

National Serviceman (name withheld) 10/09/07

Missing Voices Project Interviewed by Mike Cadman

	TAPE ONE SIDE A
Interviewer	Can you sketch briefly what city you grew up in, a rough idea of your background and then your sense of what happens...your feelings, when your military papers arrive.
NS	I was born and bred...I grew up my whole life in Johannesburg. I got my call up in 1982. I was in matric. I was 17 years old. And I got a call up to Bloemfontein to go to 1 SSB. It's the armour unit. All armour...little Noddy cars, Ratels and tanks.
Interviewer	A Noddy car was the Eland armoured car.
NS	Yes. My dad actually knew the head of the airforce because Otis had done some work for the airforce by putting lifts and escalators, and he said to me, don't worry I'll get you into the airforce, and through absolute stupidity <i>laughs</i> after I'd been in 1 SSB for about two days I realized they'd made a mistake, because I could have gone to Pretoria. And I said, no, no, look whatever call up I get I must go and do it and whatever, whatever.
Interviewer	Why did you decide to not take advantage of the airforce?
NS	I didn't even know what 1 SSB was. I suppose you're young and you're reckless and you just think all the army is the same. To be honest with you, I had no idea whatsoever what the army was about, what it consisted of. I'd never shot a weapon in my life. I don't come from a...aagh I actually lie if I say I don't come from part of a military background. But I didn't come from a background where we were very interested in...any form...we didn't follow...I would say other than, of course we read the papers, but we've never been really a family that was too interested in politics or...maybe we were a little bit naïve. So I must admit I really didn't know much about it, to be totally honest with you. My dad's side of the family flew Spitfires in the Second World War. My great uncle and my grandfather. And my dad also was in the airforce. My dad's family were all in the airforce. But other than that really we had nothing. So I had no idea.
Interviewer	Alright so you go off and you get to Bloemfontein and you're this young guy who's just come out of a Johannesburg school where you're used to playing sport and rugby and doing what everybody else does, and then you arrive in the army, what happens then?
NS	Well look, the shock to me...the first major shock of all was that I was the only English speaking person in our company. So I couldn't speak one single word of Afrikaans. So I mean, the first horror was I didn't realise there were so many Afrikaans people in South Africa, to be totally honest with you. I mean, I knew there were Afrikaans...

	<i>Interrupted tape</i>
NS	I thought or I believed the ratio was about 60/40 percent in favour of Afrikaans, and maybe I went to a more Afrikaans (intake?), I don't know, but I was the only English speaking person, or first language English in our entire company.
Interviewer	Were you discriminated because of that?
NS	I was...yes, I was.
Interviewer	So you go into your basic training, which is a lot of exercise and running around, and you then get taught how to use weapons, you get taught how to become accustomed to your vehicles and so on. How long did that period take?
NS	I went to officers course, I went to the top of the hill to the school of armour. It lasted one year, or just about a year, like 11 months. Look also with my background, farmers could shoot or farmer's kids could shoot. You know, they were fantastic. I'd never shot a rifle in my life...I'd never shot any weapon in my life. So the reality was I wasn't <i>laughs</i> very good. But yes, it was about 11 months.
Interviewer	Alright, and then during that period what sort of things did they teach you?
NS	You had to write exams and we had different courses, so you would start with...we did some infantry courses. Of course we were in armour so we did things evolving around the equipment that we had, so it was with the Eland, Ratel tanks, then it came to the armoury, how to shoot all the weapons, all the machine guns, etc, etc. I mean, we were always on course. Look, a lot of it was a total waste of time, to be totally honest, and a lot of it was relatively important.
Interviewer	Ok, they're teaching you all these things, was there much emphasis on the political side of it, who you were meant to be going off to fight?
NS	Oh yes...look I mean, yes it was. What was amazing to me is that maybe because of my family and whatever, I didn't really believe in this whole Communistic onslaught and all of that. I sort of believed that...or maybe it was my family's opinion and I knew that affectively we were in Angola because of a buffer, and affectively it was to keep space between us and whatever. I didn't really believe in this, that there was a Red under every bed and under every tree. That was a propaganda. But yes we did have that propaganda, yes. The Afrikaners believed that they were going to swarm over us. That's what they truly did believe. And they were...I don't know the exact words, but they sort of believed it was their birthright and their...while we didn't. We were more interested that we'd finish the army and go and maybe get a degree and get a career and go and do some work. Maybe for a lot of them, their outlook was extremely different to mine.

Interviewer	In other words they were a bit more gung ho, if I can use that term.
NS	Yes, absolutely, for sure.
Interviewer	And you spent most of your time counting the days to calculating when you'd be getting out and getting back to a real life.
NS	Yes. I counted every single day. It was...I suppose maybe if you do things that you don't enjoy...that year felt like ten years of my life, to be honest with you.
Interviewer	What year was this?
NS	1983.
Interviewer	Were you part of the January call up?
NS	Yes, January.
Interviewer	So you spent most of '83 being taught the ropes of armour...did you specialise in any particular vehicle or...?
NS	No, look, we would go into any of the vehicles, any of the three that we could use. Because on the border what happened was, we didn't use the tanks a lot as you know, we used to pull them up on those big MAC (<i>tank transporters</i>) trucks, if I remember correctly. So we used more the Ratel nineties and the Noddys. And then we did have tanks up there but we didn't have very many.
Interviewer	Those were the Oliphants.
NS	Yes, Oliphants.
Interviewer	During your training, how many passes did you get, chance to come home?
NS	Geez, minimal. I can't remember offhand but I'll say I came home about four or five times the whole year.
Interviewer	And during that time did you sort of reassure your family that it was ok, this was not too bad? Or were they concerned about what was happening to you as a young man?
NS	Yes, to be honest I think that they were concerned. I don't think that we were very knowledgeable. I don't think I came from a family that had a great interest in the army and military things. Yes, I think they were concerned.
Interviewer	Now 1983 passes and then you're fully trained. Are you an officer at this stage?
NS	Yes. I had that white candidate officer. And that was November. You only got your rank on your klaar out which was December. But then what happened with me in November, they needed officers and NCOs to go to the border...to go to Six One Mech and they asked us where we wanted to go. So I was the only

	English guy, I said, Pretoria, Zeerust, anywhere that wasn't to the border. And of course all the Afrikaans okes wanted to go to the border, ek wil te grens, grens, grens. But the Major hated me bitterly and he sent me to the border. I hadn't even got my rank then. I was still...we still had to have the klaar out thing or whatever, which was going to be in December and I think I went to the border...I don't know the exact date but it was towards the end of November '83.
Interviewer	Why would the Major have hated you?
NS	I don't know, maybe because I also was the only English guy. And also...I think I was a bit gullible, to be honest with you. because they asked me, what you going to do after the army? And I told them, look, my intention is to go to Wits and whatever. That was probably <i>laughs</i> the worst thing one has to say. I didn't even know there were other universities. I mean, I only knew Wits because it was English and I was English. The few guys that I did meet that were in the army with us had all gone to Afrikaans universities...if they'd come to us later, then they wore two pips...either went to Stellenbosch or to Tukkies. There was never ever anyone from an English university like UCT or Wits. Never. I never met one. I'm not saying there weren't any, because there were, but I never met one. So of course their perception about me going to Wits was horrific.
Interviewer	In the sense that they viewed it as a liberal university...
NS	Yes. And they thought you'd be a traitor or something.
Interviewer	In other word Wits would turn you into an enemy of the state.
NS	Absolutely. They've probably got a file on me because I went to Wits. Not that I could have been much threat, but...
Interviewer	Alright, so your good Major friend sends you off to the border. Then what happens?
NS	Let me be honest with you, even at this stage, I was extremely gullible. After being at the school of armour the story is I just thought that we were...I must be careful what my wording is...but I just thought that we were totally, totally, totally dominant. Is that effectively you go up there, you're going to drive around a few patrols and you're going to drive home. I'll never forget we flew up there in a Flossie, that big one like a Hercules.
Interviewer	You've got a DC 3 which is a Dakota, the old fashioned one with two motors and the really big one that's got a tilted up tail ...
NS	Yes, that's what we had.
Interviewer	C 130. (Hercules)
NS	C 130. So we flew up and whatever, we land, and then they come and pick all of us up and we went to Six One Mech, which was just the other side of Tsumeb, if I remember correctly.

Interviewer	That is correct.
NS	<p>And to my horror...no, it wasn't even horror, it was worse than that...is I drove into the camp and I saw Ratels that had been shot up. And I saw the one Ratel that had been hit by 7 RPGs...it was the infantry one. The guys were all inside, they'd all died...whatever...I just thought to myself, what am I coming to? I thought no-one had died. There was nothing in the news. Nine had died, I arrived there, there were about five Ratels that were shot up. And I'm thinking to myself, shit, what's going on here. the propaganda is, that there is no war. We just go in there, we shoot them, we come home. And I saw this, and I actually realised that that infantry company that they had...they sent them home. There weren't enough in that company in that company to fight. I don't want to lie because I don't know, but maybe ten died and 16 were injured, or something like that. I don't know. Historically maybe you can find out. But it was major. The whole company had to go home. So I arrived there to that, and I'm just thinking to myself, Jesus, maybe this isn't exactly what I thought it was. So yes, that was my first day at the border. Oh sorry, and I meant to tell you, is that the Major told me that I'd definitely be home for Christmas. You see I wasn't meant to go up but it was just a relief thing to relieve some of the guys. And that never happened. I think my first pass was April the following year, I came home the first time.</p>
Interviewer	So we're now talking Christmas of '83?
NS	Yes, I was meant to be home. They promised me I'd be home for Christmas.
Interviewer	And you're 19 years old?
NS	18 years old. So you must know I phoned my friends to tell them I'd be home, and I came home like the following April.
Interviewer	Which is effectively Five months later [than scheduled].
NS	Five months later, yes. And you must remember, they owed me all the pass that I had, because I hadn't cleared out of officers. I mean, they owed me like 10 days leave for that and whatever, whatever. I never got any of that plus my Christmas leave, but anyway...So anyway then I went there and then we did patrols in South West and whatever...sorry I need to go back one step, I've actually forgotten something...is that December 1983, we did a push into Angola or what was a...I don't know what the correct word that you can say, but we did a big push into Angola. We went about 400 kms into Angola.
Interviewer	What vehicles did you use?
NS	Ratel 90s. So it was massive. So it was artillery, Ratel 90s, Oliphants, infantry... <i>interruption</i> They had Impalas and Mirages. I mean, of course that flew from the border, but it was a major, major push. Now ok firstly I'd seen some of the Ratels that had

	been shot so my mind had changed a little bit, but I still believed the propaganda that we were totally, totally dominant in Angola, so I must admit, like maybe it hadn't totally sunk in. But I had my doubts but maybe they weren't totally there. And I'll never ever forget the day because it was the day of Shaka Zulu, whatever, the 16 th of December, what did we call that day?
Interviewer	Day of the Vow.
NS	Day of the Vow. And some of the Afrikaans okes were praying that we would have action and whatever. Firstly that was an absolute eye opener. I'm waking up in the morning and I see these okes all praying whatever. But I'll never ever forget that day...because when we used to train, we used to go de Brug, and we used to shoot our cannons two kilomtres, whatever. They were 90mls, the tanks were 105. I mean, we always shot a long distance. So you must remember, now I'm in Angola, it's all Mopani bushes, I can't see the end of my cannon. So you know I've spent one year and I'm questioning exactly what use when there's just millions of Mopane bushes. You can't see shit. You don't know where you are. It was chaos. So anyway, we have a push forward and all the guys are going, and the next thing is we're being bombed by mortars but you can't see where they come from. You can't see anything. I'm in the middle of the bush and fortunately...I think they're 120s or 122s or whatever the Russians were...those round fat things like this. They didn't set them properly, so they were going into the ground and making a massive hole, maybe 3 metres by, whatever...a round thing, but about half a metre deep. So they were major. And they were just firing, firing, and we're in our Ratels, we can't see anything. I mean it was absolute chaos. And also maybe this was part of my disillusionment, is that all these guys that had been to the border so many times so I really thought these guys knew what they're doing and this and that. And one of my Ratels broke down. Not mine...
Interviewer	How many are you commanding?
NS	I had 4 Ratels.
Interviewer	And how many people per Ratel?
NS	3 people. A driver, a gunner, and then like a 2 stripe.
Interviewer	A corporal.
NS	A corporal. Look I had me, a sergeant and a 2 stripe. I'm the commander. So the vehicle breaks down and we're being bombed. So I turned around, and they've all retreated but they've left me there. So they've left me, and my one Ratel. And then I tell the other two Ratels they must retreat and it's us left there. And we're being bombed by these...luckily they...I was underneath the Ratel. And I had told all the okes (<i>inaudible</i>) and these things are going off and off and I don't know what to do. The Ratel's broken down, I'm trying to like get the major on the

	<p>radio to say, where are you? And he's retreated. I mean he's ducked about 20 kms back <i>laughs</i> the oke's left us. And eventually the Tiffies, the mechanics...and you know everyone used to mock the mechanics but they were the pros. They came there and they towed the vehicle out. And I must admit, I think that to me was my biggest...I realised two things. The first thing I realised, that we weren't dominant in Angola, we maybe had half and the Russians, East Germans, and FAPLA, PLO whatever they were, had half. And that was the first reality that I realised. Ok, it wasn't what I had thought. Ok, and the second reality is that I believed that we had this amazing fighting force which we didn't have. Our Special Forces were brilliant and whatever, but our general troops which I was part of, to be honest with you, we definitely weren't special. Maybe I wasn't in the right corps, but we weren't. I think...I met a lot of the Recces and I met quite a few of the Three Two guys and I met quite a few of our pilots because they were all English so I used to drink...I really think those guys were all special, but the conventional troop like me of the infantry, I think in general we weren't really great. We may be slightly better than some of our foe but I don't believe we were anything of the quality of the East German or whatever. My personal opinion.</p>
Interviewer	Now you've now followed this big operation, your vehicle breaks down, everybody else retreats 20 kms...
NS	Yes, and they start to dig trenches.
Interviewer	So now you're being mortared, fortunately the mortars aren't set properly. Have you fired a shot at this stage?
NS	No, you can't see anything. What we realised afterwards...I realised...is the East Germans had a helicopter that was directing the mortars. So what happens is they must have dug in...we were actually going to drive into a little town or something...I can't remember the name of it...I mean, all those towns were the same little ? towns, all shot up. And they must have dug in there or something with their mortars or however they've done...and they actually had a helicopter. The East Germans were flying and they would from the air, saying, go left, go right, go whatever, so that's how...but fortunately for us as, I was saying, they hadn't set it properly.
Interviewer	In your briefings before you got into this big operation, which I think would have been either Daisy or Protea...
NS	I can't remember the name, but it was massive.
Interviewer	I'll check it for you because I can check it by the dates.
NS	It was massive. There were thousands and thousands and thousands of us.
Interviewer	Ok, so you're going in and you're getting your battle orders from some commander, did they indicate whether or not you were acting against SWAPO, against FAPLA...did they give you any

	indication?
NS	<p>No. No indication. You know what, the impression was like from these commanders is that you don't have to worry. We're the best fighting troops, there is nothing to worry about. That was...and I think that was my first...ok, I had two wake up calls. The first one when I arrived, I saw some of the vehicles shot up, when I had heard that we never lost any vehicles and just in Six One Mech I saw five there. That was a little bit of an eye opener to me and also I didn't believe the guys died. And the second thing was this, and I just realised that maybe it's not as hunkey dorey as we really believed it is. And that even went further to...I still remember having a debate with the okes, they weren't always all the brightest, but they believed at the end of the day, that the locals wanted us to be in South West and wanted us to be in Angola. And you just have to think, where are these okes coming from? We used to drive through their mealie fields, drive over their houses, we used to torture them, shoot them, I mean, where do these okes come from? What did they actually believe. This scenario I'll never forget, even being 18 years old, I tried to say to the okes, even if we win in Angola, how are we going to look after it? Who's going to look after it? There are millions of these people that live there, what are we going to do? How would we ever, ever look after it? But I think we had such a good propaganda machine, is that we all believed. We believed that we had the might of Israel, or whatever it was. When the reality was we didn't have ten percent of Israel.</p>
Interviewer	<p>But before you went into the operation and before certain phases of it, I'm sure you had collection points and staging points and so on, was there much role...did chaplains come past and talk to you and explain...?</p>
NS	<p>No. I never ever saw a chaplain once. To be totally honest. I know they were up there. I never ever saw a chaplain, no.</p>
Interviewer	<p>So now your Ratel breaks down, the Tiffies and mechanics come, do their stuff, tow you out and get you back to South African lines...now this is early in the campaign, this is your first experience, what happens then?</p>
NS	<p>Look...I mean...firstly maybe in a way it was a bit lucky or unlucky is that the vehicle had broken down and whatever. That was also maybe a misconception that we had all of these millions of vehicles, we didn't have them. We struggled to get parts, we struggled to run them, so we didn't have millions and millions of vehicles. So I actually sort of came back to the base, and then my little troop of 4 wasn't at the front anymore. So they had to fix, so effectively thereafter I wasn't involved in the front line. I was more a support, if that's the correct term. But the terrifying thing is that like this major didn't think that he'd done anything wrong leaving me there. I'm trying to think to myself, this is not like you see in the movies and okes winning VCs and you know...the course like an SOS order, they never ever leave one oke behind.</p>

	We're in tanks, it's not that we're on the ground. The major should have sent 12 tanks to come and look after me or 12 Ratels. Isn't that how you behave? I don't know, maybe...
Interviewer	Did he ever explain to you what happened, why he left you behind?
NS	Look, I mean, of course he's got his own stories or versions of it, or whatever. His version is getting bombed we need to retreat, he didn't understand that one of our vehicles had broken down, even though I'd radioed him to say it's broken, I don't know how you don't understand that. But I think as much as that they didn't admit it, but I think he was terrified like the rest of us. I think he couldn't see much like I couldn't see, and he's thinking, Jesus, I'm going to get bombed here as well, I don't need this in my life. And that's why he ducked. I don't believe there's any other reason.
Interviewer	So while you're trapped in the sand in the middle of the Mopani in your Ratel, the mortars ? landing near you, fortunately most aren't going off, but there must have been the sounds of battle all around you.
NS	Yes, yes, yes. There's just gunfire going, the guys are shooting, but I think a lot of the guys are shooting in panic, because they don't know what's going on. So I think everyone's panicking and...if I sort of understood, maybe now it's a long time past and I look back, I don't believe our intention was at that stage to try to take Angola vie versa. We were just trying to hold the line wherever it was. I don't know where that line was. But I just believe our push there was just to hold our line, so that they wouldn't come too close down towards South West. Maybe I'm wrong. But that was my mindset. I think that was all it was. A few okes have to die for that, then a few okes have to die. That was their belief.
Interviewer	So now you're acting as support of the fighting infantry, the Three Two Battalion...so the infantry guys...I don't know what units might have been there...
NS	Yes, they had a whole lot of them. They had...look, what we realised as well, the one night when I was up on this road or whatever, the one night these Recces okes come to sleep close to us. So I go to say howzit to the guys and some are blacks from Rhodesia and the doctor was a white guy also from Rhodesia, and I just realised, these okes are proper soldiers. And I asked the one guy, how long have you been in Angola? He says, I've been here for one year. I've never ever left Angola. <i>Laughs</i> Jeez, my eyes are bulging, I'm saying, fuck, but how do you...He says we live off the fucking land. If you need stuff they come here and drop it. I'm saying, you're fucking pulling my leg! You just realise that our war was fought in South West Africa by Koevoet predominantly. I think they nearly got all their kills. And I think the other side of the border was maybe your Three Twos and your Recces and your professional soldiers. I really...they knew what

	they were doing. Maybe I'm being unfair, I think the parabats maybe did a lot of good work, but I'm not saying the army and the others didn't, but I think the guys that were predominantly on their two year stint...I'm not saying they were terrible soldiers, but I don't believe we were terrific soldiers.
Interviewer	Now in this period you didn't leave to go home until April.
NS	No.
Interviewer	So there was this big thrust...
NS	It lasted 6 weeks, I remember because I couldn't shave. I don't know why it suddenly came to my mind, but I couldn't shave and I had 6 weeks of growth, that's how I remember because I had to come back...so we went for 6 weeks.
Interviewer	END OF SIDE A (<i>counter at 345</i>)
NS	SIDE B (<i>counter at 20</i>)
Interviewer	So you've now spent 6 weeks without shaving, you've seen lots of things happen around you, how much shooting actually were you directly involved in yourself, your unit, your 4 Ratels, during that period?
NS	Our scenario to be honest on a Ratel or whatever is, I contact would really be with other Ratels armour because the infantry hears you from 5 kms. So effectively we didn't shoot any of our weapons in anger at anyone at all. I never ever saw any other vehicles, but I do know that when we went to Six One Mech...now I don't want to get the timing wrong...but I do know that some of the guys from Six One Mech they had 10 or 12 Russian tanks dug in T 72s. And they shot up a whole lot of our Ratels. A whole lot. And I can't tell you the exact timing, I just once again, saw the vehicles being towed back to Six One Mech, and that there was bad info, bad intelligence. They drove into one of those little towns...I mean, they all look the same to me...and they didn't know that the T 72s had been...and they were East Germans, they weren't the blacks...
Interviewer	So you're not fighting FAPLA at this stage...
NS	No, those were East Germans, and they shot up quite a few of the Ratels. I don't know how many and I don't know how the details were, but that was related to the same Six One push that we had.
Interviewer	Now Six One Mech was a composite unit of armour, of infantry, of mortar units...
NS	Yes. We had the whole lot. Then I left the Six One Mech and I went up to Ondangwa, Oshikati, Ruacana, and I drove patrols. So I had to drive border patrols. I don't know what use it is to drive a border patrol because the okes were on foot, so what I'm driving in a Ratel for...I mean, that's why Koevoet was so effective because they were trackers. Maybe it was just a sign of

	<p>force, I used to go...and often I got lost to be honest. The okes still to this day find it quite humorous, but I actually got lost once for about three days. They couldn't find me, they had to send choppers to come and find me...they're just saying, read the map. I'm standing in the middle of a fucking Mopane bush.... where on the fucking map! He says but can't you see a river or a fucking...I can see fuck all, that's why I'm telling you that I'm lost, because I can see fuck all. Three days to find me. I had no idea where I was. There's no GPS or anything...I still can't read a map. But the reality was...is that part of the bush...it was endless Mopane bushes. We were in our Ratels just driving and there was fucking nothing. It was just remote, nothing. But effectively our job thereafter was to drive patrols. That's all I did. Till the end of my army.</p>
Interviewer	<p>In your period with 61 Mech though, did you get any sense of...you say you were acting as a support role to infantry and other guys, what does that entail? Were you with the infantry involved in battles were you support...?</p>
NS	<p>Yes, no, no...yes, the guys did. When I say that we're supporting, it means that you're quite a long way back. Ok, maybe 20 kms behind the okes. So you can hear gunfire and whatever but you're not seeing it firsthand. The first thing when we went up we were the front line so we were getting bombed. Thereafter I was a back line, I was 20 kms behind. They only would use my Ratels if the others got shot out. It was just we were like a support.</p>
Interviewer	<p>But when you get to the areas where the fighting is, when the infantry move through, when Three Two or whoever it might be, what do you see? Is it total devastation, is it prisoners of war, is it...?</p>
NS	<p>Look, when effectively we got there it would be a day afterwards. So effectively what had happened or if people had been killed or wounded they'd already been taken away, be it our guys or their guys, in all honesty. But yes, it was just the whole place, whatever it was, was totally destroyed. I mean, let's say it was a little town where people were or whatever, they sent the Impalas, sent the Mirages, then they shot those G5 cannons, which nearly gave me a heart attack. I mean, I couldn't sleep, the night they shot that thing, I shot out of bed about 5 feet. Then we shot those G5s continually. And then we had the other with the 140mm...they shot those things...shit I don't want to exaggerate...12 hours of every single day for 6 weeks.</p>
Interviewer	<p>When you say 140 mm are you talking ?</p>
NS	<p>Cannons. And rocket ones as well.</p>
Interviewer	<p>140 (<i>140 millimetre cannon</i>) is the old five fives (<i>5.5 inch</i>).</p>
NS	<p>The old fives fives.</p>
Interviewer	<p>And what I call the Stalin Organs (<i>rocket launcher</i>).</p>

NS	<p>Yes, we had lots of G5s. I didn't see any G6s, they said they had some but we had a (<i>inaudible</i>) and they shot all the time. So it was planes...look I think the Mirages do a more of a...I don't think that they're really strike planes. I don't know too much...I think they were more for the next coming, and the Impalas actually do the bombing and the shooting and whatever. And it was continual. We just bombed those little towns into smithereens. That's all we did.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Now they withdraw you, you go back into South West Africa. And the rest of your career you become a border patroller...</p>
NS	<p>Yes, we drove...when we were up at Ruacana it's right on the border so we drove along the border there. We drove a few patrols in South West...I didn't really understand the point of driving a Ratel 90 around South West but whatever, it made the colonel there happy, so you go and do that. But I've got one...I suppose it's funny, at the time it wasn't so funny story to tell you...we were driving up from Ondangwa to Ruacana and you know those old Chev big bakkie things...I don't know what you call them...like a F250 sort of thing but an old one, a bit run down or whatever...and this black guy was driving it, and there were about 12 vehicles, so ours was 4 and I think we had a captain in charge, I can't remember...I think it was van Tonder...but anyway to cut a long story short...the guy's trying to come out of thing, we go in there, he jumps out of his Ratel, pulls the oke out of his vehicle, this black guy, and he's starting to like beat the guy up. And the black guy says to him, do you know who I am? So I'm telling the captain now, he needs to calm down or whatever, and the guy's saying that he's the RSM of Koevoet. So I must admit my blood went a bit cold to say the least. So I said to the captain that I suggest that he leaves this oke alone and that he better start saying some apologies. So anyway he was quite right wing to say the least, and we got up to Ruacana, and I think it was that night, maybe the next night, Koevoet came to him and they told him they'd slit his throat. And I think maybe 4 days later came back to South Africa. Never ever saw him again.</p>
Interviewer	<p>That's interesting because Koevoet are fighting on the same side, they were police anti terrorist unit, but they felt they'd been wronged and they were going to defend their rights. That's amazing the captain decided to withdraw.</p>
NS	<p>They were mean okes. I shat myself. I don't think I slept for a week. And luckily I was the one that said to him, pull away, and whatever, and yes, he was the RSM of one of their companies. A full RSM...and the okes that came to threaten him, weren't the black guys from Koevoet, they were the white guys, the white officers, who said they're going to come and slit his throat. That captain disappeared out of there...but I don't think it was a threat. I think they would have slit his throat. I think it's such a tight unit that, it didn't matter that he was black, the RSM. I just don't think that you mess with those guys. And I also realised that there are</p>

	different corps that do different things and be it the Recces that did their own thing, and Koevoet and Three Two. I mean, Koevoet did their own thing, they had their own law, their own rules. Their offices ran their own thing. They didn't care...maybe Three Two and Recces did the same thing. And you realise there they had their own laws, their own rules that they abide by.
Interviewer	But here you are, you're a well trained soldier, you've got a year's training, you've seen action in Angola, you're in charge of some very expensive vehicles, you're in charge of men, yet you're actually terrified of some of the people who are fighting the same side as you, noticeably Koevoet.
NS	Yes...look fortunately for me I...I'm not a racist but you know, it's not my sort of style that I would have jumped out the vehicle to have a fight. I think this poor captain, he shat himself. <i>Laughs</i> Because he thinks the oke was a peasant. He thinks he's a South West peasant. Not knowing who this oke was. But that was a lesson. I think any of our...I don't know much about our Special Forces but...a lot of those corps are not the right guys to mess with.
Interviewer	So even amongst yourselves, Koevoet had a reputation of being really tough guys who were prepared to do anything to...basically defend their own honour but they were going to act in very unpredictable ways.
NS	Yes. look I had quite a few drinks with the guys in the officer's mess their...their offices and whatever...yes, they were...they had no rules. Their rule was that they always wanted to have the biggest count of SWAPO. Which they had. I think they finished the war...I don't know the final figures, but they always had the most count. They used to have charts...
Interviewer	By counts you mean kill rate.
NS	Yes, kill rate. They killed the most of SWAPO. As you know, they wore no uniforms, they didn't give a shit, they didn't wear rank. No-one ever put themselves into their Casspirs. They sat on the top of their...they were lunatics. I mean they really did what they had to do. And I think their tactics were effective but despicable at the same time. Maybe going back to a Vietnam thing, maybe some of them they did similar things to ? but they definitely had no qualms about torturing guys or tying them to the front of their vehicles or...and I know a lot of people said, yes, but that's rumours or whatever. I saw...I wouldn't say regularly, that's unfair...but I definitely saw guys tied on their vehicles often when I was on the border. Often.
Interviewer	Bodies of guys...
NS	Bodies of guys. Or they'd tie them on the front and drove them into the trees till they talked where the other guys were. They were ruthless. They were...I think quite a few of them are maybe not sleeping as well as they should but they were effective and

	that probably made the government happy. But I think the way they went about it wasn't the right thing.
Interviewer	So now you're working with a group of National Servicemen and along comes Koevoet in a Wolf Turbo and they've got a live human being tied to the front and they're driving into trees. You must have been scared out of your wits?
NS	Look, everyone says, but you're an officer, you're going to go and say something to the okes. You don't say fuck all. You don't even <i>laughs</i> even if you're in the pub, I would maybe be in the pub with the colonel, and a Koevoet's a one pip loot. The colonel is not going to tell Koevoet what to do. They'll knock the oke out. They just didn't abide by any rules, regulations, they didn't give a shit about rank, about...there are only 2 elements that I met on the border that didn't care about rank. One were the Mirage pilots...because no-one else could fly a plane...they just told the okes...when I was there they didn't fly in the day. And I mean they flew one of the generals up there who told them that they're all going to go to jail. They said to him, look, you can put us in DB, ? fly the Mirage.
Interviewer	Why did they want to put them in prison?
NS	Because they wouldn't fly in the day. They refused just point blank. They didn't even...they had no qualm because of the SAMs and because of all the things, they were getting shot at all the time. They just said bullshit, we'll only fly at night. And the generals flew up there to tell them, and they just said, fuck you. ? that can fly a Mirage, they just said fuck off. You want to come and fly it, fucking fly it. Or get someone up. But there's only us. And I believed we had fantastic pilots. I really think the okes could fly planes, but they weren't prepared to be bloody shot down, that was for sure. So those were the two limits. <i>Laughs</i> I must admit I had some drinks with them. They were a little different. The Mirage pilots and the Koevoet okes were the two that really didn't give a shit. For different reasons. One was extremely intelligent, well qualified, brilliant pilots. Look...maybe Koevoet attracted that type of element, I don't know.
Interviewer	When you say that type, were they effectively thugs?
NS	They were thugs. I think it would be like you're looking at any war where you've got maybe people that are doing things that other units or things wouldn't do. I couldn't imagine us at armour, that we would tie okes on the front of our Ratels and drive into trees. Or I wouldn't have done that personally, I'm not saying other...we wouldn't do that. We wouldn't torture the okes. I wouldn't know how to torture someone. Jisus, they just burnt whole villages down, they were ruthless.
Interviewer	Did you see them burning them?
NS	Yes, we would go afterwards. They'd burn the whole place down. So let's say they had caught a SWAPO guy in a village. The

	<p>punishment would be they'd burn the whole village. There'd be nothing left. They would destroy and they would burn all their mealies, they would...and then we thought at the end of the war, maybe they'll vote for us. I don't know how...</p>
Interviewer	<p>Would they chase the women and children out of the village before they burnt them?</p>
NS	<p>That I don't know, and I mean...I think, unfortunately for some of them, and I think that's more Special Forces, I think maybe that's the issue...it's a long time ago actually but I...he was one of Jane's friends, I don't want to mention his name, but he was married to one of Jane's friends a long time ago and he was in Koevoet and I remember the one night he got drunk and started cutting himself with a knife, and I was saying to him, what's going on here? He's had a few rums. But he had...if he drank rum he had visions of being back in Koevoet and he was an officer in Koevoet and his wife used to say he used to wake up in the night screaming...he's older than me...you know how long ago that is. My issue is, I believe if you shot people that you believed would shoot you, it doesn't give you nightmares like that. You either shot people that you shouldn't have shot or you shot children...maybe I'm wrong, but that's my argument psychologically. Why would you wake up in the middle of the night...I think it's the same thing maybe for the Vietnam people...if you shot soldiers that were trying to shoot you I do not believe that you have these terrible things. I'm not saying that you're not going to question what you've done, but I don't believe that 20 years later you're going to wake up screaming in the middle of the night. I think unfortunately, that I think we did horrific things at the border. Some of our troops, some of our people, and they live with it now. They believed that...no doubt they believed that they were doing the right thing at the time. That they realise now that the world has changed and our country has changed so much is that you can't justify that for apartheid or for whatever. There is no argument in it. But fortunately it wasn't with me. Fortunately.</p>
Interviewer	<p>You're still young soldier but now you've learned a whole bunch of things. Firstly the idea that you're fighting this sort of unknown Communist threat, but you've already discovered that you're not just fighting guys from Angola, you're fighting East Germans, your Mirage pilots are getting shot at all the time...</p>
NS	<p>Millions of Cubans there. I think they had fifty thousand Cubans when we were there.</p>
Interviewer	<p>You're not as invincible as an army as the guys once led you to believe. You realise that guys like Koevoet are not behaving in an unacceptable way. You must be sitting there thinking, what am I involved in? It must be quite a strain on you, your perceptions of why you're there, who you're fighting and also it must make you want to get out of there very quickly.</p>

NS	<p>Yes, that's right, I must admit...I think...I didn't understand the point why we were there, to be honest with you. Before I went up I never really questioned, but when you're there you just question...you know exactly who we're fighting, why we're here...I'll still never forget...and maybe this will highlight my point...us driving along the road in Angola with my Ratels on a patrol, and let's say I'm maybe 50 kms into Angola as an example...I don't know how deep I was...but it was just the four of us and we're driving, and there are these guys in uniform with AKs and they speak Portuguese. Who do you know who they are? It could have been MPLA, it could have been Unita, it could be anyone. They all speak Portuguese. All black, dark, dark black as you know. I mean, who do you know who's who? I had no fucking idea who's who. How did you know? The only time you know if the oke is shooting at you, then you know, look this is the enemy. But when you're out there how did you know who was who? Couldn't speak English...</p>
Interviewer	<p>And you don't recognise uniforms?</p>
NS	<p>No, no. They had all camo stuff. They all wore sort of like camo. Some wore like a green thing with a little bit of camo. I mean, how do you know who the fuck's who there? You don't know who's who. I mean, I didn't know. If the oke waved I waved back. If he's going to start shooting ? shoot. But I mean, how do you really know who'd who? I'm not saying sure that you go into camp, they're there, you're here. But I'm talking about in those areas where they were all a bit mixed. Who do you know who's who? I presumed they were Unita. That was my presumption.</p>
Interviewer	<p>But this is quite a bizarre war. You're not sure of who you're fighting, your government is denying much of what's going on, so it must have leave you in a sense of almost disbelief that you're fighting a war that nobody's got any parameters to.</p>
NS	<p>I don't believe there were parameters. One of my best friends, (Rob Grant?), he was a medic and trained Unita. So we come back on pass, have a few beers and he tells me that he's in Unita and I'm reading in the paper that Unita's this independent thing fighting and it's all bullshit. We're training them, we're arming them. <i>laughs</i> He was telling me. He had all the okes there, at a base wherever it was and he was the medic. I realise that war is an ugly thing. There's parameters, there's no borders, there's no...and I just...I think unfortunately war allows certain people to do despicable acts because the argument is that they're doing it in war.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Now here we are sitting a good 25 years after all those events, do you resent the government of those days for forcing you into the situation?</p>
NS	<p>You know...it's a double edge sword, the army, and I'll tell you what I mean. Yes, I do resent, I'd lie if I said I didn't. I'm not saying it's a resentment that keeps me up at night or whatever, it</p>

	<p>doesn't. I do think...part of me, yes, I do think it's a waste of time. And I thought part of what we went there and the propaganda whatever. But the other side of the sword is I think that it made me grow up. I think that it opened my eyes to real life. I'd never seen that before. I think I came from a sheltered background. I met a lot of people in the army and I just realised I just didn't want to be like this. And maybe that's a positive spin on a negative situation. Look, I never ever did a camp. I refused to go.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Why did you refuse to go to camps?</p>
NS	<p>Ok I lie, I didn't refuse, they thought I was a Communist so it was easy when they called me up when I went to Wits. But I wasn't going anyway, I'd made a decision if they want to take me to jail, but I wasn't going. I said, shit, I've done my two years, I've done my bit. But they phoned me once...the major phoned me, and I told him I was at Wits, I never ever heard him again. All correspondence stopped. They never ever phoned me again. Never.</p>
Interviewer	<p>And was this the army unit or was it a Citizen Force unit?</p>
NS	<p>No it was Citizen Force unit, I can't even remember which one I was meant to go to, but it was the armour one. It was only armour. I don't think it exists anymore, I think it's disbanded. And I never ever did a camp. So I suppose that's maybe something to be grateful for.</p>
Interviewer	<p>When you finally finished and you've done your two years, now it's time to come home, did they sit you down and debrief you, give you counselling, give you...?</p>
NS	<p>No.</p>
Interviewer	<p>There was no support.</p>
NS	<p>No. There was nothing. No.</p>
Interviewer	<p>And now looking at the guys...earlier on before we started recording you had mentioned that you knew people who you'd been at school with and you'd met guys in the army, and some guys have coped quite well but many haven't.</p>
NS	<p>I think many haven't, yes. You know, I don't know the whole story about Glen because it's not fair for me to comment because I haven't seen him enough but if I understand correctly he did five years. So he did 2 and then extended 3 and I think he was a captain in the Recces. And I think he was one of their shining lights, if that's the correct terminology. And there's no doubt that he was involved in stuff in Zimbabwe, Lesotho, wherever it was. There's no doubt. And the guy's at home. From being an officer in probably our most prestigious corps to looking after the children at home, is a little sad. He's still in unbelievable physical shape. I saw the guy's 42 years old, he doesn't carry one ounce. He still has a discipline of going to gym every day, running on the treadmill. That disciplined.</p>

Interviewer	You've clearly thought about what you went through and stuff like that, do you speak about it freely to your partner, to your family, to your friends?
NS	Yes, I do. Maybe because I didn't have a terrible time. So maybe that makes it a little bit easier.
Interviewer	But being abandoned by your commanding officer 20 kms is not exactly a nice time.
NS	No, no, sure, but look, I think I realised something is that, that whole bravado thing...the oke that talks the biggest is always the biggest bullshitter. And unfortunately I learned that quite early on in my life because I learned it in the army. And this major was a fine example because he ran away. That was maybe the reality. I'm talking about in our course, I'm not talking about the Special Forces. <i>Laughs</i> But yes, I can still laugh about it...laugh and cry I suppose at the same time.
Interviewer	I'm going to ask if there's anything else that you want to cover? Anything that's relevant to a deeper understanding of what...
	END OF TAPE ONE (<i>counter at 340</i>)
	TAPE TWO SIDE A
NS	Look, I think the sad thing is of any war, or specifically our war or some of the wars that is...I suppose at the end of the day you ask the question, was it necessary? And maybe the reality was no. That would be my feeling. And I think that maybe the saddest thing of the whole war is that we lied to...Pik Botha, PW...we lied to the South Africans...and coming back to stories that happened with me is...when I was 400 kms into Angola which was Christmas Day of that year, actually Pik Botha got on the TV and he promised all mothers in South Africa...I want to give my commitment to you is that we have no boys in Angola. And I'll never forget when I came back in April and I had to tell my mother. She was just horrified. But that's a politician. They'll say anything. Even if there's no factual to it. And I just think out of all those people that died there...both sides, not only our side, the other side as well...all the damage, all the children, all the mothers, it's just...it's horrific. And it's a war that we've both hidden. We've hidden part of the reality and so has the ANC because they also did horrific things. Again their camps, they did terrible things to their own people and so did we. And so what happens is it's just ignored. No-one wants to admit to anything so what we do is we all put it underneath the carpet. And luckily for me I came out in one piece but if I had one leg less or...I'm not too sure that my reaction would be exactly the same. I think that's so sad for all of those people, or people that the families that are left, and our government has told them a story XYZ when I'm convinced that it would be bullshit. And I hope for all of those families that they find out the truth.
Interviewer	In a way it was a war that the government refused to fully

	<p>acknowledge. There we were sitting kilometres into Angola behind enemy lines, if you want to use that terminology, but your families sitting at home there in Johannesburg weren't allowed to know what was going on.</p>
NS	<p>He said we were all in South West, we mustn't be worried, we were all having this big Christmas lunch thing on the border. And they actually had pictures of the okes sitting in Oshikati where they're chowing big turkeys or whatever it was. But it was bullshit. I mean there were some ? but you maybe had...but maybe there were 5000 of us. I mean, maybe that also gave me a reality about politics at the same time. I think there's so many families and so many people that are so scarred from the war and they can't even express themselves. Because they're either embarrassed or they're either too ashamed or you know, whatever. Whatever the reasons are. And as you say the circumstances changed in 1994 and who really is interested in their tale? No-one. That's the sad part.</p>
Interviewer	<p>That's an interesting point actually. You look at as a youngster, you're called up to the military and you went partly because you had no idea what was awaiting you on the other side, but also because there was this general perception that there was some kind of international, primarily Communist, threat to South Africa. Now many of our members of cabinet are actually Communist. How does that affect your perception of the people who now run the country? Does it affect you at all or have you said simply well we were lied to in the old days and I'll accept that people bona fide as individuals rather than as members of a party?</p>
NS	<p>I do accept that. I agree with you. I think what had happened, is with the government it was easier to find a common foe than to try to unite the country because we had a lot of other problems, so to find a common foe the Communists was the easiest common foe the government could find. Because we had so many other problems. Our inflation rate was going mad, our economic embargo sanctions, or whatever it was, embargo sanctions that we had...we had major problems, but the government of course never ever did that, and of course our press was controlled. So the Commies that was our common enemy, it was fantastic. I always say, I have to be careful with part of what I say as well, because part of maybe the earlier thing I said, I'm implied maybe it was only the Afrikaners that were so paraat in the army, but that's not true. The English guys were just as paraat. Maybe Afrikaners some more so than us, but a lot of English speaking South Africans, I mean, you look at Special Forces, a fortune of them were English speaking, they were not Afrikaans speaking surprisingly. The best soldiers we had in South Africa a lot of them were English speaking.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Yes, so indirectly they themselves...everybody who served in the military did so for various reasons. Some because of the law, some because they wanted to, and some just because they didn't know any better. But your sense is that it was at times a secret</p>

	war, that the government wasn't brave enough to tell South Africans why they were fighting the war. It was a useful tool to deflect attention away from the problems at home. But in the meantime it actually had a deep and lasting impact on many, many lives and still does 30 years later.
NS	Still does, yes. I just think of a guy like Pik Botha and I think of some of the other politicians and whatever, I mean you just...I suppose really there is no honour amongst politicians...but you just think, they were accountable for so much of that and they washed their hands of it, let's be honest. They ? the end of it, the ANC has come into power, whatever, whatever. And I'm not saying it's wrong, the ANC should have come into power, but about all the damage that they've done, the Nats, is they've just washed their hands of it. Not our problem. Bye bye. But I suppose that's politics.
Interviewer	How do you think this has impacted on the family who is sitting at home, the wives, the girlfriends, the mothers, and some instances the daughters, but I suspect we were all too young in those years...but you know, the families sitting at home, do you think they're still carrying scars from what their brothers and husbands and sons had to go through?
NS	Yes, I think so, yes I do. I think a lot of families were maybe even torn apart by the military thing. I laugh at Jane's family that...
Interviewer	Your wife.
NS	Yes. Her godmother lives down in Knysna, and of the two sons one went to the army and the other didn't go to the army, he went to jail. So you can imagine...Jane comes from quite a conservative type of family and whatever, and they believed they should all go to the army and...I mean, the father's side is Afrikaans and part of that side was quite conservative to say the least, so you can imagine the horror and whatever even in that. And he actually works for John Robbie, he's his producer now, whatever.
Interviewer	The radio show. When you say he went to jail, he went to jail as an objector.
NS	Yes, he refused to go to war. We had some guys that wouldn't carry a weapon. They made the okes carry a wooden thing or carry a stone, a big rock. So we weren't very understanding of a person didn't want to carry a weapon. We didn't have hell of a lot of interest. That was the type of environment. I just think that in South Africa...I even remember when I got my first job at Liberty Life, they wouldn't employ you if you hadn't been to the army. That was a Jewish firm. No Afrikaans shareholding that I knew about at the time. When I applied there they asked me, have you done your two years military service? Can you believe it. Even they need it.
Interviewer	So it went much deeper than just the moral expectation, the times

	it was detrimental to your future career as a civilian if you hadn't been.
NS	Yes. I think it was getting extremely difficult to get a job if you hadn't been.
Interviewer	You spoke of Jane's family, so one son goes off to war, one refuses. That must have led to a huge amount of conflict within the family?
NS	It was major. I don't know all of it. I just...like her mom still comments, yes, he didn't go to the army, or this or that. But yes, I think it was major conflict. Major.
Interviewer	And your own family, did they see a sort of change in you from the young chap who went off to the army to the slightly more experienced chap who came back?
NS	Yes, I think they did. Yes, they did. I suppose as well is that they had maybe the same expectations as me. I don't think they had any understanding of what it was. And also because of the propaganda, same thing, my mom didn't really think...or my father didn't really think that you could die. I'm not saying they believed the press but they didn't believe that the press would lie, or the government would lie to the extent that they did. You must remember of all the people that died at the border when I was there, not one of those names was ever reported. Not one. ? that's absolutely mind boggling. That's what freaked me out. I would come back and say to my mom, have you heard this or heard that or do you know about this? There was never ever one name that was reported.
Interviewer	So yet again there was another aspect of this war, a secret war, that was ? publicly acknowledged.
NS	I mean I had...the one guy, he was in the same area as me, he was a parabat, quite a few of his troops died. They got stranded in Angola and there was no water and they dropped their weapons and they walked and I think only 2 of them got out. The rest died, it was never, ever reported. I think ten of them died. The 61 Mechs, with all those ops and all the problems there, none of those names were ever reported. Etc. etc. I could continue. They never ever reported one single name. And I'm not saying I knew a lot, but our government was trying to imply that we were losing, whatever it was, like 20 people a year, the reality must have been...I don't know what it was. But it was quite a few. And a lot were injured. A lot were injured.
Interviewer	And we're not taking into account the figures for the guys who'd been former Angolans who were with the Three Two Battalion or the Bushmen Battalions.
NS	Yes, all of those! 101, absolutely. We don't include any of that. And you know you even realise how...sorry changing the subject, but I was watching the Vietnam thing and they lost fifty thousand troops and they believed they killed a million of them. So

	whatever, it's one to twenty. But even if our ratio was at...how many did we kill? We must have lost a few thousand. I don't know...but we had to have lost a few thousand. I mean, there's now way...we fought there for so long.
Interviewer	And you saw yourself, you saw vehicles that had been badly shot up.
NS	And we know as well, the one infantry thing there because it was close to Ruacana. The infantry okes were sleeping at night and they bombed them. The okes ran away and left their rifles behind. They get mortared, they ran away and they left their rifles behind. I mean, you have to question, that can't be the best trained troops. I mean, the first thing <i>laughs</i> but also some of the okes were the dimmest I've ever met in the army. But you would think that you would take your rifle? Your life depends on it. When I think 8 of the troops left their rifles behind. So they went to DB for that, but... <i>laughs</i> I'm straying off the point.
Interviewer	Not really because it's quite interesting because at that time, you mentioned much earlier that the South African government and the South African army like to present this image of this invincible fighting force that could have driven all the way to Cairo if they wanted to, yet within the army you met a whole bunch of people who were less than efficient troops, there were lots of internal conflicts between English speakers and Afrikaans speakers...
NS	Huge.
Interviewer	There was conflict between Permanent Force and conscripts...
NS	Yes, major.
Interviewer	Did you experience any of that yourself?
NS	Yes, there was major. The sad thing was...especially a lot of the Permanent Force guys, they believed they were quite special. For what reason, that's even more terrifying for me.
Interviewer	Terrifying in the sense that you're just...
NS	They were the thickest of the thick.
Interviewer	Astounded.
NS	Yes, I was astounded. You know...yes, I was astounded, absolutely astounded. And that was maybe part of our problem as well, is we were just not attracting the right calibre of people, like let's say, the American army or the English or whatever would attract. We just weren't attracting those people to be Permanent Force. I'm not saying all Permanent Force were like that. I think we did have some very good guys, but we didn't have many. That I'm convinced of.
Interviewer	Was it your perception that many of the people were there because they were good supporters of the government party?

NS	<p>Yes. A hundred percent. You wouldn't be PF if you weren't supporting. They believed that. They genuinely believed that that was the right thing. I'll never forget, the one guy as well came to us, he was from Stellenbosch and he studied something to do with armaments or weapons or something. He was an engineer. Hell of a bright oke. Jesus, this oke was bright. And he became a 2 pip, he was on officer's course with me, and he was one of the brightest okes I've ever met. I mean he genuinely believed in the cause. I couldn't believe it! I understand that...I don't mind if you have a belief in it, but it's beyond that, it's fanatical.</p>
Interviewer	<p>When you were in there obviously black people were considered to be different to white people. All National Servicemen were white because of the nature of...and was that a sort of a driving force amongst your colleagues in the training that it's not just the Communists your fighting, it's black people you're fighting as well?</p>
NS	<p>Yes, I think a lot of them believed that the blacks were inferior. Yes, I mean they believed that they were second class citizens or whatever the correct terminology is. They did. There's no doubt about that. I think, going back to the border, that was part of the problem. That's the danger of being overly sure of your ability. Because I think in the early days of the war, if I understand, like my step uncle, Ivor, who lives in the south in Walkerville. He actually was in Luanda in 1975. Now he was a pathfinder. His name is actually in the parabat thing. He was in the first corps of pathfinders. He's A company. His name is actually there, engraved. He didn't have to...he's Rhodesian and he went. He was a brilliant soldier. Then to be honest, they just weren't much of an enemy, and we could have easily taken it. I didn't ask him? he said, look the reality is of course for political considerations. And then I look at that and then I look when I was there, it's not the same. And a guy like him, I think either tries to comprehend that we only had fifty thousand troops, there were fifty thousand Cubans, there were maybe eight thousand East Germans and maybe they had another hundred thousand. I don't know. I don't know the numbers. But shit, whatever happened is, they had a good few hundred thousand. And of our fifty thousand that we had, how many did we have on the border? I don't know, ten thousand? And of that, how many would actually fight? Maybe few thousand. That's effectively all we had. We had a few thousand real fighting force, excluding our Special Forces. How are you going to beat two hundred thousand people? It's impossible. You don't have to...and they were well armed at the end. The okes had T 72s...I saw T 72s. I mean, the guys had good decent Migs. They had good Russian choppers and gunships and good artillery stuff. They really had some good stuff. It wasn't like the early days, where we just marched in there...probably when Ivar went the best armed that they had was AKs and they probably had artillery, they didn't have planes, I'm sure of, and whatever. The war changed.</p>

Interviewer	When you were inside of Angola did you...you mentioned East Germans were using a chopper to plot their bombardment. Did you ever see jets or...?
NS	Saw Migs a few times. We used to jump out of our Ratels and run and hide underneath the trees. Because you can do nothing if you're in a Ratel. Fortunately those Migs fly so fast they don't even see you. But I jumped out extremely quickly. We saw Migs often, like every day.
Interviewer	For over what period.
NS	When we were actually in Angola, every day we saw them. Every single day. They were totally, totally dominant in the day. I only knew that after drinking with those Mirage pilots. They were totally dominant. The Mirage pilots only flew at night because that gave them a big advantage. It was harder for the anti aircraft. They didn't mind a dog fight but they were worried about the ground stuff. So what happened, that's why they flew at night, because in the day, the okes were saying, they just...there was just...you can't believe how much stuff.
Interviewer	Too much aircraft fire and missiles.
NS	Millions of missiles. These guys were just saying, these okes would shoot up 20 missiles after them. So they didn't fly in the day, and also...I mean after talking to the Mirage pilots, they said that these East Germans could fly a plane. These okes weren't palookas. You didn't get the local guy and dropped him in a Mig there. So yes, we used to see the Migs. I never saw a gunship, but they did have quite a few gunships up there. But I think also one of the major changes for the war is that they had decent armour. Before that they never had. They got decent tanks, and that makes a difference. Because tanks are dominant against the infantry. It's easy to go in there and you've got your big tanks. It's not so easy when they're dug in and...they had some decent East Germans and that. So that also I think changed part of our ability in the war, and I think, maybe if we had an all out push, or whatever, whatever, we could have maybe got over that line. But I think the question is we would have probably lost too many people to make it viable for the Nats. They couldn't have bullshitted that. If you have a big push like that you maybe lose a thousand people. You can't try to hide a thousand people dying.
Interviewer	I think that's a good point. Much of the war was to try and limit costs to manpower that you could hide to the people back home.
NS	And that's what they did do. A major push of that nature that we maybe would have needed would have cost far too many lives.
Interviewer	Thinking about the way you look back at that now and so on, is there anything you want to add or any memories of Angola, or even Namibia that you want to add, whether it be what you saw Koevoet doing or Three Two, or anything. Just any opinion that you think may be useful to cast an insight into what happened.

NS	<p>You know...yes, ok...maybe as well is that effectively we believed, like when we went on training that it was a conventional war. And it was a conventional war to a degree in Angola like if we went on a push, but the reality it wasn't a conventional war because all our kills came from unconventional, so it came from Koevoet, it came from Recces and whatever. They didn't fight a conventional war. So effectively it maybe started as a conventional war and it changed over time. And the units that were the most successful were not conventional in any way. And they definitely didn't stick to any rules or regulations or anything, I don't believe, of conventional war, and that's a problem. I mean, they would hunt people in Lesotho, Swaziland, wherever they were. We would tie people on to vehicles. We would torture them. We would kill their families. Would do whatever they believed was necessary to be successful. And I think that that...if there's any highlight of the war, is it seemed like we were the extras effectively. We're the extras in the movie. The movie wasn't us. Effectively. It was those units. They were the units that effectively did most of the work. And I know...I'll never forget, I stayed in Durban in a guest house a few years back, and he was a Colonel in the Recces. And I saw all his medals and everything, and this oke, I couldn't believe it. And I spoke to him the one night and he was saying that they swam on the rivers by Luanda and whatever, that's how they used to get in. These used to get dropped by submarine...I mean these okes were lunatics. Shit. Eventually the government changed everything and that's why he got out. And his ears, he couldn't hear anything out of his right ear and I said to him why? Because he was the Recces part that were divers, whatever you call that corps, and I think he headed up that corps. He was a lieutenant colonel, or commandant in the old days. But anyway, the point that I was trying to make is those guys were swimming up rivers to go and do whatever they had to do, whatever it was. I think they blew up oil things and...those guys were...they were lunatics.</p>
Interviewer	<p>But there you are as a young National Serviceman and even though you say you were sort of support cast actors, you were nevertheless mixing with these guys and acting in the same theatre of war. So it was quite a sort of influence on your young life too.</p>
NS	<p>Yes, I think so, I think so. look, I think maybe why I was lucky is that I came back to a settled, I'd say, a normal family. And I think that helps. And sort of my life just continued, from that I went to varsity and whatever, whatever. But I think the important aspect is that I came back to normality. I think maybe if you didn't go back to normality it could have been a little more difficult.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Was there any one moment when you suddenly realised that war is not what it's made out to be in the movies?</p>
NS	<p>Yes, I think...yes, I think the biggest eye opener for me was the first day I arrived on the border, when I arrived in Six One</p>

	<p>Mech...you know, when you believe that you're totally dominant and this and that, that was my...even after all of the propaganda I just thought they can't tell me that much bullshit. And they're going on about our military might...you're just convinced that...I didn't really understand but I just thought it's okes running around with AK47s. I didn't know that there were East Germans and Cubans. I only knew that when I got there. But I didn't know that, I just thought it's these guys running around with AK47s and I thought it's not going to be easy but at least I'm in armour. And I thought Jesus, the guys' got an AK, I'm sure that he can fight, but I'm not going to be the person who's going to shoot. That's the thing of the infantry and the parabat and then you realise that that's not the story. And you realise that we were getting shot up. Our vehicles were getting shot, we were getting bombed, guys were dying. You know the one guy flew back to One Mil or whatever, he said One Mil was full. Now, I've never been to One Mil but I believe it's quite a hospital. You have to question...there have to be quite a few people. Some were civilians or whatever, or they weren't on the border. But I think that was the biggest eye opener for me. I just saw those vehicles...I mean, my heart sunk. I just thought to myself I can't believe I got myself into this. Because I still had visions of being in Pretoria with my mates.</p>
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