Frans van Niekerk Lance Corporal 6 SAI 9/02/08
Missing Voices Project Interviewed by Mike Cadman

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| | TAPE ONE SIDE A |
| Interviewer | Tell me a bit about your background… |
| Frans | I was born in Beaufort West. My dad was working for the government in the medical services and we stayed in Nelspoort, which is quite close to Beaufort West. Then before school we were transferred to East London and I still have one sister. And then from East London, still no schooling for me yet, we were transferred to Kimberley…that's why I support Griquas as I told you…and then from Kimberley my primary school and then high school, Umtata in the Transkei, and then the last two years of high school in Pietersburg where I matriculated in 1977. |
| Interviewer | Is your sister older or younger than you? |
| Frans | She's three years older than me. |
| Interviewer | As a young person at school, around about when you were 15 or 16, you would have got notification from military, it would have arrived in the post that you have to register with them and so on and so forth. |
| Frans | That's right. |
| Interviewer | When this arrived did you discuss it with your folks and say, well, what's this all about? What do you think about me going off to the military? Did you discuss it? |
| Frans | Being in Pietersburg was actually quite an honour because the airforce base was still in full swing at that stage. So in the beginning when we knew we were going to be called up, it was not such a good idea, or we didn't find the idea very positive. But we visited the airforce base a couple of times, the Mirages flew over our school one time and went through the sound barrier, which cracked windows, and as from there I was quite positive about the whole thing. I actually couldn't wait for my call up forms. And when we got the call up forms, the stuff that you had to send back, I sent back a lot quicker than most of the other guys. So I was pro the military at that stage, very pro. |
| Interviewer | And had your dad ever served in the military? |
| Frans | Yes, he was also, but they only did I think six months in their days, at some commando, I think it was in the Western Cape somewhere. So yes, he was not negative towards the military at all. |
| Interviewer | Did you do cadets at school? |
| Frans | Yes, I did. Enjoyed that, didn't like the instructors because it was like a half way thing that you were doing all the time. And we did |

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| | a bit of shooting in those days still. They had .22 rifles that we used. And that was nice. But that was not my scene really. I wanted to be in the more professional side. |
| Interviewer | Then you finish school and you get your call up and off you go. What infantry were you called up to? |
| Frans | I was called up to 6 SAI Grahamstown. At that stage though, I was working at Infoplan in their computer centre, which is the ARMSCOR front company for buying computers and things because we had sanctions against us. So I had very good background on the military and how this whole thing worked being in Blenny Centre, *(check*) that one that goes under the ground. |
| Interviewer | Whereabouts is that? |
| Frans | That is DHQ in Potgieter Street. |
| Interviewer | In Pretoria. |
| Frans | Yes. All you can see there is a little flat building with two huge air vents coming out the ground and that is Blenny Centre. And I worked on level minus four. Which is the main computer centre for the military. Still is, with all their centres now around the country. At that stage they also had quite a few centres. So background we knew exactly what was happening. And my call up form, the actual final call up was printed in the computer centre where I worked. |
| Interviewer | What year did you work there? |
| Frans | I worked there from ’79 to 1980 until I was called up. We then had the choice of joining Infoplan on a five year contract basis, which means that you would then go do your three months basics, come back as a military guide, and we had many of them working in the computer centre, and then carry on working for Infoplan. But because I didn’t know whether I wanted to continue with that career I then rather went to the army. |
| Interviewer | Did you study after leaving school to learn about computers? |
| Frans | No, not at all. I actually studied theology for two years and then I dropped out. |
| Interviewer | Where did you study theology? |
| Frans | At Tukkies University. |
| Interviewer | And the reasons for dropping out. |
| Frans | First of all…must I be that honest? A girlfriend. And spending all my money on her. And then having to work after hours trying to get money to continue the studies, and eventually, I actually phoned Infoplan from a call box near Loftus Versfeld when I saw the computer operator job advertised, and that’s how I got in there. |

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| Interviewer | So then when you went into 6 SAI you were a little bit older than the other guys. |
| Frans | Yes. I also went alone, I didn't go with a troop train because of the Infoplan and the military connection, I went a week later, and I actually went on a civilian train and was picked up at the station by 6 SAI. |
| Interviewer | So you were what…was that in January? |
| Frans | No, that was in June. I was June call up. |
| Interviewer | So you were about 21 then? |
| Frans | Yes. |
| Interviewer | And then you get to 6 SAI, what was it like? What happened? |
| Frans | The military police came to collect me because if you are late there must be a DD I don't know what, issued against you and you are late now and there must be a reason, but I had the letter from the (*inaudible*) military or the Infoplan military side, which I then just handed in and they then put me in a squad, and that's when I got a couple of surprises, obviously, with my long hair, and my attitude and things like that. It wasn't exactly what I expected it to be. Coming from Infoplan, being around the military all the time, working for the military in fact, working at a military base, for training it's a different story. |
| Interviewer | So your long hair obviously attracted attention from the corporal. And so you went straight into basics. |
| Frans | Yes, I was classified G1 K1 straight from the beginning. And then we did the first basic training and then the JLs after that, junior leadership, I didn't go to Oudtshoorn though. We did JLs where you get a one line. And then afterwards you become… |
| Interviewer | How long did your basics last? |
| Frans | That was about seven and a half months before we went up to the border. |
| Interviewer | And when you got there you got there mid winter, and Grahamstown is quite chilly. |
| Frans | Yes. It was hell. |
| Interviewer | Can you describe, at the start of your basics, what was a typical day like? |
| Frans | I found it not too difficult on the physical side because I was quite fit, I was then still playing rugby and I also played for the Defence Force in one of their teams in EP Command later on. But yes, getting up early in the morning and that thing of making your bed and getting everything ready and corporals really being absolute…I don't know what you can call them. I only realised later on there must have been a good reason for that. I felt sorry for some of the guys that did not really cope with the scenario. I |

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| | could also see that they came from a different background. I come from a divorced parent background, so from standard four onwards I did a lot of things on my own. Nobody went with me when I went to my train to go to the army or there were no crowds or nothing, so I was sort of used to that type of thing, handling pressure or knocks or whatever. But it was bad news for a couple of the guys. But after three months they would go to other sections and things like that. And they would carry on with the guys that they felt could take all their nonsense. Which again I say probably wasn't nonsense but the treatment was heavy but not bad. It was demoralising in a sense but you had to realise, and I know now today, that taking a person like that, putting him in a position where he must do certain responsible things. If he carries on from the way he was before he got there with his long hair it's not going to work. So you had to just eat that and do whatever they…and soon and quickly realise that if there's no discipline you are just going to be coming second all the time. |
| Interviewer | So physically it was demanding, psychologically it's demanding, as you say a lot of the guys have been taken out of a family environment and they're suddenly on their own and your corporal rules your world. |
| Frans | Yes, absolutely. He's your dad, he's your mother, he's your everything. Which…. and you would get, because I was 21 years old already, some of the guys were much younger than me, and it was difficult sometimes because of the way they sometimes spoke to you and language and stuff like that, and you would think by yourself, I'll kill you if I get you. But later on, ag about a year later, you would meet the guy, hug him even, because you're all from the same background or crowd or whatever. |
| Interviewer | So even though at times you thought, what am I doing here, you actually realised it was part of their building up of an infantryman. |
| Frans | It took me a while, it took me about a month to realise, ok listen you have to stick around now, just do the best and try to…and that's why I eventually then went into JLs. If my attitude was different I would probably never have gone there or things would have turned out different. |
| Interviewer | And stuff like, what was the food like and…? |
| Frans | In basics the food was not good because they would make it 12 o'clock at night and it would stand there, you'd get gooey eggs and everything that you really can't eat sometimes. But generally I would say that the food was not bad, if you look at the nutritional side of what we had to eat. And that was nice, and then in the evenings there were some of the chefs that were really great. They would actually do things that you would have in the steak house or something like that, but that's not often. |
| Interviewer | So you've got your basics, there's a lot of physical exercise, PT, the good old rondfok and opfok and all those things… |

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| Frans | Yes. |
| Interviewer | And then of course they're teaching you how to shoot, weapons drills and so on and so forth. And then your JL course was an extension of that. |
| Frans | It was only an extension and the only thing it was was meer op donner. Because they didn't teach us anything different to what we were taught in basics. The shooting, everything, the drilling, everything, was exactly the same, but on a…it was just prolonged, a little bit longer. And then the physical testing was the same type of thing, and the only reason why they awarded you the stripe was because you were on the course, not because you did anything different to what…that's how I saw it…to the other guys. Not at all. |
| Interviewer | And your instructors, was it 50/50 English/Afrikaans or was it mainly Afrikaans? |
| Frans | Boertjies all of them. Well, we had one English guy and strangely enough he was the guy that you could talk to. The other guys you would not talk to, Blackie Swart. And he was like six foot twelve or something. That's the type of guy you couldn't even talk to. The one English corporal we had, Corporal Cameron…I'll never forget this guy…he drilled us – he had a car accident half way through our basics, and he drilled us with his one leg in plaster. And he was there, with his leg in plaster, with one of those things to walk on all the time. But Cameron was there. Cameron was also the guy that took us out the first time that we had a pass. The evening before the pass he actually took us to Grahamstown and we went to one of the student pubs and had a couple of drinks there with him. |
| Interviewer | Did you notice whether the English guys coped as well as the Afrikaans guys? Was it a sort of a background thing, a discipline thing? |
| Frans | Some of the Afrikaans guys were coping but maybe in the sense that they did not say much or whatever, but they had the same problems as the English guys. I had a Springbok water polo player with me, that guy outran anybody. Dave Brennan. We had…and I can't remember his name…but he used to paddle ski with the Chalupskis, those brothers, he was also English speaking. |
| Interviewer | Gordon and Oscar. |
| Frans | Yes. He was also a Springbok. He was extremely fit. He ran the corporal down once between the base and the skietbaan because the corporal didn't know who this guy was, and he wanted to take him for extra drill after hours, and the corporal was actually the guy that needed treatment after that. But the Afrikaans speaking guys had a different approach. They would show aggression or think that with aggression they'll get through. And then we would find the English speaking guys, they were |

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| | also…and maybe I shouldn't say this, but I will say it…the English speaking guys were more financially catered for by themselves than the Afrikaans speaking guys. You would find the Afrikaans speaking guys borrowing money from the English guys. Because English guys would have either backing or whatever, or more sense what he does with his hundred bucks or seventy bucks he got at that stage. But generally we did not have any real problems there. |
| Interviewer | And this whole period lasts seven and a half months. |
| Frans | Yes. |
| Interviewer | And then you were shipped straight to the border. |
| Frans | Yes, we did an ops before that. I was sent to the Transkei for Ops Rain, which was a operation in the Transkei in five different bases…they called it Ops Rain because of the water problems that they had at that stage, which was not a fact. The whole thing was to stop ammunition being smuggled out of the Transkei into the country, by whoever. I was based in Mount Frere and then we had a base in Umtata with the Transkei military, Bantu Holomisa's people, and then there was a few other bases around there as well. And we stayed there for about a month. And then went back to Grahamstown and from Grahamstown we went to the border. |
| Interviewer | Ops Rain was 1982. |
| Frans | Yes, it was 1982, beginning of '82, or something like that. |
| Interviewer | So at this stage when you went on Ops Rain you were a one stripe corporal? |
| Frans | No. Just before Ops Rain we were given the second stripe as well. And the reason for that is because they had in charge of every camp, a sergeant, not a loot. They only had sergeants and then there would be a corporal. We were ten guys to fifteen guys per little camp. |
| Interviewer | What did Ops Rain involve? Did you do sort of house to house searches or roadblocks? |
| Frans | No, not at all. We had trucks there – I've got pictures of that. We had trucks with those water purification tanks, that we would fill up from the…pump water from the river into the tanks and then purify and then into tanks of the trucks and then drive it out to all the villages, and where they had their water tanks we would fill them with clean water. That's basically it. But while this was all happening, the banks of the river that we were next to overflowed and we had to move camp. So that was quite funny. |
| Interviewer | Ops Rain in a different sort of way. *Laughs* So that was essentially what in South West Africa they called Com Ops. You were assisting the community… |
| Frans | That's basically the same thing, yes. We mixed with the |

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| | community quite a lot, we did have a problem because they stopped our mail coming in and we couldn't make any calls home. Those days we didn't have cell phones or whatever. And we were forced one evening to take over the post office and say…it was one of those post offices with the wires and the jacks that you plug in and to be able to make calls. But they stopped the mail so that we could not get it and stupid things like that. But again, in Mount Frere the soccer team invited us, the local soccer team invited us to a wedding which we went to and then the evening after that they came and picked us up and they took us to a hotel where they offered us grass and stuff. So the people were mingling with us but I think, again, it was maybe a show that they put on. Obviously they didn't want us there. |
| Interviewer | But they didn't show any aggression? |
| Frans | No, no, we were the people that showed aggression when our mail was stopped. |
| Interviewer | But you were showing aggression to the military authorities, not to the local people. |
| Frans | Yes, that's right. We had a good time, we were given a sheep to slaughter and one guy had…there's a restaurant, I don't know where it is, but in Durban there's a restaurant called The Haven and we had a little thing, hung around the sheep with The Haven written on it. It was good. |
| Interviewer | And then you go back and they send you off to the border. Just before they sent to the border, and in your training, did they give you any kind of lectures or explanations of why you were in the army and who you were fighting? |
| Frans | Yes. That was spelled out to us every day. The whole thing was about SWAPO. The whole thing was about protecting Namibia in order to protect South Africa. And that's the only thing that stuck, it's a short little telegram style message that's in your head and it would never leave. That's exactly…and we were all expecting to go there and do exactly that. |
| Interviewer | And when they spoke about SWAPO, did they talk about the Soviet Union or Cubans? |
| Frans | Yes, we knew where the backing came from. We were shown pictures and stuff that was taken by intelligence and we were shown what their weapons looked like, we were shown the mines, we were shown the RPGs or the projectiles that some of their cannons shot. Also the Stalin Organs before we went to the border. We knew exactly what those things were all about. And we knew all the names behind the… |
| Interviewer | So in your mind and the way they explained it to you, SWAPO was the same as Communism? Did they ever mention Communism? |
| Frans | Yes, Communism was something that I grew up with. We spoke |

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| | about Communism…in my classes in primary school that's what people talk about all the time. But we didn't…if you really looked at everything, Communism, SWAPO to me was not really the same thing. Was backed by Communism or what they called Communism, and at that stage Russia was Communist Russia. So yes, that made all sense. But maybe just down to the level maybe just before SWAPO, because SWAPO didn't stand for what we understood…and eventually after that…and I will give you that later…but did not stand for Communism as such, they stood for taking Namibia. |
| Interviewer | And in your mind through school days and then in the early army, what did Communism mean? In your mind how would Communism change a society? |
| Frans | Ok, Communism to me, as a person, meant that everything belongs to the government like Socialism because it did go into…hand in hand. And the other thing it meant no religion. That's what I was taught. |
| Interviewer | And so then did you fly to the border or go by…? |
| Frans | We flew to the border. We went by truck to Port Elizabeth to EP Command, we stayed over there for a couple of days and then from there we flew with Safair. We had a problem then close to Pretoria. We had to land at Waterkloof where I then phoned my dad and said, listen I'm on the airport and they all came to see us there quickly. Brought us some stuff. And it was an hydraulics problem that took about 8 hours to fix that and we took the same plane and then straight up. |
| Interviewer | Where did you fly to? |
| Frans | Ondangwa airport. |
| Interviewer | Then what happened once you got there? |
| Frans | That was scary. We got there just about four o'clock in the afternoon. The plane was going to stay over and then we were brought into those huge hangars they had there. We were a lot of people. There were a lot of planes landing there. And none of us had any experience or any knowledge of the towers outside or anything and they had those ack-ack, huge guns that they shot. And I think it was about one o'clock in the morning, we were all lying in that hangar, not sleeping, because you're excited and you don't know what to expect, but nobody gave us...the whole scenario then changed with your corporals that were with you, and now you're a corporal yourself and everything changes, completely. You become a little family, you're on an expedition now. But one o'clock that morning they started shooting those things and that sounded like war. All hell broke loose. Some of us were calm and some of the guys just ran. In the hangar. Wanting, hoping, praying that there's somebody to ask, what's this? And it was a big joke amongst the guys that knew what was happening, because they were still sitting drinking in some pub there where |

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| | we were not allowed to go anywhere. But yes, that was our… |
| Interviewer | And why were the guys firing? |
| Frans | No, no, that was a…I've got that on tape somewhere. The ack-acks was firing all night, every night, they would fire these things with tracers in and amongst the rounds. And from Ondangwa we actually once fired into the veld to set it on fire. Because there were tracks that they couldn't find and there were shots coming from…in my time Ondangwa was never really attacked. Not the base, it's too big. But there were shots fired and it wasn't us. And they actually used an ack-ack to actually set the veld on fire, which they did. |
| Interviewer | So the firing was simply to cause, if there were any SWAPO guys there, was to cause just concern to them, to say, listen we're awake and we know that you're around. |
| Frans | Absolutely. And that was, like I say, that was a thing that happened often and we knew more or less when it was going to happen. |
| Interviewer | But it happened on your first night. |
| Frans | Yes, that was not good. That was really not good. |
| Interviewer | And then what happened in the days ahead. |
| Frans | The next morning it took them about three hours to get us all together again, and then off we went, which is a short drive to Ondangwa base itself. And then in Ondangwa were then regrouped different sections. I was split from my buddies and they were…SACC was also there which to me was nice. The Kleuring Korps or Coloured Corps. |
| Interviewer | South African Coloured Corps. |
| Frans | They actually arrived the day after us, and I was fortunate enough to have two of them in one of my sections. Being born in Beaufort West and having also had family in Cape Town, I enjoyed quite a lot. And there, I mean, we did everything together. My section was with the two coloured guys and then…I've got a picture of them as well. But anyway…it was quite nice. We then stayed at Ondangwa for about a month and a half. I can just add that I was also trained up in signals. I also did a signals course and my background because of that…the reason why they did that is because I mentioned one day to Captain Cochlan in Grahamstown…he's an ex Rhodesian…I mentioned to him about the signals thing and he was very into radios and stuff, and my dad is a radio ham. And he said, well I'm going to send you on a signals course, so he did. I actually came to Heidelberg and did a short course, six weeks, and then went back and then all the other things. And because of the signals thing, it was quite nice, I did the radio communication side as well for this section. But what happened then is in Pretoria they had a movement problem with troops. Nobody knows what went wrong |

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| | or whatever, and Oshigambo was left without a soul. So the people occupying Oshigambo…Oshigambo I'm not sure, but I think about 150-300 troops could occupy Oshigambo with the size of that camp. It's a small camp but big enough for a lot of troops. And there was a movement problem, and then they said, ok they have to nominate somebody to go to the base and sit in the base until the movement problem is sorted out and then those guys will be pulled out of Oshigambo. And then I sat there for six months. Nothing happened. We were 13 guys, and that was a part that was quite difficult. Occupying a base, with the highest rank a loot, and then the sergeant, myself, and then a few troops. |
| Interviewer | And you say nothing happened. Did you walk patrols every day? |
| Frans | We walked patrols every day from Ondangwa, which was fine. In Ondangwa in those days, we would be out for about 4 days, come back 2 days, 4 days, 2 days, 4 days. It was very, very well organised by the main ops room in Ondangwa itself. And because I was in signals side I had all the information as well. So it was quite close, it was nice to know where you were standing. In Oshigambo it was a different story. We could not walk patrols because you were only a few guys. So we had to occupy a base and around the base, SAP Tuin, and Koevoet would operate as well. Tuin more than Koevoet. And we were hoping on their operations or their driving around, the way they did, that we would be quite protected and we were not that well protected, we were mortared. I never shot at anybody but we were mortared and my bladder was emptied and my eardrum burst and things like that, because the last of the seven mortars they shot landed in the base, just next to where the guys stand guard, a trench. And if it wasn't for another heap of sand or whatever, that thing would have hurt people. But it was on the other side of the base, on the western side of the base, and our ops room was more towards the southern eastern side and we were all around the ops room when this happened. We also radioed then, when it started happening that evening, we radioed zero and we said that we needed protection. They said it's dark we can't do anything. And then with intelligence they said that it can only be two or three guys and between them they can only carry about seven mortars. And they were quite right. The mortars came closer and closer and closer until the seventh one landed there, and hurt nobody except for two of us, an eardrum and shit like that. And then it went quiet. And then nothing happened again. Only, we had a landmine explosion outside the base, which was on a public road, which they used to  a cuca and that was detonated by a bakkie with three adults, Ovambo people in front, and two little guys at the back. The three people were in pieces who were sitting in front, and the two little ones survived. We took them to Ondangwa. |
| Interviewer | What did you think when you saw that? |

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| Frans | That was sick. It was six o'clock in the morning and I had just come off duty basically from the ops room, and I was making my sleeping bag, getting, wiping sand off and stuff like that, and we faintly heard a vehicle. We had a 50KVA generator quite close, so that thing was making one hell of a racket all day long, especially during the night. You would switch it off during the day sometimes. But we had to charge batteries and stuff like that. Because we didn't have electricity like Ondangwa. We only had the generator. And I was in the tent, which was about 25-30 metres away from the wall, and just over the side of the sand embankment is where the little road went past towards a cuca shop which was about half a kilometre or a kilometre up the road. And we heard this huge explosion. Absolutely huge. It shook the whole place. When I stood…I walked three steps out of my tent, when I stood outside the tent and looked in that direction I could see parts of the vehicle coming down back to the ground already, after it shot the thing into the air. Then we started running around there also, back to the ops room. None of us tried to go to where this explosion took…partly because we didn't know what it was. We expected landmines but now we don't know whether there's more than one vehicle or what or who. It could be SAP Tuin those guys were ruthless and reckless. They drove at night… |
| Interviewer | Who were SAP Tuin? Because Koevoet was a police anti terrorist unit and SAP Tuin was that a South West Africa unit or…? |
| Frans | No, it was also a South African police unit. And I can't remember what Tuin stood for. In our area they were extremely reckless, they drove at night…after last night we would warn them, and we could also pick up their signals and we would radio them and say, you must get off, whatever. And then they would just pull in at the camp there by us and then swop rats *(ration packs)* and stuff like that with beer for food, that type of thing. *laughs* |
| Interviewer | And the Koevoet guys, did they ever visit you? |
| Frans | They visited once or twice. |
| Interviewer | Did they treat you as equals? |
| Frans | Yes, they were nice, in fact I think…and I thought about this many times…they were trained differently to what our training was, so they approached everything differently. And in that area I don't think that was the right approach, the way they worked. |
| Interviewer | In what sense? |
| Frans | They just didn't have the knowledge that we had, they didn't have the background, how to…for example, if you set out a route for a patrol or something like that. You have to use certain methods of planning that patrol. They didn't do it that way, they just did…went in a direction almost blindfolded, but that's how they operated. |
| Interviewer | Sorry, back to the landmine thing, so you see all the bits of the |

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| | vehicle coming down, all the guys inside the base are a bit confused, they don't know whether it's one landmine, more landmines, say an RPG, nobody knows what it is. |
| Frans | Nothing. We didn't have a clue. It took us a minute or three to actually go out the main gate with a Buffel. We only had two Buffels there, that's the other thing. So we had nothing else. We only had us, the rifles and Buffels and stuff like that. So we actually drove out with a Buffel and as the guys drove out they actually could see, ok, there's the wreck. The hole was massive, the two little kids were lying in the veld. They were out, like lights out type of thing, passed out. And then we all realised, ok, this is what it was, so we all went there and saw this story. The little kiddies…we had one medic, an English speaking guy, he was very good, this guy was excellent. He took the little kiddies, he wrapped them in blankets, they were very small. They were two or three years old each. They were just big enough to sit in the bakkie in the back. But they lived, they didn't have a scratch on them. |
| Interviewer | And in later years have you thought about that incident a lot? |
| Frans | Yes, absolutely. |
| Interviewer | Do your family know about it, have you spoken to them? |
| Frans | Aagh you mention things like that, but I soon realised that it's not something that you mentioned, because people…even though if they have read these things…it doesn't bring the message across that I would like to bring across. Because I thought that…the one thing that we all knew is that that road was never used by us. Never, ever. So why would a landmine be planted there? It's either a very uninformed person that did it, or just stupidity. Or it could be revenge because we were…some of the kraals would help us to trace or track people, and very few would not. The guys that would not would be under threat from whoever. |
| Interviewer | So you stayed at Oshigambo for six months all in all? |
| Frans | Yes, almost six months. |
| Interviewer | How did you cope with the border? |
| Frans | No, we didn't. We were frightened at one stage, because this landmines story. Then one evening, on the lighter side, we were having a braai and we had this generator running again, and then the thing went off. At about nine o'clock, so it was dark. And one of the guys said he saw…there's a little light on the generator, you can see it from a distance, but you don't put the generator so that the light you can see it from outside the camp. You turn the generator so that the little light shines in. Just a little globe. And he said that…his name was Johaan van Meiring…he was a very naughty guy. He said that he saw there was a movement, the light went off, so somebody walked past. Now in order to get to the, where you powered the thing off, you have to walk from that side because of the sandbags, you had to walk past that little |

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| | light and then power it off. So we thought, ok well now we are all going to be killed. This is the major ambush or something. But no, the generator just died for I don't know what reason. But it took us about half an hour and a couple of beers to get enough strength for three of us backing one another to go and see what was wrong with the generator. We were, apart from that, never attacked. Only for that one incident, and then this landmine story. Just for interest sake, I was involved in the tracking of Matimba, that's one of the…in my time…he was one of the most wanted landmine experts. And we actually caught him. And I actually became friends with him. We had him… |
| Interviewer | So when you became friends with him, was he held at Oshigambo? |
| Frans | No, we caught him just outside Oshigambo. Two sections: our guys, because we knew he was there. That's information that we got from one of the kraals. But another section helped us and he was actually so tired that we didn't really catch him. I can be honest with you, he actually gave himself up. He was hungry, he couldn't go any further and he was alone. Because they were three walking in groups, and they split, and he decided no, well he doesn't know what to do anymore. And I don't think he had enough courage to come to us or whatever, because that happened often. That happened especially at Ondangwa. They would walk over. |
| Interviewer | And just say, I've had enough of this. |
| Frans | Had enough. Just give up. And we then took him to Ondangwa and he was kept in the KG hok, I don't know what you call that in English, it's a cage like you would keep an animal. |
| Interviewer | Gevangenis hok. A prison… |
| Frans | Yes, a prison cage. Quite close to the ops room. And he was kept there for a long time, because we took him, dropped him off, gave him over to intelligence and went back to base again. So about three weeks before we went back to South Africa, we went back to Ondangwa first and he was then out of the cage, and walking around…then I actually went and I gave him some cigarettes. He had to sleep in the cage though. But he was actually amongst us and he would come and have a beer with us in the tent because we had nothing to do. We were not consigned to anything anymore, we were just waiting to go back. And I actually spoke to him, and I got his bayonet, his Bakalite bayonet, that they took from him, which he had on him. They took that from him, and I had it with me on…to get out, when we flew back and when they started searching the guys I saw that they searched a loot and things like that, and I went and I dropped it in a toilet in Ondangwa. |
| Interviewer | And when you spoke to him, did he tell you about why he was fighting or stuff like that? |

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| Frans | Yes, he was fighting for Namibia. He was fighting so that Namibia could have their own government. Communism, and that's where I said to you that I felt SWAPO, Communism and all that, the link, that wasn't the real…not for us, not from what I saw. He wanted his own government, he wanted his own people and he wanted his own car, his own house, whatever, his own school. That's what he was looking for. |
| Interviewer | And that made sense to you. |
| Frans | It made sense to me to a certain extent. But after some of the stuff that we knew about and…it also made you worry. It's many, many years ago, with these big powers coming from the north and the Soviet being involved, we were also told that when they take Namibia, they're going to take us. So that's what I believed as well. So to a certain extent, we would say to him, we can do these things, but we're not going to give you the country pal. |
| Interviewer | And what happened to him? |
| Frans | I don't know. I also had a little picture of him and a little letter thanking me for my cigarettes and I showed it to my wife once, and I hid these things away so well so that it can't get lost and I still haven't found it again. But I showed my wife on one of these 'thank you tannie' pads, he actually wrote a little letter saying thank you corporal for the cigarettes. And with his signature, Matimba, it was very close to my heart that. But I will find that little picture, and that little ID picture, which you would have in your ID book. |
| Interviewer | You grew up in Beaufort West so you'd met lots of coloured guys. |
| Frans | Yes. |
| Interviewer | Had you ever sat with an adult black guy before and had a face to face chat about politics and war and stuff like that, or was this guy the first? |
| Frans | Not really. In the Transkei I was privileged, my dad there also being in the government, they would sometimes have a Christmas party and the black guys and the white guys would be there, because that was before independence of the Transkei. In fact it was just before they became independent. I think after we left for Pietersburg it's about six months later they had that independence. So I had that type of communication. And then also playing rugby we also had the same thing. We once or twice played against black teams, and then I was once selected in a combination of a Transkei team, which consisted of a few black schools and then the Afrikaans and English school in Umtata. That's the closest I came to that type of thing. But on a more adult level not really, no, I can't say I have, except for talking to somebody like Matimba. And then also some of the public in Namibia. We had a lot of interaction with these people. A lot of interaction. A lady had their son, a little boy, he was about six, he lost half his hand with a detonator which he picked up |

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| | somewhere. And they came to Oshigambo with this little guy and his hand. And she stayed there for two days with us in the base, with him, with a medic looking after him and then he was eventually also taken to Ondangwa and maybe to Oshikati, I'm not sure, to treat the guy. So yes, I mixed with her as well, but those people were like normal…nothing…and politics wasn't the in thing. It was not politics, it was surviving. |
| Interviewer | And in your mind your presence there was helping these people survive. |
| Frans | In many cases, not in all cases. Because where they did not want us we were not welcome. |
| Interviewer | And how often would that happen that you'd be out there and the people would be unfriendly towards you? |
| Frans | In your bigger kraals you would find that. In the small kraals you won't. You will find that they are helpful to you. And if you give something like cold drink or soup or something like that, then they would want to give something back. In the bigger kraals where they had a headman who was there locally, you would then find them to be against you. Oshikati you had quite a few places like that around. And also Ondangwa not too far away. Where you would have those people being negative. But they won't chase you whatever, you're carrying a rifle, remember that. So some of their feelings they probably won't show. |
| Interviewer | And so this whole period in Oshigambo, you've got a lot of routine, you have these moments when you're terrified, when the generator goes off and stuff like that. Were you getting letters from home at that time? |
| Frans | Yes. |
| Interviewer | And the occasional parcel of cigarettes and condensed milk and all of that stuff. |
| Frans | Yes, I did from my mom. She used to send a lot of stuff, even rum came here and it came to us and it was still intact and everything. And then I had a friend who's now with M-Net, he would send us Scope Magazine. And some other magazines which I didn't know where he got it from, but yes, got that as well. *laughter* |
| Interviewer | The life of a soldier, as you say, rum and Scope and as you say, other magazines, illegal ones. That's amazing. |
| Frans | *Laughs* That would come and they wouldn't even be opened, the boxes. But yes, we got a lot of mail and the odd card. Because of my radio experience, my father in Pretoria, we would tune into with a TR15, the big radio that you've got – the two that we used, one was a TR15 Hopper, which you would use two radios, you would synch and set on the other side so nobody can pick up your signal. And then the normal TR15, I would tune in on a Sunday about eleven o'clock and my father would speak to a guy |

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| | called Kriek in Laingsburg, and I would say on my side, QRV? (*check*) station standing by, and I would then keep quiet, and then my dad would give Creak all the information that he wants to give me…talk about. And then when they finished talking I would then sign off. And I was actually quite amazed, there's a unit called Brush. The Brush unit actually picked up my signal and came to Ondangwa, because I did it from Ondangwa the one time, on a weekend, and I was back in Oshigambo the Monday and that Monday they came to Ondangwa looking for the person that was standing by. That was me. |
| Interviewer | And Brush was that Bush Reconnaissance Unit and that was part of Five Signals. |
| Frans | Yes. That's correct. So they knew what they were doing, they were very good. Because they traced the signal. |
| Interviewer | That's very interesting. So traced it to you… |
| Frans | In Ondangwa, from the ops room. |
| Interviewer | That's remarkable. And did you ever own up to being the person? |
| Frans | No. Everybody knew. We had a Commandant Nel in charge on the ops side in Ondangwa. And he knew about that but he didn't tell them. He just said to me, just don't do this again. Or do it at other times. But he knew that I was doing it and I couldn't see anything wrong. I was just trying to get news. We also used radio telephones sometimes to call home, but then you would do it for money or for milk or for food or for whatever. We arranged that as well so the guys can phone home. |
| Interviewer | So then after this period they sent you back to South Africa, or the states as it was known as. |
| Frans | We came back to the states, we actually with the Oshigambo thing, the reason why we came back three weeks earlier is that we had a unit from Bloemfontein coming in, it was a camper's (*Citizen Force*) unit, Parabats, and we had another unit, I'm not sure where they were from. And they came to us to get signals. They had to come to Oshigambo because you have a 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 0 whatever, and then under that you have another few legs. So if it's 3 0 then you will get another signals falling under in that area. And they would carry smaller radios and that will run on different frequency. So you'll have one radio to Ondangwa and then one would be to your bases. They got signals from me and then they…I told them that they were going in the same direction both of them. the campers, the Bats, (Parabats) they knew everything. And then a day later they were in contact and they shot four guys. |
| Interviewer | So they shot four South African soldiers from the camper unit? |
| Frans | Yes, they shot one another. |
| Interviewer | You say the Bats, you mean that in a sense that they were quite |

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| | arrogant about…they came in and they were in charge. We're the Parabats, we're in charge. |
| Frans | Very. They had a captain that came to me to get his signal. But he was a camper captain. He was not there…they were only there for a month or what, and they got the signal from me and I said to him…I showed him the maps, I showed him the intelligence, I showed him everything, and I said, listen, you know more or less this is where you are, what are your plans? And he said, well there and there and there. And I said, but these guys that's just got another signal from me, they're going to go the same direction more or less. So maybe you must spread the thing in a V or whatever, but just please keep that in mind. And he actually shut me up, he just told me to shut up. And then 27 hours later they struck one another. |
| Interviewer | And then…so they opened fire and did they call in casevacs or…? |
| Frans | They called in contact, contact, contact, but it was only the one side that was…not the Bats, the other guys. And the bat signal was picked up by zero as well in Ondangwa. So I think it was four or seven guys that was shot and killed. |
| Interviewer | Did they have an enquiry afterwards? |
| Frans | Yes, that's why we were taken back to Ondangwa. |
| Interviewer | And were you cross examined by an officer or something? |
| Frans | To a certain extent yes, but I had everything on paper. Any signal you give out there will be records of that. And I just tried to explain to them what happened and the way I saw it. And ok, well then they pulled us out, and we were due to go back anyway. We were long over, we were supposed to be up there for three months. That's now normal time that the people would be sent up for. But yes… |
| Interviewer | Do you know if anybody was ever court martialled for that? |
| Frans | Not as far as I know. |
| | END OF SIDE A *(counter at 555)* |
| | SIDE B |
| Interviewer | …you were there for six months rather than three. |
| Frans | I think it was closer to about eight months altogether. When we got back to the unit, to Ondangwa, we had nothing to do, so we just hung around. Also all of us were called in to the ops room just to give a short statement on what happened in our area. And we just gave the explanation that we did. And then what I did see…you become friends, like in any place or any workplace you have a couple of special guys that will give you information that others wouldn't. And because I was only a corporal I wasn't supposed to get the information, but yes. I was showed telexes |

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| | that was sent to the States to say they were killed in contact and they're such years and whatever. I hear that that was the normal procedure, unless it was a motor car or vehicle accident. But that's what I heard. But anyway felt very, very sick about that scenario. That was 1982, probably in May, June, around there, because we klaared out beginning of July. |
| Interviewer | Do you know if those deaths were every reported as deaths in the operational area or…? |
| Frans | They were reported as contacts with SWAPO. I have telexes here which…not that, but I had information from the telex room. Now in those days they used telex to Pretoria, and yes, they were reported as contact with SWAPO, which is not true. |
| Interviewer | Do you know if their families were ever told the truth? |
| Frans | Not at all. In fact I don't even know who they were, but I don't…a lot of stories were heard afterwards about other incidents were the same. |
| Interviewer | Did that make you wonder about the military and think, shit what are these guys on about? |
| Frans | No, it made me wonder about some of the people that were in the military that were I think not supposed to be there if that's…rather tell people the truth. It's like anybody now wanting to know why, what happened, what went wrong. |
| Interviewer | And then you say for the rest of the time in Ondangwa was pretty much a waste of time. |
| Frans | Yes, it was an absolute waste of time. In fact it was quite enjoyable knowing that…we were given a date and for the first time that actually did materialise. And so knowing that…we were called the ou manne then. We would see the other guys coming in, aagh we would be of assistance sometimes. And that was quite nice, and then we were also allowed to go to the mortar base, which is just outside of Ondangwa. And we mingled with those guys. This is where I got that mug from. And that was actually quite nice, knowing that you're leaving now and you looked at the whole operation in a different way then. We also went to Oshikati, we went shopping there, things like that. So yes, it was like a wind down from the whole scenario. |
| Interviewer | This mug, this is made out of a mortar ammunition…*(looks at drinking mug)* |
| Frans | It's a mortar, yes, fantastic isn't it. |
| Interviewer | Do you ever use it? |
| Frans | No. That's my little holy mug. And this, if I can give you some information on that…*(shows bullet)* |
| Interviewer | That looks like a 7.62 rifle round. |

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| Frans | It's a live round and if you look down the bottom, there's still a bit of white sticking out there. That's what we called a telegram in Ondangwa. We never used it in Oshigambo because we were only a few guys. We called that a telegram, if you had, and we did have, because of the fact that there was so many guys in the base…at any given time half the people would be in the base, the others would be patrolling or whatever. I never went across the border but they would use that base to go across the border as well. But then if you had problems with a person, you would use that, and calling it a telegram you would take Brasso and make it shine and put it either in his pillow, depending on where he sleeps. If it's a rank then he probably sleeps in a nice bed. You would get that telegram to his pillow or in his sleeping bag and that would mean, listen you have offended one of the hundreds around you so please watch your step and we used that thing. And it actually worked. That next day that person would be reborn. |
| Interviewer | So in other words, as you say, it was a message to him saying, we're tired of you… |
| Frans | We all have live rounds here so… |
| Interviewer | And in the Oshigambo base there were 150-300 people. |
| Frans | No, the Oshigambo base could have 150-300, but in our time we were 13 guys. Which made that was not the best place to be. In the security sense not the best place to be. But being a group like that was actually nice. |
| Interviewer | I see that you've got your flash there from the unit and you've got this mug and your name tag and bullet. When you look at that, it takes you straight back there, can you smell the place…? |
| Frans | Yes, I can. I can smell, I can touch, I can feel everything. And it doesn't take you two seconds to have it back. It's actually amazing. |
| Interviewer | Have you been back to Namibia since? |
| Frans | You know I've been planning to take my sons there while they were still at school, but now it's too late. And I was still planning to do that but I have heard from other guys that has been back to do trips, just normal trips, not sight seeing like I want to go and do. And some of the guys came back with pictures and stuff and obviously none of our tracks are there anymore, if I can call it that. And being just human you would like to show a person where I was. It's like the Madimbo base where I did a camp, it's the same thing, that camp was moved and now it's not there anymore. So I don't think it will be the same. But I also don't think my kids will appreciate that. I think they'd rather go overseas or to Cape Town. |
| Interviewer | So after Ondangwa they put you back in either a Flossie or something else and take you back to South Africa, and you went |

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| | back to Grahamstown. |
| Frans | Yes, we went in a real Flossie this time, a camouflage one. Which is exactly the same as the other one. *Laughs* You're sitting in this hanging things, and went back to PE once again to EP Command, stayed there again for about two days. A big boxer, I can't remember his name…I wanted to say something about him now…he was in charge of the base. But he gave us a royal time. They had a big braai for us. As a unit or as Grahamstown guys we only had seven kills in that time span, all of us now, but we were all split. My section had no kills but the other guys had seven kills. That record of that and they had a big braai celebrating that. |
| Interviewer | And all the time that you guys are out there you were mainly in Ovamboland? |
| Frans | Yes. |
| Interviewer | But did some of the guys cross in to Angola? |
| Frans | Yes, some of our section did cross in to Angola. Came back with weird stories. |
| Interviewer | Can you remember any of them? |
| Frans | Yes, I do. I can remember the one, we called him our pay tiffie, he wasn't actually the guy that did our pay, but he was the guy that handled all the borrowings amongst the guys. |
| Interviewer | And unofficial sort of banker. |
| Frans | Yes, banker, and he actually worked for one of our banks. And I hope he still does because he's probably now the president. Because he really knew how to make money for other people with interest and everything. He was very close to me because he was from our base as well. And he was burnt beyond recognition in…I don't know what that ops was or whether it was just a casual contact that they had, when an RPG apparently hit the top bar of the Buffel and then smashed into where the guys were sitting and this thing exploded. I saw him about a month after this incident, but I saw him at the base in Grahamstown, and half of him was just burnt away. He was alive though. And he was vowing to go back and I don't know do what. But I heard stories like that which I haven't been involved in myself. |
| Interviewer | And then you're back in PE for a while and then you're back to Grahamstown. |
| Frans | Back to Grahamstown, back to Captain Cochlan, one of the best people I've ever met in my life. I will never, never, never, ever forget, he welcomed us at the gate! Now that doesn't happen. They radioed him or whatever and said, listen these guys have come from the border. We came in small dribs and drabs because we were split, like the Oshigambo ones. We were only three from our base. The other guys were SACC and then the |

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| | other guys were from other bases and whatever. So we came in dribs and drabs and Captain Cochlan came to the main gate and actually welcomed us there. Then he took us to the mess, he had the guys prepare…we had about four hours to sit and wait for the food that they prepared for us. And then best of all, he called us all after that and said, listen thank you so much, you've done a great job, I don't know what you did, but we've heard no problems or whatever, go and get your haircut now. *laughs* So off we went. But we still loved him anyway. |
| Interviewer | And then soon after that you klaared out. |
| Frans | Yes, we klaared out, we had a big passing out parade and then the Pro Patrias were dished out and they didn't have enough, so all I have is a Pro Patria on paper, but I've got it on paper. |
| Interviewer | That was the medal you got for serving in an operational area. |
| Frans | Yes. |
| Interviewer | And then you got on the train and went home? |
| Frans | I actually went…with my folks now being split up and all that I went to my mum first, and then about a week or two later I came back to Pretoria. That was in July. I was called up in September to do a camp. |
| Interviewer | But just before your klaaring out, did they give you any sort of briefing to say, well you've been on the border now but you're now going back into civvy street, things are a bit different? |
| Frans | No, not really. No, nothing. In fact that's something that I thought about later on. But no, no, no, it was a non event, if I can put it that way. The parade we had, all the top brass was there, EP Command's people were there, the whole regional thing, and there was a general or two, but they gave us the passing out parade and then everybody just stood around the base like as if the game is now finished but now you've got no transport. That's what it looked like. But many people came to fetch their youngsters and the others that did not have transport or did not really know where they were going, you could either with their train tickets, go to where your address was, or you could be dropped in Grahamstown and from there do your own thing. which I did, I went to Grahamstown. |
| Interviewer | That must be quite a strange experience because on one day you're part of a military, just got back from the border, your Captain Cochlan is congratulating you for doing a good job, and the next minute you don't have a uniform, you don't have a rank anymore and you're out there. |
| Frans | Yes, and your hair is short. *Laughs* So you're carrying the signature. That was a negative part to me. It's like you're not needed in the team anymore and two years is a long time if it's intensive like that. Two years can also be a waste of time I think anywhere else. But that's intensive. That's like ten years in civvy |

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| | street. What you've learned, what you've done, what you had to do, what you were responsible for, who you met, and all that. So that was, yes, a bit strange. |
| Interviewer | So did you feel abandoned? |
| Frans | No, by the government yes, by the military, yes. But I accepted that because they don't need me anymore. |
| Interviewer | But did you have plans, now you've klaared out, did you have plans about what you want to do, go back to your job in Pretoria…? |
| Frans | Not really. At the one stage I thought of going back to the computers, back into the computer scene and then I decided against it. But with my travelling down to my mum I contacted one of the guys, Paul de Hoek, who was also with me in base. He went to Katima while I was in Oshigambo. I still have contact with him right now. Paul lives in Strand, in Gordon's Bay area. And I went for a weekend to his place in Gordon's Bay and then my stepfather at that stage, when he was still alive, he gave me the number of a guy at Sanlam to contact. Their computer centre in Sanlam of Bellville. And he gave me a job over the telephone. That's how easy it was those days. And I actually had an appointment to start at Sanlam. Then after the holiday I came back to Pretoria and my father the radio ham, he said, no, no, no, you're not going to go to Cape Town because your mom is there, he wants me here. So he also made one phone call and I got a job in the computer centre for the Volkskas head office here in Pretoria, which I then took. |
| Interviewer | And then you just start this job and you get a call up again. |
| Frans | I got a call up in September, my hair wasn't even growing yet and I had this call up to do a three month camp. And there again my father came and…I phoned him and I said, pa, what the hell is happening here? And he said, bring me that thing and with him being in the government and all that, he phoned somebody and then I got a letter promptly, about two days later, I got another letter saying sorry that was a mistake. |
| Interviewer | Was your dad senior? |
| Frans | He was a director in sport and recreation. |
| Interviewer | So then you start doing this new job of yours, and when did your next call up come? |
| Frans | About a year after that I was called up to do a camp in Madimbo. |
| Interviewer | That's in the Limpopo valley. Close to Kruger Park. |
| Frans | That's right. Over Christmas. |
| Interviewer | And what year would that have been, about '85? |
| Frans | That was the year I got married. '83 December. Just after I got |

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| | married. I got married in April ’83. |
| Interviewer | And what did you do on that camp? |
| Frans | There we also patrolled…the old Madimbo camp was very close to the Limpopo. The new base was a little bit further, you had to walk about half a kilometre to get to the old camp. And then the old camp another short to the actual river itself. and I think we were about 150 people in the base. It’s not a big base. And the only thing we did there was nothing, drink, eat, walk patrols. But you would walk patrol with all the booze you could carry, down to the river, park there, sleep there for two days, walk back, but yes we were visible. That I know. |
| Interviewer | Did you ever encounter the Recces there? |
| Frans | No, not at all. |
| Interviewer | Because they used that base occasionally. So that wasn’t a hardship camp. |
| Frans | No, it was hard being away from my wife and then sitting there and it’s Christmas. That was terrible. |
| Interviewer | Did you resent the military for that? |
| Frans | In a way, yes. But once again, when you get back and your wife is there with the little new car that you bought just before you left, it makes you feel very proud, you feel good. Although I did nothing, but they didn’t know that then. *laughter* |
| Interviewer | And then how many more camps did you do after that? |
| Frans | I did another camp with the onruste, the unrest. |
| Interviewer | So that was in the townships. |
| Frans | Yes, we were called up to DHQ and then we were then split up. I was split up to go to the Mamelodi area. That was a total different thing from the border, that’s where I really saw how things can go wrong. The border was a controlled environment, you knew exactly what you were doing. And if you met somebody wherever, they would know what you were doing also, and you would know what they were doing. But this was not the same. We went out there in Buffels, ten, twelve, fourteen at a time. My office in Silvertone is not far from Mamelodi, and I drive the same road that we used to drive going there. I actually come past the one section in the mornings going to work. And we had a small base that we put up on the mountain just behind Mamelodi, there’s like a hill. In Pretoria they call it a mountain, but it’s a hill. So we had a very small base up there but we did not occupy the base full time, we used it as a lookout as well as planning. Because all we did or wanted to do in that area, is to walk patrols. And you wouldn’t walk a patrol with a huge gun or whatever, you’d walk two two, each with your rifle, and that’s about it. But we would get together in an area where there is now a shopping centre, I think. But it’s a huge area where taxis park and there’s like little fruit |

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| | markets and stuff. and we would get together there and that's where all the nonsense would start because the press would be there with all their cameras, and that is what I then saw. I got spat in my face once, and I couldn't believe could spit that far, but a Buffel is very, very high. We were sitting in the Buffel and somebody spat at me right from down there in my face, a big whatever, and trying to instigate things to go wrong and we were warned about that. And I can understand that in a sense. That was…we then…hell was breaking loose in our country. So we knew it's trouble, we knew going in there is looking for more trouble. Rather just stay out of it, let the politicians sort out whatever they've done wrong. Not me. But unfortunately we had to be there and…you know even then, I can be honest with you, sometimes we walked past a house, where a little old lady would sit, or where somebody would do their washing outside, and the dog would bark and this lady would tell the dog not to bark. And I'd stop and say, hi, howzit. And it was so different. I shouldn't have had the clothes on because I was actually talking to somebody and they were saying, hi, slaan the hond, hit the dog and stop the dog from barking at these guys. And there was not a thing like I saw sometimes in other cases where you would see the fear for the rifle or whatever. There was like normal interaction. And then you would walk on again, and then you would suddenly hear a rock falling on the tar behind you. So that was also I found a contrasting thing where your mind would not know what's actually going on here, and you won't know what you're doing. |
| Interviewer | And did your senior officers explain how you were meant to approach this? Because you were trained for counter insurgency work in Namibia where you're fighting guys with landmines and RPGs and so on, whereas in the townships there's rocks, yes, and in some instances there were firearms but it was a very different situation. Did they give you any training to deal with urban unrest? |
| Frans | In the Pretoria East Commando we had for about three or four weeks in a row we had Saturday afternoon sessions. It would start at twelve o'clock. Most of us would not work on Saturdays, unlike I'm doing now, and we would get together at about eleven o'clock at the base, in our civilian clothes, in our cars and stuff, and they would then go through material with us, on what it is to go into a township, how you should do it, why there's only two of you and not ten? Why you're not carrying a bazooka, just your rifle. Yes, so there were quite a lot of rules that we had to follow. And we were taught to just be quiet. And if somebody wants to know why you're there, try to answer just a short answer, don't talk nonsense and don't get into politics, just say that you're protecting the area. And protecting the area in that sense that the one morning we got up to that little mountain of theirs, it was a sawn off tree or an old rotten tree, but in the tree they had a doll hanging with browns on, hanging from a rope with the ANC flag painted on it, and then on the back of it saying SADF, so good |

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| | message to get out. |
| Interviewer | It was a telegram. |
| Frans | It's a very big telegram. |
| Interviewer | How did you feel when you saw that? |
| Frans | It outraged us. It's long ago, it's not now, it's a different story. And yes, it would make you aggressive. And we then all decided, but no, there must be somebody on the mountain and that's what one of the corporals said, and I thought to myself, you know what, you're going to be hanging off that tree if you're on the mountain, instead of the doll. They couldn't find you and that's why the doll is hanging there. So whatever. And I really, really thought that maybe…I'm sure there's a whole chain of events that caused all the unrest in the areas, but I really did not see us doing anything great in that area. Not at all. |
| Interviewer | So you felt that wasn't the role of a soldier? |
| Frans | No, that's a policeman's role. That's got nothing to do with us. |
| Interviewer | And how many township camps did you do, two? |
| Frans | No, the other camp was supposed to be a township camp but then I volunteered to take troops to Namibia. Which was another fantastic experience. And you know, in DHQ where the guys get together, it's not at the train station it's actually next to the railway line. They actually get on to the train from a big huge field there. And we actually escorted troops to Windhoek and they were then given over by us to the Namibian people and they would take them to, I think it was, Walvis Bay. That was part of the camp. |
| Interviewer | But you were there sort of as an escort because at this stage you're much older than them, you're experienced, and so you were there just to keep an eye on them to make sure everything went ok? |
| Frans | Yes, at that stage things were getting worse in South West. |
| Interviewer | Would that have been mid eighties? |
| Frans | Yes. That was when things were really starting to get rough. And in that sense I was proud to be with those troops but I saw the folks that brought the troops. Something very undiplomatic that I saw is, we were all given per train coach, there were four corporals, two two, and then the guys would be in the middle, and you would have your line of guys that would be in your coach in front of you, and we would stand there with all our kit. That's the 50 round magazine, 35 round magazine, and then they came and with all these people standing there, all the civilians, all the new troops, and all that…and remember they did not klaar into our military, they were going to Namibia, so they were still in their civilian clothes, they were going to be issued there. |
| Interviewer | To which unit? 61 Mech or one of those units? |

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| Frans | I'm not sure. This was all the Walvis Bay, maybe Namibia as well, but it wasn't…we did not give them over to Namibian military, we gave them over to our military. But what they did there is a truck stopped there, and offloaded all the ammunition that we were supposed to put in our magazines, and we were instructed with a loud hailer, to fill the magazines. Now you're sitting five yards, now you kneel down, you know how you do that, you have to kneel down, so you do the drill, you do it exactly…they put these little boxes next to you, and you start loading magazines and the…I can call it children, because that's who you are when you're that young, and their mothers and fathers are standing there watching you doing that, just before you're getting onto the train. Now I thought that was really bad news. At that stage, I thought lekker, now you're going to feel what it's like. That's what I at that stage felt. But later on I thought you know I think that was a bad idea. One of the guys jumped off the train, and he got terribly hurt. |
| Interviewer | Because he didn't want to go. |
| Frans | He didn't want to go. That night he jumped off one of the trains. There were two or three trains going up in that direction. And we just heard about it in Windhoek. |
| Interviewer | It does sound like a strange thing to do. I've never heard of people loading up magazines in front of mom, dad and… |
| Frans | Apparently that was the general way of doing it, you do it right there, you're getting ready to go now, you're going to protect those guys. That's why you're loading the ammunition right there and then. |
| Interviewer | Would that have been nineteen eighty…? |
| Frans | That was about '85, '86. |
| Interviewer | Because there were some big operations in those days. |
| Frans | Yes, there were many trains going up. Unbelievable. When we were in Windhoek we stayed over in the Kalahari Sands for two days or three days or something like that. We actually made sure that we missed the plane coming back. |
| Interviewer | So you could stay at the hotel again? |
| Frans | Yes! It was fantastic. |
| Interviewer | It was a good hotel. |
| Frans | Yes it was, and we flew back SAA. It was wonderful. I mean, it's a camp so you know you're not going to do much when you get back. We were then put on water towers in DHQ twenty-four hours a day. You were lying on water towers. Now there's quite a lot there if you can remember in that area, we were manning those water towers all the time when we came back. And we knew we were going to go there, so yes, let's just miss the plane and stay two days longer. But thousands of troops were coming |

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| | into Windhoek at that stage. Now the troops going to the other bases were going to Windhoek and the other guys would go straight to Ondangwa. So I don't know how many went to Ondangwa but it was big. |
| Interviewer | Going back to Mamelodi township, how long did you patrol there for? |
| Frans | Two weeks. |
| Interviewer | And did you see any riots? |
| Frans | We saw riots but we didn't see people setting houses alight or cars or anything. We saw riots against us. The guys would…a couple of hundred people would go out together around those Buffels of ours, six o'clock in the morning. They would also then stop the people from going to work. You can do nothing, you just stand there. And then we would have to sit it out, and sometimes we only got on to the patrol stage at about eleven o'clock that morning. Because you have to sit in that Buffel until they have calmed down. Because what they said is, that the news teams that were there want the action. We had a clever guy there, I can't remember his name, but also a captain in charge, of those Buffels there and then operational, that part of Mamelodi, and he said, you just sit it out. Because what the news want, they want nonsense, they want to photograph you drawing rifles and things like that. |
| Interviewer | You said earlier on that you had strict rules about what you could do and couldn't do. |
| Frans | Yes. |
| Interviewer | So there was a strict rule about when you could cock your weapon and so on and so forth? |
| Frans | Yes. |
| Interviewer | And who enforced that, the officer commanding? |
| Frans | The officer commanding would bring the rules down the ranks and it would stop with the corporal in charge with that section or that area, working around there. |
| Interviewer | When you were patrolling did you have a policeman with you or did you…? |
| Frans | No. No policemen, just the army. The policemen were never present in that area. Never, never, never. You would see a police van, but probably en route from one point to another point for some totally different reason. |
| Interviewer | And when all these guys surrounded you and you couldn't go anywhere and you just had to sit tight, what did feel about what was happening? |
| Frans | Well, you would get a little bit scared, but you knew you had the upper hand. The first round you shoot they will scatter. I know |

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| | that. We've seen that on wherever. But you know, it made you really feel that whatever you're trying to do here, is not working, it's not going down with the people here, that live here. In those days we didn't have the taxi business as it is now. It was a much smaller little enterprise. But those guys came up to us and said, don't do this. Just do it one o'clock. Not now. Come one o'clock and stay till twelve o'clock the night, don't do it now, I'm working. But no, they couldn't move because the crowd was there. So yes, you couldn't really see the whole thing. And like I said, because I did not see action there, real action, I also could not understand really what was going on. But then on TV and in the news there were other pictures that you saw, with that gathering things…we were coached about that as well in courses that they presented to us, how they would start, two guys would start, and mobilise a whole township just by running up and down and around the streets. And that's how they did it. |
| Interviewer | Who gave those lectures? Military officers? |
| Frans | Yes. It was mainly intelligence guys because they would have all their other background information as well. |
| Interviewer | And then when your next call up came and they said, this is a township call up, even though I know that you went to South West instead, did you sort of say, well stuff this I'm not going to do this? |
| Frans | That's exactly why, immediately when we got to DHQ, I went to a couple of guys that I knew there and I said, listen what else have you got going on here? I'm not going on this thing. I'll AWOL if you send me into the township again. It's just…I don't want to be there. I really didn't feel that we were making any headway. And by that time we had deaths and people were killing one another in the townships. So I really wasn't interested in that. |
| Interviewer | Did you know other guys who felt the same way as you? |
| Frans | Yes. A lot of us. That's probably the one and only thing that we ever did in the military that everybody was against. Nobody wanted to go into a township and walk the streets there and frighten people or whatever. You didn't want to do that, it wasn't…the main reason I think is because you couldn't see the reason for that. |
| Interviewer | But if they'd said to you, listen, you're going back to Oshigambo for six weeks…? |
| Frans | I'll go. I'll go now. Because at least there, there were people thanking me for what I did. Ok, there were a minority that did not like us, but at least there I could see the reason. |
| Interviewer | And when after having been in Mamelodi, a couple of weeks later you're back in civvy street, you're doing your job and there's a black guy making the tea or whatever it is, and that guy could live in Mamelodi, could you sort of equate what was happening and |

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| | say well…? |
| Frans | Yes, absolutely, and in certain cases it would be a person…if the person, a black guy from Mamelodi showed aggression or whatever, I would return that with aggression, because I would say to him, hey I was there watching your house pal, so you know, listen to me, or treat me better, or I'll do whatever to you. remember we were also brought up in this racism thing. So yes, there would be massive aggression. And that's one of the things why I didn't want to go back there. I also did not want any conflict with people. I'm extremely anti conflict, and that's because of my past. Not only my past in the military but my past before that, with my folks and all that, I will run away from any conflict if possible. If the conflict is with the uniform and a rifle it's different. But if the conflict is between humans trying to break one another or do something horrible to one another, that to me is where I do not want to be, I walk away from that. |
| Interviewer | Now these days, as you say, this all happened a long time ago, the mid eighties was twenty years ago, but you work with lots of black colleagues now, do the guys ever say to you, hey were you in the army? |
| Frans | Once or twice but I try to also avoid that because I wouldn't like to…I know how they feel. I've got one guy working with me right now, his name is Tom, he's one of our best drivers who's been without an accident for I don't know how many years. Tommy is more or less my age. He was in the military and he then left the military for some reason, I think it was… |
| Interviewer | When you say military, he was in the SADF? |
| Frans | SANDF. And he left the military there because I think it could have been some corporal or whatever that gave him a hard time, and he decided, no that's it. So he was in the Permanent Force, and he became a driver and he's quite happy now. But Tom you know, knows that I…in fact you know what I did I actually asked him what Matimba meant. Because I got that nickname, for quite a few years after that even. I had the Matimba nickname because of the guy. And he actually came back to me and he told me what it meant and then he said, why do you want to know? And I told him the story. Because I knew he was in the military, otherwise I wouldn't have done it. |
| Interviewer | And you don't want to discuss it because you don't want to get involved in a conflict situation? |
| Frans | No, I don't want to get involved in a conflict situation but I also do feel that you can be victimised because of the feeling that people have now towards the ex military chaps from that time. |
| Interviewer | And your whole military sort of history, do you talk about it with friends…you say you've got one friend who lives in the Strand from those days…do you have other mates from those days? |

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| Frans | No. Paul is the guy that was with me for a long time. Michael Hare he's the guy who was with Infoplan. He's a hot shot rank with the military. He was actually my boss at Infoplan, him and Commandant Alex Pauw. But they were military. And I still have contact with Michael Hare, he works with M-Net. But he was at the Benny centre, so that's the background that I…the connection with them. But I've kept the connection and talk to them often and things like that. There's a lot of guys that I very much would like to see, but no I haven't had any contact. Oh, I have walked into quite a few guys that I remember from Ondangwa…not Oshigambo though…but from Ondangwa, but there was no link then, so there's no link now. |
| Interviewer | And thinking back on, certainly the Namibian section, when you were in 6 SAI, do you look back on those days with affection? Did they teach you good things or do you resent it, do you feel that it took two years of your life as a young man – when you're in your early twenties that's one tenth of your life? |
| Frans | When I got out of the military I was unstable emotionally I think. Although I did well in my job my work was not my main focus. Having a good life was my main focus. But what I did not realise then is that you must first work and then have a good life. So you must work to earn the money, I had it all the wrong way around. Remember we got paid very well up there, with the danger pay and all that. And what I did there I understood. When I got down here or into civvy life there's a lot of things that I did not understand. And I also did not think that I got the recognition that I thought I should get because of my military service that I did. Lots of guys, really, thought that was just nothing. Come here, we'll teach you what life is all about. And I thought the opposite. And so it took me quite a few years to get in to a more disciplined way of living. In fact it took me probably 15, 20 years. I only picked up my discipline six years ago, if I'm not mistaken. That I really brought…the discipline that I learned in the military back into my life and that's what's kept me going. |
| Interviewer | So do you feel that your response was…you say you were emotionally sort of mixed up…was that because of the fact that you'd spent two years in the military or do you think that would have happened to you anyway just because of circumstance? |
| Frans | I think it probably could have been worse if I was not in the military. Or maybe I can put it another way, I think it could have happened earlier if I wasn't in the military. So the military I think was a foundation in certain things. Because I was positive towards the military there's a lot of things that I learned there that I can apply in my daily life. |
| Interviewer | Did you feel that while you were you actually belonged there? You were part of a team? |
| Frans | Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. |

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| Interviewer | And then you came out and that team was gone. |
| Frans | Yes, also true. Very true. |
| Interviewer | And looking back on it now, I mean, if we were in a similar situation, would you do it all over again? |
| Frans | That's a very difficult question. If it is for my country and if it's for a good country with good intentions from my country's side or my government's side, I will do it, yes. But if it's for the wrong intentions I will not do it. Because I've got a lot of brains now. Or think I've learned a lot and I know a lot more. Not saying that I would not have done it if I knew what I know now. I probably still would have. Because the scenario was different. |
| Interviewer | But if we divide your military experience up, the initial two years, in the right circumstances, you would do again, but the camps in the townships you wouldn't go near. |
| Frans | No, I wouldn't do the camps in the townships. I cannot think how one can walk around there calling shots or just looking…making people feel like they must now just sit there. That I feel is wrong. It's like us now putting all fencing around our houses and that's also wrong. You don't want that. You don't intrude into other people's lives. And that's why again I'd go back to the military. That was an organised thing, except for chasing the terrorist side, the other people knew what was coming. I believe that if you are…if somebody can predict what you are doing, then it's fine. Don't be unpredictable because you then put somebody in a very difficult position. I say to my children every day, be predictable. Don't give surprises. Most surprises are not nice. So stay out of other people's faces. |
| Interviewer | When '94 came, South Africa changed dramatically, politically. Did you feel that the politicians who'd sent you off to the military, i.e. the Minister of Defence and so on and so forth – Magnus Malan in those days I think – do you feel they'd let you down? |
| Frans | To a certain extent, yes. Because they all just disappeared. And they had nothing to say, or I thought if we were still mentioned, if they did not go and change the name of the military and things like that then maybe we would have felt better. But not being recognised at all and…you know I'm being very honest if I say that I don't speak to people about this, because I already know that they hate the past SADF, for what is written about them now. And if you look at that huge, big organisation and if you look at what was done and what was wrong, and I have also heard and seen some of that, then it's a small percentage. Most of the people were quite loyal to their people and they really believed what they were doing was right. And today I'm not saying it was wrong that they did. If you give me a job and you say, listen pal this is how you're going to do it and these are the reasons, if I'm a person with integrity I'm going to do that job properly. Ok, obviously up to a certain level where you know ok, now you are |

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| | doing wrong. But that was never expected from me. |
| Interviewer | There's a war memorial just up here near Pretoria, and there was a debate last year about whose name should go on there as the fallen dead… |
| Frans | The debate is going on. |
| Interviewer | It is. Do you think it would be acceptable to have the names of the South African Defence Force guys on there? Do you think they should be there as well? |
| Frans | Yes, I think they should be there. I think it's extremely wrong to exclude us from that. We also fought for a reason. And whoever else fought and if they are putting everybody on there and some of these guys, I again, don't think should be on there for what they've done, then we might just as well put our names on there as well. I think it can only be fair. And I think that's maybe where there's a problem, because we are not recognised at all. |
| Interviewer | And your feeling is that you fought for your country, it doesn't matter that history has looked at it and said well maybe some of the issues were wrong. The point is that you felt you were a loyal citizen of the country at the time and you did your duty. |
| Frans | That's right. Caesar was one of the worst people in the world, and everything is called Caesar. Any palace and it's called Caesar. It's the same thing I think. |
| | END OF SIDE B *(counter at 494)* |
| | TAPE TWO SIDE A |
| Frans | One evening that I came into the ops room at Oshigambo, and he received mail…we only received mail every two weeks or so, and he was based in Port Elizabeth, he was also from EP Command but a camper that was seconded to us for about two or three days and then he was going to join somebody else. There were about three of them. And he got a message from somebody saying that his wife has left the flat that they used to live in. And he had two little children. I was then about 21 and he was about in his thirties somewhere. And I then radioed the Ondangwa headquarters and I said to the guys, can we do something? And they said to me, no, we refuse, he cannot make contact, he cannot fly back to the States, he cannot do nothing, he must just wait until he hears from the people in Port Elizabeth again. I thought that was rather frightening and I was glad I wasn't married at that stage. |
| Interviewer | So this poor guy is 2000 kilometres from home and he's in a state where he doesn't know what's going on and they couldn't help. |
| Frans | Yes, the caretaker of the building, told somebody to make contact and send a letter. They actually sent a telegram to Ondangwa to say that the wife and kids has disappeared, the furniture and everything is still in the flat. And by the time he got the telegram |

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| | they were gone for about two weeks already. And they just said no there must have been a problem in the family or a divorce case coming up, he can sort it out when he gets back. When he got back I don't know because I didn't see him after that again. |
| Interviewer | The poor guy must have been in a state of panic. |
| Frans | Yes, absolutely. He was in tears, he was crying, screaming. |
| Interviewer | Actually a lot of guys I've spoken to mentioned that they've known guys who had difficulties up there. You're so far away from home. When you're older it's much more difficult than when you're 19 or 20. Most of the guys weren't married, most of them didn't have permanent girlfriends and in a way it was easier for them. But the married guys really took strain. You're a long way away from normal communication and in those days, as you say, no cell phones. If you were lucky there was a tickie box. I don't recall one in Ovamboland. |
| Frans | No, definitely not. |
| Interviewer | So it was letters. |
| Frans | Yes, that's right. In fact I saw in the base where the Permanent Force members of sector one zero…there were a lot of Permanent Force members, in fact I think most of the guys running the whole set up for sector one zero were Permanent Force people, and somebody one evening said there that that's the highest divorce rate he's ever seen, that's amongst the Permanent, PFs. Because the wife would be there sometimes and then for a year or two later they'll just start understanding that the wife is not there anymore and she's not coming back either. Because some of them, I don't know what it was called, it was called kort diens in Afrikaans. |
| Interviewer | Short term service. |
| Frans | Short term service, yes, and that's how you would then find out more of what's happening in a guy's life. |
| Interviewer | Oshikati also had a fairly large Permanent Force unit. Some of the pilots lived there, the Mirage pilots, moved in there. That incident where the Parabats and the other unit clashed and a good number of guys died in friendly fire, did your guys talk about that? Did you say, well what's going on here? |
| Frans | Well we had a huge problem with that because we all felt guilty. We had the map and we told the guys where the guys would normally walk… |
| Interviewer | And that captain just didn't want to listen to you. |
| Frans | Yes, he just said listen I think I know what I'm doing and he told me literally to shut up, that was his words. He said, korporaal hou jou bek! And I just then hou my bek, but I've already then said to him, I think…maybe just move in a V. And we spoke like that many times. You would talk about an inverted U or something like |

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| | that, and guys would understand. And I also told him that Tuin was in operation there as well and they were unpredictable and we did not know where they were going, they never reported to us. They only reported to us when we would tell them not to drive after last light, and they reported to us coming to us to get rats. Because many times their rats were given to us in Ondangwa when we went to go and fetch rats. So their rations would come to us, we would keep that for them. And then they would jump in there and get their stuff and go. But they knew exactly…they knew that we said that it's not a good idea. But I must be honest, I also did not think that it was so critical. Because one can't really imagine you seeing your own people and then shooting at them. You can't because you don't have the picture. It was almost dark apparently, and one of the guys shot first and thought there was a problem and then all hell broke loose and they killed their own. |
| Interviewer | When you said to that guy, try and move in a V, were you talking about a sort of platoon formation V? |
| Frans | No, the two sections should move in a V. Which means if they start moving in a V from our base they'll move in opposite directions. And then coming back the same thing. Then when you come back you also start moving in a V, which means you move even further away from another. |
| Interviewer | So it's to avoid them bumping into each other and exactly this happened. |
| Frans | Yes, when you turn around you do the same thing, you go V. And then you move even further around. So it's impossible to strike one another. |
| Interviewer | Did you ever see that captain again? |
| Frans | No. I never saw any one of them again, because the guys were casevaced and then the other people of the two sections were also choppered out. |
| Interviewer | While you were at Oshigambo and also Oshakati…Oshakati was one of the major air bases so there were Mirages there, Impalas, C130s and so on, did the choppers fly over your bases? *(Note this is incorrect – the aircraft where stationed at Ondangwa. Mike Cadman)* |
| Frans | A lot. A lot, that was lovely. |
| Interviewer | And were you talking to the guys? |
| Frans | No, we were not allowed to speak to any airborne… |
| Interviewer | But did you listen to some of their radio traffic? |
| Frans | We could listen sometimes. But you couldn't make out a lot. and you would not hear any specific instructions or whatever, because most of the instructions they would receive on land before they take off. So they would normally just report back…we once heard a report of somebody in a dogfight, or almost a |

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| | dogfight with a MiG, but that was so far away from us, that's just a report we heard. When they actually went into operation, we knew because they would tell the whole area how many planes would go over and if there are any gunships going and things like that. So we would know they would be flying. But when they would come back we would also get another report, but that was just to keep us away from harm. It's just to tell us what was happening. |
| Interviewer | And today when you hear an Alouette or a Puma…ok a Puma is now an Oryx…do you think straight away of those days? |
| Frans | Yes, it sounds good. It sounds very good. |
| Interviewer | I notice that the note that you sent to the SA Soldier website, you said, nice website, but also said you think about the guys who didn't come back. Were you thinking about these guys in this contact? |
| Frans | That's right, yes. Because that's the guys…we briefly met them, they ate there with us and aagh you shook hands…and one or two faces I can never, ever, ever forget. An experience that I've had a while ago is to…I saw them going to their tent that evening before they left. And I just had a thing…later on, years later on…that because they walked away from us, from the ops room, it was like their faces had disappeared, completely. It's like a…not a haunting thing, it's just a stupid thing in your head. That you saw the back of the person, and you never saw the front of the person again, because they would normally then…when they depart from a base, the signal that you give out must be signed back. That signal must be handed over to the next section. And I just had that picture in my mind with this faceless figures walking away. And if it was…all the other cases, yes, that figure will walk away but you'll see the people coming back. But from the front so you can identify the person. And that's not nice to think of it that way, and yes, you can actually see them. |
| Interviewer | And these are guys you met a few times but you didn't really know them well. |
| Frans | No, not at all. The captain I'll never forget because of his stance, they way that he did things. Nothing wrong with that, I suppose nothing wrong with being self assured or whatever. And nothing wrong with telling a corporal to shut up. |
| Interviewer | But nevertheless we're now talking about an incident that happened 26 years ago and it still weighs heavily on your mind, it still affects you. |
| Frans | Yes. when I've got to go down to Cape Town I sometimes drive through Bloem, because I lived in Kimberley I sometimes drive through Kimberley, but then I go via Bloem, so I actually take a longer route. Then…because the bats, that's where they come from. And I know also those guys were not doing their National Service, they were older people with most probably, families and |

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| | stuff. |
| Interviewer | Do you ever go to things like the Military History Museum in Joburg or the Airforce Museum here in Pretoria or anything like that? |
| Frans | I've been to the airforce in Pretoria about two or three years after the military service but I've never been to any other. And I've never gone again. In Kimberley there are, I think it's an Impala, in the centre of town that's mounted on a thing, and I've gone and I've taken pictures of my kids there and things like that. |
| Interviewer | Because it seems like for many people, but for you in particular, this military sort of history plays a vital role in your identity of your life, how your life has shaped out. |
| Frans | Yes, it does. Major. I think it's shaped many of my things that I believe in. And unfortunately a lot of that clashes with other people. It even clashes with people in my family. Because you get up that time, you do that, your shoes must be clean, those things. And it's only come out now, having kids and all that, and with my wife also obviously not being a soldier, never being a soldier or anything, that does not always gel. And then also at work as well. Of the more junior people that also hasn't gone through that, they have a different outlook on how they should look when they come to work. I believe you're dress for the occasion. If you do whatever, you're going to look the part as well. So I've got discipline things but I also believe that my discipline helps me a hell of a lot. I really have a…some people would say that's like a robot, that I do certain things…I have wild birds eating here and I buy 5kg bags and I must get food at a certain time today, and I normally come back on a Saturday and they will be sitting here, they know that on a Saturday that I'm back half day. Today I did not feed them because anything that makes them have a fright they fly up and they make a hell of a noise. But I have discipline with all those things. I believe that's where I got it from. |
| Interviewer | That's interesting because I see that you've got the paraphernalia that we discussed earlier on and so it's part of your identity of your past. |
| Frans | Yes. |
| Interviewer | Is there anything that you want to talk about? If you put yourself in the shoes of an historian ten years down the line, trying to understand what it was like to be in the SADF, anything you can think of that we haven't touched on? |
| Frans | Not really, what I would like people to realise is that there were percentage of people and there will always be in any place, even in the rugby team, there will be a small percentage of people that should not at that stage have been there, should have not been there or there will also be a small percentage of people that will not do as instructed. That's what life is all about. But I do firmly |

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| | believe, because I've met so many people, that most of the guys tried to do what they were told to do and our superior guys…I had the honour of actually dating Lieutenant General RF Holtzhausen's daughter, staff and personnel chief. I was almost married to her – Sharon. And she was as disciplined as her father and I met her before I went to my military service and I could not understand this woman, what was wrong. Why would she want to leave a restaurant at ten o'clock at night and go to bed and go to work the next day. I did not understand it but now I do. And there were people that really did the thing proper and I still believe that they did what they thought they were instructed to do or that was right. And then we had unfortunately the part that was not supposed to be there and maybe there's things that should not be done. But that was nobody like myself's intention to be involved in anything like that. |
| Interviewer | While you were in South West Africa, as it then was, did you ever bump into the guys from 101 Battalion? |
| Frans | Yes. |
| Interviewer | Ovambo Battalion, Three Two. |
| Frans | Yes. Yes, we did. We had a swimming pool building competition between 101 and the SACC in Ondangwa, where we had a competition that day, who can build a swimming pool…I think they had ten guys in a team, the quickest. And SACC actually built the swimming pool quicker than 101. And they were all well fit. Good guys. And then we had a big braai after that, celebrating the swimming pool competition. It was quite hilarious because there was no water to put in to these holes that we dug. But they were massive, massive real swimming pools like you would have at a upmarket house in Joburg for example. And yes, we mixed with these guys. We there noticed what type of rifles they carried. They carried different…they came out with R3s and stuff like that, which we'd never seen before. But they were also similar to the SAP Tuin and Koevoet, they were different in their approach. |
| Interviewer | In those days you would have been carrying R4s? |
| Frans | Yes. I had an R1 when we joined the army, and then by the time we went to the border, just before we went to the border we were issued R4s which was the old Galil, or the Galil from Israel. Some of us still had the one with the wooden… |
| Interviewer | Stock. |
| Frans | Yes, that was actually a Galil, it's not an R4. |
| Interviewer | But it was also 5.56. |
| Frans | Yes. |
| Interviewer | Whereas your R1 is 7.62. |
| Frans | Yes. That's right. |

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| Interviewer | And when you spoke to these guys, these were black Ovambos, the 101 Battalion by and large, did you just sort of think it was a normal thing, they were fighting for their country? |
| Frans | Yes. I thought that they were on our side, if you can put it that way, and I thought they were fighting to stop this force from taking over their country. And some of the guys…we never got into long conversations, but some of the guys you could see, he was serious about that. And that's why I say that some of the public people, or the PBs as we called them, were pro us, and especially the older people. They were extremely pro to us, and you would find the younger people in their twenties not. Not all of them, but a lot of them not. |
| Interviewer | There are these guys from 101 and there you are. You're all young guys, you've all got firearms and you're all fighting on the same side. You're equals, I mean, when you're in contact he could die just as easy as you could, but you could also save his life and you could save yours. Did it ever strike you as strange that here you were fighting this war, but if you went back to South Africa you couldn't actually sit down in the same bar and have a beer with him? |
| Frans | Right, I'm very glad that you're asking me that question because that's been an issue with me all my life. We did not have apartheid in the war. SACC was with us, that's why I said in the beginning that I was so happy that I had two of them. They were like us. Anybody else that came into that base over Christmas time or any other time they were the same. We did not have different facilities, we drank in the same bar, we used the same glasses, everything was together. And the fact that they guy next to you was a coloured or a black guy was 90% less…you didn't realise it. When we got back to the States, we were back into apartheid again. Which was quite strange actually. Because with the two (*inaudible*), I was one of the lucky guys, many other guys only had whites in their sections, because SACC was a small unit. But I had two guys and maybe they did not realise it but to me it was extremely strange to go into a place and to see another colour avoiding you, and having in the back of my head…I've got a picture of the one guy standing with the two of the guys and another SACC guy with a bottle of rum in his hand, we were having a party there all of us drinking from that bottle of rum, and to me that was abnormal. And in two years time we saw a different life, a different style, and we also saw camaraderie amongst guys from different races. Without any bridge. And I'm being honest now. We had a lot of fights up there, people had fist fights and it was rough and all that, but I never had any racial thing with anybody there and I can't remember of anyone close to me that I knew that had the same thing. The fights were amongst the whites about saying something about somebody else's picture of his girlfriend or whatever, that was what fights were all about. And then the other things, our little telegrams, were to higher ranking officers not treating you nicely or something. |

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| Interviewer | It just strikes me as strange, a lot of guys I've spoken to, the first time they really encountered adult black guys or coloured guys on an equal basis, was in the army. |
| Frans | That's right. |
| Interviewer | Yet there's a perception that the army was enforcing apartheid. |
| Frans | That's right. |
| Interviewer | And so it's almost a contradiction in terms. |
| Frans | Yes. I had an SACC staff sergeant that came to me the one day just before we went out on a patrol with those two guys, and he said to me, listen are these guys behaving? I said, which guys are you talking about now? He said, my guys. And he said those two Hotnots. That's how they spoke. And I said, sorry I didn't know that you were referring to them, but yes. Hulle is die lekker ouens, I like them, I'm happy. I'm glad they're here. And off they went with us to Oshigambo. I mean, to me that was an honour. I just had to use that, when I was a younger guy and my folks were busy getting divorced, I was basically brought up by a lady called Fienie George who is a coloured lady, and I still see her every year, every September, I stop in Nelspoort and I drop off groceries for her. And she's 87 now I think. So yes, it's coming back here that all the changes came in again. |
| Interviewer | That's interesting, you're right, there it was another country, even though South Africa controlled it… |
| | END OF INTERVIEW *(counter at 233)* |

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