

Eddie Wesselo                      28/04/08  
 Ex 32 Battalion, Sandton Commando & SA Navy  
 Missing Voices Project      Interviewed by Mike Cadman

	SIDE A
Interviewer	Tell me a bit about your background, where you grew up, what type of family...
Eddie	<p>Well I was born in Pretoria in November 1940 and I was born in Pretoria because that was the cheapest place my dad could find for my mom to have me. We lived in Joburg. They were immigrants from Holland, they came out in '36, I was born in '40. And I grew up in Joburg basically as a Holland speaking youngster. Got a brother and a sister. And I went to 7 different schools. Started off in an English school not being able to speak a word of English and a year later I went to an Afrikaans school not being able to speak a word of Afrikaans. So I grew up pretty well bilingual or trilingual, whatever. And I had a fairly straight forward youth. My parents were both photographers, they had their own photographic studio. And as such I had to come home from school and do some work in the studio in the afternoons. The Hollanders were pretty work oriented. And therefore I missed out on a lot of sport and things like that, which I did miss quite a bit, because work was waiting. Anyhow, I matriculated at Damelin College eventually, and then started working for my dad in the studio on a full-time basis. But always felt a little bit disappointed that I wasn't balloted for military service. Because that was the ballot system where you did a three month camp, and for the next three years you did three weeks and that was it, that was your military training. I always felt that I really wanted to see this part of life. Not that I'd been subjected to it. There were certainly ancestors that had been involved in military careers. My father wasn't, he had polio and therefore wasn't liable for service during the war, or in Holland. And worked for my dad as I say, then I went off to P.E. for a year, I just wanted to sort of get out of the photographic environment for a while. And at that stage I just decided that I wanted to do some form of military service and I volunteered for the Air Force Gym. The Air Force Gym because I wanted to do photography, they were one of the gyms that offered a good photographic course, and eventually after the third time I managed to get in and I went to the gym in 1961 where I did my first year's gymnasium training. A hard year. Gym training in those days was pretty rigorous, it was strict, it was excellent. I certainly enjoyed it, of course there were those who didn't enjoy it. Managed to play my sport. I trained in rugby, I played for the staff team because I was too old to play for the gym team, the average sort of age being 17, 18 year olds. I'd turned 21 in that year. But had the fortune of practising rugby with likes of Frik du Preez and Manneljies Roux who were both Springboks at the time.</p>

Interviewer	Was that fortunate, your body must have taken a...?
Eddie	<p>That was fortunate. Gratefully we didn't play against them too often. We just sort of ran with them, we did the odd bit of training. both amazing players. Yes, in those days they used to pass a hat around to find money to go overseas to play for the Springboks. There just wasn't the sort of professional sport it is now. But I had a good year. Really. I did photography in the gym. And in fact Manneljies Roux was my pilot, my first training flight who gave me a bit of a hairy ride because he knew who I was. But it was fun. I really enjoyed that. Then after gym I joined my dad's studio and worked there from 1962 till 1968. 1962 the end of the year I got married, I had 4 kids with my first wife. Our first lot were a set of twins. And then another son and a daughter. In fact my daughter was killed in a car accident a month ago, so we lost her. But I worked there until 1968. Very difficult. I think it's difficult working for parents for starters. My father was a typical Hollander, very tight pockets, and eventually I found it impossible to carry on with him so I left the studio, which we closed down. But yes, it had been going for a long time, it had a very good name but it was just impossible to carry on. In 1962 having just left the gym I started missing the military life already after a month, and as you know, gymnasium, once you've finished your year that was it. You left and you were finished. And then I saw an article in the paper about the new infantry commandoes, the English speaking commandoes that were being started in Johannesburg, West Park, East Park, Wemmer Pan and... what was the fourth one, I've forgotten. So I went to the meeting at the Drill Hall and signed up there and then, and that was my start of my service with West Park Commando where Colonel George Duxbury was the first OC. I spent most of my military career in West Park, worked myself up to eventually to be OC. I was acting OC for two years and then officer commanding for five years. During that time, during the time that I was OC, we got the Freedom of Sandton, which was a big parade. We got our unit colour as opposed to the national colour, during that time. And we also during my years there, we developed the whole civil defence system in conjunction with Sandton town council. This was presented to the army and town councils at a big show in Kimberley where we took it, and this was in fact adopted as a standard procedure for town councils and commando units to work together for all matters, be it floods, earthquakes, military uprisings, anything like that, so it worked really well.</p>
Interviewer	What sort of year are we talking about there?
Eddie	<p>We're talking there about 1975, '76, somewhere around there... in fact '74 I think it was. We went to the town council and our guys were taught fire fighting for instance. So if a big fire broke out they could actually call up the commando members and they could be fire fighters. Road blocks of course were par for the course. Cordons and searches, things like that, to assist the police and that sort of thing. But it was any civil defence and any</p>

	<p>defence matter that the commandoes were liable for. And this is one of the reasons that I think the commando people, and we're talking about a commando as opposed to a skip commando, which is the old system of commandoes, where the best shot was the OC and the second best shot was the adjutant and the third best shot was the warrant. I think we did on average probably about three to four times as much service as traditional units because we had the civil defence side, we had internal security, we had the townships...we all had our own allocated township. In '76 for instance we were very active in the townships.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Would you have done Alex?</p>
Eddie	<p>We did Alex. Alex was our township. We had border service and we had promotion courses. Because like any other army unit if you wanted promotion you had to do a course plus two camps before you could be promoted, so you were pretty busy with this, so all your holidays went one way, they went on courses. So yes, my time with West Park, which became Sandton Commando during my ten years OC as well, when we got the Freedom of Sandton we became Sandton Commando.</p>
Interviewer	<p>And what years were you the OC?</p>
Eddie	<p>I was OC from 1979 to 1985. From there I went to 7 Infantry Div, and from 7 Infantry Div I went to the navy. I came to the navy in '88 so I was there in '85. So I was OC from 79-85. and before that acting OC for two years. Yes, it was really good years, they were hard years. We spent up to anything of five or six nights a week at the headquarters because we didn't have admin staff. Our area bound members, those were members with their own businesses, with health problems, that couldn't go and serve in camps, were then assigned to admin duties. They became admin clerks, admin oriented. And whereas our fit guys were fit for all other duties. We had a small company do border service twice but commandoes generally were more called up in smaller groups than as individuals. Whereas the traditional units were called up in platoons and companies and even whole battalions.</p>
Interviewer	<p>And when you say traditional, you're thinking there Rand Light Infantry...</p>
Eddie	<p>Rand Light Infantry, The Dukes, Cape Town Highlanders, the Scottish...as opposed to commando units, which were...the commando system of course came into its own when the ballot system came in, in '73 I think it was, and then also for foreigners too could be balloted from '78 onwards I think it was. I'm not a hundred percent sure about those dates. But this of course was a very unfair thing for about five years in that foreigners got all the prime jobs in South Africa because they couldn't be balloted. And they didn't have to go and do border duties. Which was a very, very sore point amongst the South Africans.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Did you find guys saying, listen, I know you're going to call me up and I'm going to find every way I can to get out of it because it's</p>

	going to jeopardize my job, it's going to take me away from my family?
Eddie	Oh, as OC, that's why you had to spend so much time there. In fact I know of two cases where two members offered...we had a half day secretary, she was secretary for the gunner's association and our unit. That was the only full time staff we had. And on two occasions she was actually told that if she could produce their file, remembering that at that stage the only file for every member was at the unit. It's not like everything is computers and sits in a central...it was all on one file. And she was on two occasions by two different people told, you produce the file, your brand new motor car will be registered in your name, in your driveway tomorrow. So there were huge temptations for that sort of thing. We did have one guy who committed fraud, took some of the money that shouldn't have been his. He was caught out. A senior officer. He was caught out but unfortunately the day before his trial he died of a heart attack, so he could never be tried. But things were different. People were aware of looking out for this sort of thing and there was a huge big honesty element where...pay was very little. In fact in the beginning there was no pay, it cost you money. If you volunteered it cost you, it cost you holidays, it cost you money to go, there was no pay involved at all.
Interviewer	So you did it for the love of soldiering and...
Eddie	And the camaraderie and the...I loved the soldiering, the camaraderie, it was really...it was another family.
Interviewer	Ok, and also did you feel you were serving the state in a useful way?
Eddie	Absolutely. That stage I think we were all pretty well convinced that die <i>Rooi Gevaar</i> was the one to watch out for, and if we didn't guard against this we'd all be in trouble. Which at one stage may have been a fact but later it certainly wasn't. But yes, it was duty to the state. I mean, in as much as that most of us carried on serving after '94, and we still do our duties, did all the election patrols and things like that, and still did our duties. It was duty to the state. And love for your country. It's really what it was. And I'm one of those South Africans that's born and bred here and my feet are firmly planted never mind what.
Interviewer	In the sort of seventies, we had the '76 uprising, which was the first really big sort of event that got national publicity and I think that changed a lot of people's attitudes to a lot of things. And from then on, in '78, conscription was changed from one year to two years, and there was a ratcheting up of a whole militarization of the state. Did you sense that in your commitment or your requirements as a commando? Was more and more stuff put on your plate?
Eddie	Oh yes, because at that stage I was OC of the unit. And definitely the orders were, tighten your belts, tighten security...you know,

	we also had what we called VPs and VIPs. Vulnerable points and very important points. Like with ( <i>inaudible</i> ) ammo depot, we had SABC, we had areas that were considered as targets for bombings, etc. And now there we also had to supply manpower to guard these places, so we had to tighten up on those. Security had become a huge problem. We had to tighten up on personal security, unit security, etc. And in '76 we spent that first bad weekend, which I think was June, July, somewhere around there.
Interviewer	June.
Eddie	June. We spent 4 days in Alex, without coming out. As OC I spent there, the troops were all on standby, right outside the township. We didn't have to call them in in the end because it was quelled by the police, but it was violent, it was a rough one, it was not a good time for South Africa. But after that we certainly did have to tighten up the belts and increase training and look at being sent up north.
Interviewer	And then when you say your unit had a couple of border calls, were those in the seventies or were those the early eighties?
Eddie	Seventies. Those were the seventies. We had two border calls before I actually went up myself, because we were very involved with work at the unit, but once you sort of get going and this thing...this is the other thing I liked about the military, it was organised. We could plan, we could organise, we'd say, right, this is how we're going to do this, and plan, plan, plan, plan. Plan A, plan B, plan C. Plan A didn't come off, plan B came in. So by that time we were organised to the point where I felt I could actually go away and I was then called up for duty at Grootfontein. I was told it was a Grootfontein post as ops officer. I got my call up while I was on holiday in December 1976. At this stage I had also just been divorced, I got divorced in 1975.
Interviewer	Ok, and at the same time you're working, you're running your own business as a photographer?
Eddie	I was working for RAU at the time. In 1968 I left my dad's business and I worked for a friend of mine for a year in sales. Certainly wasn't my thing. I wanted to get back to photography. And then I worked for Wits. I became a medical photographer for the department of surgery. I worked there for two and a half years and then I got a call from a friend of mine in Durban who wanted me to join his photographic firm. Dennis Cleaver Studios up on the Ridge at Tollgate. I worked there for 18 months but all his promises of partnerships, etc, came to nil. And then I was phoned by RAU, who had just started up...Rand Afrikaans University. In fact they were still in Braamfontein when they phoned me and they offered me a job there as art photographer for a big project on Maggie Loubser, which I accepted. So I went to RAU and from then I'm always at universities...three different universities but I'm always at universities. So from 1971 I was at universities. And I spent the rest of my working life at universities.

Interviewer	But then you get the call up to go to Grootfontein.
Eddie	<p>Ok, then I got the call up and at this stage now remembering that I was a single parent with four kids, because I got my four kids when I got divorced. Which was a problem because two of them were at boarding school, which is not such a huge problem but I had two at home. But my daughter then went to my ex wife and my youngest son stayed with friends for three months, which is a big take now, I think it was hard on the kids, and it was hard on those kids. It wasn't easy to be told, you're staying there for three months, goodbye, your dad's going off. But be that as it may, I got the call up and I went up in the beginning of January 1977. I went to Grootfontein, I <i>klaared in</i>, the same night I did ops duty with one of the old hands to show me the ropes, and of course, as you know, whatever you learn down here, up there the opposite counts. But you learn quickly. You go in at the deep end, you learn quickly. Had a good kip the next day and the next night I was sailing solo. The old ops guy had already left. So once again, you learn even quicker. But we'd been very involved in mapping, map marking, in sitreps through the work we were doing at the unit, so it wasn't that huge big a change. So I went through that night, and the next morning had breakfast, I went to bed and I was only just falling asleep and a young lieutenant came and called me and said, the brigadier wants to see you, because the brig was then OC of the whole area, it was based in Grootfontein. I thought well obviously I really boomed or something, so got dressed quickly, ran up, and ushered into his office, there's the Brig, and then slouching in a chair across the side there was old Jan Breytenbach, AK 47 across his chest, beret pulled over his eyes, typical young Breytenbach, and the Brigadier said to me, I want you to listen, I don't want you to say anything, and when we're finished talking, Commandant Breytenbach...he was then Commandant...so Jan Breytenbach explained to me that they'd just established this new unit – in fact it wasn't even know as Three Two I think, it was still known as the Buffalo Regiment if I'm not mistaken – and this was the story, FNLA troops and they all came down from Savannah, they'd been trained up and they're going to be operational in South Africa. Can I work with blacks? I said, yes, I could. And he said, they're all Portuguese speaking, would this be a problem? I said, I can't see that it would be a problem. He said to me, are you interested? I said, yes sir. To me this was a damn sight better than sitting in the ops room at night. And he said, right, you've got 20 mins to pack, meet me at my car. So that was my intro to Three Two...</p>
Interviewer	At that stage what rank were you?
Eddie	<p>I was then a major. I was still acting OC at Sandton. And so off I went to Rundu, I had a part of one of the hangars there, and I was shown the ropes over there, got my info, told where, what, and how. Not forgetting that Three Two then didn't exist. Legally for all intents and purposes we didn't exist. As I told the guys, if</p>

	<p>we wanted a car we had to steal it. And people soon opened the bases, you don't leave keys in the car, because it's gone. Never mind what vehicle, it's gone. We had to beg, borrow, and steal a lot of stuff. Jan Breytenbach then decided he's going to send me to a little base called Charlie November, which was just north east of Eenhana, which is a hell of a long way from Rundu. So got all my info and all the rest of it and stuck on a rat run to Omahole. Omahole was a technical HQ and it had just been taken. In fact it was pretty well a brand new base. And old Eddie Viljoen was there. Eddie Viljoen and I became big mates. We really became good friends. He was also a major then. At Omahole, bundu bashing most of the way because it was Oom Willie's se Pad, which ended just short of the river. It was all mined. So bundu basing was the way. It took us two days to get to Omahole. Spent a day there and then another two days to Charlie November and ended up at Charlie November where there were guys from 3 SAI, which was a little signals detachment, which was in that base as a sort of telstar group. We took over the base lock, stock and barrel, other than personal effects we took over the ammo, we took over the tents, we took over the food, and we had a 16x16 tent packed to the roof with Provita. It was all dry rations, there were no wet rations, there was no supply for us. We had ammunition coming out of our ears, we had mortars, we had mortar pits, all pretty new stuff to somebody who's coming from an urban area. But 20 minutes later they were on their way, they wanted to get out, they wanted to get back, they were going back to the states – South Africa as we called the states. And there was sat. I sat with five of us, five personnel. I had two Portuguese chefs, probably two chefs because they both spoke Portuguese in case. I had a sergeant major, all commando guys. I had a signaller and I had a mortar guy. And that was it. And the troops were going to arrive three days later. But we had Charlie November for six weeks from where it was. On average I had three platoons on the South West African side of the border and one platoon up north. Mainly reconnaissance but SWAPO was becoming very active. And in fact my first guy I lost there was a young lieutenant by the name of Gerhard Kilder. It was a section of them that ran into about...we reckon it was about 300 SWAPO. And a five minute fire fight, they ran, but Gerhard was killed. And he was actually wearing my shirt. So it was the first loss, that was hard hitting. Youngster, hell of a nice guy, opted to come to Three Two, for the extra money because he wanted to study theology and become a dominee. So that was a hard one.</p>
Interviewer	Now when you say the extra money, was that danger pay?
Eddie	Danger pay.
Interviewer	Now this is a dramatic change from arranging fire fighting courses in Sandton.
Eddie	Oh! You're going from one world into another world. Slidex, running patrols, working out patrols, sitreps, trying to plan what

	<p>the enemy is going to do...there you'd get now in a situation where a guy gets killed. Now you've got to get his body out, you've got to do a casevac, you've got to do follow up patrols. We had no vehicles. Most of it was on foot, and this is why we had Charlie November. We were seven kms from the border. So it was the only way that we could actually do a quick follow up. And of course another interesting thing is that we were at sector one zero, as opposed to two zero. So we were theoretically this side of the border under another officer, colonel this side, but on the other side of the border we were directly under Three Two. Because nobody knew what was happening that side. We were clandestine basically. We went with no recognition stuff, we went with Communist weapons, we went with unmarked rat packs, etc. So it was a hell of a learning curve. During my time at Charlie November also...and this is just as an example to show what sort of guy Breytenbach was...my brother's wife died. She died from a heart disease, and my mom phoned and said...to inform me that my sister-in-law died, and that my brother was asking if I could please come down just to be with him for the funeral. And which is of course against the regulations, because [if it's a] blood relation go, anything else, bam. Jan Breytenbach got Eddie Viljoen to contact me and Eddie said...Carpenter was Jan Breytenbach...Carpenter says, would you like to go? So I said, yes, I'm in the middle of the bush. He says, do you want to go? I said, well I'd love to go but I know the rules and...he says, you want to go, you'll be picked up in an hour and a half. An hour and a half later a chopper came to pick me up, took me to the base, got a clean shirt, clean pair of pants, flew me to Oshakati, Ondangwa. There was a <i>moer</i> of a big storm so no planes could fly, so they transferred me by vehicle to Grootfontein. I'd been without sleep at this stage for two nights and two days. I was bugged and I stank. And I sat there in that bloody ops room drinking coffee by the bucket and a young woman lieutenant came in and she said, Major Wesselo you can't go, it's your sister-in-law, it's not a blood relation. So I said, well you'd better phone Commandant Breytenbach. So she said, I will phone Commandant Breytenbach. Then she came back two minutes later and said, you're going. And apparently what he said to her is unprintable. But he just basically said to her, these are my people, lay off, <i>voetsak</i>, get out of it. And that was Jan Breytenbach. I flew done and flew back...two days later I was back. But that was...if you worked for Jan Breytenbach and you did your job he would move heaven and earth for you. And he was to me probably one of the best OCs we've ever had in this country. He was a leader by example.</p>
Interviewer	He's something of a legend in military circles.
Eddie	Absolutely.
Interviewer	I hear that story that you just told me and I've heard similar stories that he was loyal to his men, if you pulled your weight he would support you to the end.



Eddie	All the way. He was a rebel.
Interviewer	But apparently Pretoria found him a nightmare.
Eddie	<p>He was a rebel! He'd suddenly disappear. Where's Jan Breytenbach? No, he's gone to the bush. Eddie Viljoen and Breytenbach on staff course were nightmares. They were hell to live with. Both probably a bit <i>bossies</i>. We all deny that there's such a thing as <i>bossies</i>. My wife claims it's true. But oh no, he was hell. But to work for him, the troops worshipped the ground he walked on, they really did. Black, white, everything. Anyhow, so after six weeks eventually the brigadier in sector one zero got his way. He said it's much too hot where we were...I mean it was too close to the border, it was too easy to hit. We sat there sometimes with three people. We just dropped mortar bombs all around the base just to frighten off anybody who would have ideas. And they told us, and I said, well we can't go, I've still got guys on the other side. He said, well you're going, the vehicles will be there eight o'clock tomorrow morning, that's a direct order. He says, otherwise I will have you picked out there and I will return you to your unit in South Africa. I had to go. We loaded up these trucks that came, about 20 tons of ammunition we had. we burnt mountains of food, we just didn't have the space in the vehicles, and worked our way down through the <i>kaplyn</i> and we moved to a little base called Elundu, which was sort of halfway between Eenhana and Omahone, where we eventually set up a base in a corner. We had to keep completely separate. Nobody knew about us, so it was another wall within a wall. And that was sort of the operational base from there on for the platoons working south of the border and just north. That whole trip was a story in itself because we drove non stop through the night, and of course we ran into one of the CF units that had just arrived. Unbeknown to us at that stage they were also heading for Elundu and of course we were told to halt because sundown to sunup there's no movement. And I eventually got the OC out of bed and I said, listen mate if you want a riot on your hands, and a fire fight here, you get these guys to stop...and I had to confide in him, say look I've got vehicles full of black troops armed to the hilt and this can only be bad news. I can't tell you more than that but trust me. And he said, well you'd better go. And we ended up as their neighbours up in Elundu. Not that we mixed but...so we set up base in Elundu, got that all fixed up, got it all set up, operated from there for about a month, and then it was time to go home. So I jumped a rat run, went to Omahone on the way back...this is now after three months...and Eddie Viljoen said to me, listen you can't go home and I need you here. I said, what do you mean you need me here, of course I can go home. Three months later! And he said...because we were right in the middle of planning a big thing with across the border raids and stuff. So I said to him, Eddie I've got my kids at home, I've got to go. And there's no ways I can get off work for another three months. So he said, well we'll see, but cheers, see you, thank you for everything, goodbye, and off I went to Rundu, and got on to the Flossie there, which</p>

	<p>then stopped at Grootfontein...as you know there were two flights a week, one to Rundu...and when we landed at Grootfontein, while they were loading all the extra packs, once again a young lieutenant...I don't know, they must have had lieutenants growing out of their ears...comes to me and says, there's an envelope for you sir, you Major Wesselo? Yes. There's an envelope addressed to Dr Gerrit Viljoen, who was the vice chancellor of RAU, and he said, there's a meeting for you set up tomorrow morning seven o'clock. I said, well thanks very much for that, geez, I wouldn't even get to see my kids when I get home. Cut a long story short, next morning seven o'clock I'm in Gerrit Viljoen's office, and he welcomed me home with open arms, boy there's a mountain of work for you, glad to see you back. I've grown a beard, and I said, Dr Viljoen there's an envelope for you. And he opened it and read it and he came over to me, shook my hand, says goodbye, you're leaving on Thursday. So my first stint was a six month stint. I had to rearrange four kids, because the people that they were with couldn't keep my son any longer. It was hellish and very difficult.</p>
Interviewer	Did you consider saying, listen guys, I'm not doing this?
Eddie	<p>Yes. On a number of occasions. And Eddie Viljoen actually spoke to me and he explained certain things to me which made it fairly...I felt at that stage...fairly important to be there because I was involved in a lot of things, which could...I don't know if it could have led to loss of life or anything, but there was a certain amount that hinged on it...not that I was a kingpin or anything...but there were certain things that hinged...and I felt to myself, am I going to be the cause of problems or am I going to assist the thing and make sure it works and get out...and at that stage I was actually thinking maybe it will be for a couple of weeks and then I can come home. so gratefully I had some excellent super friends that all said, look, don't worry about the kids, we'll sort them out. I had a girlfriend at that stage who was looking after one of them. But that was turning sour. You know, you go away, these things don't last. So I took my son away from her and put him with somebody else, and two days later I pushed off again. And then I actually came back as officer commanding Tac HQ, Omahone. That was my new posting there. So I stayed at Omahone then for another three months. We did our little thing and we did more things and we did more things, and Eddie Viljoen and I actually started thinking alike. We could talk about things which was total nonsense to anybody, we knew exactly what we were talking about. An example is he needed a machine gun, a special Russian machine gun that we captured, with ammunition. So he said, listen they're clearing bush over at Buffalo, can I please send the chainsaw? And he said, not the small one, send me the chainsaw with 150 teeth. So I knew he wanted the 150 belt machine gun. Now things like that we started understanding each other.</p>
Interviewer	So for other people it would have been total gibberish, but for

	you, you knew what he was talking about.
Eddie	Total bullshit, otherwise we used Codex or Slidex, all those things.
Interviewer	Just for the record, Codex and Slidex were your signal codes.
Eddie	Yes. so they'd be in letter alpha, alpha letter or...and then we also had our own code system, Three Two only, so that nobody else could understand, and we used Morse code with some of our platoon leaders strangely enough, also with code, and Morse code, so it was minimal, slow Morse, things like that. So that was a good three months, and then I went back and I said, listen guys, don't phone me, I'll phone you. It was a little heavy going. Then I did a total of 22 months with Three Two Battalion.
Interviewer	All in and out, in and out.
Eddie	In and out, in and out, three months, three months.
Interviewer	And this second three month period that you're speaking of now, this must have ended what, late...
Eddie	July.
Interviewer	July '77. So it's middle of '77.
Eddie	Yes. Then '78 was up, '79 was up, '80 was up, mainly December, Christmas. The first three Christmases I had with Daphne I was up on the border. In between that as well I was called up for a three month stint at Five One Ruacana, as acting 2IC because the 2IC was away on staff course. So I did a three month stint at Ruacana. And then I was also called up at Five Two at Okavango as acting OC for six weeks.
Interviewer	So at this stage you're spending an awful amount of time in the military. Did they not pressurise you to join Permanent Force?
Eddie	Oh yes. Three Two, they kept on saying, listen the papers are on the way. One stage I seriously did consider it but it wouldn't have been fair on my kids. I think that was the one thing that actually stopped me, was my kids. It would have been fair on them. And in retrospect I'm very glad I didn't. So yes, they were hard years and from one to the other to the other it wasn't all that different, they were all fantastic experiences, they were hard work, concentrated work. It was much of the same until...and you see this all came to an end when I went to Seven Div. When I handed over command of Sandton Commando in 1979, '80, I went to Seven Infantry Division because I'd done my five years as OC, I handed over as OC. And Seven Infantry Division that was their theatre of war. So we still went to the border, we went on big planning sessions. We went on divisional planning sessions if this thing escalated, if we had to go into Angola, if...
Interviewer	Now Seven Div, what units would have comprised Seven Div, would that have been...?

Eddie	71 Brigade, 72 Brigade, 73 Brigade. It was a huge...and then we also had that thunder chariot exercise at Lohatla, which was the whole Seven Div Infantry Division that went down. That's the first time the idiot badge was handed out. The volunteer badge, we called the idiot badge. That's where Jannie Geldenhuys handed it out to about 2500 people on parade. ( <i>inaudible</i> ) I had a lot of time for Jannie Geldenhuys, he was actually a good general, he really was. I don't know if you knew that he also writes children's books.
Interviewer	Yes, I know that. He's an interesting guy, he's quite complex, old fashioned..
Eddie	Oh yes. Oh yes.
Interviewer	He insists on protocol and stuff like that.
Eddie	Except at the gunner's memorials in Potch, as OC I always got invited, and we went there one year and my wife Daphne and my quartermaster sergeant, Major Robbie Dell – he in fact was here two weeks ago – him and I were both founder units of West Park and he's still there, still closing down the unit. After all these years. Now there's an interesting guy to talk to. I'll give you some info on him. We went to the gunner's memorial and afterwards the RC always invited us to his little flat. And I actually took a photograph of my wife and Robbie's wife sitting on Jannie Geldenhuys' lap. And the next morning I got a call at work said, Commandant Wesselo, we would like those negatives. <i>Laughter</i> But he was always the nicest, superest guy. He really was great. And then one of the times that I was up there at Omahone, we had a huge problem in that our Lister engine on the water pump packed up. And that was the only water for about 200 kms. We had one pump, one engine. So no water. You know there was this strict rule about not butchering and swopping parts of cars and things like that. We had to. We did not have an option, we had to do it. But there was no other pump, so what I did is I took an old Buffel that had a huge dif problem, stuck this thing on bricks and I took the tyre off and I ran the belt over the rim onto the water pump. And this thing was pumping away, pumping away, it worked like a charm. And old General Viljoen came to Omahone, we were about to go off on a big operation, and he came to Omahone because he stayed over at Omahone, we did all the final planning and everything, final orders from General Viljoen at Omahone before. He came and he said, <i>wat gaan hier aan?</i> And he went ballistic. And I said to him, General with respect sir, we have to drink water. I understand but why haven't you got a pump? And I brought him a stack of requests, weekly I sent requests for spares to Grootfontein, which was where the big spares shops were, and he says to his adj, <i>vat daaie papiere</i> . Anyhow, ten days into the bush, back, fly off, gone. And I thought, well that's the end of it. Meantime the old Buffel is pumping water. A week later I get a signal to say there's a convoy arriving. I thought, convoy? Because Three Two bases were closed to everybody, nobody goes in. Until 1979 when

	<p>Corporal Edwards blew the whistle in the Sunday Times. Convoy, what the hell can this be? I think there were about eight or nine trucks, loaded to the hilt, pumps, motor spares, tyres, you name it. And I said to this one guy who was a captain that came with it, now why suddenly are there spares available? He said, no we didn't want to upset the stores because we were due for inspection. You know the story. The troops can go without water, we're having an inspection. So anyhow, we got two pumps, we got tyres, we got the works. So that was good. and then there were fun things like, when our wet rations arrived, they arrived in big plastic bins, so we had meat for a week. And then what we used to do is wash out the bins and then my doctor, my RSM, myself, used to go and get hot water and used to have a bath and sit there with a drink. That was traditional. In fact it's on some of the photographs you can see. That was traditional. That was meat, bath. We had hot water, because we had the donkeys. You know those big 44 gallon drums. And there were things like that. What I also did there, and one of my stints, I think it was in '77 or '78, I had a doctor who was mad about training and we actually saw a great need for training, especially amongst the troops. Now these guys were in the firing line all the time. They were the guys that fought the fire fights and got the results and got injured. So standard pack for every single troop was a drip set and bandages. And they always had a medic with them. But if your medic gets shot and a couple of your other troops get shot. So we taught each and every single troop to put up a drip set. Even in semi darkness they could do it. But what we also did is we produced five slide shows with trauma drills, emergency drills on breakages, gunshot wounds, in fact they all went through these classes. We actually taught them. We took them and we taught them, we had these slide shows and we sent a complete set to Rundu and a complete set to Buffalo as well which was a training camp. I don't know what every happened to those slide shows now but between the doctor and myself we did that. And I actually flew home halfway through to go and process this at RAU because I had all the equipment there. I was a photographer there. And flew back with them and got the guys into the training. We taught the medics how to use it as a training tool. And that worked quite well. So the guys were not only good soldiers they were sort of taught emergency first aid and trauma work as well.</p>
Interviewer	Which in itself makes a good soldier because they can look after themselves, to a degree.
Eddie	Absolutely. And at that stage I was already commandant then because then I became a commandant and Eddie of course was still a major, but then Eddie became a commandant. But when we walked around Rundu people used to say, oh there go those bloody majors. Because they didn't really know what we were there for, because Three Two wasn't there. And then Corporal Edwards blew the whistle in 1979.

	END OF SIDE A (counter at 512)
	SIDE B (counter at 21 )
Interviewer	Then there was lots of speculation about what Three Two really was. But I don't think anybody really understood until, in fact even now, I don't think people understand...
Eddie	Immediately after that we got all the bad reports about the Dogs of War in the Sunday Times and then it was...Colonel Breytenbach was already gone then...it was Deon Ferreira. And Deon said, right, all the newspapers, invite them. Open invitation. We'll fly them up. And they flew them up, they had free carte blanche to go anywhere, and they all came up and said, there's not a shred of evidence. Which of course there wasn't. Look, they were bloody hard fighting soldiers. You didn't want to fight against them. They were bloody good troops.
Interviewer	That's an interesting aspect of it. Initially it was completely secret, then Edwards comes in '79, but then as the eighties dragged on Three Two were operational most of the time.
Eddie	Absolutely.
Interviewer	And looking back to that history now I don't think people realised that much of the day to day fighting in northern South West Africa, in Angola, was actually done by black men. Three Two Battalion...
Eddie	They were all black.
Interviewer	And then later on 101 Battalion and 121 Battalion and so on and so forth.
Eddie	Yes.
Interviewer	And my understanding is that they did...those units, 101, Three Two, and 201 which was the Bushmen, and later on...on the big operations Smokeshell, Protea, stuff like that, all the Citizen Force units and the more regular units would go in, but it was the black guys who were at the front end.
Eddie	They had the shit jobs. Three Two were used mainly as reconnaissance and as stoppers. So they'd go the long way around and have the shit job. So they always got the <i>kak</i> jobs but what it did do when it was opened up, it then became a bona fide...ok, suddenly we got our own beret, we got stable belts, we got everything, we were recognised as a unit. We had summer and winter camouflage instead of just the stuff we used to go in with. What it did do is it stopped us from doing these little clandestine...because we'd get info either by some of our guys doing the reconnaissance, but we'd get info about infiltration routes, people coming in. We could nip in, take out a section and come back again. It stopped that. We had to now do all our operations formally. We weren't a clandestine, do it your own way unit any more. Which did spoil it to a large extent, but on the

	<p>other hand, we actually had as many successes with that as we did because we did get the jobs where the fighting was, and it was good. And then of course we developed our own Recce wing. In fact my last three months at Omahone I was OC of the Recces there. We had our own Parabats. We could put our three sticks of Three Two Parabats. And we had our own battery of gunners, 25-pounders, fully trained. So we could send our own battery...so it was probably one of the most complete all round battalions. In fact it was 8 companies at one stage.</p>
Interviewer	<p>And a company was about 120 troops?</p>
Eddie	<p>Well our company was 160. We were a big company. We had a huge unit. And we had all the families at Pica Pauw not forgetting that...you know how Three Two started? In 1975 Jan Breytenbach was tasked to go and assist FNLA with getting themselves sorted out and to see what we could do for UNITA because UNITA was still fighting. FNLA and UNITA were sort of on the same side where they were facing the Communist, the Rooi Gevaar. So old Jan Breytenbach flew through to Epupa with a little twin-engined aircraft, landed in the bush there, with a translator. And there was this rag a tag bunch of cut-throats, hungry, ill disciplined, absolute bunch of hooligans. That was the FNLA. And it was talk talk talk talk talk. And on the way back to the aircraft Jan says, what the hell, I didn't understand a bloody word. He says, oh, you're the OC. What do you mean the OC? No, you've been elected as the OC. This basically was our start. Jan Breytenbach then went in and took this lot and they really were trained during the year of Ops Savannah. They had on the job training. So our (<i>inaudible</i>) was forged in battle. And they were actually forged in battle, they learned by fighting. And this whole unit just grew and grew and grew, and then when he came back, they went to Buffalo, which was the base allocated, where there was nothing. And at that stage interestingly enough we were already starting to talk about Three Two Battalion and Charlie November was Three Three Battalion. But then of course we were Three Two. And then he invited these guys to bring their families back. So slowly but surely all the families came over and eventually it was a huge big thriving town with schools, with shops, with a sort of elected mayor, and Jan Breytenbach even wanted to put up a brothel. Which would have been a bloody good thing because, you know, half these troops weren't married. As soon as the married guys were off, the unmarried guys would be into the women. And he said, but he can't have it. They used to ambush each other, shoot each other at camp. And he said, right, I'll put up a brothel. We'll get some young ladies from Angola and they can look after them. And of course the dominees had a bloody fit so...that went down.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Now this is Pica Pauw. Which means woodpecker. Where exactly would that have been?</p>
Eddie	<p>Right in the middle of the Caprivi. Also on the maps that base when Three Two left, was a paradise for tourists. The mess was</p>

	<p>the most beautiful building on the river. We had the houseboat there. Charlie Spilover, that he actually brought from Angola. We found this thing floating around, said, right load up, <i>vat saam</i>. And it was really an absolute paradise that place. We used to go to order groups there, we used to go and track elephant on foot. Of course Jan Breytenbach is a conservationist second to none. You can do anything but don't touch...because if you touch his animals he'll shoot you. Personally. He was mad.</p>
Interviewer	He wrote that book...something about Eden. I forget...
Eddie	<p>Yes, there is something Eden. I haven't read it. Pica Pauw was a completely self contained village and it worked well. And of course Three Two made a lot of money because the money that was paid to the troops, especially until 1979, they didn't come out of the bucks. They couldn't sort of go to Rundu or Grootfontein and go and do shopping. They didn't exist. After '79 of course we got our own uniforms and they could actually go out into the different places and be seen. Not that it was all that possible because they were to hell and gone in the Caprivi.</p>
Interviewer	How big was Three Two? I know initially it was very small and secretive but in the end how big was Three Two, how many men?
Eddie	<p>4000 I think when they sort of got to the end of it. Then of course we had another 2500 or 3000 women and you had another 2 or 3000 kids. That was a town. A beautiful town. In fact the guy who would probably have that info would be old Piet Nortje who was the last sergeant major. I don't know if you've seen his book. In fact old Piet asked me for some more info, he's writing another book now. He's sitting in Dubai somewhere. And then there's another book now that's just come out, <i>Die Buffel Stryk Hom</i>. I haven't read it. Apparently it's also quite good and being translated. So yes, Three Two was a hugely great experience. So I really served from Ruacana all the way up to the Caprivi so I got to know the border area quite well.</p>
Interviewer	And then was Seven Div. Ok, you've now got conventional units...
Eddie	Total change.
Interviewer	They've got infantry, motorised infantry, artillery...
Eddie	<p>I was appointed as SSO counter intelligence when I first arrived, and then also eventually became their SSO COM ops. I must admit I wasn't desperately happy there. It was...to me the...I preferred the unconventional type of stuff to the very conventional. I enjoyed it, I was there for two and a half years, I certainly intended staying there till the end of my tether.</p>
Interviewer	Once again, were you still working at RAU professionally...?
Eddie	<p>Still working at RAU and then I went to Wits...I was at Wits when I was with Seven Div. And strangely enough when Wits phoned</p>



	<p>me to ask me if I wouldn't consider coming to work for them, I was in camp with a unit and we were about to get our unit colour. We'd got the freedom the year before. And I said to the personnel officer, listen this is very difficult, I'm on a camp at the moment, there's just no ways I can get home and get changed. He says, come as you are. I said, ok. So I pitched up at Wits in Senate House in a military jeep, in browns with a sidearm. And you should have seen the guys' faces at the door of Senate House. <i>Laughs</i> With a parking arranged, in the lift, up to the 11<sup>th</sup> floor, and that's how I went for my interview. And I said to them...they made a very attractive offer...and I said, you must understand one thing, I'm still very involved with the military and I need military leave. And they agreed to it. I always made that a condition of service. Trying my luck. But the senior people at the universities were pro military service, they really were.</p>
Interviewer	<p>This is the question I was going to ask you. You were now talking about the early eighties, so the political climate in South Africa was ratcheting up quite considerably...</p>
Eddie	<p>Yes.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Wits was a very radical campus...</p>
Eddie	<p>Liberal campus.</p>
Interviewer	<p>And it must have been quite interesting for you as a military person spending lots of time in the border areas, coming back to see how things were developing?</p>
Eddie	<p>Oh yes.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Was it apparent to you that...was there any indication that the political awareness was discouraging guys from going to the army? As conscripts (<i>inaudible</i>)</p>
Eddie	<p>Oh yes, big time. We had it all the time. We had confrontations. I never hid the fact that I was active in the army. I was never ever confronted by any of the students. In fact I had one or two students that were plants at the university that actually worked for BOSS that used to come and bend my ear and talk to me. But I was never ever accosted or shouted at or anything by any of the students. Black and white. And we ran a pretty...I ran the central graphics unit there. And we were pretty open to everybody. Anybody could come in and see us and it was also the photographic unit and various subdivisions of that, audio visual units and lecture theatres. So it's not like we were hidden away. And I never had a direct attack other than at the unit, guys that were called up. There we were certainly...we had our odd little threats which were pure bloody hot air. But there we faced some guys and some vicious tongues from mothers and sisters and brothers and wives. In fact I even had one guy whose wife phoned me and said, she's got to speak to her husband because the child is very sick. And I said, but your husband's not here. She said, but he's on the border. I said, well let me check, and I</p>

	<p>checked and I said, your husband's not on the border. She says, no he is, he left last month. And I said, he's not on the border. The long and the short of the story is, he came back after three months talking about all his border exploits and all the rest of it, and in fact we found out he'd spent three months with his girlfriend in Durban on a so called border...so this happened, this happened all the time. Things like that.</p>
Interviewer	<p>I'm just interested because as Sandton commander you had to look after Alex for a while, but then in the eighties the township component of military service became much more prominent. In '84 during Operation Palmiet, there were what, 5000 troops deployed around the Vaal Triangle townships. And then for the rest of the eighties the troops were in and out of the townships all the time, which in my mind must have...</p>
Eddie	<p>More commando than regular force. They were the ones that...of course I was out of the commando system at that stage, I was with Seven Div. I'd just gone off to Seven Div.</p>
Interviewer	<p>But it just struck me that military commandoes must have had a sort of divergent job. One was fighting a war on the Namibia Angola border...</p>
Eddie	<p>Oh, yes!</p>
Interviewer	<p>And the other one was a kind of peacekeeping operation where you were more policemen than soldiers.</p>
Eddie	<p>Absolutely. And toothless policemen. And all your...those roadblocks and things went on for years. And you were there to assist the police. If we'd been in a total war the police would have been there to assist us. That was the difference. So yes, but that's already since the seventies. That's why I say the commando guys had border service, they had internal security service, they had courses to do, they had camps to do, they were worked. They spent a hell of a lot of time away from work, which wasn't always easy. And luckily for me in 1980 I got married to Daphne. I mean I knew her for a month and she had full signing powers on my cheque book. Because I had to go off to the border again. And she just managed everything, and then of course there was a home for the kids to get to, because we'd met in '79 already and she was looking after everybody. So that made a huge difference. There you get the thing where, before it was, the worst part about going away is my kids, and what they were going through because I wasn't there. But then from '79 onwards they could go to Daphne and she just loved them with open arms and it was like going home.</p>
Interviewer	<p>But your example was actually replicated in many men whose situation might have varied in specifics but the general principle was the same.</p>
Eddie	<p>Oh yes. All the same.</p>

Interviewer	They were suddenly being uprooted out of their normal stable society and...
Eddie	Yes, you're a civilian getting dumped into a different world. Yes, definitely.
Interviewer	Did the army have any plans that you were aware of, did they have any sort of strategies to deal with that sort of difficulty with the men who were serving with them?
Eddie	Look they had the psychiatrists, the guys we called with the <i>lang hare en dik brille</i> . The only case that I ever had, and then I was already in the navy, was this guy B? We'd just got SAS Outeniqua and we called him up to take Outeniqua back to Russia, they had to do some work on the winches and the cranes. He was away for two and a half months. And his wife had a baby during that time, and she actually wanted to give the baby away, that's how depressed she was, and we had to get the psychiatrist.
Interviewer	You say the SAS Outeniqua had to go back to Russia for refitting?
Eddie	Yes, we bought it in Russia. It was an icebreaker.
Interviewer	What year was that?
Eddie	1994, 1993.
Interviewer	Ok, so this was after the sort of...?
Eddie	Oh, this was after the war. This now we're calling him up for a totally different, because we'd call up guys to go to sea now. Because we haven't got sailors left. So now we call up guys to go to sea. Or used to. I've been booted out. When you're 65 you get the boot. Yes, so anyhow I ended up at Seven Div and then I was there for two and a half years, and then my old friend Lucas Bacchus who was OC of SAS Rand, which was the naval reserve unit in Joburg, he phoned me one day and he said, Eddie I want you to come to the navy. And I said to him, you're crazy. He was at that stage an admiral junior grade, because he'd left as OC and he was now part of director naval resources. No, he was captain then. And I said, but you're crazy. I know there's a sharp side and a blunt side, but that's as much as I know about ships. He said, no, I want you to come and handle the marines. Now of course the navy had started the marine corps in 1989 or something...you'll get all that from John who's the founder of the marine corps. And there was a problem in the reserve units between the marines and the other navy. Because it was the brown navy and the blue navy. Because marines were infantry trained. The only difference is they were a little bit like, the Parabats were delivered by air, the marines were delivered by landing craft, but they were infantry trained to fight, they were infantry trained to look after VIPs in Simon's Town and things like that. So there was a problem and they actually didn't have trained

	<p>people to look after this one. So I said, Lucas ok, sounds fine to me. Purely coincidentally at the time, I was also in the process of getting a job at UCT. I'd got offered the job as director of medical graphics at Groote Schuur, which is a joint UCT Groote Schuur Hospital post.</p>
Interviewer	<p>What year are we looking at now?</p>
Eddie	<p>'88. So I sort of thought, yes, why not? I wasn't that happy at Seven Infantry Div. And I thought yes this is a challenge more in my sort of field. And Lucas Bacchus ripped out a sheet of this lined paper and he wrote down there, request of immediate transfer, blah, blah, blah. So two weeks later I was transferred. Boom. Suddenly now I'm in the navy. And it all worked well, because we were on the brink of moving down and I had to come down for an interview at UCT, and at the same time I had to come down for a conversion course to the navy. So I just slotted the two together and it all worked out well. And then I was SS of marines for director of naval resources. And then two years later they disbanded the marines. So now here's this ex pongo blue, whatever you like to call him, floating about. Stayed with director naval resources and then '93 I was appointed officer commanding of SAS Yselstein, which was the reserve base in Simon's Town. And I was OC there until '99. It's all in this wad there. And then usually it's five years, I was six years and then you hand over to the next OC. And then I stayed on the strength of the navy, I was doing boards of enquiry, I was doing all sorts of other little jobs for them. And then in 2003, I think it was, I was called up to come and look after the Naval Museum for a month, because the OC had retired, and the person who was looking after it was needed for another job, and I ended up staying there for two years as officer commanding Naval Museum in Simon's Town. So that was two good really fun years. I'd retired in '99 from UCT, so I was free agent and of course it was an extra bit of income for us, which was very welcome.</p>
Interviewer	<p>At Seven Div you would have been involved in carrying some of the bigger operations, whether it be Protea or Meebos, or, I'm not quite sure of the years...</p>
Eddie	<p>That was done at brigade level. Those were the brigades, because not all the brigades were involved with that. We were involved in the overall planning of the contingency plans if all the brigades had to go up, in other words how would we move them up? And you had brilliant, Klaus van Lieres, who's the advocate general of the Transvaal at this stage, he was our SSO Log. Roy Anderson, was SSO Ops. Two absolutely brilliant brains. These guys used to deliver a ops or intplan for 4, 5 hours...now they wanted to sit and listen and make little notes, the enemy says, right, you're moving 53 tanks up there, you're moving 48 tanks up there, you've got one tank carrier there, you've got five tank carriers there, you haven't got enough fuel to go there, you're going to run out of fuel at that and that other point. This was the sort of brain. This was the sort of operation which was quite</p>

	<p>frankly a little bit above me, because I haven't...I've come through the conventional...I did the conventional course to become an officer, because there weren't IS courses then. Then I went and did the IS course at Kimberley. So I qualified in all the courses, but the conventional course I did to become an officer. And so much of that I actually I still remember, but if you haven't been fully trained in conventional warfare and you suddenly get into this whole conventional, it's a different thing. I did two modules of the senior staff course, but I lost my left eye in 1980 and suddenly just boom, boom, I had a detached retina reattached six times, boom, boom, boom, and I actually had a major problem after about midnight I'd start getting blurry because on those courses you work 16 hours a day, otherwise you don't make it. So I did two modules but then I just couldn't carry on, my eye just packed up and I actually said to Colonel Dippenaar who was our 2IC at Seven Div, I said, maybe at some stage in the future if it gets easier...well it never did, I always had this eye, it's bugged. But I enjoyed the two modules and 2x4 modules would have been nice, but just never completed that one.</p>
Interviewer	All in all you spent 40 years...?
Eddie	47 years as a volunteer.
Interviewer	As a volunteer in a very broad range of military units, from the conventional to the secret to the navy. You mentioned earlier that you enjoyed it from the camaraderie point of view, you enjoyed it because the discipline, there were whole numbers of aspects that you enjoyed. But during that period there was also lots of fighting, people died, you spoke about the guy who was wearing your shirt who got killed.
Eddie	Terrible.
Interviewer	Looking back on it now, why did those guys die?
Eddie	For nothing. For nothing, really. Well when I say for nothing, I still honestly believe that if we had not been involved in SWA Angola we wouldn't have had the peaceful transition we did in Namibia. And I think Namibia is a fantastic country today. And a large part of that is due to the fact that it was the shaping of Namibia was helped by what we managed to put there and systems on the ground. I mean there's no two ways about it. Ok, our rolling stock went, our planes were there, but that's all material stuff. But I think we put a system in place there...Sam Nujoma who we fought against, I think also probably got to some thinking, value thinking, and he also realised, I think, what the Communist threat was. Because we didn't fight MPLA, we fought Russia, we thought China, we fought the Cubans, I mean, we fought them all. We saw them all face to face. The MPLA was never short of weapons. They had weapons coming out of their ears, as much as they wanted. They'd just float in, and this is one of the reasons why we've got problems today because I think there's still about 20 million AKs lying around that haven't even been unwrapped.

	<p>And I honestly believe that those in power in Namibia today are actually looking and saying we've got a stable country here we've got to keep it stable. And we've got a friendly country in South Africa, we've got a friendly country in Zambia. Zimbabwe anything can happen and probably will. And I think Angola is slowly but surely transforming, mainly because the Communist Bloc is actually breaking down. Now why is the Communist Bloc breaking down? Because they've had so much opposition, and I think we were a small little thorn but certainly a thorn in their side in that they couldn't just bulldoze, roll over, and take the bloc of South Africa that they wanted. They wanted Angola, they wanted Namibia. Namibia they wanted for the rich diamond rich country that was available and they didn't get it.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Just to encapsulate that, essentially you feel that the SADF's deployment in South West Africa and with the incursions into Angola, put a cap on Soviet expansionism in...</p>
Eddie	<p>I honestly think so.</p>
Interviewer	<p>And then in '89 the Berlin Wall came down and that threat pretty much dissipated.</p>
Eddie	<p>Absolutely. Not forgetting also that we had the mandate...ok, it was only a C class mandate from not the United Nations but the League of Nations, which there's still argument about was it carried or wasn't it carried through? We had the mandate to look after South West Africa and make sure that things worked there. Which we did. In fact I was asked to give a lecture to Bishops to their history club, and I was quite amazed, there were about 55, 60 kids there. And intelligent questions after, but of course now you've got to tell them what South West Africa is all about so I had to tell them about South West Africa and then sort of my time very watered down that I spent up there in the Defence Force. But reading up on that history of South West Africa and how we came to become the godfathers, it became a fifth province, with a lot more leniency and a lot more liberal than any of our other provinces, but it certainly...and I think if South Africa had been like South West Africa I think we would have a different South Africa today. I really do. So, it's easy to look back and say this and that was wrong, but we were all brainwashed certainly to a large extent. But a lot of us also didn't want to look further beyond what we could see.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Isn't that part of, people sit back now and look at the whole concept of military service and things, but the society in those years, censorship was very powerful. The National Party propaganda wing was very powerful.</p>
Eddie	<p>Absolutely.</p>
Interviewer	<p>And also there was the law that you had to go to the military, so we have a whole generation of youngsters for whom...and I'm not defending them or criticizing them...but a whole generation of youngsters who the concept of not going to the army was fairly</p>

	remote.
Eddie	Yes. Well you know the interesting thing is that all my kids who are now fathers, all say, they wish military service was still there for the boys. But not two years, one year.
Interviewer	From what point of view?
Eddie	The best forming, they learned discipline, they learned self discipline, and they without exception they say, it's the best thing that happened to us. But not the fighting and the border afterwards, and not two years. A year, military service they reckon would be fantastic. They all hated it, and they loved when they were finished. They met their best friends which are still their best friends today. The camaraderie is something you don't find anywhere else. You just don't. Esprit de corps. Especially in the fire fight. You actually learn that this smelly rogue next to you is actually your buddy and your life is going to depend on his being sharp, makes all the difference.
Interviewer	Many guys actually talk about that, and when they talk about seeing action, it doesn't matter whether the person next to them is English speaking, Afrikaans speaking, or what their race is, you're actually fighting for survival together.
Eddie	You learn to be one. And I've never had a problem working with black people. I've always worked well with them. Universities. I had 2ICs that were black, coloured and all the rest of it. I've never had a problem with them. And they've always been nice guys. If they're not nice guys I tell them they're not nice guys and they become nice guys. because sometimes they don't realise they're not nice guys. And I'm probably not a nice guy all the time either. And I expect the same.
Interviewer	When you were at UCT...I mean you mention at Wits that you might have had a couple of debates but nobody ever sort of got onto your case about being part of the military. At UCT or even now if you...I'm sure when you spoke at Bishops and the kids might have been black kids, did anybody say to you, well what did you do in the military? Why did you do it? Is there interest in that?
Eddie	No. What did you do? Yes. Where did you do it? And how did you do it? And why were we there and why weren't we there? So the important thing was to lay the ground, to say why were we in South West? These guys don't know South West, they know Namibia. Why were we in South West? You've got to go back to the First World War. You've got to go back 150 years when South West was nothing, nobody worried about it, it was a bit of desert. And how the Germans came in because they wanted a little country, a little empire outside and how we took it over and how we got the mandate to look after it. And why we were there? Because we were mandated to. That mandate was officially never withdrawn. It was officially never reinstated by the United Nations, so South Africa said, well we carry on. And there was

	<p>always the fight, are you looking after it properly, and should you be there? And that was never resolved. It was also always seen as a bit of desert wasteland.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Thinking about your military service and the various guises that you did it, and for the project that I'm doing, is there anything that you want to add that sort of encapsulates what it was all about, what you feel about it, and so on?</p>
Eddie	<p>I think the big thing that gets you is the <i>esprit de corps</i> and the being able to...it's not a making friends, it's a having trust in other people and being able to work as a group. There's no...even in the Recces, where guys tend to be individuals, there's none of this on my own. No Audie Murphy stuff. You actually work as a group. You learn to rely on other people and to trust other people and to put your life in other people's hands. I think that <i>esprit de corps</i>, that togetherness, was something that was very important to me. I also in my...especially the time in the commandoes, and even in the navy...I like being in a position where I could actually help people. You know that, it's interesting, I think it was about two years ago I met a guy at some function. And he came up to me and he says, you're Major Wesselo. I said, yes, I was. He says, I want to thank you. When I was called up to go to the border and I was just starting my business, you're the guy that managed to give me work at the unit headquarters. If it wasn't for that I wouldn't be where I am now. And I think this happened quite often that you could sort out the bullshitters from the genuine cases, whereas I think the system didn't allow for that. They really just, number so and so, boom, that way. Number so and so, boom, that way. And I think just being able to help people to do what they want to do as far as possible...you couldn't always do it, obviously...and there were huge bullshitters. That's another thing you learned, you learned to pick up the bullshitters and the genuine guys. So it was extremely interesting from that point of view, I learned a hell of a lot about people and the way people think and talk and I really enjoyed that part of it. And I made some good, good friends over the years.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Once again, we spoke about it earlier, a whole generation of young men went through that and their wives and girlfriends alongside them. Do you think the people who did military service...and once again, their families...do you think they've managed to deal with it over the years now that we're sitting 20 years later? Or does it still prey on their minds in many instances?</p>
Eddie	<p>No, I think most of them have actually...even our youngest son, he was wounded after the cease fire. They ran into an ambush after the cease fire. And he actually killed the guy. On the day that he killed him, every day, he goes to the pub and he has a beer on this guy. Because that worried him. Still worries him. He hasn't quite got over it. He's a different sort...I look back and I say, ok, have I killed people, how many people I killed, and I say, I was doing a job. It was you or me. That's the way it was. He's</p>



	<p>still affected by it, but not as much as he was. I think everybody's dealing with it pretty well. I think there's very few and far between people...this guy B? and his wife, they are a fantastic couple together today, because that's the way it is. I think generally everybody's pretty well over it. You know, it's a long time, hey. And where you can see it, is for instance one of the Shell Holes here, Redpaths, still has an border boy's service every year in February, and the numbers are dwindling rapidly. Very quickly. So I think guys are actually writing it off as history and in the past and getting on with it.</p>
Interviewer	<p>When you talk about the Shell Hole and things like that, when you talk to guys, particularly after they've had a few beers, do people in any way resent it and say, well what was the war for? We fought this war against what we thought to be Soviet expansionism or Communist expansionism, call it what you will, but then in 1994 a new government came in, the old guard, the National Party, some of them joined the ANC, some of them disappeared, and everybody seemed to forget. Is there resentment about that?</p>
Eddie	<p>I don't think so. I don't think there's resentment as such. Yes, certainly...look the guys that didn't want to go, the guys that were dead against, still say, bloody government wasted two years of my life. Or three years of my life, whatever it is. They haven't changed. But they've written it off as, that was then, this is now. And I think to a large extent most of those guys have left the country. Whereas you know, strangely enough the guys that resented it the most were the first to leave. They were the first that said, <i>hier kom die Swart Gevaar</i>, now we've had it, we're going for a black government. And I think we're going to go through a pretty torrid time, but I don't believe that's the end of the world. I think we're going to go through this dip and come out the other side.</p>
Interviewer	<p>That's interesting you say that, earlier on you said that you've got your feet rooted in Africa and you're not going anywhere. So you don't have any sense that...Three Two you would have seen some difficult things...but you don't have a sense that you were betrayed for having done all that.</p>
Eddie	<p>No. I think Three Two was betrayed because Three Two was disbanded and they were really highly successful. '94, '95, '96 in the townships. And because they didn't have an alliance to any tribal thing. And they were extremely successful. And for that they were disbanded. And now they've sort of just been written off. They're still sitting in Pomfret which is a little asbestos...not getting any money, they're not getting pensions, they're basically...and there's the threat of being kicked out there too. and Three Two Veteran's Association has actually appointed a lawyer to fight the case for them. And there is a little bit of light on the horizon. Looks like they may get to something. Most of the Three Two guys of course went to other units. Because we had excellent guys. We even had fathers and sons fighting next to</p>

	each other towards the end of Three Two days. They came across as kids and became soldiers themselves. And there were some good officers. We had a couple of good Three Two officers, we had some excellent Three Two senior officers, non-commissioned officers, by the time they left Angola and early days here. So they were a hot unit.
Interviewer	While I'm thinking about the whole military structure, when you were with Sandton commandoes and then later on with Seven Div, by that stage in the early eighties, PW Botha's government has started using the JMCs, the Joint Monitoring Councils, were you in any way involved in those?
Eddie	No. Look we had the JMCs...we were involved through that our stireps and stuff were used by the JMCs. I was never fully involved, I think I was in one or two of the sittings with Seven Div, purely as counter intelligence, but never really involved with the JMCs.
Interviewer	It just seems to me that in many instances surely some of the commandoes would have been required to attend meetings with the local government departments, the police and everybody else.
Eddie	Well you see this was basically what the civil defence was about, and that was really a follow on of civil defence. And then of course when '94 the new government didn't like the name 'civil defence', so it was changed to something else, now I think the whole thing's just fallen flat completely because the commandoes have been closed. Which I believe was a administrative mistake. Commandoes were never supposed to close down. Now the guy I want to give you his name is Robbie Dow. He's one of the founder members at West Park. He's an ex ( <i>inaudible</i> ) boy. He came down here for the 50 <sup>th</sup> anniversary. Interesting boytjie to talk to. In Joburg.
	END OF INTERVIEW ( <i>counter at 450</i> )

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