

Leopold Scholtz                      Military Analyst                      19/11/07  
 Missing Voices Project              Interviewed by Mike Cadman

	SIDE A
Interviewer	Tell me a little bit about your background as a military historian, as an analyst, as a strategist.
Leopold	I did my doctoral dissertation about General Christian de Wet as military commander. I did that in 1978 at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands. It was published quite a few years later when the centenary of the Anglo Boer War took place. And it's an abridged version. I made I think a study of strategy military principles, those sorts of things, during the years, and especially since I became Professor Extraordinaire at the University of Stellenbosch in 1997. I have written quite a few, shall we say, academic articles published in academic journals about the military history. I wrote about the one that you saw yourself, the Namibian war, an appraisal of the South African strategy. I wrote an analysis of the Operation Modular, which was the last phase of the war in Angola. I wrote a thing about the development of South Africa army doctrine during the war. I wrote a paper, which I delivered at the School of Armour in Bloemfontein about the ten commandants of armoured warfare. And so on. So I've done quite a lot. I also wrote a book about why the Boers lost the Anglo Boer War.
Interviewer	Yes, I've actually found that on the web, or I've found references to it. And you also wrote a paper comparing modern Iraq with ancient Iraq, didn't you?
Leopold	Well, not so much a comparison, it was on request I did a three part analysis of the Iraq war, the conventional side of the Iraq war. I forgot about that. It's in Scientia Militaria. It's the journal of the Military Academy.
Interviewer	Thinking about the bush war in Namibia, we had South West Africa, which we'd been asked to look after through the League of Nations, and the war started escalating slowly... I think you point out in your piece that 1966 was considered to be one of the first ...
Leopold	Ongulumbashe.
Interviewer	Exactly. One of the first skirmishes of the modern bush war.
Leopold	Right.
Interviewer	At that stage the police force patrolled the border, it was primarily a police area, and then in the early seventies the military started taking over.
Leopold	Yes.
Interviewer	And we had an army that was made up of Permanent Force

	<p>soldiers, conscripts and Citizen Force guys who went in and out for short periods. In writing about the strategy of the war in Namibia, what were some of the difficulties of this fairly disjointed force?</p>
Leopold	<p>Well first of all, the South African Defence Force had no idea what to do and how to do it. They had no experience of counter insurgency warfare. They had no doctrine, they had no strategy, they had no nothing. It was basically a conventional force which came out of the Second World War, a clone of the British army, the uniforms, the military culture, the way of doing things, everything was intensely British. The only thing which differed from the British Army of the Second Word War was a tradition of mobility, of extreme mobility. If you look for instance at the way the South Africans conducted the campaigns in Somalia and Ethiopia in 1941 when they called the shots. I mean, the South Africans were there with the main force there. They used mounted infantry, or motorised infantry, more or less in the way they used the mounted commandoes during the Anglo Boer War. Very, very rapid movements and so on. But they lost that when the British took over and they moved on to north Africa and they became only a small part of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army. So in 1966, this was the year I did my service, I was a volunteer in the Army Gymnasium, we were an intensely British kind of force. And there was no tradition, no knowledge, no nothing of how to conduct this. I think nothing much changed up until 1973 when the SADF took over the course of things in Namibia. General Geldenhuys admitted to me the other day that there was no strategy and they didn't have a clue of what to do. This was exacerbated by the fact, as I wrote in that paper, that they took people like me. I was born and bred in Johannesburg. The first generation which was not brought up in the rural areas. And they put them in the bush area, they didn't know the physical area, they didn't know the people, they were very badly led, they were badly organised, and they expected them to go and fight a war. And the result was...if you go and read the book by, I think Louis is his first name, Bothma, Die Buffel Struikel, about 32 Battalion. Now 32 Battalion went on to become one of the most formidable units in the bush war, but this was the early days. This was the seventies. And you see from it that SWAPO – it doesn't write it but you can infer it from what he writes – SWAPO ran rings around them all the time. SWAPO held the initiative almost all the fights that Bothma describes were initiated by SWAPO, in the form of ambushes and the like. It's only through error and trial that they started learning. And also they took out progressively the National Servicemen from the...how shall I put it...from the war in Owambo. They used the National Servicemen during the eighties mainly for standing guard, and they used a lot of them as teachers, to build road, the tiffies, and the water tanks and the like, and doctors obviously, you know the old campaign to win hearts and minds, and they used them on the cross border operations in conventional operations. But the main pursuit of SWAPO were the elite units, parabats, 101 Battalion, 32 Battalion also helped, and of course</p>

	<p>Koevoet. Koevoet was a different thing altogether again, because I think they did more bad than good. so in terms of doctrine there was a paper written by General C.A. Frasier in 1969, which was very, very good but Geldenhuys admitted to me that very few people had read it. That's to say in the first phases. So they had a very bad beginning. And only during the last years of the seventies, and of course the eighties, they started to really see how things should be done and then they started winning.</p>
Interviewer	<p>So essentially you say, the National Servicemen were generally back-ups and then used in conventional warfare on the big operations. So most of the day to day fighting, if you can call it that, was done by Three Two Battalion, the Bushmen Battalions, and that was the external fighting. Then internally they left it to the police unit, Koevoet.</p>
Leopold	<p>Koevoet and 101 Battalion. And of course SWATF, the South West African Territory Force. These were people who came from the country itself. They had a much better idea of what to do and how to do it.</p>
Interviewer	<p>But it's in my mind something of a contradiction in that most of the day to day fighting then was done by troops who were primarily black.</p>
Leopold	<p>That's right.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Yet, after the fighting, even if they'd fought alongside of a white guy, they couldn't actually go back to South Africa and have a holiday in Cape Town together.</p>
Leopold	<p>Exactly. And that of course, the things that I saw on the internet, that a lot of them wrote...I can give you the addresses, I don't know if you've seen some of them? They mention this. And this played a role, I think, in sensitising people: What is this apartheid all about? And in Namibia, in general, apartheid was abolished much earlier than in South Africa itself. And everybody went together there to restaurants and so on. So I think the border experience played a role...I'm not sure how big this role is, I haven't actually done research about it, but it did play a role in creating critical attitudes towards the policy of apartheid.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Was there also something to a degree of a secret war? Often...I mean for example, the Recces would spend months inside Angola doing what they needed to do, Three Two Battalion were in and out all the time, and even on some of the bigger operations they were conducted with the South African government knowing that they were actually involved. In my mind that must have created quite a bit of stress amongst some of the soldiers because they thought they were doing the right thing, yet the government was denying that they were there at all? In your research and readings have you picked up that people feel resentment about that secret nature of the war?</p>
Leopold	<p>Yes, I think so. More than once you come across people who say</p>

	<p>they were a hundred kilometres inside Angola and they listen on the radio to the newscast and the minister of defence denies that they are there. And they find it hilarious but at the same time, why are we here then if they say we're not? So I think that played a role. But it's much more than that of course. It's also a question of the South African government being, in the greater scheme of things, stupid. I mean, this is not the way to fight a war. Experience has shown that in a democracy, and South Africa amongst the whites at least, were a democracy of sorts. You cannot fight a war in which the sons and brothers and fathers of people are sent out into harm's way where they can be killed without getting the population on your side. And you can only get them on your side if you play open cards with them. So time and again you see these campaigns, operations going on into Angola especially, and people here back home know nothing about it. and this caused a huge resentment. You find leader articles, commentary articles in the newspapers, even in Die Burger, which was very much pro government at the time. I remember...I've been here since 1981...we had a quite forceful leader articles in 1987 when Modular started, saying to the government play open cards with the people because these are your family, and we have family there. It's our readers who are asking us what's going on, we're not allowed to tell them. So I think in general this was a very bad way to fight a war and obviously this must have had a very negative effect on the troops as well.</p>
Interviewer	<p>This is quite interesting in that, if I mentioned to most people the South African Defence Force of the seventies and eighties, many people would have this image of this all powerful force that could sweep from Cape Town to Cairo without any difficulty, highly trained, highly skilled. Yet we're talking about a force that initially way back in the late sixties, early seventies was primarily trained to be a conventional force, so had no idea of counter insurgency warfare, they then conducted a secret war to a degree, and you mentioned earlier that many of the National Servicemen for example were poorly led. So the SADF wasn't necessarily this all powerful machine that...</p>
Leopold	<p>Not in the beginning. They learnt...everybody learns I think...the actual turning point, I think, was in 1976 – it had nothing to do with Soweto, it coincided – when Jannie Geldenhuys took over the South West Africa Command. He was one of the only two guys in the South African Defence Force who thought about warfare and counter insurgency warfare in an intellectual fashion. What is this that we're trying to do? How are we going to have to do it? And let's look at other examples of other armies who had to do something similar, and try to learn something from it. The one was Frasier and the other was Geldenhuys. So there the turning point started and also grew very much the question of winning the hearts and minds of people. And they succeeded to a certain extent except in Owambo, which was very much SWAPO territory. They never really made a dent in SWAPO support there.</p>

	<p>But in the other areas they got quite some support. Also the mechanics of: how do you walk a patrol; how do you conduct yourself towards the population? Let me give you just two very, very simple examples. I used to train with the R1 rifle, which is a rather heavy thing. It has heavy ammunition with a lot of stopping power. You can really kill someone at a long distance with it, and it's very accurate. But it's heavy and because the heavy ammunition, you can carry so much and not more. Now they did some research and they found that an overwhelming majority, something like 95% of all fire fights take place at a maximum of 80 paces. You don't need a rifle which can fire a bullet accurately here over 3 kilometres. Take a lighter rifle with a smaller calibre, smaller ammunition, and you can take more ammunition then. Then you have a magazine, instead of 20 rounds you can have 30 rounds. That's one very, very basic example. The other is, don't give people all these heavy packs to carry. Because if you're on patrol and you carry a heavy pack, your natural inclination is to bend forward, and you look downwards, you don't look up to see where the enemy might be. So rather re-supply them every day, or twice a day, by helicopter in the field when they're out on patrol, or by whatever means, so that they can walk upright and see what's happening. These are very basic examples of how they learned to do things.</p>
Interviewer	<p>And while they were learning their equipment, you mentioned the rifle for example, where you could carry more ammunition with a lighter weapon and lighter bullets. So as they were adapting their strategies, they were adapting their equipment to suit it as well.</p>
Leopold	<p>Oh yes, absolutely. The webbing that I had was very, very uncomfortable. Later on they got completely new webbing, they go new boots, they didn't use steel helmets in the bush anymore, but light bush hats, and so on. To make it easier for the troops in the bush. They also learned how to...if you're on a patrol you stay out three or four days or whatever...how to camouflage your presence. In the beginning they bashed about. SWAPO must have heard them 10 kilometres away. Seen their tracks and everything. They learned something very, very basic. If you...I don't know a civilised word for it...if you go and shit, you don't do it and leave it there, you dig a hole and you cover it up so that SWAPO won't smell it. After you've eaten the cans in which the food are, have to be buried and everything has to be brought back to its pristine state so to speak. The bush craft in other words. They learned it. And obviously some of the indigenous troops knew this already by instinct sort of.</p>
Interviewer	<p>And then they also learned the value of helicopters.</p>
Leopold	<p>Well helicopters played a very, very important role. For instance, the basic SADF presence was an aggressive constant patrolling. Now, a patrol would then, because of the fact that...Owambo was a limited geographical area. SWAPO made the mistake of never seriously trying to broaden the war, because it's much easier controlling a limited area. In terms of counter insurgency. So</p>

	<p>swamp the area with constant patrols. Not go in once a week and leave the rest of the week to SWAPO, to influence or terrorise or whatever, the local population. Swamp that place constantly. Sooner or later a patrol will stumble across a SWAPO band. Now, they will simply engage them and call in the choppers. Or in other cases armoured personnel carriers, the Casspirs and so on. Then the parabats or Koevoet or whatever would come and they would take over the chase, and they would really chase SWAPO. And that SWAPO band would either be wiped out or captured or chased into Angola where there would be no respite for them. They would be chased even there and mostly...I've seen the figures and I think I've used them in that article...during the eighties, there was a period of about six days on average, before the SADF became aware of a SWAPO band. And 90% plus of the SWAPO bands were either decimated or wiped out. And I must say, this is a tribute to the bravery of the SWAPO people, they knew that they had very little chance and yet they kept on coming. But during the eighties SWAPO was chased, they had no quarter, and the SADF by that time really got into its stride.</p>
Interviewer	They'd also learned from the Rhodesian experience.
Leopold	<p>They learned from the Rhodesian experience. For instance there was an officer, he's a well known guy now with the Institute of Security Studies, Jakkie Cilliers. He was a commandant or lieutenant colonel at the time. He wrote his MA about the Rhodesian war. There's an excellent study in there. And he came to basically the conclusion that the Rhodesians concentrated too much on the military aspect. They concentrated on killing the other guy. And they didn't see that thereby they left the so-called reserves open to infiltration. That not the enemy force is the point of gravity, which is a Clausewitzian term, of the war, but the local population's hearts and minds. And the Rhodesians never made any attempt to engage that. And this is the basic reason why they lost the war. And the South African Defence Force did learn from that very much.</p>
Interviewer	Hence the doctors and school teachers and various other forms of trying to convince people that you're actually not really against them.
Leopold	Yes, exactly.
Interviewer	<p>So we're sitting with this experience and we're fighting a counter insurgency war that the SADF have learned from experience in Rhodesia, they've done their homework, they now ratcheting up a couple of levels of experience. And in between you've got Casinga which was an airborne raid, you've got Operation Protea which was a mechanized operation, you've got Modular which was air strikes, artillery and armour. So you're suddenly having to say, well we're fighting the insurgency war here, but down the road we're actually fighting a conventional war. That must have taken a little bit of mental gymnastics on behalf of the</p>

	commanders?
Leopold	I don't think so. Because the South Africa Defence, or rather the army, was very much organised in counter insurgency separate from conventional. You had counter insurgency units and you had conventional units. And these were trained separately and with different doctrines and everything. So I don't think that came into play very much. The conventional types were sent into Angola and the counter insurgency types were used in Namibia.
Interviewer	And Three Two Battalion for example, were largely used in conventional warfare, although they must have done some pseudo operations and things like that.
Leopold	Well actually, Three Two changed its character about '84, '85. It started off in '76, '77, as a clandestine counter guerrilla force in Angola, as Jan Breytenbach put it in his book, "we wanted to out guerrilla the guerrillas". So they were sent...this was before there was ever any acknowledgement of the South African continued presence after Savannah in Angola. So they went in and they used classic guerrilla tactics against the guerrillas. And this kept on as a sort of counter anti guerrilla sort of thing in Angola, not so much in Namibia itself, but especially in Angola. And then in '84 there was this accord of Lusaka...well there was a truce...and even before that the last operation, Askari, you got the fact that SWAPO was hiding behind the wings of FAPLA. And for the first time in order to get to SWAPO they had to engage FAPLA. So that was the reason why 32 Battalion was then withdrawn, retrained and as a conventional force...as a mechanized...well, it was more of a brigade force actually than a battalion, because it had 7, 8, 9 companies. And with armour and with its own ( <i>inaudible</i> ) artillery and so on. It was a unit more or less like Six One Mechanised Battalion group. And during Modular it was used extensively in this role.
Interviewer	A South African company those days comprised of...
Leopold	Three platoons. It's about 100 people.
Interviewer	100
Leopold	Three platoons plus a headquarter. Under the command normally of a major, but it's not always a major it can be a captain. Even in an acting capacity, a lieutenant or something.
Interviewer	When you looked at the strategy of Modular and looked at the strategy of the SADF, I know there are lot of disputes about what happened during those battles from the point of view of who won and I know it's not always possible to answer the question who won? The South Africans primary role, my understanding is...or their primary goal, was to stop FAPLA crossing through into south eastern Angola and capturing Mavinga where they could use the airbase and have taken on Unita's headquarters.
Leopold	That's right.

Interviewer	In your studies, South Africa was using armour in thick Kalahari type sand, they were using artillery which they seemed to command the battlefield with. Were their tactics the right tactics?
Leopold	The tactics, yes. The operational carry out, probably not. You have a mental view of the map?
Interviewer	I do.
Leopold	<p>FAPLA came down, cross the river, the Cuito River, in the vicinity of Cuito Cuanavale, came down and the idea as you say was to take Mavinga first and then with the airstrip there they could then go on to Jamba, which was Unita's headquarters. Now, the South Africans had two choices. They could meet the Angolans head on, which they did, and at the Lomba River this resulted in a huge South African tactical victory. And that tactical victory was mainly because the fact that the South Africans were much better equipped and much better led and much better trained. The Angolans were no match for them. But then they started driving the Angolans back, and as they did that their own lines of communication lengthened and that of the Angolans shortened. And because of this they had to pause to regroup and that gave the Angolans a chance to regroup as well, and to establish in the direction of Tumpo just across the river from Cuito Cuanavale, some very, very well prepared and very strong defences. And then they went on three brutal frontal attacks with armour and everything in this dense bush, very well suited for defence and they were repulsed, three times. And this gave Castro the opening to claim this huge victory. Now the other choice was to go...this of course west of the Cuito River which they went up...the other one was...and this is one of the fundamental principles of warfare...there's nothing honourable in warfare. When we were children you would draw a line in the sand and say, step over that and I'll <i>moer</i> you! And the other guy would step over and you would...ok. To translate that into this, you would say, hey, just look over there, and the when he looks there, you kick him in the balls. There's nothing...the sort of schoolboy honour has nothing to do with modern warfare. In other words, what I'm saying is, don't take the enemy on where he's strong. Don't take him on, on his terms. Don't take him on when he expects it. take him on where he's weak, where he doesn't expect it, everything where he's at a disadvantage. Now, when the enemy's main force is coming down west of the Cuito, go in east. Cut him off at a vicinity of Cuito Cuanavale, there's no need to go on to Menongue and all those other places. Cut off their lines of communication and in the meantime you can leave Unita here with your airforce and so on to hammer them here. And FAPLA was never a superbly organised force. That offensive would have withered away. So with minimal casualties on our side. Now this was actually recommended by the officers on the ground, but I asked Geldenhuys about it the last week, why did you go the other way? He said, he doesn't know. He didn't make that decision. Even as Chief of the Defence Force, he didn't</p>



	<p>make the decision. Presumably the politicians made the decision and presumably for political reasons. They wanted actually, in the beginning, to have this whole operation kept clandestine. Which was very, very naïve. The South Africans sent in a whole brigade. You can't send in a brigade and expect that it's going to remain secret. This is one thing and the other thing I think is that they wanted Unita not to lose out. Probably Unita demanded visible help from that point of view. So in operational terms we used the wrong approach. But you asked about the tactics as well. I think our tactics were superb. This is on the level of the Lieutenant and the Captain and the Major, our troops were superbly trained, they were very well equipped and led by that time, and we ran rings around the enemy. With the exception of the Tumpo attacks. That was very, very stupid. You don't take on a well prepared enemy which is waiting for you.</p>
Interviewer	<p>You say that FAPLA were fairly disorganised and poorly equipped. What about the Cubans who were involved in the battles?</p>
Leopold	<p>Ok, the Cubans were another question. There were very few Cubans among the FAPLA. Only when Tumpo was there, there were some Cubans put in there to stiffen them. But Castro... I don't like the guy, I abhor his politics, but he was a very, very good strategist. What he did was exactly what we should have done. Not take on the enemy head on, but take them, kick them in the balls when they were not looking. That march down, by the 50<sup>th</sup> Division, down to the Namibian border, in the west, sent a flurry through the South African ranks up to Pretoria. Because now he put the South Africans on the horns of a dilemma. He could do a lot of things. He could stay there and be a force in being, in other words, a threat, a permanent threat, or he could come through on the northern side of the border and cut off the South Africans which were engaged at Tumpo. Or he could cross the border into Namibia. And we didn't know what he would do. Which was why a whole South African Citizen Force Brigade was called up in very rapid tempo and ready to be sent over there to keep them in check. I wouldn't say that we'd done it but we were very concerned about it. Of course there was one fight when the Cubans came down there at the Caleuque Dam. There was one fight in which we gave the Cubans hell. Techipa... what is the name? Something like that. But operationally really, Castro handled this masterfully. I must take off my hat to Castro there.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Did that operation you're talking about where they fought with the Cubans, was that fighting done by 61 Mechanised Brigade?</p>
Leopold	<p>Yes, Six One Mech did that. Quite right. I think there were elements of Three Two Battalion as well.</p>
Interviewer	<p>There's been much spoken about the air war. The South African Mirages were operating at the top end of their range. They didn't have much flying time over the combat zone.</p>

Leopold	That's right. About five minutes.
Interviewer	So that must have...I think...the people I've spoken to say, the quality of the South African pilots was top notch, and even though the aircraft were aging they could have accounted for themselves very well against the MiG23 if they'd had time. Do you agree with that?
Leopold	I agree with that, but I would like to add some things to that. First of all, let's make...divide...make a difference between the air war itself and the air to ground war. The air to air war there was very little of it. I think there were three encounters between MiGs and South Africans. They all ended inconclusively with the exception of one when the Angolans they had head on missiles, which we didn't have. We had to acquire the ...
Interviewer	Because they were still heat seeking.
Leopold	That's right. And one of them exploded next to a Mirage piloted by Captain Arthur Piercy. His hydraulics were all gone but he got his aircraft back safely. He landed and the net that was supposed to come up to catch the aircraft didn't come up and he ploughed into the field, his ejector seat was activated and he broke his back, and he's been paralysed for the rest of his life. So they probably, because of better weaponry, got the best of us, but only marginally. Now the air to ground war, the Angolans and the Cubans were very afraid of the Stinger missiles of Unita. So they kept at 20,000 feet, where you can't bomb accurately at all. You want to bomb accurately you have to get down on the deck. So they were never really a threat to us. Besides we moved about mainly during the night. For which we were very well equipped and trained. We had night vision equipment and everything, the training emphasised that very much. And they never really limited our mobility. We could move about \, with some difficulty, as we wished. As far as our own attacks on them are concerned we had Recces all around them. So we knew exactly, there's a convoy coming, there's this happening, whatever. And this is a worthwhile target, that's probably not. They would get on their radios, which was a radio of a certain type, the so-called...the frequency Hopper. So we couldn't be intercepted. Tell them, at this location, a re-supply convoy is coming up. Now the Mirages would scramble. Now the enemy of course they had very, very good advanced surface to air missiles. So we never over flew the target, because that would have been suicide. What we did we perfected a method, the Toss bombing method. You come in right down on the deck. The enemy is there, obviously you have to be aligned exactly with them. At a certain point you pull off sharply. And obviously you have to train for this, you have to exercise time and time again. And then you release your bombs, <i>jy maak gat skoon</i> . You go away. And the bombs would go through there and land on the target. It's very difficult. But our chaps perfected this method, and I spoke last week to some of the officers who were on the radio intercept service, and every

	time, time and again, they were completely demoralised and they shouted a lot and cried a lot and told of lots of casualties. So we hammered them from there.
Interviewer	What sort of range would they...when they come in flat just above the deck and then when they pull up and release the bombs, from what sort of range would they then toss that bomb?
Leopold	Well, 5, 6, 7 kilometres.
Interviewer	Has anybody else ever used that technique? Any other airforces that you're aware of?
Leopold	The Brits started it during the Falklands War.
Interviewer	Just getting back to the 50 <sup>th</sup> Division of Cubans coming down the western side, they did that to put the South Africans under pressure, make them worry about specifically what they were doing, certainly worry about getting home. Given that they then had to withdraw with this threat, did they achieve some of their objectives at Modular?
Leopold	Oh yes. They made the South Africans more amenable to withdraw. I mean, if the South Africans would be inclined to play hardball, and say, no, we're not going to withdraw, there was always this threat of the Cubans coming into Namibia. And this obviously would escalate the whole war to an extent that it's not worth it anymore.
Interviewer	Would it have then become a full scale conventional war?
Leopold	Exactly. And that we didn't want. And the Russians warned us. The Russians at the UN in New York, they discreetly told us, listen if you want to have a full scale conventional war, we're ready for it, we'll go for it. Obviously our guys said, well, bring it on. <i>Laughs</i> But it's this thing of bluff and counter bluff. But somewhere behind your brain this must play a role, a psychological role.
Interviewer	Ultimately if we look at...I'll say Modular, but I know that there was a whole series of...
Leopold	Yes, Hooper and Packer.
Interviewer	Exactly. But essentially Modular succeeded in stopping FAPLA taking Mavinga.
Leopold	Yes.
Interviewer	Yet the Cubans played another card which was the threat on the western flank.
Leopold	Yes, exactly. My analysis of if you ask who won, we got what we wanted. Let me put it this way, our objective changed halfway through. PW Botha went up to Angola...this was after the victory at the Lomba River...there already we had achieved our objectives. We stopped the Angolans, Unita was saved to fight another day. And then PW Botha said, ok, go on and hit the

	Angolans so that they will not be able to launch another operation until the end of '88. So this was an extension of the original goal. We didn't achieve that. We achieved the first objective but not the second one. And then the Cubans came and they fucked everything up. <i>Laughs</i> So in the end, I'd call it a draw.
Interviewer	So both sides achieved something out of it, but neither side could walk away saying we're the champions.
Leopold	Yes.
	END OF SIDE A ( <i>counter at 514</i> )
	SIDE B
Interviewer	And Modular was essentially the last major operation of the Angolan South Africa war.
Leopold	Well as you know, it convinced both Cuba and South Africa to draw away. They stood on the edge of the precipice and they looked down at it, they both didn't like what they saw. They played "chicken" with each other, this is part of warfare. This thing of bluff and counter bluff and so on. But they both edged back. It's like the Cuban missile crisis of '62. The US and the USSR both edged back, they didn't like what they saw down there. The Cubans decided ok, let's get out of Africa because it's becoming too costly. And the Russians were putting pressure on them, because the Russians were subsidizing the whole Cuban economy. The South African economy was in a bad patch during that time. I think this is a very important factor that has to be factored in. And of course the whole question of Namibia wasn't that vital to the whites in South Africa. It's another country. Ok, we don't like giving it up but it's not like giving up the Transvaal or the Free State, something like that.
Interviewer	It's interesting you raised that point because I was going to ask you later on, while we've got this going on there's the counter insurgency war and there're intermittent conventional operations, there were also further demands on the SADF back home. The townships were drawing on their manpower quite considerably.
Leopold	Yes, right.
Interviewer	How much do you think that influenced some of their decisions?
Leopold	Oh I think it did. It did. I think they were able to do it but...I get the impression that the township duty was much more unpopular amongst the white conscripts than the border duty.
Interviewer	Now why do you think that was? Because the border duty was a...
Leopold	Well at least there you have a definable enemy. And you're fighting against outside forces and so on. Here you're fighting your own people...well, own people in a certain sense that they're citizens of your own country. It's almost a civil war. And it's here not very far from your own home.

Interviewer	Exactly, if you're based in Gugulethu for example, you can see Table Mountain and you know that your friends are watching rugby at Newlands on Saturday afternoon within sight of the same mountain, yet you're pointing a rifle at...
Leopold	Absolutely.
Interviewer	And that, you point out that the economy was in serious trouble at that stage. Do the military guys you've spoken to believe that the politicians gave them enough to win these battles, like at Modular, or during some of the other operations?
Leopold	Well, I think...it's difficult to say. I think there's not so much problems with the eighties. What I do see is a lot of grumbling about the nineties. You know for instance the dissolution of Three Two Battalion. They didn't like that at all. They saw that as treason.
Interviewer	I see that in Breytenbach's book, he feels it was treason, he feels they were completely betrayed, and he makes a point for 'his' men, and I use 'his' in inverted commas, who were dumped at Pomfret. Nobody cared about them. The previous government had already washed its hands of the unit and the new government had no interest in looking after them.
Leopold	And what I also see is that quite a lot of the people never got any post traumatic counselling.
Interviewer	Yes. How big an issue do you think that is?
Leopold	I think it's difficult for people to talk about it. Because always when I go to the physio, I tell the girl I'm a typical Afrikaner male, I'm tough, I can take it and therefore I'm <i>kleinseerig</i> . I don't like pain. So I make a joke about it. But mainly you're tough, you can take it, you don't talk about it, so it's a difficult issue. But it shines through, it comes through that...when you read and hear people talking about their friends. There's one example for instance that I can remember very vividly reading about. A Ratel was riddled with 23mm fire during Modular, and the occupants...I don't remember how many of them there were...8 or 10 or something, were converted into mincemeat more or less. Now this guy walks past and he saw this Ratel standing there with holes in it and he thought well what's going on and he looked inside. And he saw one of his own friends, which was only the upper half. The lower half was completely gone. And then this...you can really see this is a tremendous shock, but life goes on, the war goes on and there's no time, and then after that you're back and nobody understands it. The guys who were your family and friends who stayed behind, they don't understand what you're talking about. If you want to talk about it they say you're crazy or whatever, and you know, well what do you do? You get drunk, you get aggressive, something like that.
Interviewer	Sure. I think your point is right. And it depends on that soldier was who walked past the Ratel but if he was a Citizen Force guy

	or a National Serviceman, he'd be expected in a month or two's time to come home, sit down with his wife and children, have dinner at the table and on Saturday go to the school play and behave like a normal person. And the military to my knowledge never had any program for guys who'd been involved.
Leopold	No.
Interviewer	So many of these guys today must be feeling really betrayed because they fought in a secret war, they saw some bad things, they were never given full credit for it by the government of the day, and the new government is not interested in their stories.
Leopold	Exactly. And what's more, the new government claims that the old government lost the war. Which is not strictly speaking true. In some ways perhaps politically they lost the war, but not militarily. Ok, in the end that's not very relevant but to these people it's relevant. Because they probably never lost a single fight which they were in. But the ANC government obviously is going to engage in what I would call the hijacking of history. Everybody does it, I'm not saying this in a way to demonize them or so, this is what politicians do all over the world. But this must come over, I think, on these people very negatively.
Interviewer	I'm seeing it in interviews I'm doing, most of the guys are in their forties or older, and I'm trying to take them back to those days, and a lot of the guys say, hell I had a great time or other guys, yes, I saw some bad things, but they're all looking at it back now 20 years later and many of them are saying, well what was it all for?
Leopold	Well you know, you have to step back obviously and look at the broader picture. I think there was something achieved in Namibia where SWAPO could not take over power by the barrel of a gun, and that eventually it happened through a democratic process, played a large role in ending the conflict here in South Africa. But I'm not sure whether they would realise that probably.
Interviewer	I suspect for individual soldiers that's very hard to grasp that bigger picture. Those were things that they couldn't have known at the time, is that by the time Modular was being fought the Soviet Union was about to disintegrate. And of course the Berlin Wall came down in '89 and then Mandela came out of prison in 1990 and the whole world changed. Thinking about the training given to the soldiers, National Servicemen, Citizen Force guys, when they were back as National Servicemen, initially in your paper you suggested that some of the leadership wasn't that great in the early years. By the time it got to Modular you say the leadership was actually first class. In what sense was the leadership lacking? Was it in strategy? Was it the type of person who...the junior officers?
Leopold	Obviously we spoke about it, the strategy was non-existent. Let me put it this way, I think very few people are able to stand back and see the bigger picture. Most people are operationally

	<p>minded. I mean, this is not only militarily, I see it in my own vicinity, in my own profession as well. Your average journalist would know and be very good at bringing up tomorrow's newspaper. But to position your newspaper strategically, what do we stand for, what are we trying to achieve, and those sort of things, they don't think about those things. So it's the same with military things as well. The average soldier would be trained: how do we cross this river? How do we kill the enemy on that hill? The airforce: how do I get my chopper from point A to point B and so on. But how do we fight this war in order to win? It's much more than just to be killing the enemy. So there were very few officers equipped to do that, and as I say, actually, in terms of counter insurgency, only two really, and that's Jannie Geldenhuys and Frasier. As far as the leadership on the ground is concerned, if I think back at my own training, I mean...the instructors were, I think, the wrong type. I think they simply fucked you around, swore a lot at you, they let you...the Afrikaans word, <i>ek sal jou laat afkak</i>. Senselessly. There's the water tower, are you already back? And you run up and you come back and he says, no, you ran around the wrong...and do it again. And he doesn't run...we had one instructor, Sergeant Bezuidenhout, who would run in front. He was a guy for whom we had quite a lot of respect, but most of them were these typical macho people who would go home and get drunk and beat their wives. I think later on it changed to some extent, but never quite. So I think especially your more intelligent...and I sound very arrogant, perhaps that I consider myself to be among the more intelligent trainees...the more intelligent trainees would find all of this senseless. Why are we doing this? What's the purpose? Nobody explains to you what the purpose is, what the sense of it all is. There may be some sense in breaking down your identity and giving you a new one as a soldier, because nobody's naturally inclined to go into danger, to kill other people, so you have to be desensitised and sensitised again in another way. But nobody explains this to you. So I think on a lower level a lot of these people were simply...I'm not saying everybody...but a lot of these people were simply...somebody who is senselessly cruel.</p>
Interviewer	They were bordering on sadistic at times.
Leopold	Yes, sadists.
Interviewer	In your experience and your knowledge of the SADF as an institution, was there much conflict between these people that you talk about, the corporal that greets the new conscript, the 18 year old ( <i>inaudible</i> ). Was there any discrimination on the grounds of language, English, Afrikaans?
Leopold	Yes, but not very much. Not in my time. There was this sort of <i>Soutpiel</i> , what the hell do you think you're doing? But not really, and I didn't see any of it in terms of...the <i>Soutpiele</i> will run to the water tower, the Boere can stay behind. No. As a matter of fact, some of the <i>Soutpiele</i> were made corporals themselves. The Defence Force at that time was very scrupulous in having one

	month English as an operational language and then next month have Afrikaans.
Interviewer	There's another side of the story that I'm interested in, but I haven't got very far into looking into it. It's the people who were left behind, the mothers, the sister, the daughters. There were organisations like the Southern Cross Fund where people would work together and send off parcels to the guys in the army and so on. Do you know any programs where the Defence Force said, well let's explain to these family members what Johnny is doing?
Leopold	I have very little knowledge of that beyond the fact that the Southern Cross existed. But no, not really.
Interviewer	It ties in to my understanding of you've got these young guys, you're going off to the war, and instead of the corporal just chasing up and down the hill they should have had it explained to them what they were doing. And once again, to your knowledge, was there any broader understanding given to the soldiers of what they were doing?
Leopold	None whatsoever. Well, just to say, you're going to fight Communists. But that's about it.
Interviewer	And then you get told stories about Russian ships floating on the coastline...
Leopold	Yes, these are bad guys, go and kill them. And although the SADF was officially very much against the whole question of body counts as a measurement of how you're doing, in practice people were very much encouraged, kill as many as you can. I mean, this is what war is about, isn't it? <i>laughs</i>
Interviewer	It's oppressing the enemy.
Leopold	Yes.
Interviewer	When they ended up going into the townships, as you pointed out, a lot of people thought, well that wasn't the right thing to do...are you aware of any conflict between the army line of command and the police line of command?
Leopold	Oh, very much, very much. There was constantly tension between the Defence Force and the police. Because the Defence Force at least, and in theory, and to a certain extent in practice, this thing about hearts and minds. The police, you know there's this joke. It illustrates something of the time. Old PW Botha wanted to go and swim in the Orange River but there was a crocodile there. You know the joke?
Interviewer	Oh yes, and they make him confess to the...
Leopold	This is exactly the theme. The police had this idea of 'these bloody kaffirs, we will fuck them up and win the war in that way'. The Defence Force at least had in theory and to some extent in practice, the hearts and minds thing. The whole idea of going into the townships, repair their roads, bring fresh water there and all



	those sort of things. The civilian red tape connected with the repair of roads was very long and so they said make the army do it. And the army would simply cut through the red tape and go in and do it. Of course, it didn't matter very much in the end because it remained the whites who did it, and like you see in Zimbabwe at the moment, you take abuse from your own people much easier and much longer than you do from strangers. And the whites obviously were perceived to be the strangers, the outsiders.
Interviewer	Thinking about the army and the police and the relationship, under PW Botha's national management system with the area committees, I think they were called mini management centres...
Leopold	That's right.
Interviewer	Who held sway? Could the police overrule the army or the army over rule...?
Leopold	No, the army would overrule the police.
Interviewer	Including on strategic decisions about specific areas?
Leopold	Yes. This caused very much resentment amongst the police.
Interviewer	Along the lines of what we've been talking about, are there any other major points you'd like to make with relation to the training of the SADF, the mindset of the SADF?
Leopold	Well I think there's one thing perhaps that we should mention, and that is that amongst the higher echelons of the SADF there was to a certain extent an understanding of what was trying to achieve, hearts and minds, these sort of things. The lower you went the less knowledge there was about it. I think the SADF never succeeded in letting that culture trickle down to the bottom. So you would always get the troops at the bottom still be inclined to kick about the blacks. Going into a village in Owambo and intimidating the people. Maybe even raping the women and so on. There's a lot of evidence of things like this happening. And I don't think the SADF was strict enough in clamping down, rooting out this sort of thing. But nevertheless at the top echelon there was a real commitment amongst themselves to do this although it didn't trickle down always to an adequate extent.
Interviewer	Would that have been purely an educational thing or do you think there was a breakdown in discipline in some instances?
Leopold	I think there was a breakdown in discipline, yes.
Interviewer	Which is unusual because...
Leopold	Well, you know, 'these are only a lot of kaffirs'.
Interviewer	Sure, and that's the mindset. You're not dealing with a person who's on the same level as you. How much of a role...thinking about a breakdown in discipline...how much of a role did religion play in the SADF in motivating its cause?

Leopold	I think it played quite an important role. Before every operation begins, the chaplain is there, he reads from the bible, he asks the people, are you ready to die? Have you given your hearts to Christ? And so on. The chaplains played an extensive role, and you see very much in front of an operation people becoming very religious all of a sudden. Praying and reading their bibles and so on, and afterwards of course, they go and get drunk <i>laughs</i> and do all sorts of bad things again.
Interviewer	And forget their religious books at home. Would that have been a sort of universal thing? Would, for example, Three Two have had a company chaplain?
Leopold	Oh yes they did. Although in that case it would be Roman Catholic of course because...
Interviewer	Most of them were Angolans.
Leopold	Yes.
Interviewer	Any other points you want to make?
Leopold	I think we've covered more or less everything.
	END OF INTERVIEW ( <i>counter at 231</i> )

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