoot them, where's the best way to stop a T 54 or a BMR 21 or whatever?
Anton	Not so intensely. A bit, but not that I could really recall. There's two different rounds you use in a (<i>inaudible</i>) of course the HPs, which are high explosives, which you shoot at troops running on the ground. It's got about a 5 metre radius of explosives like a grenade. And the...armour piercing with a tungsten point inside which is deadly.
Interviewer	Wasn't that HEAT? High explosive anti-tank.
Anton	No, this one wasn't HEAT. It's just a tungsten point. My friend's actually got one. So what it does is the casing aluminium alloy casing evaporates out of the blast, and this tungsten point with a sharp point penetrates armour. That's all it does, so it's just to go through the armour and hopefully the idea was, it would kill whoever was inside. But it would not explode. So you don't shoot it on troops because you'd be wasting your ammo. So the train us that and when do you shoot this round and when do you shoot that round and how do you change the belts to pick your round and that's basically it but not really so intensely on enemy vehicles or anything like that.
Interviewer	So you go through this process and now you qualify, you're a gunner, there's a driver, the guys down the back...
Anton	Skieter one.
Interviewer	In a Ratel you get a commander, a gunner, a driver...
Anton	Yes, there's rifleman 1 that sits on the first seat. Rifleman 2...I think there's 3 or 4...its 20 years back, my memory...and then you get a LMG, a light machine gun guy who carries this big machine gun, and you get a light machine gun as number two, which carries the ammo. So this poor guy's job is just to carry the ammo and number one is to shoot the light machine gun. If the one falls of course the other guy takes over. And that's how it happens. So that is the Ratel. You've got the commander, the gunner...we sit in the turret. The driver underneath our feet in front of us. And then the two rows at the back of the Ratel, three

	on each side. Nine. There should be ten. There's a place for a tail gunner but it's not used.
Interviewer	I think Three Two Battalion used it sometimes but those guys had their own rules.
Anton	That's it. <i>laughs</i>
Interviewer	So now you're trained to do this, then what happens next?
Anton	You are now, for some unexplained reason, the drivers or...and the riflemen can choose their gunner. <i>Laughs</i> I don't know how they selected that, so the guys who see their mates select their mates. Of course I stand there alone because nobody selected me because no-one knows me, I'm this really, really skinny guy. And I didn't eat either, so I really look horrible.
Interviewer	How did you survive?
Anton	I don't know, I was...I was so skinny that I obviously got flak constantly for it, but I basically ate...I basically used to stay alive. I hardly drank any water so...I really looked bad, so nobody picked me and this one platoon section, in a platoon, got stuck with me and they were like, yes, whatever. So I joined these guys, they weren't too pleased but whatever. And their attitude changed when we hit the...in full gear, full gunship, we hit the shooting range with our Ratels and I start shooting at a target, I started to gain respect, because I love guns and that was one thing I was good at. Give me a target and I will take it out. So the guys started to respect me for being a gunner. And that's what I needed because my role was to lend supporting fire for the troops that are going to be dismounting the vehicle and run around in front or next to the vehicle. So if I was not a good shot they would get fired upon. So my deal was to get their heads down and...so I gained their respect like that, so we are now a section in a platoon.
Interviewer	How many Ratels in a...?
Anton	I think I was in Bravo...Alpha, Bravo, Charlie...so three Ratels...Delta...there were four. There was your lieutenant who is your platoon commander. Drives in the commander Ratel, which doesn't have a 20mm cannon on. It's usually got a .50 Browning, a 12,7mm Browning gun and he hasn't got riflemen, he's got a logistics guy and obviously a Ratel driver and a gunner. But the logistics guy and a signaller drives with him, and underneath him you've got 3. You've got your Alpha, Bravo and your Charlie. So that forms your 4 Ratels, 4 different sections, one platoon.
Interviewer	So now you go off to the shooting range and so on and so forth, you keep on training, you keep on training. And what happens now? You're redeployed somewhere else?
Anton	Yes, what happens is for your most intense training and for real combat simulations they ship you out to Lohatla. Army battle

	school. The hell hole of South Africa. The worst place they can send you. Every trip there is the most hated trip. The food is rubbish. It's like you're back at basics. You've got this knowledge and your training and you're au fait with all the lingo but it's just a nightmare place to be. So you go to...
Interviewer	Can you just describe the sort of scenery.
Anton	It's extremely flat and dull and thorn bushes and there's these thorn bushes, haak-en-steek, and if you walk past it grabs hold of you, you've got to cut yourself loose. Really horrible and you're sleeping in tents again and you've got to pack up your own tent, build your own tent, and you sleep in sleeping bags on the floor and...so it's quite horrible and you do stalparade there, where you unpack the whole Ratel in front of the whole battalion, and some big shot with a lot of castles and stars on his shoulders come around and find fault and you're in years of trouble because of that and...so it's really not a nice place to be. And at that training you do conventional warfare. It's your first real conventional warfare training. And at that stage was called Operation Sweepslag. And I truly believe Sweepslag was the initiation for Modular, Packer...I don't know, I could be wrong but I believe it was them training us for the year ahead's operations. I'm sure that was the hidden agenda. But it's a full gunship so everybody has their ammunition, as much as you can carry, the Ratel weighs about 18 tons. A full gunship 20 tons. So it's about 2 tons of guns and ammo. And it's your first interaction with Ratel 90s. The guys who shoot 90mm shells at tanks...the anti tanks. And there you do fire movement with a 20 [Ratel with a 20mm cannon] and 90, 20 90, 20 90, integrated. So if there is enemy tanks, they'll take them out and we'll go forward and we'll take care of the soft targets. So it's a huge operation. It includes other battalions, other groups, the Olifants and tanks and all those guys. And it includes I think the parabats as well. Although the parabats and us don't get along at all. We don't sit around and same campfire. We hated the Bats because they're a higher think of themselves. And the mid seventies some parabats and 1 SAI guys got into a fight and guys got killed. So you sign a waiver that you will not talk, touch or hit a Bat. And same with them, so they can arrest you...
Interviewer	You actually signed a document saying that?
Anton	Yes, you will not go to the Bats and start a fight. Because some guys got killed. <i>Laughs</i>
Interviewer	Fighting the same army but...
Anton	Same army but the ruling was if you are in South West Africa and you come across a parabat, you shoot him first and then you shoot the enemy. <i>Laughs</i> because it was hatred. But anyway, that was just politics.
	END OF SIDE A (<i>counter at 536</i>)

	SIDE B
Interviewer	So you get to Lohatla and you go on this huge conventional exercise, you've got Ratel 90s, you've got Ratel 20s, Olifants, probably helicopters and jets and everything.
Anton	Yes, at that exercise obviously when you have a break or when exercise is finished you get to see the helicopters. They take you for a joy ride in it, to give the guys a bit of a break and you get to see, I think at that stage G5s, cannons, you get to see them and you've heard stories of the G5 being displayed at European arms deals and people rushing to buy them because...the one thing of what apartheid did show us is we had to build our own weapons because everybody was sanctioning us, and nobody wanted to give us any of their equipment. So we copied the R4 from the Israeli... <i>interruption</i> ...fly you around to show you what a helicopter feels like, which is fun. And you get to meet other guys...not really meet other guys because each unit really...you are so told that your unit specialises in this. You can go to civvy land and jump out of an airplane with a parachute, but where are you going to fire a 20mm gun, ride a Ratel, so you're special. So you believe your unit is better than the other unit and you stick to yourself and your guys, but it's a chance to see how big the SADF force was, the army, as a unit. Which was quite spectacular. You fire at fibre glass cut outs of tanks and you fire with live ammunition and the operation takes days and it's days of driving. I can remember falling asleep in my turret, my hands on the controls, and my head just resting, and then they say there's an enemy up front, there's tyres whatever, my head is rising up, I wake up, I shoot at the tyres and go back to sleep. <i>Laughs</i> Because it's days and they're just carrying on and you're really tired. So that's the reason why people hate Lohatla because it's just training and training. And heropleiding, as we used to call it, and you hate that word, you don't want to hear it ever again.
Interviewer	Just once again for the record, Lohatla is huge, I think it's sixty thousand hectares, it's bigger than a game reserve. It's a huge army training ground.
Anton	Yes, it's massive, and the danger of course is there's been so many exercises there that a lot of the mortars or whatnot are dud, so you don't go wandering off and kick the sand and trip on something and blow your leg off. So you don't go wandering off and that and...oh yes, what also we did was while we were there is bring some South African singer...de Chamois...
Interviewer	Patrick de Chamois, a guy with black hair and a little beard.
Anton	Yes! That's it. They brought him to give us a show, whatever. Some guys threw smoke grenades on the stage and there was coughing in the back, it was hilarious. So they sort of bring us entertainment and they tried to give us guys beer to drink, limited to two each of course. I wasn't and still not a beer drinker so I

	traded it for chocolates or something to eat. So yes, they tried to make it nice but whenever you got back on camps, you go to Lohatla, you know you're going to be in for a horrible time.
Interviewer	And you say that while you were there you thought they were training you for something bigger.
Anton	Yes. Not at that stage, no. We were told you're training now so if one day you are in combat this is what it's going to look like. And you're like, yes, yes, lekker, we're ready for it. And you train and you train and it's second nature, you know exactly what to do, when to fire, when not to fire. So we didn't know that there was an agenda somewhere but be that as it may, the exercise was finished and then you drive all the way back with your Ratels back to 1 SAI. And of course while in Lohatla some guys bail out and take the Ratel for joyrides and then roll it and guys get killed and so that was always a concern.
Interviewer	So you go all the way back to 1 SAI and then you sit and wait, as you do in the army.
Anton	Yes, sit and wait. And you go on pass again, as far as I can recall when you come back. Your pass is then a bit longer. one weekend or a week or two weeks, I can't recall but it was a nice long break. And when you're back basically, I can't remember the time span, but basically what happens is you're close to year end and they're now going to tell you where you will be spending your second year. And that's the big surprise. Each company usually gets sent to a different place. And you don't have a clue where you're going to be sent to. You just know that some guys will be in South Africa and some guys will be in South West Africa, based. And that's all you know. And then your major comes out and he announces the following company...I was in Charlie Company back then. Charlie Company will now be known as Alpha Company and you'll go to Six One Mech. And that's South West Africa. We were thrilled because we wanted to serve on the border. What's the point of training for a year, and then sitting in South Africa doing nothing. We wanted to go to the border because we wanted to patrol the borders and basically do what we were taught to do. So it was sort of an honour to go to South West Africa and be based there. We didn't know what Six One Mech was called or what it was or who they were. No clue who they were. But I did know that the captain was very despondent that he couldn't go with. He says, you guys are really honoured to go to Six One and they wish they could join us, but they have other plans for him here. You could see he had a long face and I didn't understand why at that stage but nevertheless Six One was for us. The other guys were going to...I can't remember...somewhere else, but that's their story.
Interviewer	But in the mind of your captain and you guys, Six One was first prize.
Anton	It sounded like the place to be. Why is this guy so sad he can't go and it was South Africa and we are infantry, and Six One

	sounded like the place to be. I didn't know the history behind Six One at all. And off we go to Omatea in a Hercules. Yes, flew us down in a Hercules, land in South West Africa...
Interviewer	Where did you land, Ondangwa?
Anton	No, it was a big airport. They drove us...
Interviewer	Grootfontein?
Anton	Grootfontein. We landed in Grootfontein, picked up in Wit Olifante. The first time I saw one, these huge white trucks. Looks like a cattle truck. And there you sit like cattle on it, guys standing, guys sitting, trying to sleep, and they drive you...I couldn't remember where they drove us to and then you sleep over somewhere and then they drive you to Omatea. I can't recall but it was a hell of a trip and as you get to the gates, it says, be paraat and we thought, ooh, don't tell us that! And you stopped there quite late in the afternoon and there's ou manne walking around with brandy in their cokes and giving you brandy and coke and they're like, you guys and this, and they had long hair and they looked rough and tough and that sort of thing and then you basically start building your base, because the base wasn't even properly built back then. You had to lay your concrete for your floor and put your tent up. And electricity for your light bulb, and that was your tent. And they were basically treating you like you were a roofie all over again. There's some guy shouting at you again from scratch...we were sort of expecting to be ou manne. In my two years I was never an ou man. Never an ou man. We were then chased around, stand up straight, shut up, tuck your shirt in, run there. Crap, here it starts all over again. So we built our little Alpha company and we heard that the bombardiers for the G5 or G6 guys were that end and another company like us was the other end and you didn't really go across to their side. You didn't really get along with other companies so you stuck to your own platoon, your own section, and that sort of thing. I thought at that stage of course after building your stuff and you moving your tent I was without a tent and I had to sleep with the HQ guys. So I was One Three Bravo, and I slept with...there were four guys in a tent and they were only three so I had to move in with the One Three guys. They weren't too pleased but too bad, there was a bed so I moved in there, and there we were.
Interviewer	So you weren't with your own driver or your...?
Anton	That's right, I wasn't.
Interviewer	That must have been quite difficult because inside the Ratel you're a team. So you were separated.
Anton	Yes. But it's funny it turned out that I became good friends with the One Three guys and they asked me to swop gunners. So I was driving basically with the lieutenant at that stage. I don't think a wise move at that stage because we didn't really get along with

	him but the guys wanted me there because the signaller and those guys really befriended me and said, come and drive with us. The driver was a very cool guy so we swapped gunners. So I became the lieutenant's gunner. At that stage the lieutenant gunner was a 20, so all four Ratels were 20s. Ratel 20s.
Interviewer	So now you put down your concrete slab, you've got your tent, you've got your bed and all the rest, do you start doing exercises, do you do patrols, what do you do?
Anton	Yes, we had to go somewhere else to...I can't remember, to bring sand back or dig holes somewhere...
Interviewer	You're in Namibia and they want you to bring sand back?
Anton	Yes, funnily enough sandbags were something ridiculous. There was a swimming pool but it was empty. At that stage the Six One Mech had an empty swimming pool. The guys were lying around a swimming pool with no water entertaining. It's crazy. And there was a tavern, the guys could buy beer and stuff like that, so that was something lekker for the guys. The heat was something horrible. It was a different heat. I couldn't get used to it. You're constantly thirsty and dehydrated. I didn't drink water that stage so I really suffered. So when you get a gap you go to the canteen and you buy Coke and Fanta and that sort of stuff to keep the thirst down. And you go a bit naafi because you're working in the heat here. It was a bit horrible.
Interviewer	Did any of your corporals or your company commanders or anything notice that you didn't drink a lot and that you weren't like...in the army there were some guys I saw who drank tons of water, tons of beer, ate tons of food. Did they ever notice that you didn't drink a lot of water and stuff like that?
Anton	During...I think I must have been in Lohatla, they caught me not eating my vegetables and Staff Smit which was referred to back then as Killer Smit. Killer Smit because the year before me, or year after me, he drilled his sister's son to death on the parade ground. The guy died on the parade ground. And he was Killer Smit after that. He was the meanest guy we'd ever seen. His legs were abnormally long, so his browns were extended at the bottom. So you couldn't miss this guy if he came around. My first interaction with him really was our corporal was giving us a lecture, so you sit in that little tent, all got seats, and they have a flip chart of the R4. They tell you this is the R4, this is the bullet, how a projectile works, the prime and all that. And he walked by and he said, where's your table? When you give a lecture you're supposed to have a table. And we saw the fear in this corporal's eyes. When he stood attention, we don't have one. He says, get one! You don't give a lecture without a table, and he walked off. And just the fear in this guy's face, we knew that this guy you must not mess with him. And whenever you march from the mess where you eat to your section, if he's in the vicinity you make a way detour, don't march past him, because he might find something to fault and you're going to suffer. So Killer Smit was

	really bad and he caught me not eating vegetables. So I thought I was going to die of course. He filled a fire bucket, which is the little canteen thingy in your water bottle, full of vegetables and basically stood out in the Ratel and told me to eat. And obviously shouting at me, jy moet sluk malgat, and there I was eating vegetables and when he looked away I was spitting it out but you don't get caught doing that. So I was caught doing that. Also while I was in 1 SDB I was starting to dehydrate, because when they asked us to drink water I was throwing it out. Again you don't get caught doing that but I was throwing it out on the floor because I just couldn't stand water. And I was starting to dehydrate so I was falling over my own feet. And they thought the guys were gypping so they were threatening on giving them injections and I told them...
Interviewer	Saline injections?
Anton	I have no idea what was in it, but I don't think...as soon as they brought the needles out the guys were saying, no I'm fine, and they were running back to where they were. So I said, bring on the injection, I'm not afraid of an injection, I'm feeling now crap. So like, yes, ok, whatever, go sit there. So it was really a scare tactic. But my back was really, really sore and I was really dehydrating and they were threatening me with a needle, I don't care about the needle, I'm in pain.
Interviewer	Had you always been like that, in school and as a kid?
Anton	Yes, yes. Really skinny, and when I came out of the army of course my mom first saw me she almost died. I was a skeleton with skin wrapped around. Really bad. I had one photo and I can't find it, it's a pity because I want to give it to my friend, Sarel, for his collection of army memorabilia, where what I look like when I was...hell I was really skinny, my ribs all showed and...but you know I was relatively at that stage relatively fit, and I shot well, and so it wasn't any concern medically. <i>Laughs</i>
Interviewer	I'm just thinking that the idea of a guy going through huge amounts of physical exercise, carrying heavy things and so on, not drinking water can be fatal.
Anton	Yes. At that stage I had to carry the F1 F2 cannon. I think it's 100kgs.
Interviewer	That's heavier than a .50 Browning.
Anton	Yes. So you unscrew the barrel and you take the barrel and you come back and you take this heavy thing and...all that training though of course your R4 rifle feels like a feather. I can't believe it being so light. Because when you first got it, it was quite a heavy thing and now it's nothing. So they trained you to be quite tough. So that was basically Six One Mech.
Interviewer	Killer Smit, was he ever court martialled for...
Anton	I believe Killer Smit was court martialled many times. He was

	supposed to be a sergeant major, and he was a sergeant major a couple of times and they dropped him back to staff sergeant and back to sergeant and back to staff sergeant, because of all the stuff that he'd done. He would get drunk and take the Jerry and drive wildly and guys would have to jump out of the way, and do stupid stuff and get rapped over the knuckles and then...
Interviewer	He sounded as bad as the enemy.
Anton	Yes, he was a bad guy. Really, really bad guy, and then in Lohatla for a brief period we fell underneath him. And we really feared for our lives then because he was such a bad thing. And he told us, one day standing there, he says he heard there's a guy here somewhere 'wat my wil opfok, waar's jy?' And we thought, who's that stupid? <i>Laughs</i> He's huge and he's so mean, and were just like, dead silence. And he said, someone stole his browns off the washing line. And you can see his browns because they were extended. And he's going to look and find this. And we thought, who's the monkey stealing this guys' browns? And he told us then, he said, for 8 years, I was the biggest, the P word, in 1 SAI. And we thought, yes, we know that. <i>laughs</i> And he says, but I've now calmed down a bit. So we're like crikey! So yes, Killer Smit was the baddie and wherever I go, the guys who've been there, cannot stop talking about Killer Smit. And when I went on a camp, my last camp, back many years after that, I drove back from the station to 1 SAI, one of the guys mentioned the word Smit, and an English guy sitting there says, Smit? Staff Smit! Geez I hope he's dead. This guy obviously ran into Staff Smit because he was a bad guy. Many years later on, actually only now, 19 years later after the army, last year, someone told me that he'd joined Three Two. And that's the last I've heard. As an RSM. Regiment Sergeant Major. So he finally got that rank. <i>Laughs</i>
Interviewer	So back to 61 Mech, and did you start doing patrols...?
Anton	Yes. At that stage there was obviously a monument, pointing to the sky and the guys' names on, and back then we didn't know the history of Six One Mech, but the fought in Askari and I think Bridge 14 and all those classic, classic, which we heard as kids on the news. You heard on the news Askari like, whoa! Guys fought in Angola against SWAPO there. We didn't know the history behind Six One. So we were like, whatever, Six One, we're just there to do our job and finish the second year. Because we were told that your first year in the beginning didn't go very fast but after the end it felt like it's going fast. And your second year it's going to fly, so we were like, yeah! It's going to get finished, we can go back home. So you're there doing patrols. You're there 3 months before you get your first pass. And your pass is 21 days, so it's the longest pass you get, and it's great, 21 days at home. And you start doing patrols. You get a Ratel, you get your R4 rifle, you get your F2 cannon, 20mm cannon you sign for, and you start driving around South West Africa and by the red line, you go over it and you say you're now this side of the

	red line. We were based I think...after the red line that's where we got danger pay.
Interviewer	That was officially the operational area.
Anton	Yes. So we got slightly more pay than the other guys, which was also nice. I think you'd access R200 a month or something. It was a lot of money. <i>Laughs</i> Doing patrols, running around and then going out, not just training as you would being a 20mm gunner, but you also train as a foot soldier. Because when you lose your Ratel, you're a foot soldier, with a rifle and you're now rifleman number X. And so you go out sleeping out somewhere in the rain, whatnot, how to dig a foxhole, all that type of rubbish and doing more intensely...trench cleanup, again it's a bit of more re-training and you had now storm troopers with you and guys doing the mortars, so you had guys throwing mortars over your head as a practice. And the mortars dropping there and you're lying on the ground and then when that stops you're moving forward. You're getting a bit of that training now, which we didn't have at Lohatla. You also get a bit of training in terms of walking over land mines. You had this big rubber padded cushions with this like a target painted on it and you would basically throw it and walk on these and you can walk over a mine field. And if those guys were not available, how to use your soeksteekstokkie and at a 45 degree angle with a stick poke into the sand and look for land mines, so that the other guys can follow across. So you get a bit of that more which we didn't have anywhere else. So that was quite a rich training session. And patrols. A lot of patrols. Going into the area where the PBs, the plaaslike bevolking. That's the local...what were they called? I can't remember what their name was. Ovambos?
Interviewer	Depending on how far up your patrols were going. Because Ovambos were mainly sort of Ondangwa, Oshakati, that area, and then further west you get Kavangas and then you get Lozi people in the Caprivi and so on and so forth.
Anton	Ok. And then you would sometimes stop over at one of the bases, I can't recall where it was but it was the coloured guys. So there was a whole unit, just coloureds. I think they were called KKK. We called them that. Cape Coloured Corps, or something, you just gave them a name. So you don't really mingle with them but you talk to them and where are they from and what they do? So you would stop at some of the bases to refuel and get meals besides your rat packs and stuff like that, and you would go out and do patrols again and...
Interviewer	What do you see on these patrols when you're patrolling around? Was there anything to see, just the people living in kraals...?
Anton	Yes, people living, people walking around the streets, then you move into the bush area of course, there's nothing, there's temporary bases. Where guys would have built...just a big circle, slightly hilled, so you go into a circle, park, and protect yourself if at night there's an attack, and that's basically it. And a lot of

	<p>practice is how to do temporary...tydelike basis...temporary base where you would overnight. So you'll creep into a place, lights all basically switched off. You put a red light on in the Ratel so you can't really be seen. And you silently have to get out of the vehicle, not allowed to slam any doors, drop any hatches, no talking, you get out, put your sleeping bag out and you basically form a huge circle sleeping facing outwards. You use the toilet on the inside. So the middle point is the toilet and whatever you use, and you're facing outside. When you hear something you wake up the guy to your right and in the big circle they'll wake everybody up, and you would be ready if there's any action. Because you have cattle or stuff walking and the guy standing duty must wake up someone to say, look, we don't know who's crawling around here but we need to be awake. And if somebody makes a fire or a noise, you pack up, you drive and you do it again. You do it all night until there's silence. So everybody is like dead quiet. Because you want to get some sleep in. And a lot of the times when you do do that, the guys attach string to their left wrists, and everybody's got, so you can tug on the string to wake up the guy. We didn't physically do that. And of course guard duty is essential then. There you get trained for 2 hour shifts guard duty. When your guard duty is over you wake up the next guy and he does guard duty, and what inevitably happens you wake up a guy, he sits straight up in his sleeping bag, he's fast asleep, he's talking to you in his sleep, and you go back to sleep and he never stands up and you get blamed because he says, but you didn't wake me. So you're basically in trouble for that so you don't want to try and do that. So guard duty was essential. And in South West Africa and even when you go into Angola the guard duty was basically a time for you to...and it's dead silent and it's pitch dark...just reflect on life and whatever, and the guys are daydreaming, and some guys that can't sleep come and join you and sit and talk nonsense and make coffee or whatever. Doing patrols, patrols, patrols all the time and waiting for your second 21 day pass, which was at that stage a couple of weeks away. So you only get two 21 day passes and we were ready for our second one now.</p>
Interviewer	And during this whole time was there any discussion from the senior guys from your commanders about what was happening in Angola, what you were there for? Or was it just ? instructions?
Anton	Not really, the guys would talk to you about SWAPO and they would talk to you about FAPLA and MPLA, but that didn't really mean much to me, we knew from school, watching the news that SWAPO was the bad guy. Not a clue. Looking forward to 21 days pass and that's it.
Interviewer	Any talk about Cubans or Russians?
Anton	No. No Russians or Cubans. We knew of course that the Russians were giving these guys tanks and AK47s, and at that stage no helicopters, we're just talking about tanks or T54s.

Interviewer	At Cuito they had T54s, T55s. And then T34s were the other one I think.
Anton	Ok, T54s were the ones that we encountered but there were sort of talks about that but no real talk because at that point in time we haven't really seen any action, any enemy, we've heard they're blowing up this place, we would go there. We heard that the guys were spotted at this village, we would go and talk to the guys. And of course you would get some idiot troop that would steal the local kraal guy's liquor and...then he'll report us and then you find out later it's a mate that was actually in your Ratel and you all share the liquor. <i>Laughs</i> But weeks later, and stupid stuff like that. Because there's no action, and you're basically pretty much bored.
Interviewer	And by all time you're still waiting for that second 21 days.
Anton	Yes, yes, waiting for it. It was I think a week away and the guys were excited and the guys were not as naafi anymore because they want to go home now. And suddenly, the guys call a big get together and we're all there and...listen your pass is cancelled. Geez! The guys weren't happy. They say you guys are going operational. It's called modular. And you guys will ship out ASAP. So we were like, crikey, couldn't they do this after the pass. And we were sitting in the mess hall, and news camera guys arrive with cameras and stuff like that...
Interviewer	Were those SABC?
Anton	Yes. SABC guys arrive, and they were filming and this guy was talking and we all had long faces and I don't know who was talking there, a guy with rank, he was senior, telling us exactly what the story was. And we were like, yes, whatever. And then we shipped out. And its very interesting, a year after we were operational basically...September the 16 th we hit our first contact.
Interviewer	That was 1987.
Anton	1987. A year later, 1988, sitting at home on the 16 th of September...I remember it was my dad's birthday...16 th of September, my first contact, so you remember it. I was sitting at home, on my dad's birthday, 16 th of September 1988. A friend that was LMG number 2, who also lives in Durban, arrived with a video VHS cassette and he says, there's a guy that we know on this tape. It was like SABC footage of us! A year back. He played it and there's me sitting. You idiot that's me. And there's the guy next to me, my signaller and the guy...and another guy, I'm saying, Jan Visagie, I could be wrong, I saw him, on the 16 th of September he died on that first contact. And he was actually on the video tape, a year later, I could see him sitting there among us. I don't know when it was viewed. It was viewed much later on the news because it was only told that we were in Angola two or three months later. My folks didn't know. They knew something was up because I told them, when you don't get letters from me then I'm operational, which means there's no flights or something

	for mail. So they obviously knew, they were not getting letters from me, that I was operational, but it wasn't made public. But wherever this guy's brother recorded it, when he heard...he had this tape and it's a pity I don't have a copy of that, which is really sad. But yes, just coincidentally a year later I saw a guy that basically on the 16 th of September... <i>interruption</i>
Interviewer	Sorry you were saying, so this senior rank tells you, this is it, you're going operational.
Anton	That's it. Packing up, get your equipment ready and...
Interviewer	And this is September '87?
Anton	This is...maybe August. Because we're taking a long drive through to Angola. I can't remember how long drive but you had to drive obviously a certain speed because you can only go as fast as the slowest vehicle. Logistics all that has to follow. So there we all were, damn the guys were mal. Packing our equipment, I don't know how many days later, but it was one or two. We were in our Ratel, you got your equipment, there you go. A long drive. The Olifant tanks were basically making a road for us. So they were crashing through the sand...in Angola...there were thick, thick white sand. Some of the places were very, very bushy. Huge trees, a lot of bush. So they basically had to make a road for us. They're running a road and of course if an Olifant tank hits a landmine it's better than a Ratel. Because I saw a Ratel hit by a landmine, it looks like someone opened it with a tin can opener. It's horrible. So the Olifants, we heard some of them lost their trucks through landmines but they basically paved the way for us and we were driving. Of course your problems...my turret, there's a lot of trees so you've got these smoke grenade launchers on your turret, and a tree ripped it, but it stripped my turret. So my turret was like going on its own, I couldn't control it. So I basically couldn't shoot at anything at that stage. My turret was immobilised. It was just moving freely. So we were driving, driving, driving, get the turret replaced or fixed, and carrying on. Basically driving for I don't know how long.
Interviewer	It was many, many days.
Anton	Yes. Stopping in Mavinga, I think, the first time, I'm not sure.
Interviewer	Where did you cross into Angola? Do you remember?
Anton	Don't have a clue. We were not told a thing, we don't know where we were.
Interviewer	You didn't cross on a big river crossing? Or did you just drive across sand?
Anton	There was a big river crossing. Genie (<i>the engineers</i>) was there with their mobile bridge and we crossed over it. I can't recall the river we crossed. It could have been Mavinga. I don't know.
Interviewer	But then you drive up to Mavinga which is a long way inside

	Angola.
Anton	Yes. Basically recap, refuel...a lot of refuelling. Trying to stay awake. Travelling a lot of the times at night. Trying to stay awake, falling asleep, getting lost. Big trouble for that. Getting back on track, finding your unit, against what we practised being silent, sleeping and next morning that's now physically happening. Because you're not in your own country. There could be enemy out there. And at that stage we were told FAPLA...MPLA was the bad guy. There were Cubans. These guys were getting their stuff from the Russians. So it's serious business so be in your best behaviour.
Interviewer	But now you're following their tanks, you've got your Ratel, you're surrounded by other Ratels...I don't know if there's been helicopters dropping stuff off all the time...
Anton	Yes.
Interviewer	Ok, so you know you're in something big now.
Anton	Yes. Some of the places were...they had weird fruit growing on the trees. They had these huge ants that let off gas if you touched them that stank. So you had all these...you're not in your own country now, the helicopters were bringing beers for the guys, if they could, it was very rare. At that stage it was warm. And the guys bringing meat. By the time the meat got to us it was starting to rot. Mail obviously, forget about mail going out. Nobody wrote. So it was rat pack upon rat pack upon rat pack, which made us so ill. Because what they were giving us, give us 5 days rat packs, so there's 5 days food, so logistics won't see you again in 5 days. Now your groot sak, we were using new webbing of course, it's on a truck. Now the logistics truck I didn't see it for three months. So you had the same underwear, no toothbrush, the same browns, for three months. So you can imagine what those browns look like. They were pitch black. And there's no water to shower or bath with. So it's water you drink.
Interviewer	So your kit was separated from you earlier on and you never saw it again.
Anton	Never saw again.
Interviewer	And nobody ever bothered to re-supply you.
Anton	It was some reason they couldn't. We were asking, can we get like socks? If you had water to spare you would wash your socks. And other guys from other companies would walk past and say, hey you guys got water to wash socks! We don't have water to drink. And we were like, whatever. Now and again you get refill water. You can take a jerry can, get water to shower. And most cases you got 2 water bottles, that's 2 litres each, so 4 litres to shower with. So you use sparingly, shower in 4 litres. But yes, no clean underwear, no clean browns and boots, because you don't have your own stuff. And that's how you carry on, day to day,

	refilling, moving forward, refilling, moving forward.
Interviewer	And you're only bathing every second, third or whatever day.
Anton	Yes, sometimes 2 or 3 weeks no water for showering. That was not a nice experience.
Interviewer	At this stage it's getting tougher and tougher, you're not clean, you're struggling for food, you're getting sick from the food, were you apprehensive, were you afraid at all?
Anton	<p>Yes, that stage, we weren't so much afraid of the enemy, we were afraid of dying here of some sickness, because the stomach cramps...at that stage I didn't...basically because I didn't eat. Because I get my rat packs, you dig a hole and you bury them, because you don't want to carry them, because you're not going to eat them because it's rubbish. You take out a chocolate bar and that's all you're going to have. And then you go through a phase, the first month, it's just chocolate bars, the second month it's just the Cheezies and the dog biscuits. After a month of that you get fed up. Then it's just the milkshakes. So at that stage I was starting to vomit but nothing came out because my stomach was empty. They put you on drips of course and all that and...to feed you I think, free of AIDS or something, but that was only once. But whenever you bump into Unita soldiers it's a treat. Because they've got like fancy rat packs. They had this like yellowy plastic cover around it. It had a honey type chocolate bar in. they had long cheese that tasted differently. It was really a treat. But Unita soldiers only traded their food. It also had dried out snoek. I'd kill for that. They would only swop that basically for equipment. They don't care about food, they've got food. They want stuff to protect them from the rain. So any guys who would give up their ponchos or whatever they had, they'd give that. So that they can have something else to eat and these guys were thrilled because now they can keep dry in the rain. So that was a treat to bump into these guys and talk to these guys. And there was culture shock. They're asking how many years are we going to fight? We're like, no, in December we go back home because our two years is up. They're like, you're not going to fight until the war is finished? We're like, no. Because they grew up in the war and we're just here to do our service. So that was quite a shock and then they ask you how many kids you got? We don't have kids. We're 18 and 19 years old. I turned 20 November 20th in Mavinga obviously still in operational. So I was 19 at that stage. We don't have kids. No, they have bambinos here and bambinos there. And I was like, ok. So it was quite a different perspective. They had a high respect for Jonas Savimbi. Referred to him as General or Doctor or President Savimbi for them. We had high respect for them because we were taught he was the one black guy that you had high respect for, it was Jonas Savimbi. We had high respect for him as well at that stage. The food was an issue but now and again they managed to get us food in, meat in, which you braaied immediately. Or stopped to make bread, and those guys who knew how to make bread made bread for us.</p>

	And the biggest problem there of course was flies. The fly issue was frightening. Just flies everywhere so you better eat fast before your meat gets cold because the flies will eat it for you. So the food issue was bad but you somehow survived it.
Interviewer	And while you're driving and guys are getting sick and you get to Mavinga were there doctors checking on you guys?
Anton	Yes...I don't think Mavinga, it was one of the bases that we formed. It was obviously in a safe zone in Angola, the guys formed a base and...I cut myself on the foot and it was getting septic of course, because you're not eating properly and it was getting bad and I went to the doc and he gave me antibiotics and he says, come back in 3 days time. I was like no, we're shipping out tomorrow, I'm only here today. I need tablets, enough...so that helped, the antibiotics helped. Wherever you can get tablets from a medic you take. Be it antibiotics or any tablet because you knew that if you're going to get a cut or something it's not going to heal that fast so try and get medication from the guys. So when you can you do. But in the two years I was never light duty ever. I was never too sick to do anything. Those guys are sort of frowned upon so I didn't want to be light duty, I was ready to do my job and get on with it. And then you refuel, get restocked and they have a big braai for the guys in a safe zone, so there's meat and there's beers and the guys who wanted a beer...I didn't want a beer, swapped for cooldrinks, so I had extra stock to take with me, so that was a bonus. Also what I would do is I'd buy cigarettes although I didn't smoke. Chesterfields was the brand to smoke then. Get cigarettes, buy, and as you're out and the guy's cigarettes get out, you can trade that for anything, because the guys were desperate. So I would trade in cigarettes for other foods that they would hog or stock or...
Interviewer	So you traded for chocolate bars and milkshake.
Anton	That's it, because I didn't eat the other stuff so that stuff I gave away. But the guys who were hanging on to the chocolate bars and the shakes, I said I've got cigarettes and the guys would just...this guy would give me three...I'd have a bidding war there. So that was for my advantage.
Interviewer	So then you're at Mavinga which is obviously the holding zone before you enter...
Anton	Yes, you would go out, do patrols, get fired upon out of the blue, and then it would stop and guys would go out and do their action and...the 6th of September we did a...although we were at the back, our Ratel, basically supporting the guys in front. And if they fall back or if the enemy would swing a flank we would go in from another flank. So that day a few shots fired in our direction, a few shots fired from our guys and when you finish you'd go back, refuel, re-ammo, what do you need and all that, and clean your equipment and all that, and then you would go out again towards another section. But at that stage just after the 16 th of September, it was late September, we had a debriefing where the captains

	<p>and the colonels would come...then they told us, there's a 47th Brigade and a 52nd or 53rd...were cut off and we were basically keep cutting their lines, cutting their logistics, so we were starving these guys. And what they were planning doing is merge, these two big brigades, and then it will be one hell of a force, and our job was to cut them down. And that would happen on the 3rd of October. So 3rd of October was D day for us to hit and hit them hard. So we all got a good night's rest in, and at that time, a Lieutenant Hind, and I actually tracked him on the internet late last year, first time in 20 years, I actually tracked him. Lieutenant Hind from another section or company asked us gunners where do you shoot at a T54 tank and where not and do you guys remember from training and where do you do this? And remember this vehicle has got bins on its side that carries fuel, shoot at that so it can burn. Make sure you've got the right ammo armour piercing and not the HE and that sort of thing. So Lieutenant Hind, basically he spoke to me and I raised my hand and answered the question and we spoke face to face, and on the 3rd of October which is a week later, he was actually killed on that day. It was amazing I could never forget his name. All the other guys I was with I've forgotten them but Lieutenant Adrian Hind I'll never forget. And I actually tracked him on an internet site the other day where somebody mentioned him and I was thrilled that he's actually remembered for his contribution. From the Cape I think he was.</p>
Interviewer	Was he the first guy to tell you where to shoot at a T54?
Anton	Yes, more intensely. What we're encountering now is a T54 and this is more or less what it's going to look like and this is where you shoot. And the other vehicles were light armoured vehicles, troop carriers...
Interviewer	Most of them had Bs.
Anton	BTRs. We'd probably be encountering BTRs. It had a 76mm whatever cannon on it. so you know, it's going to shoot back so watch it. But your ammo would be able to penetrate it. So it's cool. You would shoot at it and this is what it looks like and this is the colour of it and all that. More intensely of what we were facing there. Because the enemy of that obviously wasn't SWAPO. It was FAPLA or MPLA and that's what they were using. So that was my real first in-depth encounter with that.
	END OF SIDE B (<i>counter at 524</i>)
	TAPE 2 SIDE A
Interviewer	...your column is moving north now, you've encountered your first contact with guys shooting at you and you're shooting back. What's the feeling going through you at that time?
Anton	At that time physically I wasn't shooting back with the 20mm cannon or anything because we were basically waiting for orders to move forward. Disappointingly we didn't get that order to move

	forward on the 16 th of September, and we basically went back, regrouped, get the logistics right and that sort of stuff, and in between that and the 3rd of October there were a few sands hopping up because someone was shooting an AK47 at you out of nowhere.
Interviewer	Could you see who was shooting at you?
Anton	You can't see a thing. It's bush, you might see there the flame from their muzzles. And that's it. You don't see a person at all. And between that and the actual battles you do more sort of patrols, you go and protect your 120mm mortars. You go and babysit them and make sure they don't get attacked in the middle of the night. I recall one incident standing in a tree line and protecting these guys, and that thing is loud, and a black guy with an AK47 comes running towards us and we all raise our rifles and he just ran past us. And we realised he must be one of Unita's guys and not FAPLA. So they stopped him and got someone who speaks Portuguese and he said, no his base was attacked and wiped out and he got away and he's here. So they took care of him. So we knew they must be close so we were pretty on alert. But then you go and protect these guys and we'd drive around more, and then the 3 rd of October, early hours of the morning, that was the big one. We all stood in a huge formation, and waiting for march, so your Ratel is running. You're behind your gun and you're outside of the turret and you're waiting for orders. And when orders are given you move in with a massive force in Ratel 90s, Ratel 20s. I didn't see any Olifant tanks. I don't recall if there were at that section there, but the G5s and G6s were bombarding the guys with hard artillery. I saw my first Mirage strike on a base which was amazing to see. You just feel the ground tremble as the bombs just dropped.
Interviewer	Did you see the Mirages coming in?
Anton	No, we turned our heads and we saw it come, because you get a warning on the radio, don't shoot at this guy he's friendly. And we look and you can see the guy come. Obviously there's no sound. And as he passes you he breaks the barrier and you hear the bang. Then he turns, he drops something, goes through the air, it looks like a bunch of grapes, and then he disappears. And as he disappears you just hear the guys who must have been a kilometre or two away from us, shoot everything they've got at him. RPGs and everything and you just hear them shooting and he disappears in the sunset. Pointless shooting at him at this stage. And you just see these bombs travel and you can follow with your eyes and then they fall actually on the target and you can just hear a rumble and the shooting stops and you know it's over. So that was something really amazing that I witnessed was the drop.
Interviewer	When you're watching those Mirages come in, they coming in at a low level?

Anton	Yes.
Interviewer	And then when they drop their bombs do they climb in an arc and then the bombs go up in an arc.
Anton	Yes, that's it. Comes out in an arc and then they go past the enemy and the enemy goes crazy and starts shooting because they obviously heard the bang and they could see him come. And then slowly through the air these little bombs drop and I'll tell you it was really amazing to see. And we saw a couple of MIGS 21 of course come past us. Some of them extremely low. That's quite frightening because they throw bombs at you. Every time you stop you dig a fox hole. And when they shout, Victor, Victor, you are in that fox hole and you are hiding because if that bomb falls anywhere in your proximity you're going to feel it. We heard through the grapevine some of the guys...their Ratel was shot down by a MIG. Holes through it and whatnot. None of my fighting group though. But you can hear it shoot, you can hear it drop bombs. Because wherever it thinks you are, because you're camouflaged with trees and stuff like that, your Ratel and where you sleep and all that, so you can hear shooting and dropping bombs but it's not in your close proximity, so you get to see that. But no enemy helicopters or anything like that. And the 3 rd of October was the big onslaught. A huge battle.
Interviewer	But now going into this battle, what are you feeling?
Anton	Adrenalin. I can remember [being] anxious, very anxious because you want to get it over and done with, and at that stage a lot of the guys were, oh we don't want to fight for this war, we didn't vote for this party, and that sort of thing, and I didn't really feel that way. Although a lot of us were conservatives who voted for someone else, we felt this is our duty to stop these guys, because if they amalgamate and if they grow stronger, next year other guys are going to have to come up and do the same job. So we need to maybe wipe them out now. And the instruction was clear, we're trying to wipe out as many of them as we can, because we will be outnumbered. So you need to hit them, hit them hard. While they run you hit them. We don't take prisoners at this stage. What do you do with them when you take them? Where are you going to put them? So we need to hit them, hit them hard and go back and re-ammo and do it again. And when this force amalgamates it's going to be so huge that we need to stop it. So that was clear. So you wanted to do it, you wanted to be paraat and fight in this battle but late at night it's only really when it comes. You realise, geez, this guy, you saw him last week, and you heard now that he's dead. Then it comes closer to home. When you hear a guy's dying, whatever I don't know them, but as soon as you hear of someone you know, you start to worry. So late at night when it's silent that's when it hits you. but during the day in the action, adrenalin pumps so fast that you just want to jump in the action.
Interviewer	Now you've got your force en masse there and on your first

	morning of that battle is...you probably went in it first light.
Anton	Yes.
Interviewer	What starts happening?
Anton	You start moving and you're moving, you're slow, and you move and you move and you're anxious, come on get this over and done with, and you move, and you start hearing ttk ttk ttk, and you hear hard artillery, you hear mortars, you can hear the sound is different so it must be enemy firing back and all that. And then suddenly you're in it. It doesn't matter how you've trained, where you stand and lining up whatnot, it's chaos. Guys are shooting at you, you can hear the AK 47 - inside a Ratel it sounds like a popcorn machine. All around you hear this AK because you can hear the ting ting against your Ratel. It can't penetrate of course but you can hear you're now attracting fire. You're a gunner, you're behind your sight so you're just looking and it's bush and it's trees and it's...you can't see a damn thing. The guys shooting at you, you don't know where the hell they are. Your troops can't climb out because they're dropping mortars. I think it's 80 or 89mm?
Interviewer	Probably 82 or 81mm mortar.
Anton	They're dropping 81s on our guys, so our guys can't climb out. They're dropping 81s on our Ratels. It doesn't penetrate but damn it makes a loud bang. And you're basically ready to see an enemy vehicle or something to fire out. So the hardest is for the guys sitting at the back, the riflemen, because they can't see a damn thing. I'm looking out of a little prism type armoured glass so I can see. The driver's got a nice big...and the commander has got all around his turret, but the guys at the back there can't see a damn thing. at that stage the commander instructed the guys to stick their heads out and be ready to fight. One guy opened and closed, he says, these guys are shooting at us, I don't want to stick my head out. He was cursing and swearing, you guys are all cowards and whatnot. So he lost a lot of respect there because what's the point, can't see a damn thing. I'm the gunner, I'll see, I'll shoot.
Interviewer	Your sight, you're looking through, it's a prism, so I imagine that you're looking through something a bit like binoculars but...
Anton	Yes, going up, so I'm looking through...it's a gadget, it's about this big. I look out through here and I see...I mount it onto this Ratel with clamps and everything, it's part of your equipment and you clean it and all that, you're looking through an armoured glass.
Interviewer	So it's a prism that works through a periscope system.
Anton	That's it. It's not magnified or anything, it's real vision. And it's got my 20mm sights on. So when you calibrate the 20mm cross hairs, all lined up to your 20mm and to your 30 Browning. That's my secondary gun, my 30 Browning. My rifle is obviously tucked

away behind me. So I've got my left button is for my .30 Browning.... 7.62, and my 20mm is on my right, so if I turn the turret I shoot. At that stage I also tell the driver when to stop, because if you see a guy with an RPG, the Ratel hasn't got like a tank stabiliser. You go and you look at that so if you see a guy, driver stops, you look at the ground, you look up, you get onto target, you take it out, you tell the driver move. Because when you miss the target it takes an RPG 7 a guy about 7 seconds to reload, you need to get the hell out of there. Because if the RPG hits you from front it's fine, it's thick armour, it's at an angle, won't penetrate. But along the side you're in trouble. So our firing movement is basically forward, backwards at an angle, forward, so everybody is doing that, but it's chaos of course, because there's smoke pitching up and it's dust as you're getting fire. And I've got a radio on my head and I'm talking to some guys, lieutenant is talking to the rest of my platoon and they're saying they're heavy under fire, what do they do? And I look to my right and the whole Ratel is like a Christmas tree of all the fire is getting. He says, you want to move, where do you want to move to? There's nowhere to go. We are all in a line and we need to maintain it to maintain the force. So that was also a sight. And so slowly we're moving forward. And suddenly you don't know who's left or right of you, you don't have a clue because it is very hairy there, it's huge trees and it's bush and it's green and it's thick sand so...I don't know. You go through and suddenly it's silent and there's no shooting at you and it's shooting somewhere else and suddenly you see something and you fire at it. And that's basically how you go through the whole battle. The thing I fired at, presumably it would be a BTR, because of its colour and the bins that it had on, the way that they described it, or pictures that we saw, that meant what it was. Of course this thing shot back and took out a huge tree next to us, out. Basically what we do is we fire a bit of 30 Browning rounds at it. See if it's moving because it's standing still and then it shot back, I just opened up with 20mm...and opened up and the thing made a big bang, smoke coming out of it and we got the hell out of there. So unfortunately we don't know if the guys are alive or dead or if they're in it, or they jumped out or they burnt to death or whatever, but all I know is I shot, the thing exploded and we got the hell out of there. Because you know, that thing is 76mm, I don't know, what calibre it had on it, but if it shoots back you're going to come second. *Laughs* At that stage over the radio we heard that Lieutenant Hind's vehicle got hit. I can't remember the calibre, bounced off, hit it from underneath its carriage and basically caused serious damage. Big damage to the driver, damage to the other guys, and Lieutenant Hind's got damaged from the inside, because it forms like a vacuum when it hits that Ratel. And I can remember my leg just going ballistic. Just jumping out so fast that I had to grab it to keep it down. The adrenalin was so heavy, now hearing this guy was shot out and the guys are seriously injured, the Ratel is out, the guys had to bail. The guy from platoon one, Graham Green, he had red, red

	<p>hair. Graham Green, rifleman number one from my Alpha, he was 13 Alpha, jumped out and grabbed one of the guys...I don't know if it was Lieutenant Hind or one of the guys...years later he got the Honoris Crux for that, which is great. Of course, jumping out and doing that while there's fire going on is...he said, he doesn't know, the fire's running, you don't concentrate on that, you concentrate on the guy there and he took the guy back to the vehicle and he got medical attention. So that was that fire and I remember the adrenalin coming through was massive, so you were really anxious to get this battle over. And when it was finally finished we just pulled out. You don't see dead guys on the ground, you don't see the enemy, someone else does the cleanup. You don't know who or what, you just move out. And you get your logistics sorted out again, refuel and all that.</p>
Interviewer	<p>It must be incredibly hot inside your Ratel.</p>
Anton	<p>Yes. And there's ten guys of which 8 of them are smoking. So when you open your hatch it's just smoke coming out, it looks like the thing is burning. So everybody is smoking because the guys are now seriously under stress. They're weeing in their water bottles to dump it outside because you can't get out. There's constant fire and you don't want to stick your head out. So yes, it's very hot...the tension and all that. It felt like it was over in a few seconds but it was a long battle. But when you look again it was over. Again you're out there and it was dark and now we are resting and trying to get it behind you and guys are talking to you, hey what happened? What happened? Who did you shoot? And that guy shot a guy climbing out of a trench with his 20mm. What happened? Trying to swop stories. But it felt very quick but it obviously wasn't.</p>
Interviewer	<p>How long do you think this battle lasted?</p>
Anton	<p>I can't remember if it was an hour and we were back...but it must have been much longer because it was late afternoon, so I don't have a clue, but when you hit contact and it's so disorientated and it's chaos. This guy's talking, that guy's shouting, this guy's saying, move in there, why are you doing that, move back, you're out of line!</p>
Interviewer	<p>And so you get back and everybody's talking to each other to find out who saw what, who did what...</p>
Anton	<p>Who saw what and what happened to Lieutenant Hind?</p>
Interviewer	<p>And then do you need supplies of food, water, everything else, is that ready for you?</p>
Anton	<p>Yes, you go back to somewhere along in Mavinga. I think there used to be a little town or buildings somewhere in Mavinga that was shot to pieces. I remember driving past on our way there, past a field that was totally destroyed. Pieces of shrapnel were in the trees and the field was just...and we heard it was the South African version of the Stalin Orrel...I can't remember what it's</p>

	called.
Interviewer	127mm Valkyrie (<i>multiple rocket launcher</i>).
Anton	<p>Total devastation there and it was amazing to see the devastation that it causes. So you go back and shattered buildings or whatnot and there you've got a couple of medics and stuff like that. But you stick to your own guys, talk to your own guys, chatting what happened. The one line lieutenant, one stripe lieutenant came to me from Alpha company and like shook my hand. He heard from the lieutenant I shot at...the other gunners were sort of no, impossible. Guys were basically sort of...jealousy started up and that sort of thing because aagh you know how guys are. Guys at 19 are. Whatever. I know what happened, I saw what happened, so I don't really have a case, but also one thing that we encountered there is, when we went over a little hill there was a shona and there were 4 Russian tanks riding around. <i>Laughs</i> And immediately I hit the smoke. Because you don't stand a chance...a Ratel 20 doesn't stand a chance. Hit smoke and that point in time the Ratel 90s weren't with us. We weren't in formation, we were travelling somewhere. And a Ratel 20 went driving in front of me, he just passed us, I was ready to fire and my smoke grenades fell on top of their roof and they thought it was fosfor. So they wanted to get out and come and hit me. But a guy driving in front of another is bloody stupid because I was about to press my nozzle for my 20mm to shoot. Because you shoot while you retreat in case. But we retreat. 90s came in and took them out. We heard they took them all out. The intel we got there were going to be four. We ended up with 16 of these tanks. <i>Laughs</i> So that was a bit of wrong intel there, but I didn't encounter them face to face except that order. And then the rumour started that this idiot who drove in front of me, I opened up fire at him and shot at them and shot holes in the back of their Ratel. I'm like, listen, the thing that I shot at A: it wasn't a Ratel, wasn't brown, it was greenish. And it exploded, so unless your Ratel exploded, you are wrong. So there was a bit of rumours about that going around which was very despondent, because you go there, do a good job, you come out, the guys start rumours like that. And for years that rumour tormented me. And what I told a friend of mine once is, because you can sort of now after 20 years you've got sort of flashbacks of what happened, you wonder if you don't go into a deep hypnosis if you can't maybe recall what happened. But you don't know if that's a good thing because maybe there's a reason why you're forgetting. You don't want to get demons out so I leave it as it is. I know what happened, my lieutenant saw what happened, so it's good enough for me and my driver too, because we're all obviously watching the vehicles. And that's good enough for us and that's where it stood. But there are those rumours still there, so it's life. But yes, we go back to Mavinga, and then you rest a bit (<i>inaudible</i>). I think the 3rd of October was about ten kms away from Cuito, I'm not sure, that's the word we heard. I'm not sure.</p>

Interviewer	That was the first part of their first assault of Modular One because it was before you were moving up towards the river. And then you would have withdrawn, and then they probably sent you back again a few days later.
Anton	Yes. No combat, no battle, but the G6s and G5s doing serious damage to the airfield we've heard from coms and that...serious damage to the airfield destroying MiGs...MiGs basically crashing on the airfield because G5s and G6s. And you see it at night when it comes. That (<i>inaudible</i>) when they put that booster on, when it burns, and it goes, it's amazing how far it goes, and total devastation. And we heard Cuito was basically quite a big stronghold. Then we would go out, a few more patrols, and then we were basically finished. And then the other guys were taking over from us. Taking over your Ratel and all that, and these guys looked so young. <i>Laughs</i> We didn't have a haircut or a bath or a shave, so you're looking pretty awful and these guys they're all clean, they've got short hair and clean shaven. They really looked like they were still at school and we looked battered and torn. But that was quite a shock, they were a year younger and they really looked much, much younger. And you think back that's the way the old men looked when we got to Six One. And then they took over. And that must have been the Hooper or Packer or whatever that was to finish Cuito.
Interviewer	Correct. But that first battle of yours, did that only last one day? Did it not last longer? Because Modular itself wasn't over in one day.
Anton	The big shooting was in one day, but we were still riding around patrolling longer. But I can't recall how many days it took. You're so disorientated about days and weeks and what day it was that you just carry on. We just heard the 3 rd was the big onslaught. The guys were carving it in their belts and wherever they could, the 3 rd of October was a big battle. But I can't recall how many days.
Interviewer	Did you ever run into mine fields?
Anton	No, never mine fields. The Olifants did, yes and we heard that some Ratels did, but we never did.
Interviewer	And then when it's night time and you're standing guard, can anybody sleep or do you just pass out, out of sheer exhaustion?
Anton	Yes. After that first battle no, you're still a bit psyched up and you think of Lieutenant Hind and the other guys and the Ratel and you think how damn lucky you are. There's some phrase that I heard years later, I don't remember the exact phrase, a disbeliever or an atheist in a fox hole, or something like that. And there I saw it. I saw guys who were complete atheists reading a little Gideon bible. I actually saw that and I realised these guys now realise that, now you know guys who got shot at and you guys are finding religion, and you're just sitting thinking back of home and then it starts hitting you how you're now going to cope

	<p>with civvy life. Guys out there that don't have a clue what's going on here. Because we knew that they weren't going to make it public that we were there. But the other times you basically fall asleep through pure exhaustion. Yes, absolutely.</p>
Interviewer	<p>And other guys you're with now, your lieutenant, your driver, your infantry guys with you, how are they all coping? Are you all relying on each other or are you just going into your own little world of survival?</p>
Anton	<p>Yes, at one point it became heavy, the battle was over, we're riding around, enemy is still out there, we don't know exactly where but we're riding around, part of the operation. And my big friend, who made big friends with me, we more or less liked the same music and stuff like that, was a signaller. He was from Kroonstad, I was from Durban. On one of my passes we actually, he came down to Durban and we became good friends and he just became completely distant. The lieutenant was also from the same, Kroonstad, but they didn't get along at all. And fights and words and stuff like that. And he became extremely distant and I hanged out with a couple of other guys and you were just fooling around, and I remember him telling me that like the way I'm acting I'm losing it. And I thought that was quite strange. Because he was losing it. That was my perspective. He was losing it. He was sitting there in the distance that I couldn't talk to this guy. Didn't really know what to say so you rather stick to yourself and talk to guys, whatever conversation is coming up. And I thought he was losing it and he slowly started to get it with and he asked me to come with him home. Not to go home when we klaared out. Go to Kroonstad, stay there for a couple of days and then take the train back to Durban. And I did and the message he gave out to his folks was...I think they picked up that he wasn't really going to...he wasn't coping that well at that stage with it, and I was basically there just for support. I think that's the reason why he wanted me to come home with him. His dad bought him a car when he got out. The dad some money, and he went out and I sat home in his room taping some music on his expensive tape deck system, and his folks coming to talk to me and saying thanks for being there. I said, look he became a bit quiet and that and maybe we must just look after him. And I completely lost contact with him. I tried to keep contact and I called many times but I think maybe he doesn't want to...maybe he needs to forget that. Because later on he said something in a conversation...what I picked up was maybe post traumatic stress disorder, and maybe he just wants to forget and not keep in contact. So I basically lost contact completely with him. And some of the other guys I had slight contact with, but you find you don't have that much more in common and a lot of the guys drink a lot and I don't drink heavily so I can't really sit in bars and drink and pick up girls, it's not my scene. The one guy who still now and again sms...he smsd me about 2 months ago and says, I haven't heard from him in four years, there's a Six One reunion sometime in 2008. He phoned me, I said, yes, I know about it. He</p>

	said, great we'll get together and that was a couple of months back. But we don't have much in common. We sort of go our separate ways.
Interviewer	In the time that you're there, during the battle and stuff like that...I mean, your Ratel was hit by small arms fire, but you were never hit by anything heavier?
Anton	No. My sights as well. Because what they do is they're shooting at my sights. So when there's a cracked glass on my sights I can't see, I can't shoot. So you keep seeing the sparks in front of your sights as they're trying to hit you. But no big fire, no RPGs or anything like that.
Interviewer	Although they hit the tree next to you and destroyed the tree.
Anton	Yes, yes, yes. That was quite scary. But no RPGs and...mortars yes. But they don't penetrate or anything.
Interviewer	And during this time did you see any more air strikes or anything like that?
Anton	No, we heard that there was a SAM 7 or SAM 8...I can't recall, it was really, really new for the Russians. They just brought the SAM out. And the rumour was the Americans wanted to get hold of this. And they asked us to capture one of them. <i>laughs</i> So somewhere along the line...because I think on the black market back then a SAM 8 missile went for a million rand or something ridiculous. And the west didn't have the technology of the SAM 8. And our fight group managed to capture one. Fully intact with its radar, and it was brand spanking new. The rumour was that we were told...we gave it to the Americans and they financed our...they gave us 40 million for ammo towards the war. That was the big rumour there. And we heard after the Mirage that went down. And we saw a couple of Mirages fly by, but never again an air strike as impressive as the one I saw then.
Interviewer	And so now your main battle is pretty much over, you go back to Mavinga and then these youngsters come in...the youngsters...a year younger than you...and then did they fly you out of Mavinga?
Anton	Yes, they fly us in Hercules' to Rundu. For debriefing and a bit of counselling. Land on mud. Like I told the guys today, (17/1/2008) we flew down to Joburg now for this training session, it's the first time in 20 years I've actually been on a plane. And the last time I'd been on a plane was in that Hercules. Which is amazing. Basically it falls out of the sky and when it lands and it's loud and all that. Yes, we landed there for debriefing and you get to see your equipment for the first time. You burn your Browns because it's pitch black. You can't clean it. Your boots you throw away. They give you new Browns, new boots. You get a pair of underwear. You see your toothbrush for the first time in 3 months. Which is great. And all your pakkies from home arrive. All in bulk, and there's like 5 for me. And you basically can't eat

	what's in there, strange enough your stomach just can't stomach it. It's just biltong and biscuits and that but you can't really eat that so you just pack it in and you take it with. The guys are getting their mail, there's a band playing live, but some of the guys are a bit...like myself, didn't really want to go and listen to the band and stuff, you start to get a bit withdrawn and you start keeping to yourself.
Interviewer	And this is when, sort of late November, December?
Anton	December. And then they have a youngster there, he's probably first year varsity, psych major that is now going to in a big group talk to you and what it really does is, I believe, more damage because you sit there in a big circle and it's quiet, then he says who wants to talk? Nobody wants to talk to this guy. And who's had trauma and one of the guys, (<i>inaudible</i>) says, Obie remember when you shot at that thing and that lieutenant told you to stop firing. Now it's not the lieutenant's job to tell me to stop firing. I stop firing when the thing explodes. And when I stopped firing the thing shot back. <i>laughs</i> So you don't do that. So that sort of hit me because it wasn't his place and all that. They told me to talk to this guy and I tried to talk to this guy and I really couldn't. I had a knot in my throat and I sort of just kept quiet and that was the end of it. So that probably did more damage <i>laughs</i> than any good in talking to this guy.
Interviewer	So he's got a group counselling session going on and you've all been through war together.
Anton	Yes, it should have been a one on one, intense...a pro maybe with years experience behind him, know how to get this out of you. And I think a lot of guys bottled it up, that's probably why they have post traumatic stress disorders, because they're bottling it up and not getting it out there.
Interviewer	Now if I can take you back a little bit, you said, during the battle you're so busy on adrenalin and you're focusing about what's going on and you've got to get through this. Afterwards you said you thought about home and stuff like that, are you at all religious? Were you religious then?
Anton	Yes, I grew up in a relatively strict Christian home. My mom was relatively strict on that so, yes, I was. And the army of course forces you to go to church <i>laughs</i> Mass is good so you can catch some sleep there, because you don't really concentrate because you're so tired. So yes, I was religious and I prayed and all that. I was a firm believer.
Interviewer	Did you pray during the battle and afterwards?
Anton	Yes, yes, absolutely.
Interviewer	And then you're back at Rundu and then they flew you back to where, Bloem?
Anton	We went back to...

Interviewer	Grootfontein probably.
Anton	Yes, we never saw once Six One Mech after that...no, we never did.
Interviewer	Did you have any officers come, when you were at Rundu or anything say, thanks for this and well done guys?
Anton	Yes, yes...the head of the army, Jannie Geldenhuys...I can't remember if it was Rundu or what...or 1 SAI...I think it was Rundu...came there and he gave us each a pen with Op Modular, Well Done and his signature on it. I've still got this pen to this day. I found it the other day, I gave it to my friend Sarel. He's got all my medals that I got through the years. My certificates he's got. He's keeping it safe for me of the mould and stuff. Because he collects war memorabilia so he's got all my groups, all my letters, my call up, my certificates, letter to my folks to say I'm operational which was issued 3 months after we were there. <i>Laughs</i> Something like that. He's got all that. So we got that from him. I think there you got your operation Modular t-shirt. And a "Dankie Tannie" pakkie. Which we should have got before the damn battle because it's got a bottle opener in there, and we only got it afterwards! And how you open your bottles with your blunt knife. So that was quite ridiculous but anyway got that. There's some civvy people giving food or braais or stuff like that. Yes, so the big shot was there thanking everybody for us and I can't remember the conversation. Because again you're sitting at parade, you're damn tired, you haven't eaten very well because your stomach has shrunk to like the size of a pea and you want to pass out in the heat. Basically he was there to hand out all these things and say thanks.
Interviewer	And all the guys in your Ratel, did they all come back?
Anton	Yes.
Interviewer	So there's your little group around you, they're secure but you've heard about Lieutenant Hind, you've heard about other guys, so there's a lot of trauma, so while this guy is talking to you, you're exhausted, you're traumatised, so it's important but it's not that important.
Anton	<i>Laughs</i> Yes, exactly.
Interviewer	And then they fly you back to probably Grootfontein and then back to South Africa.
Anton	Yes, we ended up back at...Bloemfontein, that's right, where our captain from our first unit in '86, was promoted, Colonel or something, and he was there. And to say...he's the guy with the long face who wanted to go...he was there talking to the guys, shaking the guy's hands. And my friend the signaller went to talk to him and I didn't go forward. Grabbed my equipment and was sort of...a lot of guys were happy that we were there but I just couldn't get out of my head that we need to remember those

	guys who didn't come back. It still played on me a bit. So I wasn't really in a good mood. Basically shaking the guys' hands and talking to them and all that and then I went to take the train to my friend's in Kroonstad to go and visit.
Interviewer	Where you spent a couple of days...
Anton	And then I took the train back to Durban.
Interviewer	What was your feeling on the train going back to Durban?
Anton	<p>Yes, it was...it was finally going home and...one of the biggest...while you're standing guard you talk to guys, you say, I can't wait to have my first steak and a big meal and a braai, and this drink or a beer. The thing that was surprising the most was actually a tar road. Because you haven't seen or driven on a tar road for 3 or 4 months. When you drive on it, it's like this quiet humming sound. So I thought that was quite...being on a tar road, and then you start thinking, how much of have you missed from home and stuff like that. Little did I know, Durban changed quite drastically. They had the big floods. And we were dying of thirst and they had the floods at home. Very ironic. The whole beach front was changed. They paved that you couldn't drive there anymore, you had to walk there. My dad built another garage and another room on, another bathroom, so their house was changed. He built another shower for me. So a lot has changed. So on your train ride there you're thinking, what else has changed? And you finally get home and you see all these changes and you start to withdraw even more. Because people are talking to you and what and they're carrying on with their lives and you realise people carry on with their lives and these people don't have a clue what's going on out there. And you don't really want to talk because you were trained you don't really talk about what's going on there, you stick to yourself and all that. Immediately you start looking for a job. I finished on the 11th of December, so at that stage nobody was hiring. My dad at that stage was senior state advocate, and he was senior public prosecutor of a magistrate's court to get them right. And he says, clerk of court, there's a job, chief magistrate says you're welcome to start there, so I started there. Because there was no really elsewhere. But extremely withdrawn. There were some guys who worked there...I worked there for three months they didn't even know I was there. I just stuck to my job, never went to a staff office tea, and stuck to myself basically. Started to warm up to society.</p>
Interviewer	When did you start that job, in January or December?
Anton	January.
Interviewer	So after you got home, you must have got home just before Christmas?
Anton	Yes, it was probably the 15 th of December or so.

Interviewer	And then Christmas comes and everybody's having parties and braais and in Durban it's hot and everybody's sort of wandering around in shorts and having a good time. How does that affect your thoughts about them? Did you feel resentful? Did you feel confused?
Anton	Yes, a bit confused. My brother just came back as well. And he was at Grootfontein and although he didn't see action, obviously he heard it on the radios and all that and...we spoke a bit but not really intensely, I didn't really explain what happened or whatnot, or what operation I was in. And you just trying to adapt but...I was always relatively quiet but I knew that I was far more withdrawn than previously. So a total introvert and...basically just stuck to myself. The main thing that kept me going and just out of matric, I was heavily into music, so I was heavily into heavy metal and got into it. At Omatea, they take you on passes, you go to Tsumeb to draw money. They give you a card, you can draw money actually. After a few minutes they can get you money from South Africa. And you go to a music shop and you buy tapes and the new heavy metal stuff was out there and wasn't necessarily out in South Africa. So you'd go buy it, so I always had music. And the music through Angola and all that I had a Walkman with me playing music. And that was the only thing that really, I felt, kept me going, was the music. And I knew that there was more stuff out there to buy. And that actually kept me going.
Interviewer	Who were you listening to?
Anton	I was heavily back then into Judas Priest. Iron Maiden was my main band. AC/DC. Just talking to guys and saying, yes, I'm from so and so, listen to this band. I'd go and buy their album. And so you would go and buy tapes, and I had a huge tape collection so everybody would like come and listen to my tape collection and check all my imported tapes and stuff like that. I believe that and (<i>inaudible</i>) that kept me going. Because every time you were depressed or whatever, you put your headphones on and you just listen to your music. It takes you to a different place.
Interviewer	And then you did this job for 3 months where nobody even knew you were there.
Anton	Yes, a guy said, when did you start here? 3 months ago. Where were you? Stuck in an office somewhere. Why don't you come to the tea room or whatnot? But I just didn't...those guys all out of school or at varsity and then went to work and didn't go to the army and then there was no army...so, I couldn't really talk to them about that so I sort of preferred to stick to myself and I didn't really know any girls so that made it even more awkward. And slowly they invite you out for lunch, you start walking with them, and you slowly start warming up to them, and you start to socialise.
Interviewer	And then after the court, what did you do then?

Anton	<p>My dad obviously wanted me to study law and I was there two years and I realised this is really not for me, I want to be a banker, for some unexplained reason, and I resigned and I started at the bank after two years. At that stage I looked extremely young. I'm 40 now, and I looked very young. So when I started at the bank people thought that I was just out of school. Meantime I had 4 years behind me, two years army, two years work. So of course I still watched movies as a scholar <i>laughs</i> for a long time because I looked so young. There was benefits. But you couldn't buy a drink at the bar you had to have your ID on you. I was 21 and they refused to sell me liquor. I was 22. But yes, I started working at the bank and then I started to basically socialise a bit more. And at the courts I met Sarel, who was in Ops Hooper I think, in '88, but he was obviously as a camper. He's 2 years older than me.</p>
Interviewer	He was an anti tank...
Anton	<p>He was also at 1 SAI, he knows Killer Smith, so we could talk. And he also was into Judas Priest and AC/DC so we had serious stuff in common. And when I started working at the bank, I remember him saying, he worked at Trust Bank, and I tracked him down, and sort of bugged him and told him I've got this tape and I've got that tape and he told me to pull in. And so we started to visit and we started more to talk about the army and stuff like that, and more got out and I see that he's got more in common with me because I knew no guys...I kept contact with some guys. I phoned a lot but nobody really kept contact with me. So I sort of lost contact with them.</p>
Interviewer	Just going back a bit, when you got back, I remember you said earlier that your mom nearly jumped out of her skin when she saw how thin you were.
Anton	<p>Also, not just that, I was a...practising in South West Africa, I was driving in a Ratel and I was out of the hatch and they told me to tune the radios, and I went to tune the radios and as I stood up one of the riflemen was driving, which you're not allowed to because he didn't have a licence, and he drove underneath a big tree. And what happened is the thick branches basically hit me in the face, smashed my face against the hatch door that's 90 degrees open, threw my headset off on the ground, cut my lip open here, across my nose, opened my eye, a big cut and there was blood running down and the driver thought now he's dead. I jumped out and there's blood everywhere and they threw me in a Ratel and took me through to the medics. And these clowns, my whole face is now covered in blood because it's bleeding like anything, and these monkeys were like, what's wrong with this guy? They look, and they see the cut in my eye and they say, yes, this guy must get stitches. Now they're scratching around in their stuff and they say, do we have, I don't know, point five or point six thread? No, they didn't. It's going to leave a scar. Let's not stitch it up. They're having this conversation now</p>

	<p>while...hello! And I think they had drank too, so I didn't chat back and I was in bloody pain and there's blood everywhere and my face is starting to swell. And they stitched up my eye here. So I had a drooped eye for quite a while. My nose they left because they couldn't. Then they let me go and they look and blood's still running out my lip. Oh we have to stitch up that too. And then they send me back without washing the blood on my face. So they wrapped me up and my guys saw me and said, it's a bump, what's wrong with you? And I took my bandages off, these guys almost fainted. Because my whole face was swollen up. So now of course they want to take action against me because why was I up in the turret, this and that?</p>
Interviewer	Rather than trying to fix your wound.
Anton	<p>All this yes, did you hurt yourself, you're not allowed to, all this rubbish. I basically ignored them. Now they're going to send a letter to my mom to say what happened. And that letter never arrived. <i>Laughs</i> Because in my letter I wrote to them I said, you know, I've got a bit of bumps, a bit of stitches, so that sort of thing. And when I got home my mom saw my face and she saw my eye was drooping and all that. It's now basically vanished but that and how skinny I was. There's a photo of me lying by the pool without a shirt on. Now when I look at it, whoa, it's scary.</p>
	END OF SIDE A (<i>counter at 534</i>)
	SIDE B
Interviewer	And then you start working at Trust Bank and you mentioned earlier on that you were called up for some camps.
Anton	<p>Yes, the first year they give you a break, because you were operational you get one year off. So they're not going to call you up '88, which is great. Was early '89 I got my first letter. Now, where was that? Lohatla. The hell hole. Re-training again. Awful, awful time. The bad thing there was the bank said, if you go, whatever the army pays you gets deducted from your salary, so you don't get double pay. You get salary, so whatever the army pays you and there's a formula. So you go for 30 days, you come back, and then the army taxes you...but these guys don't take it in corporation, so you actually get less pay out. So you basically get screwed going to the camps. So a lot of guys were trying to gyppo. A lot of guys were paying money to get their files removed or never forwarded their addresses, just tried to get away, not to get called up because you're just losing out. And your employer is like, oh must this guy go on camps again, and he's frowning. So the first camp was pretty damn horrible. Again, there at Lohatla was doing Project Excalibur. I remember not using the loo for 21 days, because I wasn't eating. Out again, giving us rubbish, rubbish to eat, giving my food away, again trading cigarettes for chocolates or whatever the guys had to eat and travelling back. And funny, Sarel was called up for the same camp and we went together to the same camp, which was great because now I knew a guy. Different division, he had stripes and</p>

	all that, but we went with and we went back together in the bus. So that's great, I at least knew a guy.
Interviewer	What did you feel at that stage, you've been called up for a camp...ok, it's a year later, they've given you a year off, but you know that by and large South Africa had withdrawn out of Angola by that stage.
Anton	That's it, the Resolution 435 came in, SWAPO won the election or whatever the case was, and maybe we were protecting ourselves against the ANC or the new enemy, inland, because military presence we knew was very important in the township if chaos breaks through, because history has proven if the cops go in and they screw up, send the military in and it's all over. So we basically (<i>inaudible</i>) because what's the point now? So that was a bit crappy because we were treated again like nothing and we've just been through all this. So that was pointless. So that's over and you get back to work and a year later they call you up again. And so you see how the military deteriorates and how lean it had become and every camp after you go that, and then your employer tells you, no, no, no, camps are not compulsory anymore so you can't go, sort of thing. And that's basically in itself faded out.
Interviewer	That was around about '92?
Anton	Yes, '92...'94 I started in Musgrave, and then they called me up for some...I must come claim some medal. Great. So my employer told me I'm not allowed to go and my manager I told, but I'm going actually on parade to get a medal. Back then, then they changed it that for the first 30 days the bank will pay you full, so I'm scoring some extra money as well. So I went to Bloemfontein. We didn't even get the medals because they weren't ready, so they mailed it to me anyway. We went to Bloemfontein, there was no ammunition to fire with. Everybody was...the guys we knew there, the PFs, were laid back and we were shocked how run down it's become. It was really nice to be there to see how it's changed. And of course suddenly there was a huge influx of blacks in the army, and that was like new to us. But they weren't allowed to walk around with a rifles because they were selling them, and we were like, really? <i>Laughs</i> Selling them across the fence? Wow! You're caught doing that you don't hear from the guy again, he's probably somewhere. <i>Laughs</i> So that was quite an eye opener. And that was basically the last camp, because after it just died out.
Interviewer	In your other camps in the early nineties, did you get sent to the townships?
Anton	Yes, I did. Not really a township but it was in Vereeniging. I had no idea what's there but we paraded the city, the town and the surrounding areas. And there were taxis riding around flashing AK 47s at you and whatnot. And we would try and stop them and search their vehicles or whatnot. They would give you ten bullets. If you come back today they count ten. If one is missing, ooh boy,

	<p>are you in trouble, so you don't lose them, and you go out they give you ten again and that sort of thing. So it was very strictly controlled. And they warn you if you're going to shoot someone, they're going to bring you back for court cases and you're going to be in years of trouble. So don't shoot anyone, just...now's a new age, we need to...we're there to show our presence but don't go and shoot anyone please. And if it's really necessary do but otherwise don't. So we knew that you don't go willy nilly now firing. And you met a couple of guys that were in other operations in other units and you started to chat to them. Some guys asked if they can join me when we go out, whatnot, because where I was, where I come from, and was it really this GV that went out and told the guys, yes, I going to machine gun, I'm going to kill 50 terts or whatever. I was laid back but where I came from, Six One, they said, yes, were you there? Great, they want to hang out with me. So it was quite nice, and that was the only township really I did.</p>
Interviewer	Were you in Buffels?
Anton	Buffels, yes.
Interviewer	The townships there, can you remember, would it have been Sharpeville, Sebokeng, Boipatong, Bophelong, any of those names?
Anton	No...it wasn't rural township, it was more...I remember walking through the centre of town and the people were like closing their doors and locking their shops. We're like, we're just here to show our faces, that's all we're here, don't worry. And walking among the civvies. And driving around township areas but never really going in as much. We were told that that was a no-go at this stage.
Interviewer	And so then your army sort of career finishes around about then, that's your last camp. And then you've been with the bank ever since.
Anton	Yes.
Interviewer	In those years afterwards, South Africa changed dramatically in '94, in the years afterwards...I mean, Sarel is clearly a good friend of yours, do you guys ever talk about what it was all about?
Anton	Yes. A lot of guys would ask, and I say, you weren't there so you don't know, so shut up sort of thing. But the guys who were there, they all basically have the same feeling, what was it for? What a waste. Now that the country is handed over to them anyway. I don't know, I'm usually cynical but...my point of view was, basically we were sent up there to minimise the head count of the enemy and the Communists. And what we were really doing there is destroying as many of them as we could. And I think through doing that we were successful. The fact that South Africa is not being recognised for any of that and the country now belongs to someone else...I think one of the saddest moments I

	<p>can remember is seeing on news where Jonas Savimbi was lying there with no shoes on, in the field, shot dead. Hell, I was depressed. I remember phoning Sarel and telling him, today is a really sad day, and he's like yes. And I said, that was one good guy. We used to speak to Unita as well and guys took photos of Unita and I must respect that for him, it was really sad. That was a sad moment for me. But also I got a letter to say somewhere...must have been after '94, to see if I need to come...what do they call it...to go and repent my sins of the past. <i>Laughs</i></p>
Interviewer	To go to the TRC.
Anton	<p>Yes, and you know what I did then I took that thing...I should have kept it...but I threw it. Idiots. My job was not to go into townships and shoot South African blacks, it was to keep Communism out, and that's what I did. So what the hell has it got to do with them. So obviously there are baddies that did stuff that we're not proud of, and that's them. So I laughed that off. Then they sent me some medal to say, that I was available when Nelson Mandela was freed. I wasn't even and I got that medal. And a certificate. It's a little ridiculous little...it's got an infinity sign on it. It's a little bit of an embarrassment but we keep it because we got it but it's not something to be proud of. The Modular medal I got and the certificate is fantastic. Obviously Pro Patria that you get. And then Sarel obviously started to trade in, online, eBay, and that sort of stuff. Somebody just made an offer on all my stuff, for R8000. The idea is he keeps all my stuff but he's not allowed to sell it.</p>
Interviewer	Would you want him to sell it ever?
Anton	<p>No. He's sold his and he re-bought another guy's one but he's so despondent. He says he was stupid, he never should have done it. He sold it for R2300, or whatever, he never should have. And someone saw my group, my certificates and all that, my Six One balkie goes for about R750 in America. And then you buy a fake. So mine is slightly different shape, different colour and it's the proper one you get, and you only get it if you are Six One, and you only get it if you've behaved yourself. If you misbehave they take it away. So that he's been haunting me for and I told him, that's at his place, but that, he's not allowed to give away and sell because it's a big part of the Six One legacy. So I'm very proud of that stuff but it was deteriorating at my place, when I moved and all that it wasn't looked after well. Where it's now with him, he's restored the certificates and all that and looking after it, so I'm very proud of that and the South African border wars. I think it's an integral part of our history.</p>
Interviewer	And you say some of the guys, you talk and you say, well what was that all for and what a waste and the country's been given to somebody else now. Do you feel excluded from the South African now?

Anton	<p>Yes, I think most servicemen who went through that do feel...I think so. Now and then when Sarel has had a few drinks in and he's talking, now they run the country. Yes, but that's not really what it was for. We were doing it there because all white South Africans had to go in a certain...if you had a specific job you didn't have to go. Spornet and those guys didn't have to go. We had to and it's part of what we became. And although looking back you obviously never ever want to go through that again, I'm very glad I did. It's a very important...I think it made me what I am today. And sometimes when I see Carte Blanche, a couple of years back, guys talking about what they saw and what they went through and some of the Recces and how they're having post traumatic stress and all that. I'm like, give them their space and I let them talk but I also don't want to go on an American talk show and cry in front of millions like the Americans do and then carry on and on and on about how poor little me. Because I'm one of thousands that went through that. So I do feel excluded yes, but...and you know it's funny, when I work with some of my colleagues that are 20 years younger than me and I ask, when were you born? He says X, I say, you know that I was in Angola then. What were you doing there, on holiday? I'm like, no! There was a war going on. They say, what war?</p>
Interviewer	They genuinely don't know.
Anton	<p>And that was scary that...then I realised, it was quite a shock to me that they'd forgotten that...they were obviously not taught that at schools, that whole South African war scene that we had to go through. Askari and Modular and all that. It's a pity. And it's great because last night a guy showed me a whole bunch of books on the Border wars. Unfortunately I don't read a lot so I don't have any, but where he mentions specifics, which I can actually relate to, which is fantastic.</p>
Interviewer	<p>You mention you don't want to go on American TV or do that sort of TV show and make a public display of it all. Then you mention some of the guys might be suffering from post traumatic stress. Do you think you've been through post traumatic stress?</p>
Anton	<p>I think in the early days when I started work and I became depressed. What happens then, your first girlfriend dumps you and you really go suicidal and you start thinking back and you don't seem to fit in society. You start thinking why? When guys talk at parties and all that and they've never been to the army and they've all got attitudes and you're sort of withdrawn because that's how you become. You become completely withdrawn and then...go through it at special stages those days, I believe yes, I suffered from mild cases of that. And the fact that I don't really know what happened with the explosion and the shooting and all that, that is there something hidden that I'm supposed to be knowing about? So for many years I pondered upon it. sometimes it's worse, sometimes not. I don't get any nightmares though. None. Some of my friends have told me they do. They</p>

	<p>went through bad patches, they drink a lot, probably to suppress it, I don't know. I don't go in (<i>inaudible</i>). I don't also want to throw away all my stuff and say to hell with the army and all South Africa. No. It's a part of what I am today and accept it.</p>
Interviewer	<p>You say you got married late. Do you think that was a result of just your general nature or the fact that you know for 4 years you didn't get a chance to meet too many girls when you were in the army and then you came out and you were trying to find your way?</p>
Anton	<p>Yes, I think so. I think so. I was relatively withdrawn. Only knew a couple of girls and guys, but after the army I definitely became far more withdrawn, and meeting people was not on my agenda, so you don't meet people if you don't meet people. Simple as that. So later on girls start showing interest, people have to basically tell you, she's interested, wake up, sort of thing. you sort of catch on and you go through that and the ups and downs. I've become...because...and I think also because the guys don't really want to keep in contact and get together for a reunion and let's talk about the good old days. Look at how much rubbish we had to go through. Don't talk about the bad, talk about the good and laugh about it. We suffered like dogs but now we can laugh at it, so let's do it. But they don't want to do that, they don't want to get together. I feel maybe even more withdrawn, because now I really feel excluded from everybody else because nobody really wants to do that. And basically I was a loner basically all my life so the fact that I'm actually married is quite a surprise, yes.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Have you ever spoken to your wife about any of the stuff we've been talking about?</p>
Anton	<p>No not really. When I watch something and someone says...like the other day, a classic case, on the news, they were talking about the 20th anniversary of Cuito and how the Cubans claimed they won that particular war. Geldenhuys came on TV and said like, you don't...was it Fidel Castro...you don't execute one of his commanding officers if you win a battle or war. You don't do that. and they executed three of them. Which I thought...I was recording on the DVD recorder...I told my wife, look at these idiots! I was there fighting at Cuito Cuanavale. These monkeys are saying...celebrating they won it. We lost 13 or...I don't know exact figures...and they a couple of thousand. How do you justify winning that part. The fact that they won the elections is irrelevant. The war was won by us. I truly believe so. So then I sort of talked to my wife about it. At work, I work with a lot of Indians or coloureds, so obviously they were never exposed to the army, so they wouldn't know. Some of the older women, their husbands obviously went. And then I would talk to Sarel whenever I phoned. And ... the other day to a friend that's in Joburg, who wanted to see me, no, no, I'm busy, I'm talking to you, this interviewer. He said, what about? And I told him the story. People in the office were like, what war is he talking about?</p>

	<i>Laughs</i> sort of thing, which is quite shocking.
Interviewer	Do the black guys around the office ever say to you were you in the army? Were you a soldier?
Anton	Yes, yes, some guys would say, you white guys used to go to the army. There's one black guy actually working in Joburg now, I didn't have time to meet him...working in Durban...our unit closed down so we all had to find new jobs, so he found here and I found this job here. And he says, we were talking and someone said army, and he says, you were in the army? He says, no, that's impossible. I said, yes, I'm serious. He said, you! You're a skinny guy, how could you be in the army? You don't look like a soldier. So I brought a 20mm cartridge and an R1 and an AK 47 round...don't know where I got those...I brought them all. These were the ammunitions we shot with and stuff. And I couldn't find my pictures. Only my...? I couldn't find. And he just shakes his head. Can't quite believe it. Quite odd.
Interviewer	But in your mind, the war that you fought was primarily an external war. It was against, I think you pointed out, that you felt it was against expansion of Communism. So even though you were in the townships you weren't necessarily fighting war there.
Anton	No.
Interviewer	The war was actually South West Africa and Angola.
Anton	Yes. And in the townships, really what we were doing there was, the ANC who were the bad guys, who were also making nonsense and we were helping the SAP by controlling that. Which in our eyes were basically or relatively part of the bigger picture. Wasn't it all part of Communism as well? Because you really don't know...the South African Communist Party and the ANC...don't really know the difference between the two. They're all bad.
Interviewer	Do you vote in elections now?
Anton	Yes I do. We had a braai last week and the guy says, do we have to...why ? One guy in the braai says, just go and do it. It doesn't take much time out of your hands, just do it. Even though you think it's a lost cause, one day maybe it isn't. So we go and vote.
Interviewer	And do you ever sit back and think, what would my life have been like if I didn't have to go to the military?
Anton	Yeah...I honestly can't tell you how I would think that...I can see my wife's brother, and other guys slightly younger, like my friends. Most of my friends are a bit younger. Because I was single for so long I had younger friends. And none of them went and I can see their attitude and their way, and it's not really the war, it's the basic training and the discipline and respect. And they have none. <i>Laughs</i> These guys don't have a clue the way they talk to their parents. I'm like, you wouldn't do that if you went

	to the army and were taught some bloody manners. So yes...I do see a massive difference.
Interviewer	For the good, it taught you discipline?
Anton	Yes, actually maybe they can just bring a year back to show the guys discipline, how to handle a rifle, and if something does happen, that they can call up guys to stand guard just to show a presence but not necessarily to go and attack a country or anything. Like a lot of the countries are doing. Which is great. But it's just a pity that we don't do that.
Interviewer	I just want to go back to something that you said about...when you were in the township, Mamelodi, outside Pretoria, and that guy came up to you and spoke to you and that was your first interaction with black people...
Anton	Yes.
Interviewer	When you were in South West and Angola, did you have exposure to black soldiers...Three Two...I know that you met Unita...but did you have exposure to Three Two, 101 Battalions...?
Anton	Three Two and 101 Battalions basically picked up a radio signal where the enemy was and came past us. We heard fire, they came back, and we knew they went in to go and kill a bunch of guys because that's what they did. But that's it. They didn't really want us to mingle with Three Two or 101. And Koevoet was obviously Koevoet. We knew that they were...a lot of guys were ex terts and (<i>inaudible</i>) and they were hardened soldiers. They never wanted to expose us to those guys. They kept us more or less to ourselves.
Interviewer	Are there any points that you want to make about that era that impact on your life, on your thoughts, on just anything? Is there anything that you think we haven't covered?
Anton	Not offhand...a lot of people think...any film that you see...I'm quite a bit of a film buff, especially war films. Over the years I became, never used to be. A lot of them are made anti war, sort of selling the point of how bad war is and all that. It's funny that <i>laughs</i> since the beginning of time we had war and I don't think we'll ever stop, but it is a necessity for you to protect your borders. Protect your country from invaders. It's an integral part. So that's why I feel that it was necessary for us, because if South West African back then was taken over then we would have been next. It was just evident that we had to protect ourselves. But it was just for me a necessity.
	END OF INTERVIEW (<i>counter at 210</i>)

Collection Number: A3079

Collection Name: "Missing Voices" Oral History Project, 2004-2012

PUBLISHER:

Publisher: Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand

Location: Johannesburg

©2016

LEGAL NOTICES:

Copyright Notice: All materials on the Historical Papers website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Disclaimer and Terms of Use: Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

People using these records relating to the archives of Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, are reminded that such records sometimes contain material which is uncorroborated, inaccurate, distorted or untrue. While these digital records are true facsimiles of paper documents and the information contained herein is obtained from sources believed to be accurate and reliable, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand has not independently verified their content. Consequently, the University is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the website or any related information on third party websites accessible from this website.

This document forms part of a collection, held at the Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.