

	SECOND INTERVIEW TAPE 5 14/04/08 SIDE A
Geldenhuis	I just want to come back to some of the characteristics of the Cold War that I mentioned, which are in my opinion very underrated, and if not underrated, people sometimes when they discuss the war, and matters around the war, they forget about the characteristics of the Cold War and the type of war it was and then they draw the wrong conclusions. The politics and the psychological warfare and the propaganda, including not only about the confidential and secret and top secret things, I'm talking about the normal things like the press, etc, propaganda ? through the press and mass media, the effect of that I think is still highly and especially the dirty tricks, highly underrated. Now I think I did tell you of a few things but I don't think I told you everything. Now I can't remember which of the things I told you and which I didn't.
Interviewer	Tell me what you'd like to tell me now and I'll tell you if the story is familiar or not.
Geldenhuis	That there is for example now in the terms that we used to call it, a psychological warfare project or a propaganda project or what we called it, communications operations project. I have no hesitation whatsoever to mention that it is in fact a project. But I think I did tell you about that, how I experienced all the signs that came up. But I don't think I mentioned them all. But it is first that our names were not going to be on the wall [at Freedom Park]. Then came the Cuito Cuanavale thing itself. But before that was the book about Castro. Now it comes to light. The other one was the Cuban deputation that was here in Cape Town, chatting with the parliamentarians. And then there was the parliamentary session. And so I can go on one after the other. but now let's go back to the beginning of this thing. Did I tell you about how my counterpart came to me towards the end of the war and how he...with that Sal Island, I think I told you that one.
Interviewer	Yes, you did and you...
Geldenhuis	But what I think that I forgot to tell you is this, I'm speaking under consideration but you'll find it in this book, so if I say now something that's not slightly as it is in there, that one is the true version. But we were, I think it was in New York...what is that island in New York there? In any case, we had the discussion there. Then at one stage the meeting split into two, military guys one side and politicians the other...diplomats the other side. And then the Cuban leader of the delegation at that time said to me...I can't remember if it was General Rosales del Toro or Mr [Carlos] Aldana [Escalante] or both, but they said to me "please stop the guns". <i>Laughs</i> Referring to the 155mm guns. But at that time we had already withdrawn the guns. I said, listen we have stopped. But they just wouldn't accept it! They said, they are still firing. There's probably a time gap between when the military complained to the politicians and asked the politicians please can't you do something about it. But it shows you what a problem

	<p>155mm guns were. But they said, please stop. I said, but they have stopped! They said, no you haven't. And this kept on. A deadlock. They said, please stop. So I went and had a discussion with my sidekick Brigadier Sonnekus. And I said to him, you know, if these guys don't believe us and if they insist that we do, we don't have to, but we have already done so. So to give them satisfactory reply we can say yes, we'll do it. Because we've already done it. We don't give anything. But then we can bargain about it. So now we can get something from that. So I went back and said, ok, we're prepared to move the guns back, but then you must come up with a counter movement. They said, what? I said you must move up to north of a certain line. Now, I think it is that that was not fully...that that discussion was not properly ended by the time we had to leave from New York, and that is why there was another meeting again at Sal Island. I'm now talking from the top of my head. Sal Island talk was purely a military thing. now after so many years, Castro came up in one of these things around the same time as the wall of names and the same time as he came up with the so called defeat at Cuito Cuanavale. One of the things that Castro or somebody on his behalf said is that, we were hit so hard that we pleaded with them to move up to north of a certain line. <i>laughs</i> I never even thought about that thing again until this thing came up but then I clicked. So, I don't think I told you this last time did I?</p>
Interviewer	No, not this one.
Geldenhuis	But did I tell you last time where he threatened me?
Interviewer	Yes.
Geldenhuis	And how the professor on his behalf twisted that thing to...
Interviewer	He referred to a document showing that you had called up all the Citizen Force and said that showed how weak you were and that you were terrified of the Cuban Force coming down the western side of Angola.
Geldenhuis	Now the funny thing is that other people who also wrote about that used that...the fact that we called up the Citizen Force people...used that as reason why we were not really very much worried about that southward push because otherwise we would have used other troops. And so according to them <i>laughs</i> because we called up Citizen Force to show that we were not really serious. But they were both wrong. My version was the correct one.
Interviewer	But this is interesting, these major battles, I know there were lots of battles in Angola, but the ones of '87, '88, the ones around the Lomba River, around the Tumpo River and then down at Techipa, this was all 20 years ago, yet these battles are still being contested verbally and philosophically.
Geldenhuis	Well it is contested because first of all because the Cubans came and say they'd beaten us. Otherwise they wouldn't have been all

	<p>this new interest in that thing at all. It is very unfortunate that people like Deon Ferreira, who was actually the kingpin, he was our key commander, had already died. But I'm looking for, he wrote an article in Paratus, and if you can help me to find that, but I probably can too. I was going to call his wife, I just haven't got so far. But he wrote his version in the Paratus. But I'll get hold of that.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Ok, at the SANDF archives they've got every edition of Paratus going back through the seventies.</p>
Geldenhuis	<p>I think I mentioned the year or the month.</p>
Interviewer	<p>You did I forget specifically which year you mentioned but I'm sure that it is there in the files. But in your thinking...</p>
Geldenhuis	<p>And the other one that's also dead is General Liebenberg.</p>
Interviewer	<p>But over the next few weeks I'm going to be speaking to a few people who were involved in various aspects of the fighting there, but in your mind as the commander, your objectives of those battles in '87, '88 around about Cuito Cuanavale, the intention was to stop the FAPLA and Cuban offensive against UNITA. That was the primary objective of those fights.</p>
Geldenhuis	<p>Absolutely. It was the only objective. It was the objective that kicked off that war, if I could call it that.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Correct. But had FAPLA and the Cubans not planned to launch an offensive against UNITA you wouldn't necessarily have entered into the fighting in that region?</p>
Geldenhuis	<p>I think we had had fights there before but I don't think we would have entered into that region again, because there was no threat, and it was actually terrain that used to be kept intact for us by UNITA. But I must say that it did happen, on second thoughts, about annually they decided on giving it a go. I think the one in '87, '88 was about the third or fourth one. But the others knew not one of them ever got beyond the Lomba River.</p>
Interviewer	<p>In 1985 was the first time that the G5s and G6s, the 155mm artillery was used. A large defeat was inflicted on the Cubans and the FAPLA forces then, was that not the case? Primarily by UNITA backed by their guns.</p>
Geldenhuis	<p>Yes, well even in the '87, '88 one, the first offensive came from the Lucusse region and that was also defeated by UNITA perhaps with support here and there.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Tell me a little bit about the battle at Lucusse, was that also FAPLA...and I don't know if the Cubans were involved...but trying to advance and push UNITA further south?</p>
Geldenhuis	<p>Yes. Well if you have a look at the map, there was a distinct two pronged offensive. The one part of the offensive was from Lucusse which is slightly north of the others, but also in the direction of Mavinga. The other one was more south but almost</p>

	<p>laterally west of Mavinga and the second one came from there. Now one thing that many people say, and I believe it too but I can't...I don't think anybody can prove that, is that the northern offensive from Lucusse, was not really meant to be a major battle. It was meant to distract the attention from the real thrust which was coming from the west. But I'm not so sure if that is true, it could be, but there's no proof of that. Because in previous years they also came with similar things, so...and there were a lot of argument and there still is I think today a lot of argument. Many people say that the Cubans were not very keen to go for that war, for Mavinga and Jamba. And you will recall, even with hindsight, that they were quite hesitant and slow to rise to the occasion in the beginning. It was mostly FAPLA. And that first offensive from Lucusse was mostly FAPLA supported...ok, when I say FAPLA and UNITA, FAPLA and UNITA didn't have tanks, didn't have aircraft, didn't have all those things, so every time that there's a tank or armoured vehicles, or aircraft, then that must come from the Russians and the Cubans. But apart from that the main force was infantry and that was FAPLA. I can recall that we sent...we knew about that, our intelligence didn't have...we knew about that actually quite some time before it happened. So we actually sent people to Savimbi to help them training for fighting that type of offensive, which is not the sort of normal run of the mill type of operations, and we did give them...we did have certain other weaponry that we made available to them but not tanks and so on. Aircraft yes, because they're flexible, you can use them anywhere depending on where the airfields are. But according to the Cubans it was a feeble attempt. Well one reason is because they lost, so they blamed FAPLA and they said FAPLA didn't perform well. But many have the information that they were not keen at that stage yet to participate in that they didn't have much, if any, infantry on the ground themselves. They also just supported FAPLA. And they give many reasons for that. One reason is that there's a sum of money mentioned that was still due to the Cubans for their military assistance to the Angolans which they haven't received yet. So they were....well you haven't paid us so don't expect too much of us. That was the attitude. That is...many people believe that and it may well be true. The other one was that it was not so much that the Cubans wanted that operation to take place...the whole operation at all. It was more the Russians. And there are indications that there may be some truth in that. But I think I did tell you last time about the bigger picture as far as the Russians were concerned. The Russians were mainly responsible for putting up the radar, the screen, the radar belt across southern Africa. Did I tell you about that?</p>
Interviewer	You didn't go into any detail, I'd like to talk about that.
Geldenhuys	Well I don't know about the detail but I have definite information from airforce sources and international airforce sources to the effect that...that they wanted to close the gap in that belt. What is not so secret is, it was known that the Russians had a belt across

	<p>southern Africa except for that one gap, that was known. What I haven't got proof of is that they wanted to close that gap. But that is what some people say, they wanted to close that gap, because Mavinga is exactly in that gap. So they wanted to close that gap. For further operations against South Africa, it was necessary to close that gap. And so that is why the Russians...or one of the reasons given...why the Russians pushed the Cubans to go on for that campaign against Jumba.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Ok, so they could theoretically create a line of radar defence right across southern Angola.</p>
Geldenhuis	<p>Yes, it was already there except right across southern Africa. Except that gap.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Ok so that was the only gap in the whole region?</p>
Geldenhuis	<p>Yes. I can give you somebody who you can talk to about that...but just switch off here. until a short time ago, if it still exists, the airforce or the airforce attachés that we had there, once a year, I think, came together with the American airforce attachés and then they would have a dinner and whatnot. So they were very close relations, and you know, those times the Americans they think globally and we were then sort of partners in the war against the Soviet Union set up. So I think it's probably from the Americans that they got more information about the Soviet intentions radar wise with that belt around the southern part of Africa. And Dick Lord but people also probably told him, said listen don't tell this to all and sundry. But I don't think it is...I think Dick Lord is writing it in his book. And we're going to do it now, but he doesn't spell it out so specifically as I did now that it was to close that gap that the Russians pushed the Cubans to do it. I discuss with you that the Russians had serious problems back home, and that Jumba was going to be their last adventure. And it was. It turned out to be the last adventure of the Cold War before the Berlin Wall crash. The Cubans were on their knees, they were fighting in so many countries and there was such a long period, they just couldn't go on any longer. And without Soviet support and without finances, and in some cases not being paid like that by Angola then, they had reached the end of their tether. But now we must also have the understanding for the ANC's position. The ANC hasn't got a military history. And they can't keep on having celebrations and anniversaries and all sorts of commemoration services for their heroes without coming up with heroic deeds.</p>
Interviewer	<p>And they need a battle to focus on.</p>
Geldenhuis	<p>They need a military history. I can show you off the internet, and you can go and try it yourself, you type in just simply the words Cuito Cuanavale, 2 separate words, on the normal search engine, and then you get a trail of items, then you get number 15. And there you find their military history. Which is absolutely ridiculous. I think I told you this that they talk about the battle of</p>

	Silverton. Did I tell you that last time?
Interviewer	You didn't mention that, but I'm aware of...
Geldenhuis	<p>Silverton and the like. Creating battles all over the show. Non existing battles. Sooner or later that's going to boomerang on them. But I think they feel a bit...they feel the problem that SWAPO has quite a military history. You know SWAPO incidentally had certain mechanized units. I saw them once in the field in battle, and when [Marathi] Ahtisaari came back down and said, yes, we lie, I said to him, can I give you proof? Then he went quiet after I've given him proof. But everyone knows, it's only Ahtisaari that doesn't know apparently, or thought not to know. But they had a mechanised unit or two. And they fought. And then when the going was tough they stuck to their guns and if there was no way out they fought well. And although Cassinga wasn't as they said...the Battle of Cassinga, that there were only women and children, that's nonsense. But their women mostly manned the anti aircraft gun, and they fought well. MK of the ANC has nothing to show in the line of battle. Now I don't blame them for that. I'm not talking against them, I'm saying that they feel that there's something missing in the way people see them. And they want to create non existing battles. And the ANC unlike SWAPO was not popular in Angola. And you don't need to have any military knowledge to know that. Angola is one of the few countries in the world where our president hasn't visited Angola, and the Angolan president has visited here. As I have it, but I can't prove that now, but I believe it's the truth. Even Mr Mbeki was at one stage in detention, held for a while.</p>
Interviewer	In the camps in Angola?
Geldenhuis	<p>Somewhere in Angola. I won't say in the camps held by...you see, some of the ANC people who were held in those camps, were held in the camps by ANCs. What I'm talking about people in detention, the Angolan authorities that I believe Mbeki (<i>inaudible</i>). And I've said this publicly but I see it in this way the rumours won't lie down that he was held, and nobody's come back to me and said listen you're wrong. But that's the information that I had. and one of the reasons why they weren't too fond of each other was because the Angolans insisted that they participated in the fighting. And they were very reluctant to do so. So their record in Angola...they have no record at all...they did learn there is more bad than good, and they can't find a political history for themselves there. So many things that they do and say, if you see it against that background you can understand it. If you don't see it against that background you wouldn't understand it.</p>
Interviewer	And to your understanding that if any MK guys were involved in fighting in Angola, that would have ended up being against UNITA?
Geldenhuis	Or perhaps more so, FAPLA, no, no, ..rather the FNLA...

Interviewer	From Holden Roberto.
Geldenhuis	Yes. FNLA
Interviewer	And in your experience, the SADF never encountered MK fighters head on anywhere in Angola?
Geldenhuis	No....No. I've heard or read, here and there, of individuals of MK that might have been in observing positions, but not in battle. I don't know if I should say this here, and then perhaps a bit about the scars.
Interviewer	Yes, absolutely.
Geldenhuis	. I think I should like to start off by perhaps saying something that I've said before, but it's so important and it is a good start for the next session we're going to have and that is, people ask the wrong questions. If people should ask me why did we win this war? And I'm now not only talking about the Lomba and Techipa, I'm talking about the ( <i>inaudible</i> ) war started 1966, with Sinalongwe and Ongulumbashe and the war that ended in 1988, '89. But using that last phase to make a certain comparison, we didn't win because we had more troops, because we didn't. We always fought an overwhelming force against us such as at the Lomba. We never had more at any given point in time, more than 3000 troops, where they had 30 000 and more. They had more tanks than us, they had more missiles than us, they had more aircraft than us. So why did we win that war? And I think it's a big problem for researchers and people who study, who write books, and articles about this war, they don't ask this question, because if they ask this question, then they will discover truths that they haven't thought of before. And that is because of our human material. Because of our troops. There can be no other reason why...because we were outnumbered in all of the spheres. It's only in the fibre, the ability, the fighting ability, the go in a person, the human element troops that were better.
Interviewer	And the training.
Geldenhuis	Ok, what made them better? Training is one. But I now want to qualify the word troops, because we were in fact becoming, to think of it, you could almost say, a cosmopolitan lot. It wasn't only Boere and Afrikaners, it was not only South Africans. We also had Three Two Battalion which were Portuguese, black Portuguese. A lot of them Kwanyamas. Which is a Ovambo tribe. They were in end about two battalions strong, if not more. A lot of them were Bushmen they were also more than one battalion strong. It was one battalion but in numbers they were more than that. And they were not underrated and I think their contribution was also much under-reported. Then there were the rest of the South West Africa Territory Force. Now the South West Africa Territory Force really only got off the ground in a modern way around about 1978, '79. And they included commanders as we have them, mostly Afrikaans speaking, some completely German speaking, like 112 Squadron their language was German. And I

	<p>told you that they flew more hours in one year than all the other South African 11 squadrons together. Twice more. Then there were the other Namibians, Citizen Force Regiments. Then there were South African, in the beginning, let's say, '76, '77, after Operation Savannah, were National Servicemen as such and Citizen Force Regiments. And the South West Africa Territory Force. Some of those Citizen Force Regiments were only English speaking, others Afrikaans, but then we got that Citizen South West Africa Territory Force going in such a quick time that in the eighties we didn't use Citizen Force Regiments from the Republic any more. It was only the National Servicemen that we had there, which fitted in to certain structures, and the South West Africa Territory Force. Apart from airforce and certain other special units like specialised medical units etc. So if you have a look at all these things together we really had a very cosmopolitan side. But granted the South African element was the nucleus, the heart, the multiplying factor within that force, but what I was going to say about the South West Africa Territory Force we could then do away with Citizen Force units, and that is why they stayed mostly at home. Except for individuals, like I think a guy who was eventually the battalion commander of Three Two Battalion, was from Rustenburg Commando, but many such individuals they served there for a certain period then they decided to stay there. So this is not an Afrikaner affair, it is not only a South African affair, it's not only a white affair, I think all the logistics in the Kavanga and the Caprivi, which were important regions in that war were serviced logistically by the Coloured Corps maintenance unit. Maintenance unit, logistics. I know when I joined, people used to call the administrative people, socks and jams, as if it's a second class thing, but the ablution was always there, the water was always there, the food was always there, everything was always there, the transport was there, even post...to give you an idea of how good they were, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Eastern Caprivi, where three or four countries meet, they were I think one South African border, or one normal post office, the one at Grootfontein. Between Grootfontein and Kazungulu, right at the end where this coloured unit was, there was no other post office. And we built eventually a tar road there, the Defence Force. But it is hundreds and hundreds of kilometres in absolute wild African country, and the water, the petrol, the ammunition, everything was always there. And most of it was done by the Cape Corps Maintenance Unit. So it was a conglomeration. So when I say, it's because our troops were better, yes the training played a lot, but South Africans just have it, and the South Westers just have it, and with good training and with good weapons, even if they're not always the best, they could do more with it than anybody else.</p>
Interviewer	<p>And you feel now that the way history is being viewed from this perspective of 2008, you feel that many of these men and women in some cases are being given a raw deal?</p>
Geldenhuis	<p>That's exactly what I'm coming to and that is why I got the idea to</p>



	<p>phone Robert an hour ago, because they feel they're left in the lurch. But now again, look at the bigger picture. You know why I always look at the bigger...remember I was not only in command in Namibia. I was also Chief of the Army, I was also Chief of the Defence Force, and you would expect of me to have the bigger picture. Now the bigger picture is this, that the Permanent Force can look after themselves, they are career people, they're professional people and they work together for 20, 30, 40 years and they have their old boy's organisations. The Citizen Force to an extent also have people who have long ties over the years with that particular regiment. That's why you still have Royal Natal Carabineers and the Dukes, etc, etc. But many of them didn't fit into such old systems so they feel a bit out in the cold. But more than that, you must, when we discuss this subject, must bear in mind always that the government of that time, and which would normally have, under normal situations have looked after the soldiers who fought when they were in power has disintegrated, it doesn't exist anymore. The government is dead. The National Party of the time would possibly have had some sympathy with the people who fought the war during the time that they were in power. The National Party has disbanded and very few are still active in politics, 99,9% are in the ANC benches. And the National Servicemen are about now from the ages of about 35-55. Their military leaders of the time are old like me or dead. Like Deon Ferreira, like Kat Liebenberg, etc. And with no power and forgetful like me. So they feel discards of the war. They are the people who I said, it's because of them, not because of anything else, not because of 155s, but because of them that we beat an overwhelming mass of troops and war machines against us, because of them! And what do they tell them? Your names don't go on the wall. And you have lost at Cuito Cuanavale where there wasn't even a battle.</p>
<p>Interviewer</p>	<p>You've been speaking in terms of the Cold War and the dirty tricks of the Cold War by all sides in the Cold War and so on, is this in a way from, for example, the ANC perspective, is it perhaps just another aspect of a Cold War? Is it perhaps from the ANC's point of view not understandable?</p>
<p>Geldenhuis</p>	<p>Well I said, you must understand the ANC, but that doesn't mean that they are right. Because they feel that PLAN, People's Liberation Army, are a proud people, because they feel that they have fought a war. They know that FAPLA and UNITA and the Angolans say the same. They have fought the war. But they haven't! Perhaps they don't see it in the words that I express, that they haven't got the military history, but somehow or another they feel that psychologically there is not a group feeling of pride. So if they haven't got anything to boast about they would like to denigrate what we did. But that's not the whole reason why they come up with the wall of names tricks. That's not the main reason why they come up with the victories that they've scored. Once again, you must look at the global picture and you must look at the people who made and is still making history. Castro is going</p>

	<p>to die and he knows it. And he wanted to call his troops back to Cuba as if they were victorious. He had to explain what were all his efforts and the fighting in all the other countries in aid of, what did he produce. So he had to find something...now he made up this thing about Cuito Cuanavale to save his own name in the first place. In the second place, that of the Cuban defence force. And thirdly for Cuba. But that is what he organised. He got the Cuban deputation to come to Cape Town, talk to the people here. He got the people to write his books for him and so on. So Mbeki and Castro are bosom friends, and the ANC simply cannot deny, or cannot refuse to participate in Castro's psychological warfare plan. Even if they wanted to, they cannot. You can see that some of them haven't got the faintest idea what they're talking about. I would like to show you one thing that is really absolutely laughable.</p>
	<p>END OF SIDE A (<i>counter at 535</i>)</p>
	<p>SIDE B (<i>counter at 10</i>)</p>
Geldenhuis	<p>...I was invited to talk about Lees Fees in Stellenbosch. Now I would like to read to you how I started my...or how I intended to start my little talk. Quote: That war in Angola, this is something people often forget, was fought by Cuban and Angolan soldiers against an army and a government that had eight atom bombs provided by the United States! Unquote. The person who says this is Fidel Castro. He refers to the years 1975, '76, and he is in conversation with Alan Lane, the author of the book, 'Fidel Castro, My Life'. Lane continues with the interview. Quote: the South Africans had atomic bombs supplied by the United States? I didn't know that! Castro: Not many people do. But it's the truth. And then I say: Dames en here, welkom tot die Koue Oorlog ? Dit was die Kubane daar is ook nog ander. Now I selected this because I thought it's the biggest joke that I've ever heard in my life. Now to give you an idea and to answer your question about the South African government's reaction to Castro, do you know that when they had that discussion in parliament about Cuito Cuanavale, that one of the ANC members of parliament used this thing which I used to get the people to laugh because it's so ridiculous, he used the same thing about the eight atom bombs that South Africa had, as if it was the true thing, as if it was serious. Can you see how far they are distanced away from realities? I thought I was making a joke. He used it seriously in the South African parliament. It's in that book, Hansard. You see, now we think that their lies are so transparent that you don't have to worry about it. There he believes it! He sits in parliament. Or if he doesn't believe it, he pretends to believe it because it suits his politics. Now that is very typical of the ANC's treatment of the war that we fought.</p>
Interviewer	<p>So getting back to the soldiers who fought on the side of the SADF, whether it was Three Two or just a National Servicemen doing his two years, that's almost...in your mind that generation</p>

	is almost being victimised for their service that they did.
Geldenhuys	Yes, well you see the point that I'm trying to make is that it is probably one of the biggest events in South Africa's military history ever, that these guys against all odds beat the Soviet Union which then collapsed a few months later...remember this happened '88. '89 the Berlin Wall crashed. That's what they did! And what do they get for it? They don't want their names on the wall here and they are being told that they've lost the war.
Interviewer	The ANC are arguing, as you know, the ANC say they were fighting for the wrong side. They weren't fighting for liberation. And that's their justification for not putting the names on the wall.
Geldenhuys	No, but you see that is also only believed and perceived by people who have not got brains, in this sense. They don't deny that the Soviet Union supported the MPLA. They don't deny that the Cubans supported the MPLA. But when Namibia became independent, it wasn't a little East Germany, it wasn't a little Russia, it wasn't a little Cuba. It was a western democratic country very much like South Africa. So who won the war? Do you think that the Soviet Union would have created a democratic country in Namibia? Do you think Cuba would have created a democratic country in Cuba? Can you see what is the outcome of what we did and what they did? The outcome is a democratic western style country, which is totally opposite to what would have happened if SWAPO had won the war, or if the Angolans had won the war, or if the Russians had won the war. Isn't that a solid argument? You can't even argue against it because it's fact.
Interviewer	Well we've been through the politicians and you point out it's part of a...well you feel that it's part of a broader re-creation of history... <i>tape turned off (counter at 57)</i>
	TAPE 6 SIDE A
	<b>Lieutenant Robert de Vries SA Infantry 14/06/08</b>
Interviewer	Robert tell me a bit about where you grew up, your family...
De Vries	First of all Mike, I just want to thank you for the opportunity, I really appreciate it. I was born in Bloemfontein. Two brothers. I've completed my school in Bloemfontein. After my matric year I went to Stellenbosch where I studied civil engineering.
Interviewer	And then you completed your degree and then you got your call up as a National Serviceman?
De Vries	Yes, that's correct.
Interviewer	What unit were you called up to?
De Vries	I served my National Service during the period 1982-1983. 1982 I was based in Oudtshoorn where I was trained to become a soldier in the infantry unit of the South African Defence Force. My

	second year, 1983, I was seconded to One South African Coloured Corps Battalion. And then we went to the operational area. First we were based at a couple of locations in South West Africa, namely Ruacana, Nampara, then for the last six months we were based in Angola, mainly Ondjiva. We played a supportive role to Three Two Battalion.
Interviewer	Your training at Oudtshoorn, you went through the basics like all soldiers and then you were trained as a junior leader I presume?
De Vries	Yes.
Interviewer	How tough was that training?
De Vries	It was very tough. But according to me it must have been one of the best training of an unconventional soldier in the world. That's my personal opinion.
Interviewer	You enjoyed it, it was tough and I'm sure that you had lack of sleep during your basics, you got chased around by some corporal, but you figured that this was worth it?
De Vries	You're a hundred percent correct it was tough but I enjoyed every moment of it.
Interviewer	And when you were called up and you said, ok now we're going to the army, did you discuss with your folks about this army, about who you're going to fight, why you were going in to the army?
De Vries	No.
Interviewer	So for you it was something you were going to do.
De Vries	I heard over the news and you read in the newspapers about the war that's going on, so you had an idea of what it's all about.
Interviewer	So you went off and did your training, as an infantryman I presume you did all the stuff, everything from radio coms through to platoon weapons, through to the whole gamut of being a soldier.
De Vries	Yes, we've done everything.
Interviewer	And then when you were sent off to the South African Coloured Corps, did that surprise you? Were you expecting that kind of posting?
De Vries	At that stage we couldn't decide where to go so it didn't come as a surprise, it doesn't matter to me.
Interviewer	In the context of the time, in '82, '83, were you surprised that you were sharing with soldiers who weren't white guys?
De Vries	No, I've enjoyed it. According to me it's your personality. I loved it. I didn't have any problems.
Interviewer	And then in your training, they take you through this whole process, you were trained for what, 11 months, 12 months,

	before they sent you to the operational area?
De Vries	That's correct, yes.
Interviewer	In your training, was it explained to you who the enemy were? Was it SWAPO, was it Cubans, was it Russians, was it a combination?
De Vries	If I can remember now correctly...let's say they called them terrorists, that's the word.
Interviewer	And then when you got up to South West Africa, as it then was, was the situation like you expected? When you got to, say Ruacana, that was your first posting, did you expect there to be war all around you every day or what did you expect?
De Vries	I didn't expect war every day around me. First of all at Ruacana we were based at the base. We went out on patrols. Two week patrols, back on a camp, patrols.
Interviewer	And those patrols, explain an average patrol for me, what was it like? For somebody who didn't do that. You go out, you've got your water, you've got your rations, and then what happens?
De Vries	Usually before you go out on a patrol your leaders discuss it with you, your reason why you're going out, and the purpose why you're going out, maybe it's a quick reaction, the Special Forces or somebody noticed something somewhere, or local people were murdered. There are many reasons. So they discuss beforehand with us the reason why you're going out and then you make ready for patrol all your necessary rations. You do training before you go out, get a map and you work out your course you must walk, and then you go out and do the job.
Interviewer	And then you sleep in the bush and you're out there for ten days, two weeks.
De Vries	That's correct, I sleep in the bush, rain, mosquitoes, everything. <i>Laughs</i>
Interviewer	And during that time you must build up friendships with your guys. I'm sure some guys you might argue with, I think it happens in all teams, but you must also build up friendships with some of the guys?
De Vries	Yes, we build up lovely friendships and you trust each other. That's where the camaraderie comes in.
Interviewer	Are you still friends with some of those guys that you met in those years?
De Vries	No, not. Unfortunately not.
Interviewer	And then you start doing these patrols and things like that, did you encounter any of the enemy, did you get involved in shooting?
De Vries	Yes.

Interviewer	How quickly did that happen to you?
De Vries	After the first month.
Interviewer	And what was your reaction to that? Everybody reacts differently under fire.
De Vries	The first experience we had was a landmine. We approached a place that was suspicious and there were landmines. And one of my guys walked over a landmine. We were well trained, you know exactly what to do and you stabilise the person, and you call in the medics, brilliantly trained, and you call the helicopters and they casevac him off.
Interviewer	And did he survive that guy?
De Vries	Yes, he survived.
Interviewer	And when this starts happening, no matter, you've done all your training, you know what to do and so on, but it's still quite a realisation that somebody is actually trying to kill you.
De Vries	Yes. <i>Laughs</i> The reality kicks in, yes.
Interviewer	And how did you feel about that? Did you feel that your training was worthwhile, now you understood why it was so tough and so on?
De Vries	Definitely, yes. If it was not for the training, it would have been chaos.
Interviewer	And when this poor guy got himself blown up by the landmine did he think, gee I don't like this, I'd rather go home?
De Vries	It was war, you didn't have a choice. It was two year's National Service, you didn't have a choice.
Interviewer	How long did you stay at Ruacana?
De Vries	About three months.
Interviewer	And then did you go home on a pass?
De Vries	No.
Interviewer	And when you told your family that you were going off to the border, was there concern or was it just expected that that was part of your duty?
De Vries	It was part of my duty. Especially if you're an infantry soldier, you go to the border. It's...
Interviewer	That's what you do.
De Vries	Yes, that's correct. <i>laughs</i>
Interviewer	And then when you were at Ruacana, quite often soldiers on the ground you don't get given the bigger picture. The guys on the top know the bigger picture, you've just got specific duties. Did you get any sense of what was happening in the region? '82, '83

	there were some big operations into Angola and things like that. did you get a sense of what was happening or were you simply focusing on your tasks.
De Vries	As the officer...I was a lieutenant...of the platoon, you have meetings with the leaders higher up, they explain to you exactly what is going on in the region. Where they have noticed terrorists or possible infiltration from Angola so you know what's going on.
Interviewer	So you settle into this and as you get more experienced you understand better what's going on, what's expected of you. and the troops that you were working with, they were all committed to their tasks, they were quite happy and that was their job?
De Vries	Yes, no problem.
Interviewer	The guys you were with are the SACC, is that an abbreviation, South African Coloured Corps?
De Vries	South African Coloured Corps Battalion. You get a school and a battalion, I was with the battalion.
Interviewer	Ok, they were professional soldiers, they were Permanent Force soldiers.
De Vries	Yes.
Interviewer	So they knew that they were getting paid to...
De Vries	They've done it out of free will. I don't think it was compulsory. Coloured guys they done it out of free will.
Interviewer	And then they moved you across to Nampara, what...?
De Vries	Yes. same story, patrols, following up tracks, seek and destroy, reaction force.
Interviewer	Did you ever get into a situation where you thought, now we're in big trouble, there's more of these guys than us, we need help?
De Vries	No. It was usually small terrorist units that we encountered. It was not major operations for example.
Interviewer	And when in a fire fight, if one of the enemy got shot, and you looked at the body, did that have any impact on you? When you saw somebody, one of the enemy face to face who was now dead?
De Vries	You feel sad about it, I think, it's human. But it's war.
Interviewer	So it could have been you as well.
De Vries	Exactly. It's you or him.
Interviewer	And so this just went on for a long time, so you sort of got used to the South West Africa sunsets and the hot sun and the rain in summer and so on and so forth.
De Vries	Yes.

Interviewer	And you then ended up inside Angola for six months, which is a long time. Can you explain to me a bit about what happened there and how it happened.
De Vries	Originally we were based at Ondjiva, it's about, I think, 60 kilometres in Angola. And from Ondjiva we went to what they called die HAG the helicopter administrasie gebied. (Helicopter Administration Area) The big kwevoels with the after tanks, carrying the after tanks. I think it was the base in Askari, I'm not sure. We played a supportive role during Operation Askari, for the gun ships to refuel so we protected de Haag, the helicopter aanvellings gebied. While the Three Two Battalion and Special Forces were busy with operations base in Askari. That was about 80 kilometres in Angola. And we were at die HAG for about almost a month. We were based just one place, sleeping in the trenches every night for about a month.
Interviewer	So you're a long way inside Angola, there's a chance you could be attacked, it might not have happened, it may have happened...
De Vries	Yes, we were sitting ducks.
Interviewer	But you were prepared for that. every night you were in your trenches, you had sentries, you had all your defensive positions.
De Vries	Yes.
Interviewer	What's it like living under those circumstances? <i>Tape turned off</i> So Robert you were saying, you were at Ondjiva, you were protecting the base, you're supplying backup for the helicopter gun ships and so on, and you were there at Ondjiva for a month, did you ever come under attack at that time?
De Vries	No. No attacks.
Interviewer	But you lacked for nothing, there was decent water supply, decent food supply and stuff like that?
De Vries	Mmm.
Interviewer	So you were re-supplied all the time, logistically it was ok.
De Vries	Mmm.
Interviewer	And sitting there, some of the war that was going on there now was a bit different to what you were doing at Ruacana or Nampara. Here you're walking patrols in the bush encountering small groups of people, but during Operation Askari it was a lot more conventional.
De Vries	Mmm.
Interviewer	Did you then get asked after your time at Ondjiva, did you get drawn in to any of the fighting?
De Vries	No.



Interviewer	But you were fully aware that there was some serious stuff going on?
De Vries	Yes.
Interviewer	Were you apprehensive about that, that you might get called in, or did you actually want to go in?
De Vries	We were standby.
Interviewer	And then after that period at Ondjiva?
De Vries	We pulled back to...Ruacana.
Interviewer	And what happened there, did you remain sort of on standby?
De Vries	That was my last couple of months, and I was finished with my National Service.
Interviewer	And then you went back to civilian life as an engineer?
De Vries	Yes.
Interviewer	Are you a mechanical engineer?
De Vries	Civil engineer.
Interviewer	And then were you called up for camps?
De Vries	Yes. Done about three camps.
Interviewer	And which units were you with?
De Vries	Six One Mech.
Interviewer	And where did you do those camps?
De Vries	At Lohatla.
Interviewer	Seems everybody in the army went to Lohatla at some time. And those were all exercises and...?
De Vries	Yes, I was motorized infantry, Six One Mech. Mechanized.
Interviewer	And did you go back to the border after that?
De Vries	No.
Interviewer	When you came out, that was '84, and you did camps over the...a number of camps. Did you think about your military experience, did you think it was a good thing that you did? Did it eat up a lot of your time as a young man when you'd just finished university, two years is one tenth of your life just about. What were your feelings about it all?
De Vries	I've enjoyed it, I think it was a good thing. That's my personal opinion. I didn't waste that two years, I enjoyed it. I think it was worth it.
Interviewer	And so when camps came along you were quite happy to go to them?

De Vries	I was not so happy with the camps, but...
Interviewer	Because you were now trying to start a professional career?
De Vries	That's correct.
Interviewer	So you felt that was taking you out of the work place for a while?
De Vries	That's correct.
Interviewer	What did your colleagues feel about it? Did some of your colleagues feel the same way?
De Vries	Yes.
Interviewer	But nevertheless you went because that was...
De Vries	Didn't have a choice.
Interviewer	And in those camps, now that you're a bit older, when you go into army...ok, you were slightly older anyway because you had already qualified with a degree...but as you get older, going off to the army, perhaps you've got a girlfriend, perhaps you've got a wife and kids, it must become much more difficult to go and be a soldier. Did that worry you?
De Vries	No.
Interviewer	And now thinking back on your army, you look back on it and you enjoyed that period of your life, and would you do it again?
De Vries	Yes, I'd do it again, definitely. <i>Laughs</i>
Interviewer	And when you meet guys your age and sort of background and you talk about it, what are the sort of the feelings of the majority of the guys?
De Vries	This is now the interesting part. I think the general feeling among the National Servicemen are, we were left in the cold. On my way to this interview I thought about this. It's like playing a rugby game, and you're ahead sort of ten points, and ten minutes before the end of the game they stop the game, then the administrators must decide who won the game. Don't you think it's a good comparison?
Interviewer	It is a good analogy...well in my mind it is because I understand it. So you feel that during the conflict, the war, while you were there, you felt that you had done everything right from a military point of view...yes you were a lieutenant and you were part of a much bigger organisation and the guys responsible to you were also were also way down the ladder in terms of making decisions on a broader scale, but nevertheless you felt you'd done everything right and your understanding was that you were, from a military point of view, winning the war.
De Vries	Yes.
Interviewer	And there was no doubt in your mind?

De Vries	I'm talking from a soldier's point of view, from on the ground level. So I'm talking as a soldier. I can't talk on behalf of the upper ranks, our leaders and the politicians. I'm talking from a soldier's point of view.
Interviewer	Ok, so you were convinced that you'd done everything right, that you'd been winning the war. And then obviously South Africa withdrew from Namibia in '89, Angola just a little bit before that, and then it was clear that South Africa was changing, '94 we got a new government. What was your feeling then in '94 when the government changed dramatically and the old SADF, the old National Party government ceased to be in the sense that you remember them? What was your feeling then?
De Vries	You start thinking was it worth it? Why did you do it? It's difficult to say but...why did we fight? For what? Ok, there were the Cold War and the Communists but that you read about it later on. Communist threat and...
Interviewer	And you were feeling, why did we fight? But you felt that while you were fighting you were still ten points ahead, as it were.
De Vries	Yes. We were the best conventional soldiers, that's my personal opinion, in the world.
Interviewer	And you were proud of that but you feel that after '94 the politicians...
De Vries	They dropped us. They left us in the cold. That's my personal opinion.
Interviewer	Did you receive any medals after your service?
De Vries	Pro Patria.
Interviewer	And do you feel that was a contradiction in terms judging by the way the politicians dealt with you afterwards? Pro Patria as a reward for being loyal to your country for serving in an operational area?
De Vries	Which country? <i>laughs</i>
Interviewer	And that's the question. So given the circumstances though what do you think the politicians could have done about the guys who served in the SADF? Who served as soldiers?
De Vries	I think at that stage there was not a lot that they could have done. The Soviet threat and the Communist threat...it's difficult, I don't know.
Interviewer	But what I'm suggesting is do you feel that the politicians could have made more of an effort to acknowledge the efforts of the soldiers, albeit that the government changed dramatically in '94? Do you feel they didn't speak out enough in support of you?
De Vries	Yes. Definitely. I'm not talking about the generals, I'm talking about the politicians now.

Interviewer	And that was in '94 and that was early days, everybody wanted to see what was going to happen. Now it's 20 years since the withdrawal from Angola, 19 years since the withdrawal from Namibia, what do you feel about the memory of what your generation sacrificed...did in the army. Some sacrificed their lives, some sacrificed time, do you feel that they've been put on the side?
De Vries	Yes. That's 100% correct, on the side. Like that generation gap you're one sided. We are now the guilty ones, and the bad boys.
Interviewer	Guilty of what?
De Vries	Fighting the wrong war.
Interviewer	But you were a National Serviceman, it was the law that you had to go.
De Vries	Exactly. That's why I mention the politicians.
Interviewer	And in feeling that, does that influence the way that you feel about society in general? Does it worry you regularly?
De Vries	Yes, I think in a way. Definitely. That's why we started the organisation now recently, the South African Bush War Veterans. Just to give the appreciation and just thank you. because there's nothing, there's the American Vietnam War veterans, even the Zimbabwe War veterans. Where's our veteran organisation? There's nothing.
Interviewer	Why do you think that is?
De Vries	That's a good question. I don't know. So we've started one.
Interviewer	Well, can I put it to you hypothetically that in '94 the election was very new in people's minds, people were uncertain about the future of the country. And having thought, as you said, we were the bad guys, perhaps there was a sensitivity about speaking about that in public, lest you be victimised publicly for what you did. But recently there's been a lot more websites coming out, there's the SA soldier website, there's Sentinel projects, which has got the bad guys as their little logo thing. And you've just started the Bush War Veteran's site. How many people have come forward to talk to you?
De Vries	The membership is about now over a hundred. You can register and become a member. I think it's 120 members now. It's about 3 or 4 months old. There's also a guest book, where you can go and read all the stories, the personal stories.
Interviewer	How many of your members are still here in South Africa? Because I noticed with some of the other website, many of the guys have got foreign email addresses and aren't here.
De Vries	Most of them still in South Africa. There's a couple overseas, in Australia and New Zealand, Europe, even the United States.

Interviewer	Do you have children?
De Vries	Yes.
Interviewer	How old are they?
De Vries	My son is 17 and my daughter 13.
Interviewer	Have you discussed with them about the past, about South West Africa, Angola, stuff like that?
De Vries	I've tried. Not interested.
Interviewer	Why are they not interested in what their father did? Do you think times have just changed?
De Vries	A hundred percent correct. The public in the general are not interested in what we have done. It's part of the history. My children in school they don't learn about the war!
Interviewer	And that hurts you?
De Vries	Yes.
Interviewer	When you're in the work place and you encounter black people, has anybody ever said to you, did you fight in that war?
De Vries	No.
Interviewer	Nobody's ever asked you?
De Vries	No. I worked in Zambia for almost a year and I met a black guy in Zambia who fought for SWAPO and we became big friends, and we talked about the war. He was a soldier just like me. A soldier is a soldier, you fight under instructions. You fight for your country's ideology, what do you call it. We became big friends.
Interviewer	And yet nobody here has ever asked you?
De Vries	No.
Geldenduys	Because they never fought. You see that's the point you're trying to make. Anywhere I go to big friends with SWAPO, big friends with...it's only the locals.
Interviewer	And now with your website, people can post their stories, they can post comments and so on and so forth...
De Vries	Yes.
Interviewer	Where do you think...do you plan to publish something out of it or is it just going to be electronic?
De Vries	The reason for the website is just to get appreciation, just a thank you, appreciation, and it's like a spokesperson for the ex soldiers. Because there's nothing else. I'm talking about the National Serviceman. Not about the Permanent Force guys. They've got...there's different...what do you call it, Bondo...
Geldenduys	It's the National Servicemen who haven't membership like the

	Transvaal Scottish or the Duke of Edinburgh, the Rifles and all that.
De Vries	And there's a major interest.
Interviewer	And do you get together physically and go and meet each other for a beer or whatever?
De Vries	For the next one, we're busy planning it. And we're going to have an executive committee, we've got our mission and statements, and we want to get together once a month.
Interviewer	Have you thought about contacting some of the guys from...you're thinking only about National Servicemen...the guys who were with the Bushmen Battalions who are now near Kimberley or the Pomfret guys?
De Vries	Yes, that's one of the personal of the whole organisation is to support that guys. Even the Three Two Battalion at Pomfret, support them, support the Bushmen. One of the missions of the website, of the organisation.
Interviewer	And you were saying that you were doing it as a soldier, the guy you met in Zambia, you guys spoke to each other as equals and friends because you were both soldiers, irrespective that one day you might have even shot at each other, but you respected each other as individual soldiers.
De Vries	Yes.
Interviewer	Did you feel that somebody, from the political point of view, people might think that what you're doing is trying to remember the past when the past isn't necessarily acceptable to the majority of people in the government now? Do you think it might engender some opposition to you, from the politicians?
De Vries	No, I don't think so. There's an MK veteran's organisation, why can't we have one? A veteran's organisation according to me is legal, it's all over the world
Interviewer	I think it is. I'm just curious because there's such a thing as being politically correct, and I think that's perhaps why to a degree these organisations didn't start happening in the nineties. But now it's all these years later...
De Vries	It's interesting when you mentioned earlier, after 20 years, or after 30 years everybody's talking now about it. And the books all over. Why? After 20 years. It's that generation gap.
Interviewer	It's interesting. I don't know. As I say, possibly for some guys like yourself, your son is nearly an adult and I think people feel the need to explain what happened at that stage of their lives. When we were 17...ok, you went to university, but most white South African males were getting ready to go to the army the next year. so I think that might have something to do with it.
De Vries	It's interesting if you read the messages on the guest book, in

	<p>general the ex soldiers they're looking for that camaraderie. They miss the camaraderie. They can't just talk to anybody, everybody about the war. They want to get together, they're missing that camaraderie.</p>
Interviewer	<p>And do you play sport?</p>
De Vries	<p>Yes.</p>
Interviewer	<p>So guys your age would remember the war but the youngsters...</p>
De Vries	<p>You can't talk to everybody about the war because they're not interested.</p>
Interviewer	<p>And what about...this politician thing interests me, this public debate that's going on about that battle for Cuito Cuanavale, and the politicians say, well you fought for the wrong side that's why the names can't go on the wall of remembrance. What's your view about that?</p>
De Vries	<p>I don't want my name on that wall. I wasn't a freedom fighter. Freedom Park. I was not a freedom fighter.</p>
Interviewer	<p>So you don't mind that the names of guys you might have fought with aren't going to be on that wall.</p>
De Vries	<p>I respect it. They can put their names on any time, no problem. But to be honest with you, it's actually a very good thing they've done. That their leadership, or let's call it the new government, is at least doing something for their ex soldiers. What are our ex politicians doing for us? Zero!</p>
Interviewer	<p>So you would feel that now even though it's 20 years later, it would be the right thing for somebody to try and do something similar for the SADF?</p>
De Vries	<p>Yes.</p>
Geldenuys	<p>Can I just come in there? Firstly on the point of when are people interested? and then secondly the politicians say you've been fighting for the wrong war, and then what you said now, ? (290). I must just say about that first thing: I've picked up over the years this phenomenon, there's a pattern always after a war, that war books are not in demand. If people buy it they will put it on the shelves as a...just to have it, but they're not really interested. Then about 15, 18 years later, then there is a big demand for the war books. And the only explanation that I can find for this is, it has to do with changing our generation... <i>interruption</i> I knew about this phenomenon before, when the interest is there and when it isn't there. Because I have produced this firstly in 1993, and it wasn't selling well, there wasn't a demand for it. Now, it's now 15 years later, now it is in demand. People buy it and they phone me and say, listen I want the book and I can't find it.</p>
De Vries	<p>Even on the website, they send me messages on the website, where can I get the book?</p>

Geldenhuis	I'm now going to sell it myself. Because it seems that somewhere people's blocking it. I have people tell me the same, is there a boycott or what? What's happening? But the point I'm trying to get at is this, for example, Albert van ( <i>inaudible</i> ) who is a retired colonel, sent a book to me with somebody, to sign, he wants to give it to his kid. So he wants before he dies, he wants to know that his kid can read the book, what he was busy with before. Then I get just the opposite too, that two guys came here from Rustenburg, their father apparently was in the Citizen Force and he did some service up on the border. And I had to sign it, they wanted to give the book to him for Christmas. It's now the youngster wanted to show his father, we know where you were, and here's the book. So there is a...perhaps if some of these kids are not interested now, they may become interested in three years time, or when he's older. So there is this generation thing.
De Vries	You see, there's a negative connotation to the whole...to the war.
Geldenhuis	The same time I want to add on to what he said, people say you fought the wrong war. I don't think it's only that. Or if it's that it's not only that. But it is not getting recognition for what you've done. Whether it was a wrong war or a right war, is not really the point, the point is they are not getting recognition for what they've done, and there's more than that, they say you've lost the war! That is a thing that...
De Vries	To be honest with you, it doesn't matter to me if the war was right or wrong, according to me and most of the people I've spoken to, it's about recognition and appreciation and just thank you.
Geldenhuis	For example now, who should support him when they discuss this thing in parliament? The old National Party members of parliament sit in their parliament, they don't come up for him and for me! It's not only him! It's me too! I was also involved in that war. They are now in the ANC! So you would have expected that normally the political party of that time, the governing party of that time would come up with you. They are sitting there with their mouths shut! So it's not that the politicians are saying that you're fighting the wrong war, they don't come up for that. They're quiet because they are in the wrong party now.
De Vries	So like the important thing to me is to salute the soldiers, what they have done, for two years, and then you serve 5, 6, 7 years. The soldiers on the ground.
Geldenhuis	The other reason why people like him and I don't want our names there anymore, do you want us to go and creep on our knees to the ANC and say, please put our names on there? They have created a dispute about this, and of course now we will say, ok stuff it! We are on the wall at Fort Klapperkop But there are also another reason why perhaps they don't want our names on that wall. Because they have the Cubans names there and the Cuban names are 2113, and what we have during that war, lost 611. So that will show them up. So I think the Cubans also had a big hand



	in that thing. It's a Cuban wall, it's not a South African wall and they don't want to be embarrassed.
De Vries	The big problem according to me now personally is, the big problem, all the fighting whatever, is the politicians. And as I mentioned to you earlier on that ex SWAPO soldier I met in Zambia, lovely person! A soldier like me. And we became big friends.
Interviewer	Even before '94 did you sense that the politicians had forgotten about what you did?
De Vries	Yes, definitely.
Interviewer	And that's because they were concerned about...?
De Vries	I won't mention the names now, but I was in a general's office in Cape Town, and I asked him, where's our veteran's organisation? Go and prepare something. So I decided to start one myself.
Geldenhuys	It was not '94 it was back 1992 already,
Interviewer	There was a referendum.
Geldenhuys	And there was a build up to that. So you can say it started with 1990 thereabouts.
Interviewer	That's what I was trying to get a sense of, was that '94 was the cut off, formal election and so on and so forth. I was trying to get a sense of that the politicians had already made up their minds that whatever had happened to you guys as soldiers was no longer relevant to their circumstance. When you were starting your veteran's association there's a side of it that interests me and that's, you fought as a soldier, you fought as a soldier, so you know what it's like to be in a uniform carrying a firearm and so on and so forth, but the side of it that interests me is that there's also an impact on sisters and mothers and wives and girlfriends. Does anybody cater for their interests?
De Vries	If you go look at our website, it's one of our aims, to support the wives, soldiers being killed, girlfriends, and also the psychological. There's still guys out there these days suffering of psychological problems. To support them.
Interviewer	Guys who something happened to while they were soldiers, that still affects them?
De Vries	Yes. Because nobody else is doing it. Where's the politicians? Why are they not doing something? Ok, it's difficult now because there's a new government. The previous government's not there anymore.
Interviewer	But the argument is that the politicians from the National Party, because they were the ruling party at that stage, could still have done something, even though it might not have been formally approved by government, they could have done something

	informally themselves to set up support systems.
De Vries	Yes. Like a website. Like a veteran's organisation.
Geldenhuis	You ask these questions but remember they are sitting now in the ANC benches in parliament, so do you expect them to do anything? It's no good arguing why they should, they won't! Because they're now on the governing party's side. The old party doesn't exist anymore.
Interviewer	Although there are many people from the old National Party who are not in the ANC, who have just disappeared from sight.
Geldenhuis	Some of them are also dead.
De Vries	The whole political story is another subject, we could talk the whole day about it. Even the Americans. That's a whole other subject.
Interviewer	Your sense of those days, you remember them with fondness, there were some people who lost their lives on both sides, and war is something that humans do all the time, but war is not a nice thing, because people die. You are still in your mind convinced that war was a necessary war and that what you did was the right thing in the circumstances?
De Vries	Yes. Definitely.
Interviewer	And you would just like some more recognition for that, not to make you out as a hero but to have somebody say thank you for...
De Vries	Yes. Like what they're doing now for their soldiers. Freedom Park. That's why I respect it. And they can do it anytime. I think it's a good thing.
Geldenhuis	Just before you step off this thing about the politicians, why don't you also put the question...I'm always saying, ask the right questions...why don't you also put the question to the politicians in power today? Because they do things which they don't do in other countries. Like in the United States, like in the UK, like in South Africa before, after the Anglo Boer War, whether it was the National Party or the United Party or whatever party, they always honoured the monuments and the regiments and all the commemorations, all those things. There were regiments that participated in the Xhosa wars, in World War 1, in World War 2, in the Bush Wars, and they were always by whatever party made up the government, it's sort of an international rule. You don't change your monuments, unless it's a revolutionary take over, fighting in the streets like in Moscow. But even in Moscow I was told that they still honour the monuments of previous regimes. I can't bring you concrete evidence of all these things. but this government says no...we discussed this before...that the history of South Africa starts in 1994. So don't only point the fingers at the old National Party politics, yes do, but there is no decent way out for the government in power now not to retain and to respect

	the monuments of the past.
De Vries	Die vrae wat ek baie vir myself vra, was ons die middle tot gedoel.
Interviewer	And do you believe that?
De Vries	I don't know. Another thing that I also want to mention is there's book on the war out on the streets that portray us as barbaric and whatever. I was not a barbaric when I was in the army and I never will be a barbaric. But there's some books out there that's really negative and portray a negative image of the South African soldiers in general. That's rubbish!
Interviewer	Why do you think those books have hit the shelves? Do you think that it's a selling ploy or why do you think that's the case?
De Vries	To be honest with you I'm not sure and I don't want to give my opinion.
Interviewer	Look there are some guys who hated their National Service, there are some guys who hated what they did in the army. And I think I know which book you're referring to, it's called An Unpopular War, written by Jackie Thompson. Is that the one you're thinking of?
De Vries	Yes.
Interviewer	I thought so. And I think that those guys, those views are what they believe in. But do you think it's part of a deliberate attempt to try and embarrass people who served in the SADF? Do you think it's part of a campaign?
De Vries	It's possible.
Interviewer	But do you think that if somebody does feel badly about what they did or saw in the army...not just the army, in the military...it might annoy you but surely they have a right to say well...
De Vries	They have the right I agree, but don't generalise.
Interviewer	Ok, so that's what you're against. You're against the generalisations.
De Vries	Exactly. If the public read that book, what impression do the public get from ex soldiers? It's a negative picture of the whole war in general. And I can't tell you that's not true.
Interviewer	And did that book play any role in prompting you to start your website?
De Vries	No, that's before that.
Interviewer	So you'd sensed the need for the website anyway?
De Vries	Yes. I thought about a website for the last 15 years. Or the organisation, not the website.
Geldenhuis	Recent events caused you to take more positive action.

De Vries	It was in the back of my mind for the last 15 years, a South African Bush War veterans, like the Vietnam veterans, and all over the world in veteran organisations. There's no veteran organisation for the National Servicemen. There's nothing!
Geldenhuis	In the United States the government makes provision for those veteran organisations and they support them in many ways.
Interviewer	Robert, is there anything you want to add?
De Vries	According to me all the soldiers that was involved in the war, from the chefs to the Special Force, today is a hero, according to me. everybody involved. Not only the Special Forces and the Three Two Battalions, everybody! Like a gear in the engine.
Interviewer	Part of a greater whole.
De Vries	There's a couple in the guest book that are asking, but why only the Special Forces? Why only Three Two Battalion? What about us? There's 101 Battalion, there's...everybody was important. From a chef to the Special Forces. Not only the Special Forces and the Three Two Battalion. There was 102 Battalion, 101 Battalion, parabats.
Interviewer	And services school in Pretoria.
De Vries	Everybody played a role.
Interviewer	And your goal is to try...
De Vries	It's like an umbrella organisation. Everybody. Because there's a Three Two Battalion website and there's a Special Forces website, what about other guys? there's nothing.
Geldenhuis	Also the reasons why there are not so much in writing or why not so much writing hit the headlines, it is, I think I've already explained the other day that it is not true to say that we didn't play the game with the newspapers and reporters. Have I said that?
Interviewer	You told me last week.
Geldenhuis	Now let's take that now one step further, perhaps if I repeat myself you must excuse me, but even people like you yourself, when you ask but why not this? Why not that? I can go back and say, listen I have written a book in 1993, I've given you the whole story, and people still phone me like, after you've arrived here, people phone me and say, why don't you write about it? Chester Crocker has written a book. He's actually got a chapter or at least under a subtitle, a large section of his book, the title is, The Myth of Cuito Cuanavale. Meaning that it's a myth. That is before 1993. Helmoed Heitman wrote it. Fred Bridgeland wrote it. And both of them brag about how many people who were actually in action that gave an interview to write all their facts. So it has been written. Now van Zyl Slabbert comes in about 2006 to say, we must now think twice about who actually won at Cuito Cuanavale. Because why would the Cubans kill their triumphant general if they had won? But that's in 2006! But I mention now four or five

	<p>books and I didn't even mention people like the one reporter from Miami or was it New York...you mentioned his name the other day...but there were many other authoritative feature writers who also wrote that we won. So where do these people come from and which world do they live to say now, but we didn't know that. They didn't know because they were ignorant, because they were not interested or most likely because it doesn't suit their politics. It didn't suit their politics and in some cases it still doesn't suit their politics because the books and literature, the true story about Cuito Cuanavale, is far in the majority. There are only a few people like Castro, like Piero Gleijeses, and one or two others who come with feeble explanations to the effect that we have lost. So it is wrong to say that nobody told them the right story. They didn't believe it or they didn't want to believe it, and they still don't want to believe it. So let's not blame too many other people because the true stories are there for the reading.</p>
Interviewer	And it's been there for a long time.
Geldenhuis	It's been there for a long time and it's been repeated.
	END OF SIDE A ( <i>counter at 503</i> )
	SIDE B ( <i>counter at 23</i> )
Geldenhuis	...the Afrikaners or the Defence Force or they want to do business with the new government or...
de Vries	Even that new book Ops Medic, there was a write up in die Beeld...
Geldenhuis	<p>Now he says he was an Ops Medic and he said they received three months training and they were pushed in to the war zone. That's not true! There was something else, just switch off there please ... I gave a copy of South Africa's Fantastic and I marked the military chapters and I gave it to the editor of a newspaper, Sunday paper. He's not published any review on that one. And so I can mention a number of newspapers who haven't done a review on this one or that one. And that to me under normal circumstances I would have accepted that. But Cuito Cuanavale is a sensational thing, it's a topical thing, I deal with it in these books, they don't even have a review in their newspapers. Now you ask me why? I don't know. I think they are...what's the better word for ass creeping? <i>Laughter</i> They want to be in with the right politicians or they want to do business and they think it's not politically correct to come out with the truth. They'd rather follow the mainstream which was dictated by Castro. They don't always blame us, or blame the way we handled the media, etc, because what more can you do? If you present them with the books, you tell them which chapters to look at, they're not published, then they say, well you know you guys don't give us the right information. It's not true! That is the frustration.</p>
Interviewer	I sense that there's a huge amount of frustration, it comes out just in this conversation now, but I see it on the website as well. do

	you think it will ease the frustration to be able to talk about it on the websites and at gatherings and things like that?
Geldenhuys	Yes! That's why people like that do it.
de Vries	We actually want to arrange a national seminar. The South African Bush War Veterans we want to arrange a national seminar.
Interviewer	And that would be open to anybody?
de Vries	Anyone.
Interviewer	And you plan to do that this year?
de Vries	Yes.
Interviewer	And I presume you're going to publish the campaign?
de Vries	Yes.
Interviewer	It would be interesting to see.
Geldenhuys	<p>Listen, the thing that the misrepresentation of our war efforts, didn't start a few months or a few years ago. You must think back to the time of the Cold War, the seventies and eighties. The government, to be more specific, the National Party, became very unpopular during the eighties. Their unpopularity reached a peak during the eighties. That is when people like van Zyl Slabbert and Hermann Giliomee and Max du Preez and all those went to Dakar and they went to Moscow and they went to Havana. Now can you imagine just what we are really talking about! Moscow, the capital of Communism, and those in charge in Moscow were despots. And they went to Havana, probably the biggest despot, the biggest dictator of the modern era. Those were their friends! But I'm not very much against them, but I'm just trying to paint the picture in which circles they found themselves and to which influences they subjected themselves. They saw that as the last way out because the politicians of those days reached a point where they hated the government. They hated John Vorster, they hated PW Botha, they hated Magnus Malan, etc. And I don't blame them, politics is politics. But it so happens that...but I think I told you before, didn't I...that John Vorster was a Minister of the Police before he became Prime Minister. PW Botha was Minister of Defence for 12 years. Then they saw that the blue eyed boy Magnus Malan became Minister of Defence. So the security departments were all run by those people and they were politically fighting those people and they were frustrated by them. So a defeat for the Defence Force is a defeat for the government, it's a defeat for the Nationalist Party, it's a defeat for Vorster, Botha and Malan. So it didn't suit them at the time, when Crocker came and said the South Africans beat the Cubans in Angola. It didn't suit them! That's politics. So Helmoed Heitman came out with his book. It didn't suit them! It didn't suit anybody who said that we did a good job. So don't now say the Defence Force didn't inform the press. Don't blame us. In some case don't even</p>

	blame the press because the press to some extent, especially the English press, were supportive of these people I just mentioned. And they tried to promote their policies. So that is one of the reasons why people didn't know the true facts because their leaders didn't want to accept it. And then it was hushed, everything that was positive about the Defence Force was hushed.
Interviewer	That's an interesting point, was there not another aspect to it all? You had your war that was happening in South West Africa and Angola with occasional things in Zambia and elsewhere, but in South Africa you had the issue of the political situation where you had troops in the townships, and many people said the troops in the townships to suppress political expression. So wasn't that part of a similar situation where the Defence Force was getting caught in the middle of the politics again?
Geldenhuis	The troops in the townships happened only for a short period in the late 1980s. So that was after all these other battles had been fought. And we did a very good job and it was not a fight against MK, it was keeping peace in the streets. Although I must admit there were not such protests and marches as we have found in Cape Town recently and in Johannesburg recently, and fights in the streets. We didn't have those things. Like the Jeppe thing ( <i>the 2006 shooting of policemen at a house in Jeppe Johannesburg after a supermarket robbery</i> ) and similar things in Cape Town. Even in those days we didn't have that. But if you count those things as political violence, it was not MK, it was a little bit ANC, it was a little bit UDF and Inkatha. Then most people ever killed during the last few decades were the fights between those three elements I've mentioned now in Natal! That is why 300 odd people are still in jail of Inkatha. They're trying to get them out, trying to get amnesty for them. So the Defence Force played a minor role and it was more a calming role maintaining law and order. It wasn't directed against any political or military or semi military force at all. And that's almost forgotten.
Interviewer	Except at the time I think it was quite a big issue. The government banned the End Conscription Campaign in '87 or '88 I think, because I think there was a feeling that the troops who were sent into the townships had become an issue.
Geldenhuis	No, it has been made into an issue for the same reason that the same press that made issue out of that, that same press wouldn't claim a victory for us in Angola. But I can tell you that that is grossly exaggerated because I've got in my office as Chief of the Defence Force in Cape Town, two letters from none other than the Black Sash who asked me please to send Three Two Battalion back to their places where their branches were in Natal. They were calling for them. And those troops who did they kill? Did they kill anybody?
Interviewer	I don't know.

Geldenhuis	I suppose if they'd had to, somebody would have known. Because the troops didn't kill anybody. It was normal British style keeping the peace. So that's just the point I'm trying to tell you, because of that hatred, and I don't think I want to go into the pros and cons of that, I accept that, that's politics, but the hatred and the aim at crushing the National Party and the government, that press exaggerated this and downplayed our successes in Namibia and Angola.
Interviewer	You said to me before that you didn't like politics, you didn't want to get involved in politics, did you always view the SADF as being separate from politics, it was a purely military operation and you obeyed orders, they came down the line?
Geldenhuis	I'll show you something very interesting. Very interesting. Here is Max du Preez. Max du Preez was probably one of the most poisonous...what's that word?
Interviewer	You think he had a poison pen?
Geldenhuis	He was violently anti Defence Force. He says, "a lot can be said of the apartheid era Defence Force and the way they destabilized the neighbouring states, but they were a prime example of a highly disciplined force where party politics were banned. They were loyal to the government of the day." Max du Preez! Can you believe it. The culture of discipline and of being above party politics. Save our transition from democracy from derailing. So that is my answer too.
Interviewer	That's a good answer to quote Max du Preez. When did Max write that?
Geldenhuis	He ends by saying, "instead of saddling our young children with an oath for ever reminding them that the little white ones among them are evil seed, perhaps we should get all our soldiers in shape to stand on the parade ground early every morning promising to serve the constitution only". He wrote this in...I want to get the name of the newspaper.
de Vries	19 February 2008.
Interviewer	Ok, that was just after that whole debate about the oath at the schools. That was at the same time as the Cuito stuff, that was just the oath in the schools.
Geldenhuis	I've got two copies of this, this one was sent to me by a private person, the other one I got from the newspaper.
de Vries	South African Defence Force versus the South African National Defence Force.
Geldenhuis	Yes, but it comes from a newspaper. I think it was the Sunday paper.
Interviewer	I can find it easily enough, I'll do a search and find it.
Geldenhuis	As I told you before, we were much less politicized than the



	<p>general public would believe. And the general public's opinion was created by obviously anti government forces. For example, I know of only one Defence Force officer, around about the early nineties that joined the National Party, and that was Kobus Bosman. But he wasn't a real soldier, he was a press liaison officer. Our Chief of the Air Force, Bob Rogers, he joined the DA. But before the DA, when it was called the PFP. When van Zyl Slabbert was still there. So did Louise Botha who was commanding officer of the South African Army Women's College in George. Schalkwyk, he died as brigadier general also went to an opposition party, Viljoen [Gen Contstand] he went to the Freedom Front. But I don't want now to back off on the National Party at all, but most soldiers didn't got that way.</p>
Interviewer	<p>What I'm trying to examine is the whole issue of the SADF and its image and how it was portrayed by various parties. I know that we discussed the role of the SADF alongside the police in the townships and sometimes the police, I think you pointed out, they got a very different role to the military. Do you think that the way the police behaved sometimes reflected...not reflected badly on the SADF but that the SADF reviewed in the same light?</p>
Geldenhuis	<p>I think I already said for the record that yes, the police cultures were different than ours and I'll explain it again. Even Hermann Giliomee who was one of the guys who went to Dakar and Moscow, etc, he said in his new book, the New History of South Africa, he said that we fought probably the best counter insurgency war in the world ever. But he was very against the National Party. What was your question again?</p>
Interviewer	<p>I was interested in the role of the police...</p>
Geldenhuis	<p>Ok, ok, yes. Let me tell you the culture of the Defence Force first, then I'll tell you the culture of the police. When I joined the army in 1953 as a rifleman, the first thing you get to know is, listen it's not you that counts it's the people in your bungalow, your section. At a later stage in your training it's not you and your section that counts, it is the platoon. Later on it's not you that counts, it's the company. Later on it's not you it's the battalion. They foster a group culture and togetherness, and you help your buddy. It's called buddy-buddy. Buddy-buddy basis. You help your buddy, your buddy helps you. You as an individual, u are not important. And so it goes on. It becomes a very definite pattern of your culture. But the police is different. A policeman does his training at the police college and then he arrives after that at the police station, and then crime happens and then he says, ok it's yours. And then maybe he goes alone or with two. And that is why they have much more an individualistic approach. Look at all the movies you see and all the serials on television, it's usually at the most two people. A senior one and a junior one. You never see the police operating in a section of ten people or a section of 30. So that is the first difference. There's much more camaraderie and much more inter personal loyalty. The other point is that especially in counter insurgency operations like where he fought,</p>

	<p>there were sectors. There's a battalion headquarters in every sector and there's a battalion commander or a sector commander for that sector or sub sector. And the anti subversion or anti insurgency basic concept is that that battalion commander at his headquarters is responsible for that area. And his responsibility is to keep that area safe and sound so that normal life can go on. That is the main thing in counter insurgency to establish a society that operates and lives like a normal society. In order to do that you have to bring down to the minimum insurgent incursions in that area, for example, like they did, you know people say, why were you talking about terrorists? But now what do you call a gang that comes in and they kill a headman only because he's a headman. That is a way of terrorising the population. So that must be blocked. And there is no way you can win such a role if you haven't got the co-operation, I mean for a long period, I'm not talking about short period, but there's no way that you can establish normal society in that area if you haven't got the co-operation of the local population. It's usually from them, they come and they say, ok we saw two people who we don't know in this area. So in order to maintain the goodwill of the people, because you're reliant on them for information, you have to treat them in a proper way. So some people said, yes you guys, we make war. You guys are just fooling around, with your funny tricks and things. And you did very excellent things, like for example, on a bigger scale, it was a National Servicemen in his first 24 months of training, he was stationed in the Kaokoland, he started the first cattle auctions. They never had cattle auctions there. He was given the job but he started cattle auctions which then became the permanent thing. Now can you imagine how popular the Defence Force was because of that. I don't even think he had a rank. If he had he was probably a corporal or a second lieutenant. He started that and it worked! Then the locals could see here the people are doing things for us that's good for us and it worked. So we were always keen to keep it that way. I'm not talking if you go across the border and you now are going to fight against the insurgents, catching them in ambushes and that, that's something totally different. But also there you use an organisation, it's not one or two people who do a thing like that. So we want to keep the co-operation and the friendship of the local population. So that is quite different from what you find in other military, or semi-military, or para-military cultures. Or security type of cultures. And I think that is one of the big reasons why we were so successful. Once your information dries up you've got problems. And where do you get the information? Who better than the local population.</p>
Interviewer	<p>As a general in charge of the Defence Force in the late eighties, '85-1990, you were tasked with looking after military matters right across South Africa, but it almost strikes me that your heart is in South West Africa. You served there in the seventies, you know the place very well, and I almost get a sense that was your...and I know that the conventional fighting did take place in</p>

	Angola...but my sense is that that was your primary focus?
Geldenhuis	<p>That situation was forced upon me. I can't help it if Namibia is where the war is and Angola is where the war is. That is not of my choosing. If it was here, I would have done the same here as I did there. But even compared today to other countries in Africa, you know, we didn't have the massacres that they had in Rwanda and that they had in Uganda, and that they have in Sudan and those places. South Africa was actually, by African standards, quite a peaceful place. And the reason why the military were not very much involved was because the crime and semi political activities that took place in South Africa were of such a kind that the police could keep it in check. It is only in the late eighties when you got masses walking up towards the Union Buildings etc. But even there you can't do more than sort of regulate the masses. Because <i>laughs</i> you can't open up the artillery on them, you can't call in the airforce to bomb them, so it wasn't really a military affair. All that we could do is assist the police to maintain as much orderly protest as is possible. And if it so happens that the turmoil is in the township, that's where you have to go and do it. But even there, we didn't go about the place shooting people. There were no battles of any kind. And we didn't like that job. I don't know if you know that we strictly followed the rules. Mainly the police is responsible and if they want assistance from the military they had to formally apply. And it was a formal document that is signed, then the military can be deployed in a certain area. And even there in most cases the police remain in charge and they can request the military to do certain things. In some cases it may happen that the police withdraw completely and they say to the military to take over, but that's the exception. But what I'm trying to get back again, every bit that the military did was potentially something on which the press could report badly. Not because they were so much against us, but as I said, anything bad they can expose about the military is bad for the government and that party. ... I would just like to remind you that there were actually very good grounds for having been more favourable, that is now from the press, towards our military efforts in Namibia and Angola. And I'll tell you why. Because when I took over there the second time in about 1977, and John Vorster decided that the South Westers must decide for themselves, and he duly put into action a machinery to put that into effect, meaning one person, one vote, and he had a vote there, the whole situation politically changed to what the opposition wanted here in South Africa. We served there under a majority black government. Where in South Africa we couldn't do it, there our NCOs, our officers went into the same messes and lounges and courses that anybody else. So apartheid was killed there! Not in theory, in practice. And it wasn't easy for us to do it, we should have been given a little bit more for what we have achieved. For example, my name was on the wall painted there one morning when I went down Kaizer Street. 'Vorster, Steyn and Geldenhuis are selling out the whites'. Because of killing apartheid there. So the Defence Force there were protecting the non apartheid</p>

	<p>system. In all respects we, as I've told you before, SWAPO wasn't even banned in Namibia. No party was banned. Not even PLAN was banned. There was nothing banned. So we didn't enforce apartheid there. It was just the opposite. We were defending that system which was overthrowing apartheid at the time. Did we get any kudos for that? Now couldn't the people see it, couldn't they understand it? No, because they didn't want to, and I give you one example. I don't mind even mentioning names. When I wrote this book the first time, the Dr, it was an academic...mention names but I don't think it's necessary...he was given to edit this, my book, he started to write in my book that, 'the South African government sent the South African Defence Force to Namibia to enforce apartheid'. So when I got to know about this I said, but you're crazy! He said, but you have to write that. So I said, but it's not true! He said, it is true and you have to write it, you can't get away from it, you were responsible, you were in charge there and you enforced apartheid. I said, no, it's just the opposite. So I went to the managing director of the publishing company, I said, listen I can't be in line with this, if I want to write that, it's my book, I'm entitled to write what I've written. But I can't write what he tells me because it's a lie, it's not true! So here was a professor, doctor at the university, editing my book and saying that we enforced apartheid then. It was absolutely not true. So you know, can you understand my frustration. But that is now just one example of where we were doing the opposite of apartheid and the media didn't really want to play the game with us and they didn't want to acknowledge anything good about us because of politics. And the legend, the myth of Cuito Cuanavale is one of the things that is still being washed out by that same attitude.</p>
Interviewer	<p>With regard to the matter of Cuito Cuanavale, I think the ministry of information, Ronnie Kasrils, wrote a piece that was published in the Independent and Business Day a couple of weeks ago, in which he said that when the Cuban 50<sup>th</sup> Division was approaching down the west and they had lengthened the runways at Xangongo and Cahama to take more MiGs and that they had tanks and so on and so forth, he suggested that that army could have marched all the way to Windhoek if they'd felt like it. Is that reality?</p>
Geldenhuis	<p>Now you know <i>laughs</i> coming from Ronnie Kasrils it is unthinkable that you can ask me that question. You must bear in mind that he has to support his party, his government so he must find things like this to <i>tape corrupted</i> why couldn't they take Jamba? I'm asking you. (<i>tape corrupted till 250</i>)</p>
	<p>TAPE 7 SIDE A</p>
Geldenhuis	<p>...but we were on the winning side when it ends, and as long as you achieved your aim. So let's say we beat them 54/6. You know what you are doing now by such questions...I don't want to talk about...what's this little Jew boy's name...?</p>

Interviewer	Kasrils.
Geldenhuis	<p>Yes, yes, Kasrils. He had to make up something! I know how it operates. Even the opposition in parliament now, members called and said, listen, what must I say? What can I say? They were also, what are we going to say? The Cuban delegates came here and our government said, yes we'll support your idea of saying that Cuito Cuanavale...so they make up things like <i>tape corrupted</i> The best way for me to answer your question about Ronnie Kasrils is, if they could have gone through to Windhoek, why didn't they go through to Jamba? That's what they were going for, they couldn't do that! now if they couldn't do that, how the hell do you think...it's underestimating my integrity and my intelligence to ask me a question like that, you must know for yourself it's a stupid question.</p>
Interviewer	<p>I had a strategy in asking that, because that's been a public accusation by a minister, and I wanted to know, you were there, and you were in command, so I wanted to know from the horse's mouth what the response was?</p>
Geldenhuis	<p>I'm going to come back to that one, but let me first come back to this rugby [analogy] of 54/6. So we have beaten them 54/6 but now...I'm not picking you now, but you are here now, and other people come and they say, yes, but that Cuito Cuanavale. That's like saying that we have won 54/6, but now you say if we ? (18) once in this 53<sup>rd</sup> minute of the game, you had the open line before you and you ? and that's...or they say, you had a clear...it was going to be a try, everything was on the ? it was going to be a try and then your one guy, there was a forward pass. And now you build the whole story around that knock and that forward pass, you forget about who won! We won 54/6 and now I have to explain to people about...they say we were not coached well because of that forward pass or because of that...you see that is how I see all the questions that's asked to me about Cuito Cuanavale. You missed the point! We were discussing things which are meaningless. But I'll tell you the real story...I think I did tell you. At London at the Brown's Hotel, the Cuban, my counterpart Cuban chief of defence force, asked if he could have a chat with me outside the mainstream of the negotiations. In other words, not the full South African and Angolan parties. Now if something like that happens, you already know that you'll hear something fishy. Because why don't they want to put it on the table during the normal course of the discussions? Why does he want to see me confidentially separate? So he came there and he explained to me that he has now mustered a big force and he's now moving there down the south west of Angola in the direction of Ovamboland, and he just want to tell me that during these negotiations I must play the game because there's big troubles for us coming with that force. So I listened to him, and you'll find it in this book. I start this book like that, what I'm telling you now. I start with it. Here it is. Written 1993, I translate as I go along, 'I warn you here comes a</p>

devastating war'. The person who's talking to me is my Cuban counterpart, General Ulises Rosales Del Toro. At his side is so and so and so and so. This is what I'm talking about. So I listened him out and to cut a long story short, I said to him, listen general, If you think you are threatening me, you are scaring me, you've got another thing coming your way. And then I told him what Pik Botha told...I'm not really a Pik Botha fan but I use his story there...I said to him, you know in 1898 when the British empire was at its best and strongest ever, they took on two South African republics, and we kept them busy for three years, and after thousands of people got killed etc, we capitulated because of etc, etc. But we kept the biggest empire of the world ever busy for three years. Now I say, you with your little Cuban force think you are going to challenge us? You've got something coming your way that you will regret for the rest of your life, because if you take us on now, if you put one toe over that border, I can promise you it will be the darkest day in history of Cuba ever. So don't come and think you can threaten me. I think forget about your threats and let's go along with the rest of the mainstream negotiations and behave like gentlemen. And did he behave like gentlemen after that I can assure you. but then you know what happened? I told you I grew up in the Cold War, I grew up with dirty tricks, and I grew up with psychological warfare. When they called me and they wanted a TV interview with me about Cuito Cuanavale because there's a Cuban delegation in Cape Town and when I saw in the bookshop there's a new book on Fidel Castro, and so I can go on mentioning quite a few other indicators, I knew here was a dirty tricks project. And Gleijeses came and saw me twice. He writes about Cuba, and he's always on Cuba's side. So I know that there was something coming. Now that guy, that professor, he cornered me and he said, no you guys were shit scared. But I didn't tell him the way that I've now told you. He told me about what the Cubans told, how they were going down the west side there, and he said, you guys were scared. I said, no, no, professor, please don't...you haven't got the right story or you prefer not to have the right story because that is not the truth. He said, no you were very scared that is why you capitulated. I said, we never capitulated! And then he referred me to a press release. Now you know what that press release was? I'd completely forgotten about it. So insignificant it was to me. Because I don't think I wrote the press release, it was just you know, the staff people do that. Apparently what happened here, the minister said, listen guys, you can't just call up a Citizen Force Regiment, these guys have got other jobs too. What will the public say, and their fathers, and brothers and sisters? You can't just call up people like that? You must give at least some sort of a reason. And I can't even remember how it was framed but it was framed that with the war raging north of Namibia it saw fit to call up the Citizen Force, which made up eventually with others a brigade. He used that as an argument of why laughs we were so scared and why we capitulated. It's absolute nonsense. So that I was there myself, I know exactly

	what I did and what he did, and that is the truth.
Interviewer	That's exactly why I asked you the question.
Geldenhuys	Well I think I've told you this before.
Interviewer	We touched on it but you've explained it again in a very lucid way which is exactly why I asked the question, irrespective of what the minister does or doesn't know.
Geldenhuys	You see, it was a knock-on that you caught there and it was a forward pass. That's what he's trying to say. Which has got nothing to do with the whole war of Cuito Cuanavale. But I still want to ask people, the first time people talk to me again I will say, why did those guys didn't go on to Jumba? If you can answer me that then I'll talk to you, if you can't answer me that then I refuse to talk to you.
Interviewer	Isn't that the thrust of it, as we've discussed a couple of times, their intention was to go to Jumba to close UNITA down to open up that front, and that never happened.
Geldenhuys	Yes. They ran away from it.
Interviewer	And you pointed out that their advances had been stopped in '85 and once or twice on other occasions as well.
Geldenhuys	Yes, we went across that border...listen only Three Two Battalion alone, I think, went over that border in operations more than a hundred times and there were other operations. So we must have gone, let's say between 1980 and 1989, in that period, we must have gone across the border in operations at least between a hundred and two hundred times...let's make it a hundred and fifty times, and every time we came back. So why would we have come back again? It was a standard thing. But you see what also happened, what I can vouch for because I heard this personally, when we asked permission to render that support to UNITA, it wasn't something that was initiated by us, it was Jonas Savimbi who came and said, listen we've got trouble, because I can fight this war, I can carry on like the way I do, but if they come again with tanks and missiles and aircraft, I haven't got that sort of equipment. So we got permission from the government to go across the border. Any time we go across the border especially on a summative scale...we sent patrols across the border we won't ask permission...but for a big operation we ask permission. So that was the main submission that we made to provide such assistance that it would compensate for the aircraft, and for the tanks and the armoured vehicles and missiles they haven't got. To counter that. That was the basis on which we got in. We didn't get political order like, clear the whole of such and such district, or conquer Luanda, or conquer that. It was like so many others that we had done for more than ten years, that is what we had to do. So that is exactly what we did, but now, and as we...also some people make a mistake, they analyse the operations as it happened, as if it was an operation that had been so pre-

	<p>planned. Which was not the case. There was not a long term deep penetration operation planned. It was a limited objective that was planned, then things developed from there. And some even...Helmoed Heitman make the mistake...perhaps it isn't even a mistake but he analysed that whole operation in three parts, Operation Modular, Hooper, and Packer. But that is misleading. And I don't mind that he described it under those headings but it may give to some readers the wrong impression, because you often have an operation of one or two or three or four phases, and you may have possible different code names for those pre-planned phases. But in this case, Modular, Hooper, Packer were not predetermined demarcated phases. There's really an administrative reason why they got that names, not an operational military reason, in this sense that our National Servicemen went there in three reliefs and the personnel people who do the call up and back here in Pretoria, that organisation, they called that one Modular. The other call up was Hooper, the other call up was Packer. So those names had nothing to do with the tactics employed or phases of the operations. So it is wrong, as I feel some people do, they analyse it as if those were pre-determined phases or as if they were operational phases. That's not so. They can say these things happened during Packer, but don't try and work out the tactics for that, then it won't work out.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Was the fact that you had National Servicemen who had to go back [to South Africa] at certain times, did that make your tactics more difficult to plan, that you had to keep refreshing the troops? Or was that actually a good thing so that you had fresh troops?</p>
Geldenhuys	<p>Well...no it's a good thing. It has advantages and disadvantages. Remember if a person had gone through one big fight, it's almost enough for some time. To go through two of them, is almost too much. And because it wasn't pre-planned, we didn't have troops in depth and in reserve in the area, we had to bring them right from behind. But it's also fresh legs, like reserves that you put on a rugby field, so it has good points and bad points. But as long as the leader corps remain the same, because you can't start re-planning every time. You start planning for the second phase whilst you're in the first one if it's not a pre-planned thing, the whole thing. So the reliefs worked out quite well. Well it's proven itself that it worked very well. There was something also not well known that I wanted to mention...no, it's slipped my mind now.</p>
Interviewer	<p>With regard to UNITA, UNITA participated in some of those battles, how good were UNITA as soldiers in terms of training, discipline, and command?</p>
Geldenhuys	<p>I would say for organisations of that kind, they were as good or as bad as the others. You must give them points in certain respects, for example, Holden Roberto, who was the founder of the first organisation there, the FNLA, he spent most of his time, if not all of his time, in Kinshasa and in Paris. Augustino Neto who broke away from the FNLA, he spent most of his time in Brazzaville just on the other side of the Congo River, or in</p>



Moscow. Savimbi was the only one who fought his whole thing from Angola. He lived in the bush. He went up to a certain date...the OAU had a very crucial meeting once to vote who they are going to support, the MPLA or UNITA, and the first vote was even, a 50/50 vote. So up to that stage Savimbi travelled quite a bit, but only for political and diplomatic reasons and to muster countries and their governments' support, but every time came back to...so he was also very African. Because you know, I can remember that once we took...once they had some 300 odd SWAPOs and General Viljoen, I think it was, asked him to deliver them to us. I wouldn't *laughs* what the hell do you do with them? But in any case, he refused. He said, no, we were always friends before this war started. And even the Kwanyamas, the Kwanyamas were also in SWAPO and in UNITA. So he was very African and he fought his war...but they all...I hate to say it, I must find more decent words now...they all had their ways of dealing with matters as they saw fit, which perhaps are not very western styled tactics or methods, but...and there are rumours about people that...political opponents that he eliminated, but he was certainly I would say perhaps as good or better than the others. And now as far as the fighting is concerned they are as good as the other, probably a little bit better. They got some training from us and they reacted well to training, and they knew the area, and they are good in the bush. They're also good in escape and evasion. But they didn't have the...they were not trained for any classical or semi classical warfare and they didn't have the weapons for that. So when the Soviet Union and the Cubans get together and they go for the tanks and the BRBMs and whatnot, then that is a sort of war that they cannot fight. Over a long period yes, but not in a...they could run away and come back again later over the years, but they couldn't stand up to a force like that. So that is why...we didn't initiate that. We were merely going to help him to stay there. Because it's a lot of territory that he covered for us, that he dominated that area, if they had over-ran him then they could infiltrate from there again, then they can open up new infiltration routes, etc, etc, so he was very valuable to us. That's why we supported him. But I can recall...and now I come back to the origin of this talk, this last bit of discussion, and that is...I don't want another Savannah. Savannah you might have had a case if you say, why did we come back? If I had my say I would have also said, we come back...because it's easy to talk about these things, it's easy to blame the government, it's easy to blame the politicians but, a principle of war is, you don't conquer a place if you're not prepared and willing to protect it. So if you capture Luanda you must keep it. Otherwise if we had captured it and then let go of it, then it would have been much worse than now where people say, why did we withdraw because we could have gone through to Luanda? The other thing is it's one thing to fight in the bush and in the African veld, but to fight in the city is quite a different matter. You'll recall that Napoleon went to capture Moscow and failed. Hitler went to Moscow and failed. A single sharpshooter

	<p>with a rifle or with an anti tank gun, can keep a whole division out of a town, a city. So I don't even talk...I know that a lot of people talk about...I don't even talk about it, it didn't happen, but I think that if I had a say, I would have said, no, please leave it. . Can you think politically, can you think what the international world would have said, that apartheid South Africa has now conquered the capital and has conquered Angola. Nobody in the world would have accepted that! Forget it! Do you think that there would have been one country in the world that would have accepted that? And, if you want to capture a thing like that, you must hold it. If you're not prepared to keep it, then don't attack it. But that's not the case with all the other operations that we had there. I start off by saying that somebody wrote that it was my strategies of limited objectives. I don't mind, he made it sound flattering but I didn't see it that way, but it wasn't my idea, even if he thinks it's a grand thing to do. It was simply because you get limited objectives by the politicians. That is why I had limited objectives, that's why we came back. And we did like any other time. But now because the Cubans had to show something when they got back home and the Russians had something to say when they got back to Moscow, they concocted this story and now some people like to believe it and it's nonsense.</p>
Interviewer	<p>One other question about UNITA: in liaising with them...I forget where I read it, it could have been in one of the books on Three Two...was there an issue with some of the UNITA commanders only being prepared to take commands from the very top, i.e. from yourself or one of the other generals? Or take advice shall I say?</p>
Geldenhuis	<p>I can understand it if they said they wouldn't do certain...if they don't get it from Savimbi himself. But I don't think that...</p>
Interviewer	<p>They didn't specify you or...</p>
Geldenhuis	<p>No.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Now it might have just been one or two operations, because I read something by Jan Hougaard going with the Three Two Recce group because there'd been some difficulty with the guys on the ground dealing with the South Africans, they said bring your senior guys and that's why they sent Jan Hougaard with him. And I believe there was some other incidents elsewhere where they said, no, no, it's got to come from Savimbi and Savimbi has to speak to a general?</p>
Geldenhuis	<p>That is so Soviet It's like many cultures amongst the blacks in South Africans too, and the only one who can give an order really, is the boss person, and that is Savimbi. That is quite often the truth. Unless he gives orders in advance, that if such and such happens then so and so. But if something happens and they're not sure but Savimbi himself would have said do so and so, then they don't. They wait for him. Yes, that is true. Well, I think, how I experienced it. Listen I did go a lot on operations, but now you see there's again a different culture between the police</p>

	<p>and us. In the police, let's say there are ten policemen who are supposed to keep a crowd under control, and there's a sergeant in command. And the colonel turns up there, a police colonel, then he takes over command. That is not the military culture. If I go and there's a combat group...like I went once with Eddie Viljoen, once with Serfontein...now I go as a passenger. I just want to see what happens. Because you have to see what happens. You have to know. Because sometimes you sit in your office in Pretoria or in Windhoek and you get a report, but if you don't know the dust and the flies and what it feels like and looks like and what happened there, then they think you don't have to report it because it's critical all the time. So you don't meddle. ... I have observed our troops in action. I was amongst them even though I didn't take over. In the case of Modular, Hooper, Packer, they definitely kept me out of it, but me or anybody else of my standing, in the sense of it was marshlands. And we didn't have air superiority and the going was tough because of rain and, as I said, the wetlands. So I didn't see as much of that operation as others that I saw. but I saw enough to kind of tell with confidence the things that I have told you today, because I've seen it and I know it and apart from the people who were there actually on the spot – not everybody was every time everywhere on the spot – but I have no doubt about the things that I'm telling you. It's not hearsay, but one wouldn't expect of a Chief of the Defence Force, even the Chief of the Army, to be able to talk about those things, and about some of them I won't talk because I wasn't there. Like the Lomba fights, I wasn't there. But I've gone the whole way with Operation Daisy with Roeland de Vries who was there. So I know all the people and I know as good as a Chief of the Defence Force could have known about what's happened there. So I just want to make the point I'm not sitting back and now being wise about these things. But some of them I didn't see. I can't tell you exactly what happened there, there and there and there.</p>
Interviewer	But as you say you've experienced the flies and the heat and the dust and the battle and so on.
Geldenhuys	And a little bit more, yes.
Interviewer	And once day you scared the chef and asked him for an ice-cream. <i>Laughter</i>
Geldenhuys	You know on occasion I wanted to tell you, listen I wasn't there don't ask me. But I think it's negative of me to say I don't know. Because I'm well enough in the picture but like at Lomba I'm not in the know. I'm not going to talk to you about that. I'm not going to talk to you about Techipa. I was there but I didn't even see any of the scraps at that time, like I've seen at other places. I was there once when we caught the Russian. I was in that combat group.
Interviewer	But that's why you put me in touch with some of the battle commanders who were actually there.

Gelden

By the way I've never ever in my life socialized with a politician. I was never in any minister's house unless I was invited for a specific reason. Not even Pik Botha. But what I wanted to...it was in response to a question you asked, Pik Botha did say, I don't want another Savannah. Because he knows our guys are keen and *laughs* if they can't go one place they go for the next one, they go for the next one, go for the next one, and then you're in a Savannah. And towards the end, and that is something that some people don't know or they don't want to know or it doesn't suit them to know, and that is this: after we had beaten them at Lomba...you must remember now there's a procedure we talk like commanders, but the staff they pass on the information, the intelligence sitreps and the operational sitreps and everything, and it goes right up to the President. Because he [PW Botha] was for 12 years Minister of Defence, he's interested in the Defence Force, he likes it, he's with us, he reads those things. So after the triumphs at Lomba either him or via General Malan, or via...it could have been only one of those two...asked me, he said, listen, what the hell are you guys still doing there? You've accomplished your mission, what the hell are you still doing there? *(Tape turned off at 347) END OF RECORDING*

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