Peter Williams 32 Battalion 15/02/08
Missing Voices Project Interviewed by Mike Cadman

	TAPE ONE SIDE A
Interviewer	Give me an idea of your background.
Peter	I was brought up in the Eastern Cape close to Port Elizabeth, in that area and I was brought up on a farm background. I'm English speaking and I'm an only child. I went to a school called Woodridge which was close to where the farm was, and it was an English boarding school, based on the British English boarding school type model. And we had lots of extra mural activities that aren't normal for normal South African schools.
Interviewer	In what sense?
Peter	We had sports, we had rock climbing, we had parachuting, we had canoeing, we had hiking. There was a lot of emphasis on extra mural activities put in junior school.
Interviewer	Ok, so it was quite a physical sort of thing.
Peter	Yes, it was quite physical. It was very pleasant. But there was a lot of leadership involved in it as well. The practical and extra mural activities were leadership based.
Interviewer	Then like many young South Africans it came time, the army wanted you to register. You I presume then registered with the army…your call up papers arrive essentially. What were your feelings about that?
Peter	I think…I just want to add a little piece in for you. Because we had this junior school called Woodridge that I went to. My father went to a school in Johannesburg called King Edward. Then I went to the same school. So I was shipped off to boarding school. And being brought up in Joburg, an English school and so on, I think you become politically aware and you get involved with what's happening around you and so on. And my father wanted me to study geology and go to varsity and I just felt I needed a break from that, and I then decided, before I left…when I got my call up I thought I must go and do short service or something like that. And I got advice from a family member who said, why didn't I just join on PF (*Permanent Force)* and then I will get a salary at least for three years and then I can buy myself out and leave the Defence Force.
Interviewer	So that was a slightly different route to the average guy who just gets conscripted and goes off. What year did you go off to the military?
Peter	I was very fortunate because my parents had contacts within the military, so in 1978 I went to Signal School in Heidelberg. And I attended basics for two and a half months. I then left there and I went back to school. So at the end of Standard Nine I went to just

	do basics in the Defence Force. But no-one knew I was going just for basics. I just went and just did basics, because my father wanted to make a point and make sure that I didn't go to the army. I enjoyed it, I went back to KES, I finished my matric, I then left, and then when I got called up again I went to Pretoria and I signed on Permanent Force.
Interviewer	That must have been quite tough because you must have been the youngest guy doing basics in the whole camp.
Peter	I was quite young but I was physically fit and you know, it didn't worry me. The other thing is I think it makes it a lot easier if you know you're just there for a two and a half month stint and the other guys are in for the long stint and they're worried about the older guys and the border and all those things. So I could put my head down and just enjoy it like a fun youth camp or something.
Interviewer	Given the sort of political sort of climate, as you mentioned, at King Edward, was there any doubt in your mind that you wanted to join the military? Did you just know that was for you?
Peter	I didn't want to join the military per se, but I wanted…I think because of my background at Woodridge and on the farm, I enjoyed the outdoors and I enjoyed the adventure, so I didn't go just for the political side of things. I didn't go and fight the war for the volk, the taal and the fatherland, and patriotism. Patriotism did come into it after that, but it was just seeking adventure, that's all. I was young, naïve and just thought this is a fun thing to do.
Interviewer	So then after school you sign up…
Peter	I signed up and then we went down to Oudtshoorn to infantry school. And I basically spent the year at infantry school doing the usual course there. I was in HQ company which was all the Permanent Force members and for some reason we had quite a few very weak officer with us, and I wasn't particularly impressed with the officer corps and during that year, three quarter way through the year, you go up to the border and I was made a lance corporal and I went up as a section leader and we spent our three months on the border and I quite enjoyed it. We were involved with a contact while we were there. But it was very low key in comparison to the rest of my career. And we were based at a place called Tsintsabis, which was very close to the Etosha Pans, and we did spend two weeks in the Etosha Pans itself because there were groups infiltrating down at that stage and they were worried about the tourists within the Etosha Pan area.
Interviewer	And your contact experience, that didn't deter you, you just took that as part of what you were doing?
Peter	It was nothing serious, none of us were killed, they shot at us, we shot at them, they ran away, I think we ran away as well, so it was just…it wasn't made out as if you read in the books and that kind of thing. I in fact through the whole contact I only saw two people, although other people saw a lot more people. And it was

	over a distance, we were most probably out of range of each other anyway, so it was very fleeting.
Interviewer	And then after that period on the border you went back to…
Peter	We went back to infantry school, we finished our course there. I was made a candidate officer and I wasn't very happy with that and I went to my company commander and I said to him, look, I don't want to be an officer, because I saw officers as guys that did paper work and I didn't exactly know what they did. We weren't exposed to them, and we always had corporals and sergeants and company sergeant majors with us, and I felt that's more the line that I wanted to go into. And they basically said to me that I'd been one of the guys chosen to stay at infantry school and they wanted officers at infantry school, and so I would become an officer. And then I explained to him that I've got a bigger picture in my life and I didn't want to become a career officer. And eventually they allowed me to become an NCO. And they still wanted to keep me at infantry school, which I fought against. And eventually by luck I met some guys from Three Two Battalion in the OC's office. The OC then, I think he was a Colonel Witkop Badenhorst. He became a general later on. But I was on office bearing in front of the OC infantry school to explain why I didn't want to be at his school.
Interviewer	Was he surprised?
Peter	I was there on office bearing and then I met these other guys that had arrived to recruit people for Three Two, and they asked me, well what am I doing there? I'm obviously in trouble. And I said to them…I didn't know who they were and so on…one of their senior guys was in civilian clothes and I thought he was like an oom, an Afrikaans guy, and I just called him oom. I didn't know what rank he had or…and they asked me what my problem was and what I was doing there and I told them. And they said, would I be interested in going to Three Two Battalion and I said, no, definitely not. I want to go to South West to the border. So they said, no it is on the border. It is in South West. Because no-one had heard of Three Two. We didn't know who they were. Then I went into the OC's office and he was very curt with me and just said, why do you want to not go with and one thing and another? And the Three Two guys had been in before me, so they told him they wanted me, so it was…I basically didn't even go on a selection or anything. Because after that everyone went to all these different selection boards what units they wanted to go to. And I think in those days, everybody wanted to go to their home town or where they had loved ones or that kind of thing. So if you volunteered for some distant place you just got it. There was no…and what was peculiar there is that the National Servicemen, because they only had a year left of their conscription period, they left immediately. I think two days later they were on a train and they left. And being Permanent Force members you stayed on a bit longer. I think we still had a culotte course to do. There was some finishing off stuff to do. And then basically they sent

	you on leave. You went on holiday first, to see your parents…it was close to…I think it was about the 10th or 12th of December. So you were let off for Christmas and New Year and then early in January, I think the 3rd of January, you basically got…if you were unfortunate like myself, you got a train ticket. And you ended up…I was in Port Elizabeth so I got a train ticket from there to go to De Aar, and I think from De Aar you went to…I don't even know…you went to Cape Town, and from Cape Town you went to Grootfontein. But I remember it was a ten day trip all the way up to Grootfontein.
Interviewer	Quite a mission.
Peter	Yes.
Interviewer	And then finally you go north and you go to join the unit.
Peter	You go to join the unit. The headquarters of the unit at that stage was in Rundu itself and next to the airport they had, almost looked like a big zinc hangar. And you didn't even meet the OC…I don't think the OC was there at the time. And we met a Sergeant Major, De Sousa, or De Rosa or something like that. And he was actually the **("pers sgt")??** major, that was his actual job. And he just told you where you could get something to eat and told you when the next transport would be leaving. That's to the east in the Caprivi, and that's about 250 kilometres. And you basically took like an eight hour ride on the back of a truck all the way to Buffalo. When you arrived at Buffalo they went and met the base OC there, who then was Major Viljoen, and he just welcomed you in the unit and I put my stuff down in a hut with a zinc roof and reed sides. And they said, ok take what you need, you're going to be going out into the veld. And then we went to…the base that joins onto the Botswana border and we went there and the company that I was dealt into was Delta, and they were busy with two or three weeks training. We spent ten days on the train, we spent one night in Rundu, and the next night I was on the Botswana border doing training with everybody else.
Interviewer	And when you got there did you think to yourself, this is what I want? This is for me?
Peter	It was a little bit wild. You could hear lions roaring at night and hyenas coming into the camp. And it definitely didn't look like infantry school or an army camp to me whatsoever. The troops of the unit at that stage hadn't been properly clothed, so they were a rag tag, I don't even know, they looked like a bunch of hillbillies. And most of the troops had…well they used AK47s but most of them had AK47s but some had PPSHs, SKSs, they had a variety of weapons. So I didn't quite know, it's quite a culture shock being at infantry school where everything was prim and proper and then you end up in Three Two. We had a company commander called Julius (**Krutz?).** And everyone was very casual and there was no saluting or, rank didn't mean anything. We were a white leader group and we were black troops. And the blacks had…we didn't have any staff sergeant…we had a

	sergeant and I was basically a corporal. And I was dealt in with a lieutenant, a white lieutenant, Peer van der Walt, and a sergeant called Mario van Wyk. And we did three weeks training there and after a week or so I realised that this is fun and interesting and it's the type of thing I wanted to do. They were very operationally orientated. The troops only spoke Portuguese, so you basically spoke to someone, beg, borrowed a dictionary and you started learning day by day. But I was fortunate in that when I grew up I could speak Xhosa at a very young age and I learned Zulu, so I was easy with languages. So I picked the language up easy. And from then you got involved with your platoon, 3 platoons in a company. And then the company, it almost felt like being on an adventure, which was nice and I liked it.
Interviewer	This is start of 1979. So by now you've been in the army for a year, you've done all the (*inaudible*) and stuff.
Peter	Yes.
Interviewer	That language thing, did that shock you initially, that you're now going to be fighting with a bunch of guys who didn't speak any English or Afrikaans?
Peter	I'd grown up on a farm and I had black friends, that type of thing and obviously when I went to boarding school it wasn't politically correct to have black friends, so you just adapt there. So to me this was just going back to my roots, so it was an easy thing. These guys were all ex FNLA soldiers and they'd been through the war. And if you asked some guy if he'd been shot, he'd show you three, four gunshot wounds on his body. So you knew that these guys knew what they were talking about. And when it came to…we were training them more how to work with trip flares and the technical stuff of explosives and that kind of thing. And they obviously knew the soldiering, fire and movement and stuff that we'd struggled to do at infantry school. Just came second hand with them. And when they did their section battle drills and so on, it almost was like a party to them. It's like going on a dance course. Everything just went very smoothly. So you had a lot of confidence in them. I don't think that they had the time in their lives for education and so on, so a lot of them couldn't read and write and that kind of thing. When they were given pay later on in the end of '79, they received pay, they used to just put crosses on their pay slips and those kind of things, so that they appreciated us although we were young and inexperienced and they knew we had a role to play. They realised that they'd come from a rag-tag army and now we'd basically be walking in areas and we'd have maps and compasses and they weren't able to work those things. They couldn't bring in aircraft and air strikes, the technical side of warfare as such. And I think at that stage the FNLA still had aspirations of getting involved in the war and fighting back against FAPLA or Unita.
Interviewer	These soldiers, the former FNLA guys, had most of them left their families behind in Angola?

Peter	No, FNLA was started by Colonel Jan Breytenbach. And basically what had happened, from what I understand from the history that they told me, was that, you had FAPLA which is the forces of the MPLA, which is the political party as such. And they and FNLA were on equal terms military wise. And it actually looked at some stages of the war…Holden Roberto was the commander of the FNLA, and it would seem that they won quite a lot of ground and they'd taken large tracks of the northern and eastern part of Angola, and that they could topple the war. Then the Cubans entered the fray because FNLA sided with Russia. Russia had a pact with Cuba after the Bay of Pigs. And the Cubans were brought into the picture and they came in with motorised armour and so on, and they obviously fought a whole lot of battles and annihilated the FNLA. And they actually thought the FNLA was finished at that stage. At that stage funnily, Unita was very friendly with MPLA and they were actually thinking of doing a coalition government. They were on the same side. And where FNLA had been rousted totally, what happened then was that Savimbi and Unita decided to take over those areas instead of letting the Cubans and MPLA dominate those particular areas. So they were a rag-tag army and you know they were the losers of Angola and the battles, and I think it was an easy task for Colonel Breytenbach to go there and tell them, look we've got another option for you people and would you come and help us and so on. And I think what happened there was they were just too happy to know that they were going to get food and water. That was the situation. They then came back with a force, and instead of letting them lie idle or do retraining, they deployed them immediately and he used them in Ops Savannah and just got them going and so on. And with that time they started bringing their families back, and slowly they brought them back. And that's how Three Two was started. But that was '77. So we were now two, three years into the unit, and I think it was recognised by Defence headquarters and I think they were slowly starting to get support. When we initially came to the unit, there were times where there wasn't fixed pay days. When the (*inaudible*) or the paymaster arrived at the unit, everyone was gathered up and said, you know, it's pay day today. It wasn't the end of the month, it was just the day he arrived. And he used to have a 3-legged canvas bag, water pouch there, and the guys used to wash their hands to touch the money. They would go and collect their money and I remember we used to get…each guy got one crisp ten rand. And from there he went to the canteen and the pub and that was it. And when that money was gone, that was the end until the paymaster came again. Their families were obviously fed out of army supplies and they had some contractors there that were building messes and houses for them and so on. But basically the rotation at Three Two was six weeks in, six weeks out, so you'd go to the bush for 6 weeks. You'd most probably spend 2/3 days getting back again, and then you would go into retraining, the troops would have a bit of leave. Some of the white guys would go on leave. Others would stay

	behind. And then 4/5 weeks later you'd be ready to re-troop and go back to the bush.
Interviewer	So soon after you arrive you go into this training process done on the Botswana border, and how soon after that were you deployed on a formal …?
Peter	They were within their 6 week training, their off period, and this whole 6 weeks was used for training basically. I was there for 3 weeks and we basically deployed on our first operation. So it doesn't seem like a long time but it was just enough just to adapt. I feel sorry for some of the National Servicemen in that time. Because some of them arrived and 2/3 days later they're deployed. Some of them arrived and their companies were in the bush, so they were just taken in and you met your troops operationally. I was fortunate in that all the Permanent Force members arrived virtually at the same time, the beginning of January, depending on what type of transport they'd managed to get up there. And then they'd be obviously deployed to different platoons. But the platoon that I was in, which was funny, was that the lieutenant and the corporal…Mario…the two of them were National Servicemen, and I was a Permanent Force member. But it was just a question, they'd already been there for 5/6 weeks and they were in the process and so on and we would just fit in. they would still stay our seniors, and when they left we'd take over their positions.
Interviewer	During this period when you get there, did any of the senior officers sit you down and say, this is what Three Two is about, this is how we operate, this is the purpose of this unit?
Peter	No, nothing like that at all. Your company commander…we lived in small buildings…when I say buildings it was just reed sides to the building with a corrugated iron roof on the top. And those you built yourself. If you want to build a better one you had to go and scrounge some material stores and you built your own one. And we went to the bush on the first bush op, when we came back we built a new place for ourselves and we cemented it, put poles up. And there was no bigger picture in the whole story. Your company commander didn't stay with you, so we had the officers, NCOs all staying together. And the company commander stayed in the headquarter lines, and they had a bigger picture and so on. And orders were very, very informal and they just told us what was happening and what the next phase was, and we had to get our 36 guys ready and that kind of thing. But there was no briefing about the bigger picture. When we went operationally we were given a briefing beforehand, and basically in a nutshell, you were told that you're working between this beacon and this beacon, which is the beacons on the border, the cut-line. And you're working the first 15/20 kilometres inside Angola. You were given a map and you were told that you're not allowed to go over those boundaries. And who was on either side of your boundaries, and it was other Three Two Battalion companies. And as long as you stayed within that boundary, you had a

	mission to fulfil in the area, which was basically control and dominate the area, and then what you did and how you did it and how long you did it, was all up to you. You decided yourself. We used to do platoon operations, where each platoon had their own area. If we felt threatened we would contact by radio the platoon closest to us, we'd get together and work as two platoons together. If we felt more threatened we'd get the company together and work as a company. But a lot of the time the company commander wouldn't be with us if we were doing platoon ops. And if it was company operations then obviously the company would be with us.
Interviewer	Short distances you can easily walk but if you had to travel to before you were deployed would you use Casspirs or would you use…?
Peter	To deploy, Buffalo is in the Western Caprivi, on the Kavango River itself, which is just above the Okavango swamps. And from there we rode on the back of Samil trucks, open trucks, and we went to a place 60 kilometres east of us called Omega, which was the Bushman battalion base. Three One Battalion base. And from there we would fly to Ondangwa. And then from Ondangwa we would go by…we didn't have Buffels in those days, we had a thing called a Hippo. That was the predecessor. And from there we would deploy…they would take us to the cut-line and from the cut-line…the cut-line being the border…we would then walk into our deployment area. Sometimes we used to be taken in by Unimog, 10 kilometres or so. Operations weren't...they changed a lot after that, but re-supply was difficult. We used to get re-supplied by Dakotas sometimes, airdrops and so on. But we didn't always receive everything that was airdropped to us. So sometimes we used to get a Unimog. It would be loaded up with food and it wasn't rat packs or something fancy, it was bags of beans, bags of rice and bully beef tins and such like. And we would make a whole big cache of stuff and work around that area for 7-10 days, guarding our food on regular basis to see if it's fine. And then a Unimog would come in again, we'd re-cache and then dominate a different area. But from there we would go out almost in a fan method of trying to survey the whole area.
Interviewer	And those patrols, for want of a better word, was the main objective SWAPO or would you encounter anybody else besides SWAPO, like the MPLA or FAPLA or even…?
Peter	No, it was very much a gentleman's at that stage, and FAPLA was restricted to their bases and they stayed at those bases. And they were allowed to travel on the tar road which was basically from Ondjiva down to Santa Clara. So we weren't allowed to attack them on the tar road. And we were more worried about SWAPO infiltrating from the north coming south. In those early days there was a plan to make the first ten kilometres of Angola clear of all people. In other words so that we knew who the enemy was and wasn't. There was a lot of local pops in that area, and basically they were slowly forced out of that area. So in the

	’79, ’80 era, that’s what we were busy doing, is clearing the ten kilometre strip and then there was groups of SWAPO that were infiltrating from the north to lay landmines, indoctrinate people within South West Africa.
Interviewer	Were you ever deployed during that period in South West itself or was it always cross border?
Peter	No, we were only used cross border at that stage. We did go to bases after landing at Ondangwa we would go to Ombalantu or Eenhana, or one of those bases. And the base commander would give us a briefing, what was happening on the inside. And obviously depending on if he had groups of ten SWAPO coming through every week, infiltrating a given area, we would obviously go to the north and try and intercept those people before they came. And they used to give us intelligence about people that were in South West Africa and then ex-filtrating back out again. But in those days, in Angola, we had large groups of SWAPO walking around at a time. Used to have 80 guys walking around at a time. They used to go virtually a kilometre from the border and then they would split up into small groups with certain missions to go over the border and so on. And in those days SWAPO didn’t have uniforms and stuff like that, so you had a lot of guys who just wore a jacket or something, like some military and obviously had an AK over his shoulder. But the one thing that they always had was, they were issued with boots. Those sergeant stripe boots that they had. Everyone had brand new boots. So there was no skill in picking up SWAPO spoor in those areas. I think the difficult part there was that they were used to walking at night and walking long distances. They didn’t have to carry food and water because they had the local population that supported them in Angola, and in South West Africa. So they travelled very light. We had a thing called a mashila which was a rucksack. I then weighed about 58 kilograms, and I used to carry about 50 kilograms. So if you’re lugging a 50 kilogram pack around with you, you’re not quite as mobile as these guys dressed like darts, ready to play darts and so on. But then we had a lot of other support, we had medical support if someone was shot. Sometimes we had to carry them to the border and they would be picked up there. Very seldom were we allowed helicopters into southern Angola. Dakotas were allowed to fly in, not to land, just to throw supplies to us. And sometimes in larger context we used to have Unimogs coming in to help pick up the bodies. The bodies were also carried, our bodies were carried to the cut-line and then taken from there. We also had a base that was developed in that time called Omahone, (*now called Amauni*) which is about 250 kilometres west of Rundu again. And that was also a springboard from where operations took place. But starting the early eighties we moved further west. That infiltration route was less popular because there was…in South West Africa along that route it was very sparsely populated and I think in the early eighties they started moving west to Ondangwa, and the more populated areas to obviously intimidate the hearts and minds of

	the local pops.
Interviewer	So you were talking about how you patrolled and saw action in the first 20/25 kms of Angola north of the border. The choppers weren't allowed to fly so even if you were in a really serious contact you couldn't call in air support or anything like that.
Peter	No. You would try and see what you could do, but in that early stage there was no air support available to you.
Interviewer	Ok, so there was no point in calling aircraft that weren't there.
Peter	Well basically, if you had a wounded guy, you would report that you had a wounded guy. And they would tell you how we'd casevac him or what the process was. But in the early eighties I think, things changed then. And we did one operation into…we attacked a little town called Chiede. And Chiede must be about 30/40 kilometres inside Angola. And if you come down from Ondjiva, you get Ongongo which is on the main river itself, then you go east to Mongua and then to Ondjiva. Then the road turns south and goes down to Santa Clara where the border is. But before you get to Santa Clara, it was on the eastern side, and it was a small little town, and obviously a Portuguese little town. And apparently SWAPO had been stopping off there, obviously vehicles had come there and dropped off ammunition and supplies and so on. And I don't know if it was FAPLA or if it was SWAPO, but SWAPO was making use of that time to pick stuff up, mines and whatever, and then go in. So I think it was in the early eighties where I think we were just one company…we could have been two companies. We then did this attack on Chiede itself. And we got horribly lost in the course of the evening. And the attack should have taken place at first light, and in summertime that could have been like five o'clock in the morning. And I think we only rocked up there at seven o'clock in the morning. And we half missed the target as well because some of us were in the target area and some of us were on the flanks. I was fortunately in the target area, and there was reportedly 25 guys there and we shot 26. And when we arrived there they were still in their beds. Had they come up for first light to do all round defence and then gone back to sleep I don't exactly know. And that was the first time that I'd actually seen helicopters being used operationally. And I think that was because the OC of Eenhana, whose area was in South West, James Hills, I don't think he believed that we'd killed so many people. And they just said, no the bodies must all come out. We did have some wounded guys so they also had to come out. And that was the first operation that I've actually seen choppers and those were Pumas that came in. And Alouettes first came in to protect the landing of the Pumas and then they left.
Interviewer	During those early days did your men take any casualties?
Peter	We did take casualties. I wouldn't say a lot, I would say, in one operation you might have lost one fatality and you might have

	had two guys wounded, out of a group of say 120.
Interviewer	So in other words, your losses were statistically very low by comparison to that that the SWAPO guys were suffering.
Peter	Yes, very low. I think the other thing is that when our guys were wounded, even if they were badly wounded, they could be rehabilitated and brought back into the process. Whereas if we had wounded one of theirs, it was only later on in the war that I realised the whole concept of wounding people. Because in the beginning with the FNLA guys they didn't believe in the concept of wounding, they just believed in killing people. And I left Three Two companies in 1982 and I went to the Reconnaissance wing, and we had guys there from Rhodesia and all over the world, and we actually learned the importance of wounding people and not killing them, because then they'd be taken back, they'd have to be hospitalised, they're a burden on those people, they don't have the facilities, it's a breakdown of the morale, and that kind of thing. So initially we just went out for kills and in those days kills was important because the platoons used to compete against each other on kills and the companies used to compete against each other in kills. And it was a natural process, especially being with the FNLA guys. And they were really hardened soldiers and they didn't have sympathy for anybody.
Interviewer	When you spoke to the guys, and obviously I presume in the end you spoke Portuguese at some level so you could understand each other much greater?
Peter	We learned Portuguese very quickly. I think the National Servicemen only had a year so they just got by, but I think after your second year I could read and write Portuguese.
Interviewer	In discussing with the guys about what were they fighting for, in their minds were they defending South West Africa/South Africa or were they fighting to liberate Angola?
Peter	No, they were definitely fighting to liberate Angola. At a later stage in the war, they were awarded South African citizenship because of the good service and everything else they'd done. And then I think they realised that if they were getting South African citizenship that they wouldn't actually…we wouldn't be winning the war in Angola, so Angola was…we changed them from a rag-tag guerrilla army into soldiers and they realised then there was careers and they started doing courses and they were more integrated into like a normal army. We got uniforms for them. Three Two got their own camouflage - we had a winter camouflage and a summer camouflage. There was a lot of administration done in the later years and there was a whole process. And they were all Catholics and they had a Catholic priest appointed and they had the social network to support them was there.
Interviewer	And in those early days, certainly when you were patrolling that belt just north of the border, did you work on your own or did you

	have support from either infantry units, whether it might be 6 SAI, 7 SAI one of those units, or support from the Reconnaissance Commandoes, the Recces?
Peter	We never ever saw any other units at that stage. There were areas that were called frozen areas, and frozen areas were obviously areas adjacent to the areas we were working in, and we were told Reconnaissance units were working in those areas and they wouldn't venture into our areas and we wouldn't venture into their areas. The early 1980s and before that, there was Vietnam and Moscow which were two operations that took place, but basically it was two military bases that were formed within 60 kilometres of the border and they were just picking up supplies there at two central points, and basically we went in, we did those two operations and then we withdrew. It was just to show them. I think after that the enemy learned their lesson, and instead of having big bases they decentralised to small bases like Chiede town and those, and made them smaller and more mobile so they didn't stay in one particular area. Chiede was a town and then after that we didn't really hit towns in the early eighties because they weren't using the towns. Obviously FAPLA still had the presence on the tar road as such but that was as far as their presence. FAPLA didn't patrol or didn't move out of those routes that they felt were relatively safe. And I think then the war changed after that when we realised that FAPLA and SWAPO were hand in hand, and that the SWAPO advisors and their logistics and everything were staying in the FAPLA bases. And that's when the bigger operations started taking place. Smokeshell and Daisy and Butterfly and all that.
Interviewer	And those operations, those were far more conventional with armoured vehicles and helicopter support?
Peter	They were more conventional in nature but basically what they would do is they would get Three Two in southern Angola to do area operations in given areas, channelize the enemy into other areas that we wanted them in. Three Two's Reconnaissance unit was used to do reconnaissance of certain areas, and when they identify areas where more activity was taking place they would get the use of the airforce to go in and do aerial photography. Once they'd identified a base they would start. I think Ops Butterfly was the first type operations where they just went in with helicopters, dropped Three Two off and they'd attack given bases. But do six bases over four weeks. And then attack all these different bases. And then after that when the war changed to FAPLA itself, we started hitting…Ondjiva was attacked and Chingongo was attacked and basically we moved FAPLA west of the Cunene River. And then they were based in Cahama and the bridge at Chingongo had been severed so they couldn't get over the bridge, so that area was then made devoid of FAPLA and SWAPO had longer logistic lines. And basically we'd moved the logistics line and the support bases of SWAPO just further north, and further north I think we then took Cuvelai, Nehome, and we

	went up to Techamutete.
Interviewer	And you say that, in the early eighties you joined the Reconnaissance wing of Three Two?
Peter	Three Two had a Reconnaissance wing which was based in Omahone base, and it was a very, very small unit. The OC when I arrived there was an Australian guy called Blue Kelly and he wasn't there long…I wasn't there long when he left and he joined the Reconnaissance units here in South Africa. And after that in the early eighties…towards the end of eighty, we had quite a lot of Rhodesians coming out of Rhodesia, and a lot of them weren't pure bred Rhodesians. We had Americans, and we had a guy from New Zealand, and we had guys from Belgium and France and all over the world. We even had a guy from Puerto Rico. So we had a diverse group of guys. But I think what happens when you bring a whole lot of diverse guys together, they all come with their own experiences and their own knowledge, then you have a mix…after Blue had left there was a little bit of a gap with the OC and then Willem Ratte arrived and he was with the Rhodesian SAS, and he was quite a dynamic leader and he had some weird and wonderful ideas.
Interviewer	Weird in what sense?
Peter	Weird in all the senses actually. For instance…we'd have our…our daily routine in Omahone was…we lived in a very small base of about…Omahone couldn't be bigger than 400 metres by 400 metres. It had walls around the edges and we lived on the inside and there wasn't a real big threat of SWAPO in the area, but he'd have his own little war games organised and we would shoot out the base morning, noon, and night and pretend the enemy was attacking us. And when new guys arrived at the unit it was always a big joke because they would know beforehand there's 3 new guys arriving from Rundu, another 8 hour ride on the back of the Buffel or whatever. And you'd arrive and there'd be food and everyone would be happy to see you, you'd be there an hour and a half or two hours and then supposedly the base would be attacked. And the grenades would be going off inside the base, simulating incoming mortars and you would see bodies being carried around on stretchers with blood coming out of them. And then everyone would have a big laugh at your expense and say, yes, that was just a little exercise. But this happens every other week. The real thing. And then Willem was the kind of guy that waked everyone up at like two o'clock in the morning and you'd have an order group and everyone would be half asleep. And he would say, he was thinking of a plan to stop a convoy in southern Angola, a convoy of 20 FAPLA vehicles and what did we think was the best way to stop it? And the guys would come with all sorts of stupid suggestions and he'd say, well I've been thinking about it the whole night and I think if you put white gloves on and you've got a stop sign and you stop them, the whole convoy would stop! What do you guys think? And being half asleep we'd say, yes, you know it might work. And

	then two weeks later he'd say, ok, we're going to do that job. You've got the white gloves and the stop sign. Then it wasn't so funny, and it wasn't such a good idea.
	END OF SIDE A (*counter at 525*)
	SIDE B (*counter at 16*)
Peter	…a different kind of a base because we had an RSM there called Piet Nortje. He later on became the RSM of the unit.
Interviewer	He wrote a book?
Peter	He wrote a book as well. But we had a maximum of 40 guys in the unit, when the unit was full of guys, and there was one or two chefs, we had some tiffies, which are the mechanics, but they came from Three Two, they were blacks. There was one or two white tiffie guys that used to fix the vehicles and so on. And I think the admin staff must have amounted to five guys. and the rest were all operators that worked for Three Two. The dress was completely casual, you wore takkies, short pants and a t-shirt of your choice. The only time you wore uniform was if you had to leave the unit and go to Rundu or go on leave or something like that. There was no formal parades. There was no saluting in the base. We had a volleyball court where we used to muster for parades in the morning, and the parade was, you just stood at ease, you were brought to attention, prayers were had and order group was held and then you went on with your work. You were divided into much smaller teams. An offensive team would be ten guys. And then that used to be broken up into smaller teams as well. We had black troops with us as well. And then they used to go back for leave to their wives in Buffalo and then come back for operations. And we had a whole lot of characters there. We had a guy called Ron Gregory who was a sergeant major, and he was with Mike Hoare in the Congo. So that was his kind of background. And he did R&D, research and development. Basically what you did there was in the morning you'd wake up early, you would do all around offence, climb into the bunkers. I think at least twice a week we were all allowed to shoot out the bunkers and shoot at nothing in the bushes just to make all the local pops aware that they shouldn't come close by. And after that we used to go for a run on the airstrip, do PT. Straight after PT when you were totally exhausted you went to the shooting range and fired. And there was different exercises. There was bush lanes where you walked through bushes and shot at moving targets and all that kind of thing. You'd come back, have breakfast, and after breakfast your normal day would start. That would like be the routine. In the evening…we used to have brunch…I say breakfast, I mean brunch at like ten o'clock in the morning. And then after that your day would start. And basically you'd be planning to do operations. Everything was operationally based. Willem used to go to sector one zero, had Oshakati as its headquarters, and he would go down there and look for operations for us to do and things to do and then we'd be

	deployed from there. Normally we'd be picked up by Pumas there and flown directly into the operational area and get dropped off. And we were basically the eyes and ears of Three Two Battalion and preparing for larger operations, sniffing the enemy out, trying to look for big concentrations of enemy and then we'd bring the company in. They used to be flown in a lot of the time. And basically from there operations were planned for Three Two and the companies were brought in, and they would meet us in the bush and then we would take them and place them out and do attacks on bases and that kind of thing.
Interviewer	But your initial purpose when you were out there was simply to locate the enemy, gauge their size, and avoid contact until you can plan a large operation?
Peter	We had two different purposes. The one we had an offensive role and the offensive role was to attack the enemy and disrupt them along given routes. And the other one was to do pure reconnaissance. If you did pure reconnaissance you obviously evaded the enemy and you just gained information…gathered information to bring back and use at a later stage. But the offensive thing was…I don't want to say popular, but it was quite active as well, in that we used to do road blocks on known roads. At that stage FAPLA was the enemy as much as what SWAPO was. So the tar road between Chingonga and Ondjiva was quite a main tar road. And we used to often walk in from the border to that tar road, attack vehicles on the tar road and the ex-filtrate out by helicopter. And obviously the situation used to begin with a few URALS, or smaller trucks, and later on they had infantry walking on the side of the road with BDRs. As we were attacking the soft targets they obviously brought in more, so it just became more complicated and there was a lot of offensive work that we actually did.
Interviewer	And this is still the early eighties?
Peter	Yes, this is '81, '82, '83, and that kind of period.
Interviewer	And then things started escalating a little and you had a few more fairly large operations. There was Protea, there was Meebos…
Peter	I think Meebos was before Protea.
Interviewer	That's right.
Peter	Meebos was an operation that encompassed south of the tar road. So it was from Chingongo, Mongua, Ondjiva, was the boundary in the north of the tar road itself, and it was the area south of that. And there was a place called Cuamato which was almost in the middle of that area. It had a mission station and a lot of SWAPO infiltration was coming through the mission station down towards the south. And if I'm correct, Meebos was the beginning of using other forces in southern Angola as well. Koevoet was involved as well with their Casspirs, 101 had Casspirs involved as well, and Three Two were basically on foot.

	And when they picked something up like other vehicles, then these other forces were brought in to scrap with them.
Interviewer	During Meebos a Puma was shot down. There'd been one shot down during the year as well, so they were fairly large operations.
Peter	Yes, they were large operations and they were very active at that stage.
Interviewer	During this whole period when you got leave, and you went home or whatever you did with your leave, did you ever mention to people back home, your friends, acquaintances, that there was actually something quite serious going on in Angola?
Peter	I think at that stage the South African public were very naïve. Television had come out and there were announcements made of soldiers that had passed away on the border and so on, but it wasn't a knowledgeable war, and you didn't really talk about it when you came back on leave because people didn't understand it and they didn't know about it, and I don't think you actually knew what you were allowed to say and not allowed to say. So I think any talk that came out about what was happening was basically guys getting drunk at a party and something and then they would say a few things. And I actually think that the civilians didn't believe half the stories they were told anyway, they thought it was just war stories as such. The guys you did speak to were other guys that had been there, National Servicemen and those. And I think there was a big gap at that stage between guys who were at school and guys that had been in the army. The maturity had changed quite a lot. So it was difficult and we did…when you were in Three Two you had 14 days bush leave in the first half of the year and 14 days in the second half of the year. And basically you had 14 days or less off and you used to come back and just sort out your affairs and have a good time and meet girls and those kind of things. And you actually had your other life, your war life that you left behind.
Interviewer	That's what I was thinking about, wasn't it sort of, almost a kind of schizophrenia. There you were for most of your life you're fighting a very serious war, you get this leave and you go back and the very people you're representing almost, are totally unaware of what you're doing. Didn't it frustrate you not to be able to say, well listen, this is what we're doing it's quite serious?
Peter	I actually think you don't become frustrated if you have the approach that they don't know what's happening and they won't understand and you just let it be at that. It is frustrating to know that you're serving your country and you're fighting for a cause and they don't quite realise the cause. I think in those early eighties there was no unrest…there'd been the '76 unrests. That had been suppressed. I think a lot of the ANC type cadres were out and they'd gone into training and that kind of thing, but there wasn't really large infiltrations into South Africa. There weren't a lot of limpet bombs and that kind of thing so it was very low key as such. People used to ask you what's happening in South West

	Africa? And people didn't even know that we were inside Angola. It just wasn't spoken about as such. When we were in Three Two, we used to have HF, high frequency radios to communicate with our headquarters and with everybody else. But what was very interesting at that stage was that with the HF radio, you could pick up Radio Moscow, the English service. You could pick up Radio America. You picked up the BBC. So a lot of our time in the bush, when other guys were out on patrol and we were back guarding our rucksacks, our stuff, we would sit and listen to the BBC and the world news and hear what the United Nations was doing. And we'd hear that Pik Botha was at the United Nations and he was assuring them that there was no South African soldiers in southern Angola, and we were sitting 40/50 kilometres inside Angola. So, I think that set the trend of, we're not officially there and if you came back to South Africa and you told your loved ones what was happening, they wouldn't actually believe you because the news and everything else said something else. So we just went with it and we said the war in South West is going well and we're surviving. I think they were more worried about our good health and did we know other people that had died and so on. And we knew very few people that had been shot up there because we didn't have much contact with other people. So there just wasn't any contact. And when we came back here we just carried on playing the double life. Just let it be. And I think especially with your parents and your loved ones you don't want to tell them how bad things are. That kind of thing. I think they were very distraught when they knew other people in Three Two and those guys were shot and they'd gone down to One Military Hospital and we would just assure them that we weren't with those guys' companies, we were far apart and we really weren't involved.
Interviewer	Your ability to listen to, whether it was the BBC or VOA or whatever it was, you'd have heard a lot of stuff said about the South Africans in Angola and that Three Two Battalion were there murdering civilians and so on and so forth. What sort of attitude…did you guys just shrug and say, well that's what they say, it's propaganda, or how did you react to that?
Peter	We assumed that…I think we were very much indoctrinated by this Rooi Gevaar, the Communist Threat, and that the Communists had basically taken over Mozambique and Angola and you know, South West was next and we were next after that. And obviously having the threat of the Cubans and the Russians and so on, we were told we were fighting a good cause. And if in the process there was a few civilians shot in cross fire, it was all part of the cause. And I think that we were also patriotic and we swallowed hook, line and sinker that any politician or anyone told us, we had a few Afrikaans speaking guys in the Reconnaissance wing as well. One guy called Dave van der Merwe, and he was very…politically he was very right wing orientated. Although I must say the Reconnaissance Wing in general was very apolitical. We weren't knowledgeable in politics, we weren't

	involved in politics, and we really didn't discuss…but this one particular guy was very right wing orientated and when he came down he went to rallies of Eugene Terre'Blanche of the right wing, and he brought tapes back and we listened to tapes of Eugene saying it's…and that all fired us even more to say, no the Russians are taking over and the blacks are going to take over the country and those kind of things. And we never ever associated our black troops with blacks in South Africa. We thought they were a totally different breed. They could have been green in colour as far as what we were concerned. There were times where we ran away in the Reconnaissance wing, where the enemy was larger than us, or they had vehicles and they were chasing us and we chucked our kit away, and we'd end up sleeping in the same sleeping bag with a black guy for 2 days. It didn't phase us at all. We didn't perceive them to be black at all. We thought they were our comrades in arms.
Interviewer	And you thought they were different to the guys sitting back at home?
Peter	Totally, totally different.
Interviewer	So it never entered your mind that, a man you've just spent a long time with in the bush, you fought cheek by jowl, you're doing exactly the same job, you're saving each other's lives basically, but if you took him home to South Africa you wouldn't be able to go into a pub and have a beer with him.
Peter	No, no, you definitely wouldn't be able to. But that was the difference with South West Africa. Because it was a German colony there was no colour bar, there was no racial, everything was integrated. For us, we were the guys looking at white men walking around with white (***means black*****??)** women and wondering the whole thing is skew. But in South West Africa, not so much in Rundu and the smaller places…but when you went to Windhoek, that was like normal. It was like an international country. South West made South Africans feel they were overseas. They could have been in Germany. So there was less inhibition about colour and that kind of thing. But we definitely didn't associate…our troops…our troops were fighting the war that our government said we were fighting. Against the Russian revolution and the Socialist revolution, and this was the good fight to be had.
Interviewer	And through circumstance the white guys in the unit would never have thought of saying to one of the black colleagues, well come home with me to South Africa and we can go and have a good time drinking beer and sitting on the beach?
Peter	The black troops in Three Two were based in Buffalo. Buffalo had the base itself and then we had (Akimbo? *167*) about ten kilometres away where all their women and children lived and they had a high school and everything else. And the blacks in Three Two had no aspirations of going to South Africa. They'd never been there, they had no interest to go there, they were

	busy fighting the war to save Angola. So there was no aspirations to go in that…at that early stage. And I don't know, I wonder what my parents would have thought if I'd brought a black Three Two guy back and…it never…it just seemed there was the barrier and we wouldn't have to come to that point. But there were Three Two guys that were wounded, and they came back to One Military Hospital. And obviously that was the start where they came back and said, you should see this place. Every road there's a tar road. And every corner has got a stop street and every second corner has got a robot. And airplanes fly in and out of this airport worse than what they do at Ondangwa, and it makes Luanda look like a village. But a lot of those Three Two guys hadn't even been to Luanda. They were rural so they didn't know. But they came back with like fascinating stories and things. And I don't think some of those Three Two troops believed them anyway. They thought it was just a fixation of their imaginations. It's just impossible to believe. The other thing I just wanted to mention, I want to retrogress a little bit and then we come back again. When we were in Three Two's Reconnaissance wing in Omahone, the base 250 kilometres west of Rundu, we said Willem had some weird ideas. And I just wanted to go back now you're talking about different people. Now we must have been about 15 kilometres from the border and I wonder if we had in our area…we must have had 150 Ovambos living in that area. And they were made positive towards the Defence Force because they were allowed to our base, they used to get medical supplies there. If they were sick we would come out and bring them to the doctor and fix them up. So we bought them basically. And without us knowing it we were just good neighbours. And a lot of them didn't have water, their boreholes had dried up, then we would go out there and drill them new boreholes. And the system with their Lister pumps if they weren't working and that kind of thing. And when they wanted to go into Rundu – not that many had vehicles, I think there was only one guy that had a vehicle in the area – he would slip on behind our convoy when the roads were being swept and he would follow us in. But Willem thought, we're too sparsely populated and we don't have a buffer and an early warning system for locals to warn us, so basically SWAPO or FAPLA could come up right to the wall of the base before we would realise there was any threat. And I think it changed because in 1981, the end of '81, Willem got married in Rhodesia, and he brought his wife back, Zanzi. Now he was living in a white woman in this area which was a war zone, obviously he didn't want to bring his pretty wife into the base with us, so he lived outside in a tent. But now he was really vulnerable on the outside. And obviously the idea was if there was a problem, they'd jump in his land rover and drive back into the base. And then he came up with this brain scheme, we had a guy called Theuns Eloff that was also from South Africa but he'd fought in Rhodesia with Special Branch…
Interviewer	With Special Branch or the SAS?

Peter	Special Branch. Theuns Eloff was with Special Branch but Willem was with SAS. And Theuns was a guy that was in Delta Company with me as well when I was in the companies. And he taught us about explosives and all sorts. But Theuns and myself and a group of guys went up north of the border and there's a pan there called La Gorge des Elephantes. Means the water hole of the elephants. And he said to us that there's Bushmen living in that area because there's water there, so we should go up there and speak to the Bushmen…I don't know how we were supposed to speak to them but you know, get some agreement and we wanted to move them south to our side of the border. And then we'd supplement their food with some rations from the army, that kind of thing, and then they would have to do patrols in that area and we'd give them weapons as well so that they could patrol that area and act as a buffer. We went out there and we made very little contact with the Bushmen because they just ran away. We obviously got the HF radio up and we told Willem, these little yellow guys are very elusive and we're struggling to make contact with them as such. So he un-categorically told us to chase them and capture them and bring them back. It's as easy as that. And Ron Gregory, that Englishman that had been with Mike Hoare, he had gone up to close to the border, like 2kms at a place called Ohikik, and he'd put up some tents and formed a base and he had a welcoming party for us already. So they were waiting there doing nothing. So we caught these Bushmen, chased them with the vehicles and caught them. and when we'd caught…I think we'd caught about 20 of them in total. Some of them we couldn't catch. We went back to where their little huts were and we took everything from them. They weren't very forthcoming in coming with and so on. So every now and again we'd have an escapee here and there and he'd have to be recaptured. We brought them back to Ohikik and Ron Gregory had big basins, those big baths that you used to use in the olden days to wash in. And each one had…the one had bully beef and the other one had rice krispies and they had corn flakes and they had all this stuff neatly packed out there and this was their welcoming committee. And Ron told them, you guys can now…and he spoke English, the queen's English, and he told them categorically that they must now disperse the food and sleep in the tents and so on, and they proceeded to go and sleep in the bush. And I think it was 3, 4 hours later they realised these guys had never seen tins before in their lives and they didn't know how to open them. So someone would have to help and assist. So they opened these tins for them and they like left them there. Two of them escaped and they went back obviously and the others were told that if they escaped they're now going to get shot. This is like, I don't know, concentration camp, or whatever. And we left there that evening and went back to our base and we heard from Ron, and Ron said, no they'd got the hang of things but they'd taken all that food, the jam, the cereals, the long life milk, they'd poured it all into one big bowl and they were eating it all. All mixed together. And he said, they were quite enjoying it, and I think they ate for a

	day and a half, and they were all huge, and they just lay down and they slept. And that was the beginning of Ohikik. And we eventually got all those Bushmen out of southern Angola, the wild Bushmen, and they formed a settlement there. And they were the buffer. So those were those ideas. And when you were talking about different cultures and people, I thought about these Bushmen. And in the later operation, Ops Smoke Shell, one of these Bushmen was shot. And he didn't have a Force number. Or he wasn't in the Defence Force. So they just gave him some other Three Two guy's Force number and his name and they casevaced him. And his spleen had been shot in this attack. And your spleen is an important part to make you function. And unbeknown to us when he was very young he had some disease, malaria or something, and his spleen had actually shrunk and it was actually ineffective. And although he had internal bleeding his spleen wasn't affected. And he was flown to Ondangwa and casevaced from there down to One Military Hospital in Pretoria. And he came back with stories that were unbelievable for these Bushmen. And when the Bushmen were despondent or they had problems, and we didn't quite know how to solve their issues, we would get this guy in to tell them a story about what it's like on the other side. And they would laugh at these stories because they thought they were hilariously funny. They were like totally fiction stories. They did not believe that people could fly in helicopters. That was just out of the question. And it was arranged that an Allo flew up with people, landed there and got out, and they were amazed that this actually happened. They were also an intricate part of the Reconnaissance wing, because we used them for tracking and they knew the land very well and they knew what to avoid. And obviously a lot of the time if you were on a Reconnaissance type job they were the ideal type of people to have with you, and they knew what to do and not to do. And on one of these occasions this same guy that had been shot was with us. And it was Willem, myself, this guy, and another black guy. There was four of us doing a Reconnaissance. And the aerial photographs that we'd looked at in preparation for this operation were dated incorrectly. And we assumed there'd be water this time of the year when we were there and there was no water. And we found certain things in the area of enemy movement going through the area but basically we ran out of water and we got too weak…we couldn't get out of the area because of enemy movement, and eventually Willem had to call in a casevac. And he couldn't even talk on the radio, we had to send Morse to get the message so that they could come back. We'd obviously sent through we were out of water, but the message didn't get through to the Puma pilot, so when they arrived there, all they had for us was an ice cold case of beer in the middle of the chopper. But we just clambered in to the chopper and we flew back. And we each obviously opened a beer, there was nothing else to open and we downed these beers. And it obviously went to our heads and the Bushman was given a beer and he didn't want to drink the beer. And it was

	about ten minutes into the flight that he opened his rucksack. In the meanwhile we'd drunk all our drips, the drips that we had in case something happened, we'd drunk them. One of the guys had drunk his urine because we knew we could leave our urine overnight and then you could drink your own urine. And then the Bushman opened his rucksack and he pulled out four litres of water. He had two 2 litre water bottles full of water but he wasn't going to be sharing it with us. So he drank his water and then he offered it, and the first guy he offered it to was Willem because he was the commander. And Willem looked at the water and he drank it and he closed it and then he proceeded the beat the Bushman up inside the helicopter. And the flight sergeant had to jump in and separate them, he thought Willem had lost his marbles and lost his head. But those are the type of ingenious things that Willem had thought up in this whole process. And he had an intricate knowledge about people and how they thought. And he always asked the locals in the area who was the headman, and even though we were the enemy walking through that area, he would send someone off to the headman's house and send greetings and say, we're here to fight the SWAPO war and we don't want to be involved with you and we won't damage your family and your kraals and all that kind of thing. So he was an ingenious guy in unconventional warfare and the way that he approached things and things that were happening. We were talking about HF radios…
Interviewer	Yes, and how you monitor news of the world and BBC.
Peter	We also had a radio station, I think it was down in Swakopmund or somewhere…they had a radio station where contractors in the bush could phone in. But they obviously had accounts. So they would say they're from LTA Construction, this site. And then that woman would patch you up to a normal telephone and then speak to your loved ones or in LTA's case to the head office and they would order supplies and that kind of thing. And occasionally when we felt lonely out in the bush we would phone her up and say you're just man in the bos, man in the bush. And if she wasn't busy and she was in a good mood then she'd patch you through to your loved ones and you'd have a quick conversation. Obviously quite illegally. But you'd have a quick conversation to say that you're all well and you'll be coming home in two weeks time or whatever the case is.
Interviewer	Did the Five Signals or the Bush Reconnaissance Regiment guys ever pick you up on that and say, listen, this is a breach of protocol?
Peter	No, no, no, they knew about it and they were doing the same thing. Eventually everyone was doing the same thing. That was Brush. We were quite involved with Brush and we used to get quite a lot of intelligence from them about activities that were happening. And Brush produced a thing that we used to call comics, like comic books, and they would give us…they would say, a comic came through, and a comic was an interception of a

	message and it would basically say, you have been picked up in this area. Or this eastern headquarters detachment sent a message to their lower echelons to say there's ten Boere in the area and your position has been compromised, whatever.
Interviewer	Going back to the Bushmen, what was the attitude of your black troops in Three Two towards Bushmen?
Peter	Look, we had two Bushmen cultures within South West Africa. Three Two Battalion was the Portuguese part of the guys that had been recruited. Three One was the Bushmen that were in south eastern Angola at that stage. And they were recruited down in the base, Amigo, where we used to fly from, their base. The Bushmen were nomadic type people and they were good at tracking, but they weren't really good soldiers as such. I think Three Two had the edge on them because they'd lost Angola and they were fighting for a cause and they had a reason to fight. And Amigo was basically a base that was…well they did do operations, I'm not saying they didn't do, but they were also a showcase of the South African Defence Force, and a lot of influential people or people they wanted to be influenced were brought up to the base on 2, 3 night-over stops. They had a lovely tar runway and they would sing them Bushmen songs and show them what the Bushmen can do. So it was that kind of base. The Bushmen that we got involved in were totally wild Bushmen. They had crossed paths with Ovambo people. The elder ones might have had seen white people but definitely the kids and the youngest ones had never seen white people before. So it was totally wild. The Three Two troops had no qualms with those type of Bushmen and I think they just felt that they were like inferior beings and they didn't mind helping them or working with them at all. Whereas the Three Two guys didn't particularly like the Bushmen from Three One, because they thought they were on an easy meal ticket. Their houses were built much smarter because there was visitors going there. They had a savvy which is a South African kind of store that you could buy civilian stuff at. So they had a massive savvy there. There was a lot of things that they were entitled to or got, that we weren't entitled to. So we just felt that they were spoilt.
Interviewer	That's what I understand from reading various things and so on. How long did you stay at Three Two?
Peter	I stayed at Three Two until 1984. And that was with the Reconnaissance wing. The OC of Three Two in that period was Falcon and Falcon is Colonel Deon Ferreira. And the 2 IC at that stage was Echo Victor, Eddie Viljoen. And I think that Eddie Viljoen had then decided…what had happened is, Willem's influence within sector one zero and sector two zero had grown more and more. We were doing a lot of operations that Special Forces, the Reconnaissance unit, were not able to do because of lack of manpower, we would do in that area. And I think that southern Angolan operations were being run by Three Two Battalion. And the information capital or the source of information

	was Three Two's Reconnaissance wing. Because at that stage there weren't a lot of debriefs being done on operations. Whereas all our tasks were totally information orientated. Every water hole, all the kraals, everything that you saw on a map, you would put, come back, it would be disseminated, put on a master sheet, so when you went out again, there was information about headman and where there was water and what activities took place in what area. So we had a lot of information. Special Forces had the advantage, they were based in Ondangwa and they had a base called Fort Rev next to the airstrip, and the POWs that were caught of FAPLA and SWAPO were taken back to Oshakati to a place called KG hokke, which is the POW camp. From there they were vetted. Once they were vetted and they had information they'd be transferred to Fort Rev. So they had more tactical information about what was happening on the ground, and the bigger picture as such. And they used to react on that information. We were working on real information on the ground that we'd gathered. I think that Colonel Deon Ferreira could handle and understand Willem very well and they had a very good rapport together. And I think the personality between Willem Ratte and Colonel Eddie Viljoen wasn't quite the same, because Eddie Viljoen was a staunch Afrikaans type guy, he had been on the mines in Rustenburg, he was a mine captain. He went and did one or two camps from his commando, he enjoyed and then he signed on Permanent Force. But he believed he had to work within the structure and he didn't like the unconventional nature of Willem's thinking. So in 1984, in his wisdom, Eddie Viljoen decided to close the Reconnaissance base in Omahone and he wanted to transfer the Reconnaissance element all the way back to Buffalo. And then he was going to decentralise it back to the company so each company would have four or five guys that will have a Reconnaissance ability. But we were worried that we won't be able to do the bigger operations. We wouldn't have that tactical information and so on. And we were given an option at that stage. And because South West Africa was slowly slipping away people realised that we might lose South West Africa. They started a new unit called One South West African Reconnaissance Regiment. They got the ex-officer commanding of Five Reconnaissance, which was in Phalaborwa, and his name was Willie Snyders, and he was going to run this unit. He obviously brought some members of the Reconnaissance unit with him and he recruited some that had left to go work in civvy street – he recruited them back to the Defence Force – and he obviously came up and said that the Reconnaissance wing of Three Two, those guys that wanted to stay, could stay behind. And then we carried on the same role we had before except we didn't always have Three Two as a support. In other words, we couldn't call on the companies to come and assist as such. But then we were working deeper into Angola, more tactical work. We'd made our own convoy of enemy vehicles so we could do a more offensive role. And the operations then obviously varied from there but those are the kind of operations we did after 1984.

Interviewer	As One South West Africa Recce?
Peter	Yes. Willie Snyders was a totally different character to Willem Ratte but a character in his own right. Also very unconventional. But I don't think he was involved in his military career at that stage. I think he'd bumped heads with people at Special Forces and so on, otherwise he would have had a career within Special Forces. And he came to us, and he had some hair-brain schemes as well and idea. But I think the unit didn't last very long because he wasn't always there. He would go off on a tangent. We were doing investigations of a place called Mongu in south western Zambia, and there was a very big refugee camp and the ANC was doing training at this camp, but they weren't using it as a springboard into South Africa or into South West Africa. And reconnaissance had to be done of this particular place, and we were doing aerial photographs, having a look at…we'd been down to Katima Mulilo to see what information they had in their archives and so on. And Colonel Snyders disappeared on us. He was Commandant Snyders. He was there and then he wasn't there. And he just decided to go down to the Cape, met a girlfriend and they went on a tour of Zambia, and he just got in a land-rover and went there the other way with his passport in hand.
Interviewer	Like South Africans do now.
Peter	Yes, same type of thing. But we didn't know what he was doing. He was doing his own thing. We had the second in command that used to run the unit while he wasn't there. Willem was the operational commander and we just continued like that. And we did some good operations but I think we didn't have the same support of the companies and that kind of thing, so we did get into trouble at times. I know at one stage that…at that stage in the war, Three Two had a base at Ondjiva, a presence for a long time, and then they were withdrawn from that. And the road between Mupa south Cuvelai, Techamutete, all the way down to Ondjiva and so on was reactivated by FAPLA, and FAPLA was starting to use the roads. And we did an operation at Mongu, which is a town between and Chingongo and Ondjiva and we bumped into a large group of FAPLA there. And when we were asked for support we didn't have that good support that we should have had and 101 actually came in with Casspirs and helped us out of trouble there. Another operation was held in the Kaokoveld, and the same thing happened there. I wasn't on that operation at that stage. I was on course at infantry school doing battalion mortars. And I know that they lost…two guys drowned in the river and it just didn't have that necessary support. What was interesting though is that we had more diverse thinkers within the unit. We had guys like Chris Schullenberg that was from the Selous Scouts. He was running the small teams. I was running the offensive teams. We had a much greater diverse group of people. And we did some good operations in that time as well. But I think at that stage people were starting to get despondent

	about the South West African campaignand they were getting worried about what was happening in South Africa and so on.
Interviewer	So you're talking '84, '85 there?
Peter	'84, '85, yes, and that kind of period. We had Amahoni base as a base that was ours. And obviously some of the guys that they brought in were a little older, they were married with children and they needed schooling and those kind of needs. And the idea was that these South Africans would now become part of the South West African Defence Force. They would stay there after independence and carry on. We would carry on a career as a foreign country and obviously still have influence in that country. But I think, Willem Snyders was involved with a lot of things that we didn't know about. And I know that he was blamed for involvement in Windhoek of the advocate that was killed there later on…but we did internal operations as well within South West Africa, which wasn't our normal sphere of kind of work. And because we had these diverse type of guys, no-one spoke about what they were doing, so you were in a unit…previously in Three Two's Reconnaissance wing we were always talking everything that happened with us, so that we could learn lessons learned and see what was happening. And all of a sudden everyone just did their own thing and you were briefed by the ops officer and you went out and you did your own thing and you came back. There was also a little bit of professional jealousy between the guys. I've been to Vietnam and you were in Rhodesia, that kind of thing.
	END OF SIDE B (*counter at 338*)
	TAPE TWO SIDE A
Interviewer	Willie Snyders was something of a strange appointment bearing in mind that Three Two had operated pretty effectively until then.
Peter	Yes he was a strange appointment. We obviously initially thought he was a breath of fresh air. We were also then given the opportunity, being part of Three Two, to go and do all the reconnaissance courses. So in that time all the Three Two guys went and did their reconnaissance courses, got all their courses up to date. But to give an example of Willie Snyders - during this preparation for the Zambia operation that we did, he decided that it was a good place to do a spanbou, and asSpanbou is when you get all the members of a unit together and you go out and you do a bosberaad or you go and decide what's good in the unit and bad and so on. So he organised a Dakota from Rundu and he got all the women, children, all the operators, everyone, on this Dakota and we were going to go fly off to Katima Mulilo and we were going to have a long weekend of fun and just relaxing, and after which obviously the women and children would be flown back and then we would carry on with our operation. And I remember that on this particular day we had to fly, the previous night we had a big party at his house and they had a pig on the spit and everyone got merrily drunk and everything else. But the

	following morning, not too early, like nine o'clock in the morning, we had to meet the Dakota at the airport. Obviously Willem Snyders woke up late, and some of his guys were late that were staying at his house, the rest of us were all at the airport packed on the plane ready to go, and then he arrived and obviously suffering from a headache from the night before and most probably had a few toots before he got on the plane, and the pilots weren't very impressed because while they were trying to give the briefing as to what the safety regulations are and where we're flying to and all that, they were passing comment. And then they started the plane and checked all the engines and there was a problem with the plane. Some technical problem. So they switched off and they said, you guys can just relax in the aircraft, we're going to check something out, one thing and another. And eventually they said we can get off the plane and we got off, and then we got back on the plane. And the pilots weren't sure if they should fly with this thing. I can't remember if it was the compass not working or some small problem with the plane. And one of the guys was actually a Dakota pilot in the unit itself, and Willem Snyders asked if he was prepared to fly the plane? He said, yes, he knows how to fly this plane, it's not a problem. And so they told the pilots that, you know, if they weren't happy to fly the plane we had someone and they could be passengers. We didn't mind if they like went with us. The pilots didn't take that lightly and there were stages that they mentioned the word mutiny and things like that. And Willem had to go up and chat to the pilot and say, listen, we're going on a spanbou and we're just jolly and happy. But it was incidents like that where things didn't go too well. I think he also had a few brushes with the law. He had some hunters come out to the unit at one stage and go to that same La Gorge des Elephantes, and I think they went to poach rhino or something like that. I don't know if they did poach rhino or not but they were exposed I think before they shot the rhino, or whatever, the thing was squashed and that was the end of that. And from there the unit had to move. We stayed in Omahone, we had it as an outside base, but we moved to Rundu. And after Rundu they realised Rundu is too far off and it wouldn't look politically correct in the new South West African order if we were up on the border, so they looked for new premises for us. And then we moved to a small little town called Omaruru, which is 100 kilometres or so south of the Etosha Pans. And actually slap bang in the middle of South West…the northern half of South West Africa. And we moved into a mine called Kransberg Mine, which was an old tungsten mine, disused, and we moved in there, and the married members stayed in the town of Omaruru.
Interviewer	That would have been what, '85, '86?
Peter	Yes, '85, '86. And we did operations from there. I'm saying that was our home base and then we could deploy. The difference was we weren't based in Ovamboland, or close to Ovamboland We were out of touch with the intelligence because we weren't on the ground as such. And we went to Windhoek and we did

	operations in Windhoek. We very seldom went to Windhoek but we suddenly ended up doing operations in Katatura township and places like that. And some of the small teams were involved with the advocate, Anton Lobowski. I was involved there with the spying on a newspaper.
Interviewer	The Namibian? A woman called Gwen Lister?
Peter	No, it wasn't Gwen. We did bump into Gwen Lister. There was another guy.
Interviewer	Hannes Smith.
Peter	Hannes Smith. Hannes Smith was our one target and then there was the Reuters offices were also there. Actually Reuters offices right next to the headquarters of the army there.
Interviewer	There would have been a photographer called Johan Liebenberg at one stage.
Peter	Johan Liebenberg was there. There was a guy called Jim Freeman was there. There was a couple of other guys there.
Interviewer	And you were just there to monitor and see what they were doing?
Peter	Yes, see what they were doing, what information was coming in, and we put some bugs in their offices and on their telephones and such like. What was rather peculiar in that time is that Jim Freeman used to be a member of Three Two Battalion and he was a lieutenant in Alpha Company. And I won't say I got to know Jim well but I knew him on sight and we were on speaking terms and so on. And later on I was spying on his offices in Windhoek. So when I was given the dossier and they said Jim Freeman I didn't even have to look at a photograph of him, I knew exactly who the guy was. And during that operation we bumped into him, and I had to obviously…I couldn't tell him what I was doing but I said we were in Windhoek for whatever reason and we went out and had a couple of beers, that kind of thing.
Interviewer	That strikes me as very odd, at this stage you're a battle hardened combat soldier with a unit doing exactly the same stuff, and they're taking you into civilian monitoring of offices. Surely that's a security policeman's job?
Peter	I actually think it had something to do with Willem Snyders. Because remember we were being groomed to be the Special Forces of South West Africa, and the Special Forces of South Africa were doing those operations in South Africa. He knew he had a very good team with bush warfare and counter insurgency warfare, and maybe he wanted to cut our teeth on urban operations. I'm not exactly sure…we didn't quite know. We weren't told the bigger picture. It was just we did these kind of things. And being a soldier you do what you're told to do, and working in Windhoek was nice, we stayed in a hotel and the novelty was quite nice. It was like something else. Speaking of

	Windhoek I want to regress back to Three Two and things that happened then. While in the Reconnaissance wing, I think in 1981 or possibly 1982, we were running short of people as such, because we had about 30, 36 guys in the Reconnaissance wing. And for the amount of operations Willem was doing that was too many. And we eventually took some National Servicemen in to assist us with the work that we were doing. It was I think only one year that we took them in. But some of these National Servicemen were guys that had brothers in Three Two's Reconnaissance wing. So when they came to Three Two…we asked for them to come to the Reconnaissance wing, they were happy because they'd had brothers there. The one guy's name was (**Kenny Kallie?)…**the younger brother. And during Ops Smoke Shell Kenny was involved with the signal work. In other words they had to pick up Morse code of the guys that were out in the field and so on. And just before we deployed on Ops Smoke Shell there was some altercation with Kenny Kallie and I think he refused to go to the bush. And we were very worried about these National Servicemen, because if one refused to go to the bush, maybe the rest would also refuse. And these guys were an integral part of our operation because they'd been learning the Morse. And Morse code is a difficult thing to learn and each person sends Morse differently. So basically those signallers were taught to listen to my Morse or someone else's Morse. And no-one else could just do it off the cuff. So we had a small mutiny on our hands. And I know Kevin (**Sider?)** was there and Piet Notje was there and being the army and far away from the eyes that peer and so on, we had a very peculiar disciplinary system. And we just held a quick kangaroo court in the tea room and we decided now I think the best is we just sjambok this guy. Now the Three Two troops in Buffalo itself, they had an ops tent, 16x16 feet, which is 5 metres by 5 metres. The OC of the base would sit there and having 1500 black troops under his control and another 2500 women and children, they would sort these disputes out like this every day. You'd go to the ops room, and there would be guys whose wives had been whoring around. So you'd have the whore, her husband, and the guy she'd been whoring with. And they'd have the 3 of them in the ops room, and they would discuss it and the OC would say, ok, the whore gets six slashes with the sjambok, and the guy whose wife it is gets three slashes, he should be looking after his wife, and the guy that was whoring around with her he gets six slashes. And the MPs would grab you and pull you over an empty 44 gallon drum and beat you, and then the medic would have a look if your wounds were ok and patch you up and the next lot would go in and the same thing would happen. And similar treatment happened in the bush as well. The only thing you could do wrong in the bush was sleep on guard duty. And if you were found out sleeping on guard duty then Willem or one of the seniors would grab a big stick out the bush and beat the living daylights out of you and two other guys would be holding you down. And we'd never ever reasoned that this is a National Serviceman who should be treated otherwise.

	So Kenny Callie was given…I don't know how many lashes he was given, I think he was given 16 lashes. And I was called in at the latter part of this whole thing. And I was told, come here we need you, and I went there, and they said this guy has refused to go to operations and he's going to get 16 lashes. And fortunately I had the job of just counting the lashes. That's all I had to do. And as in Three Two as well, if you had three lashes you counted one, two, three, and the fourth one missed, you just didn't count that one. You just counted three again, and you counted three again until he hit and then you went to four and five…I can't remember. I think Kenny got 16 lashes. But anyway Kenny obviously went on the operation, everything was successful, Kenny didn't hold a grudge against us, there was no big problems. And he went back to South Africa and I think 3 or 4 months after his service had finished, he told his girlfriend or someone, and then it went through the channels and now we were going to get court martialled. And that was my first experience of Windhoek in 1981, '82, because we were, I think about ten of us were sent down to Windhoek. The only other time I'd been in Windhoek then was on the train up from South West, and that was just a stop over and then we went again. I was quite amazed to see Windhoek and the big city. Metropolitan nature of the city and everything.
Interviewer	Because you'd been living in the bush constantly since 1978.
Peter	Yes. And we didn't know any better. So going back to Windhoek with One SWA Reconnaissance was a fresh start and we didn't actually worry. And slowly the unit disintegrated and we realised that it's not going to work out. And we had now become…we had finished our Special Forces training. Because we were South West African Special Forces we weren't awarded badges as such. Because we didn't have a South West African Reconnaissance badge.
Interviewer	Where did you do your training?
Peter	We came back to South Africa and did it with the cycle, the normal Special Forces cycle…we came here to do 'urban in Durban'. We went to Langebaan to do boat orientation. We went to Phalaborwa to do 'know your enemy'. We went back to South West to Fort Doppies which is in the Eastern Caprivi to do minor tactics.
Interviewer	You say you went to Phalaborwa to do 'know your enemy'. Was that lectures about the political scenario across the region or…?
Peter	Yes, yes. Who the ANC was, who APLA was, and to know your enemy, and SWAPO, the whole broad spectrum. So we're back in Windhoek. We don't actually know what happened to Commandant Willem Hendrik Snyders, because when the unit slowly disintegrated, he disappeared off the map. We heard that he was somewhere in Africa selling spilpunte. A spilpunt is a…you know when you have water coming to a point and then it

	goes around there…irrigation system.
Interviewer	It's a pivot irrigation system.
Peter	Pivot irrigation system. But if he was working for…he was most probably working for Barnacle or D9 or whatever Special Forces called them later on. He disappeared off the map. The OC of the unit became a Commandant (Tors?). Commandant Tors was a commando type unit in the Windhoek area and he was just given this Special Forces baby. He didn't have a clue what was happening. We felt totally dejected. A lot of the members of the unit that came from overseas…we had a guy from the New Zealand SAS called Phil Kearns. He packed up, went back to New Zealand. The foreigners just decided this is a lost cause and they packed up first. The South Africans, we realised that the unit was going nowhere and we can't work without a decent commander and so on. And Willem contacted Jan Breytenbach. Jan Breytenbach was sitting in the Caprivi at the time. He was the OC of…he worked for Chief Staff Intelligence who had a wing called Director Special Tasks. Director Special Tasks was the support of Unita and other organisations. And he had the unconventional warfare school in the eastern Caprivi. Some of the Three Two guys who had been in Three Two when I was with the companies had moved directly to Colonel Breytenbach. And they didn't do all these other things that I'd gone on, and we knew some of those members that had gone directly to him in the early eighties already. Willem approached him and he sent a message that we should just put transfers in and come. Breytenbach is another character, almost like Willem Ratte but in other ways, and he didn't realise that as being officers in the Defence Force we couldn't just leave a letter for Commandant Tors and tell him, we'll see you sometime in our lives. And we obviously waited for authority from Defence headquarters, and we sat there idly for 3 or 4 months waiting for something to happen. We had no operational tasking as such and we weren't peace time soldiers and it was becoming very unpleasant. In fact our marriages started taking…I was married…and it had a diverse effect on our marriage because our wives didn't know us as peace time soldiers. Here we were home every night and we had nothing to do. And they were actually getting agitated. And our wives basically said as long as we're going to an operational unit they didn't mind, they'd go anywhere. And we eventually got this call up. With Commandant Tors I think all we did was we went to some commando units to go and brief them about what was happening in the war, and he wasn't very impressed with us because we didn't actually tell war stories and I assume that's what they wanted. And eventually we were transferred and we were transferred to Director Special Task Two. Director Special Tasks One was the support of Unita. The place we were at is called Fort St Michel. And it is…if you travel from Mpacha, which is an airport in the Caprivi, if you travel west, there was a tar road that went up to the Chobe River. The Chobe River is called Chobe in Botswana and to the north it had a different name. And

	just north of that area, on that road to the north was Colonel Breytenbach's area. To the south was the Special Forces base of Fort Doppies where we'd done our minor tactics training a few years before. We got there, found a very nice base hidden in the forest, and he was busy training various forces. Director Special Tasks One was a division of Chief Staff Intelligence, which headquarters was based in Vermeulen Street in Pretoria, and they ran the Unita operations and they ran everything to do with Unita. From assisting Savimbi with the peace talks in Rome in Italy to removing ivory out of Angola and paying him, and diamonds, and whatever else they did. They also ran bases from a place called Cheta. Cheta is exactly between St Michel and Three One Battalion's base of Omega. They had a base and they did the training for the whole of Unita. And it was a big operation. I imagine they trained 5000 troops at a time. And they trained basic training, regulars and motorized and various types of training. The leader group which were, I imagine, company commander type level to battalion commanders were trained at St Michel by Colonel Breytenbach's team. And they were told combat training was done there of their leaders. That was all part of DST One. We were involved with DST One on very low key. But we mainly did DST Two. DST Two was anything in Africa excluding Unita. They were involved with an organisation called Fleck, which was the front line for the enclave of Cabinda. Which is the little enclave from Angola which is to the north of Angola, other side the big river. And their training and liaison with them. Later the training for the operation, where Wynand du Toit was caught, was done there, the pre-training, and then they went up there to support Fleck, and then that operation was exposed and they were caught. We were involved with the training of Inkatha Freedom Party. They had 211 guys come up from South Africa and the South African situation had deteriorated. We had SDUs, Special Defence Units. And Buthelezi was worried about their position, they didn't have a military arm and so on, and those guys were trained up there by us. And they returned and did their thing here in Natal. That was later exposed in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and General Magnus Malan and his court case and that whole saga. The other part of DST Two that we did is Renamo. In 1984 the Inkomati Accord was signed between Mozambique and South Africa. And that accord was basically an agreement that South Africa wouldn't support the resistance movement, which was Renamo in Mozambique. Renamo was then being trained and supported by Five Reconnaissance in Phalaborwa and they were doing operations in the middle of…Renamo had their headquarters in Gorongoza which is a game park in the middle of Mozambique. And they did operations between Beira and Mutare in Zimbabwe to prevent vehicle movement and the oil pipe line from functioning. We had 200 odd members of Renamo flown out of Mozambique, and they came into St Michel. We had them in a base to the north of where the other training took place. We were on the border and working over the border with Angola in that small stretch there. And we

	did the training there for about nearly a year, of these senior members of Renamo. During that time Alfonso Dhlakama used to visit there quite regularly. He was the chief of Renamo. And his wife Rosa and their children lived there permanently with us in the base. Because a lot of activity had taken place. Previously they'd been housed in Walmansdal, north of Pretoria. And their base there and in Phalaborwa had been infiltrated by spies and some of the guys had been killed there. So they were worried about her safety and she'd been moved to the Caprivi. The biggest problem that Renamo had at that stage, was the Mi-24s that were being brought into central… …the Hind helicopters were in the area and they were disrupting Renamo, and obviously the Frelimo guys in Mozambique were obviously launching big offensives against Renamo. And this is what they were worried about and they basically wanted some solution to their problems. Willem Ratte was in charge of the project of doing the training. We did a debrief. We had a general Thomas. Obviously all these guys worked under pseudonyms, and we also had pseudonyms. And they briefed us to what the situation was. And we began with training of anti aircraft. Special Tasks, which were guys that were going to do reconnaissance and blow up airplanes and such like. We had a communication team that was being taught how to make recordings and they were going to be given radios that would transmit on FM, and then influence the local population and inform them what was happening. We had one or two others…I'll get to the other team. But I was given the anti aircraft team and I had seen helicopters in southern Angola, enemy helicopters. I'd seen some MiGs. But I had no clue whatsoever, anything to do with anti aircraft. Never ever been on a course or anything. And they were busy with basic training initially, just to get all the guys on the same level. And I was dispatched to South Africa to go and look for weapons. They had no plan and we were told we had to go look and see what weapons we would use for them. We went to CSIR, Dr Vernon Joynt was in charge of a company called…he was with CSIR then. Only later he became Mechem. And we told them what the parameters were, and they said they would have a look and see what they could do. But we needed to get hold of a weapon and they would manage to make a weapon platform. We eventually ended up in Simonstown and we went through to the naval gunnery school and we met a guy there called Warren Williams. Although he wasn't a relative of mine but the same surname. And he showed us what weapons they had there and we started shooting with an Oerlikon 20mm, which was a weapon used in the Second World War on ships. And we quite liked the weapon. There were weapons available. We made the necessary arrangements. We even arranged for him to fly up to the Caprivi, to assist us with the training of these weapons. He gave us a two week course on how to handle these weapons. We returned to Pretoria, we spoke to Dr Vernon Joynt to see what was happening about the weapons platform and he started working on the platforms as such. We also went to PMP, which is Pretoria

	Metal Press. And they make the ammunition for the Defence Force. And General Lootz who used to be the Officer of Special Forces. Commanding Officer of Special Forces had a son who worked there and he was the research and development officer. We told him our problem with the Mi-24s and we said that we didn't want to just shoot them down in a defensive role, we wanted to take the battle to them and we wanted to try and shoot them on the ground if necessary. And they deliberated about various things and eventually they decided the only round that could do it was a 12,7 mm round. The Barret had come out in the United Kingdom at that stage, but the Barret didn't have the penetrating power to shoot through, I think just 22mm of panzer steel.
Interviewer	And the Barret is a sniper rifle but in 12,7.
Peter	Sniper rifle designed by the British. The difference, the weapon that we wanted to design, the Barret is a sniper rifle to take humans out at long distance, and obviously shoot out land rovers, small vehicles. The weapon we wanted, we wanted to shoot the equivalent of a tank with a handgun, a rifle. And he had a look around and he came up with the idea of barrel. He said the breach and all that could always be designed but the barrel was the problem. The DSHKI is a 12,7 anti aircraft weapon that fits on the back of the T34 tank, and it's used in the anti aircraft role. The weapon is used as a machine gun to shoot 12,7 rounds. The penetration ability wasn't quite what we needed but Lootz decided that he could change the mix of the all the rounds and he could supercharge the rounds and he would adapt the round ends and then we would be able to pierce the necessary stuff. So they began their experiments. I don't know exactly where they got their 12,7s from but I know Unita had a whole lot of tanks that they were parading in Jumba and so on, so I'm sure they just went and borrowed those 12,7s there. We got ten 12,7 barrels and they started the experiments and the experiment worked. The other course that I couldn't remember was obviously the sniping course. We went back to training in the Caprivi and we started training (*inaudible*). I began with conventional training of trenches and aircraft attacking trenches, and while the basic training I'd studied anti aircraft manuals and we were giving the basic anti aircraft all arms type solution to anti aircraft. In the meanwhile we were developing these other options that we had. We went to Pretoria quite often to speak to Vernon Joynt. He got us the Oerlikon platforms ready. Obviously they didn't work immediately. A team came up from them to come and do the practical training in the Caprivi to test…the guys that were doing the research and development never ever met the troops themselves, they were always kept apart. And they developed it and they fixed the platform up and the platform worked. The 12,7 round was developed and the weapons were developed. Initially they were so super charged that when you shot a shot you ended up on your ass 3 metres back. So we had to arrange a compensator. We began off with a normal theodolight tripod, big

	massive tripod, and we were shooting big weather balloons that we were shooting at 1,8 kilometres and hitting them, and that's basically the size that we wanted to start off with. So the training went well. We finished all the different training and we were then due to deploy into Mozambique as advisors. And we obviously realised we would be involved with the war section. Colonel Breytenbach tried his damnedest to come with because he realised that Alfonso Dhlakama and some of his generals, they had *(inaudible)* in central Mozambique and that the senior staff rode around on motorbikes, and he obviously envisaged himself going to war on a motorbike. Unfortunately the powers that be in Pretoria didn't want him to go anywhere near a war. I think they were frightened he might have just won the war in Mozambique and they didn't want that to take place in a hurry. The politics was starting to get nasty with the Inkomati Accord. Certain things were happening, and I don't remember the exact time frame, but I think that the president's aircraft had then gone down. Samora Machel's.
Interviewer	That would have been in '86.
Peter	In that time his aircraft went down and the whole Inkomati Accord thing was coming up and was it sound and there was also a pilot of the MiG17, Lieutenant Lomba…he flew the MiG17 out of Mozambique and he defected. And obviously he went over to Renamo and was involved with the communications teams and started sending messages and so on. The operation was on off, on off, on off, and then we got the green light that we're going to go ahead. What is interesting about the whole Renamo, after Inkomati Accord debacle, is the fact that I don't always know if the generals or FW de Klerk knew exactly what was happening. I think at this stage in the war that a lot of senior officers had their own agendas and were doing their own things on the side. And the operation was very sensitive and obviously they didn't want us to be captured and we eventually moved on…obviously all the training was done with parachute training as well, we were going to parachute into Mozambique. The Mi-14s were I the air. There were MiG21s that had moved from Mozambique to Angola and were back in Mozambique. So obviously the situation for Renamo had deteriorated a lot more. We flew down from Mpacha with our crew. We flew into Pretoria, Wonderboom. From there we were moved out to a farm in Murray Hill. And we were based there for, I think a day or two, just for the final preparations. All our equipment came down with us, that was loaded into two C130s. And it was a lot of equipment because we had anti aircraft weapons, we had ammunition for them, we had the sniper rifles. We had medical supplies, we had a lot of other supplies that they hadn't seen for a long time. We had a hundred odd soldiers that had to parachute. We were all parachuting out of one aircraft. The other aircraft was loaded just with kit. And ours was loaded with kit and a hundred people. The aircraft was loaded to capacity with equipment. When we got in there was no space, they just said, climb on top of everything and just…in between, at

	the end of the C130 there's a net. And between that net and the bulkhead there's a little area where they can make coffee or tea. There must have been at least 40 people in there. I think we were at least 20 people inside the cockpit itself. It had a very large jump seat at the back. We had guys on the stairs and under the stairs. And we were ready to take off from Waterkloof airport. And as is always the case, the engines revved up and we went careering, the first aircraft down the airfield, flat taps. And we got three quarter way down the runway and the pilot decided he's not going to get off the ground, we're far, far, far too heavy. And they aborted the takeoff. Obviously we went off the edge of the runway and into the bushes. And there was reverse thrust and equipment was falling on people and people falling over each other. But no damage was done to the aircraft. The aircraft was taken back to the hangar – we were in a sealed hangar, no-one in the hangar. Taken there, and obviously they said there's no ways they could take off with this load. We have to get rid of some of the load first of all, and they want to now take off out of Durban instead. Hustled off back to Murray Hill, I think we spent the night there and then we were taken down to Durban. And all the troops were put in a bus, a Pantechnikon. And given sandwiches and food and whatever and off they went. And we got to Durban, and we didn't overnight in Durban, it was the next day and we were due to take off at about five in the afternoon, late afternoon. The whole military section of the airport I Durban was sealed off and there was no-one. It looked totally, totally deserted. Our C160s had obviously flown down with the equipment. Without the packs. And they were waiting for us. We boarded the aircraft, we were given a final briefing, and some of the troops had boots tied on their personal kits, their rucksacks. And obviously the airforce guys that had moved our equipment off the aircraft and onto the trucks that carted it down, saw these nice boots and they stole some of the boots, and I nearly missed the aircraft in Durban because I was out in the troop lines trying to buy boots from the guys. And when I got back to the aircraft the engines were turning already. We boarded and we took off. We flew to the Comores from Durban. We did a dummy landing, in other words, you come down and pretend. We weren't on Grand Comore we were on a island called Mayotte. We did a dummy landing. From there we were obviously under radar cover so the radar couldn't pick us up. We then low levelled from there all the way to north of Bira. We hit the coast. It was a night with very little moon and it was very dark and there was a lot of cloud cover. Colonel Alexander was the jump master of the aircraft. He was a parachute…
Interviewer	McGill Alexander.
Peter	McGill Alexander, the same one. And they had the path finders with them to do the dispatching. They must have known where they were going to I assume. Senior officers would have known and the pilots and so on. And we had problem getting radio communication between the aircraft and the ground. Willem was

asked what is the process or what's going to happen, and he told them that we're going, doesn't matter what. If they're not going to find the landing zone they must just drop us. So we flew around there low level for a while and then they spotted the area we had to land in. And all they had was fires on the ground. And the tailgate opened, I was jumper number one in the aircraft. Jumper number two was General Thomas, behind me. And we only kitted up about an hour before hitting the Mozambique coast. We were told one hour, kit up. And we started…because of the space, all the parachutes were just put in one corner, and we started then getting parachutes. And although we checked our parachutes in Pretoria, we'd then taken our parachutes and put them in bags and left them. when we start kitting up we realise we're short of about 16 reserve parachutes. Don't have. And obviously the guys that had carted the stuff down, the National Servicemen, had seen parachutes and playing with them and pulling the reserve parachutes and so on, and they obviously thought we can't leave these popped reserves so they hid them or stole them or whatever happened. And we didn't know, we had parachutes in the front and then they started checking equipment and a fight ensued in the middle of the aircraft. Colonel Alexander told me to go back and sort this lot out. We went there and a guerrilla organisation has batmen looking after their seniors, and although the batmen didn't come with for the training, there were senior officers and very junior officers, and the junior officers were then treated as batmen. And this junior officer refused to give his reserve parachute to a senior officer who didn't have one. And I said to them, it's ridiculous, we're jumping at 800 feet, you'll have to use your reserve parachute as soon as you're out the aircraft. I took my reserve off and I gave it to the commander and I went back to my position. And General Thomas looked at me and he immediately said to me, you're not going to get my parachute. You want to jump without one, you jump without one. One of the instructors checked me and he refused to pass me because I didn't have a reserve. Colonel Alexander came there and he looked at this and he said, no, you will jump with a reserve parachute. You're a South African Defence Force member, you will jump. So I said to General Thomas, give me your reserve parachute, there is…at the fulcrum point of the C130 we were tailgating out the back because we had equipment and equipment had to go out the tailgate. I said to him, at the fulcrum point, beyond that about 2 metres is a red line, and I said, the dispatching instructors are not permitted to go beyond that red line. Only if there's a hook-up at the back or something serious are they then permitted. But I said…now we're shouting in the aircraft because it's very noisy…and I said to him, these guys are parachuters, they will not bend the rules. There's no ways they will go over the red line. So what you do, give me your reserve chute, let him check me, we will then be told to go forward above the red line in the ready position. I said, about five minutes after that we're going to get the green light to go. And then we will jump. I said, in between…we've gone over the red line I will

	return your reserve parachute. He reluctantly agreed but he told me...showed me he had his Tokarev with him and it was loaded. So he doesn't mind having a dispute with me. and he knew that I didn't have a sidearm. So he was quite happy, he didn't mind. Our weapons were tied on to our rucksacks which were then in front of us and we couldn't untie them. So the whole process went on and Alexander was none the wiser and we went over the red line and we were told to get in position. We got over the red line and I took my reserve parachute off and I gave it to the General and he saluted me, he thought this was wonderful. Colonel Alexander was jumping up and down and lost the plot totally and shouting and screaming. And the General was waving at him and I said to him, just ignore him, nothing will happen. And they…
	END OF SIDE A *(counter at 549)*
	SIDE B
Interviewer	The night was pitch, pitch black. We were below the clouds, the clouds were above us. And I had to go back to Colonel Alexander because I wasn't going to jump. There was a problem. The problem was we were too low. And I stood beyond the red line and he was standing on the red line. And he was shouting about the reserve parachute. And I said to him, there's a problem, we're too low, the altitude is too low. And he said to me that we're flying at 250 feet. And only when we are at the DZ are they going to do a shoot-up and then we're going to jump. And then they're going to return to 250 and low level out of the area. So I went in position. The general wasn't perturbed about the height but I realised we were far, far too low. And I hung onto his kit and I told him brace yourself. When the pilot changed from the 250 up to the 800 feet, he just took it almost vertical that plane, and got to the ceiling point. All the parachuters were flat on the ground. They weren't sitting, they were lying on the ground. And we'd barely recovered and regained our posture and position and the green light went on. And I know that the general and myself went out very, very fast. The rest were a little bit slow. And the last guy, (Pete Bring?), he ended up going into the trees at the end of the DZ. The DZ was beautifully cut out of the forest, but it was cut out by hand. There was nothing. It was in the remote part of Mozambique. There was nothing there. These civilians came up to us and they halted and they saluted and they would have kissed us if they could. They stripped us of our parachutes, our main equipment, everything. We weren't allowed to carry anything. They virtually nearly carried us into the bush line on the edge of the DZ, and we were just checked if we were ok and so on, and we were fine. And then the second aircraft came past the drop with the equipment. And the first palette landed very close to us. It must have been 50 metres away from us and it broke some trees. And they started removing the equipment. But to have come from an organised infantry school trained background, to get into a guerrilla war, we were used to Unita and worked a lot

	with Unita, this was a totally different war. We were totally out of our depth. The tonnage…I don't know what tonnage we had, we most probably had 100 tons of equipment with us. They had 30 thousand civilians there to porter all the equipment. I've never seen so many people in my life in one place. All with the same purpose. Discipline was better than any South African Defence Force unit you came across. …*Break… (counter at 29)*

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