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Please note:

1. When typist is unsure of names, speakers will be identified by title.
2. Transcriptions are typed verbatim, and typist, when unsure of jargon, industry terms or individual's names, will type phonetic spelling followed by (unsure)

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay so we are joined now by Willem Rate...can you tell us a bit more about yourself and how you ended up in 32 Battalion.

**WILLEM RATTE:** Shortly about myself, I was born in South Africa...but I was never called up at the stage when I left school in 1965...we had the so called ballot system and so I missed out on the Army in South Africa, and then eventually in 1975 I went up and joined the Rhodesian Army, I fought there for six years in the special air service...when I came back I was sent up to 32 Battalion in South West Africa, that was the beginning of 1980...and I got posted to the so called Reconnaissance wing of 32 Battalion by the then Commandant Deon Ferreira ... and that's basically where I stayed for the next few years, we had our own base in Ammonia which is in Eastern Owamboland but we were part of 32 battalion whose main base was in Buffalo where all the troops were staying and then the HQ was in Rundu. Now I was, I think when I joined 32 Battalion I was about 31 at that stage and I was made a Lieutenant when I joined the South African Army ...when I got to Ammonia the first time there was already a reconnaissance wing in existence which had been started by Blue Kelly and Ron Gregory...two very remarkable soldiers who had welded some officers and NCO's into and obviously the troops ...the officers and NCO's were whites and the troops were black, into a unit which already at ...or sub-unit, which already at that stage had proved to be a remarkable bunch of guys. They had had some quite remarkable operations behind them and up to that stage they did not have a lot of support from the air force, operations done by 32 had to be done on foot normally in Angola with the minimum or no air support at all which had resulted in

quite a few casualties and also to some extent a feeling that we weren't really winning the war at that stage. Now Deon Ferreira was in charge of 32 Battalion ...I was quite fortunate in that I had his confidence in me, for some reason he thought my experience in Rhodesia would benefit and would be of value to the reconnaissance wing, which I think it was actually, and I had seen in Rhodesia what could be done with a small team or teams, and a small unit...if its properly trained and utilised and also and especially if its got the right support, amongst others from the Airforce. So from the time that I was at the 32 Wing from that time onwards I think we had a very good support system, mainly choppers on standby if we had problems on the ground. There were exceptions and I think one of the exceptions was Savate...which was a unique operation in that it actually never should have happened, it was never officially sanctioned by higher HQ...I was lieutenant at that stage, and I didn't know the workings of, and especially the intrigues in the Army HQ and Pretoria and so on...but looking back I think even at that time we already had a large element inside our own Government and Military hierarchy which was working in exactly the opposite direction that we working on the ground. Now UNITA at that stage was the force in Angola which South Africa supported and through which South Africa was hoping to establish a friendly government in Angola. The Military had set up a special support organisation to train and supply UNITA and UNITA obviously had to do the fighting...and to the outside world UNITA was a credible gorilla organisation fighting the NPLA regime in Luanda. At some stage Ulshich [?] Fred Ulshich was the chief of that organisation which was supporting UNITA on

our side in Rundu and him and Deon Ferreira had a good relationship going and UNITA had a problem with FAPLA's garrison in Savate...and UNITA was at that stage where they needed a big success to try and break into the system of FAPLA bases in Southern Angola...to establish their own sort of area...and to consolidate their own area...and they couldn't take on Savate on their own, not at that stage, they were still in the early stages, they were training with our help mainly close to the border they had a lot of training camps ...and Savate was a bit further in. Savati is a garrison on that Cuvango River about 40 kilometres in from the South West Border...

**INTERVIEWER:** From Congo....

**WILLEM RATTE:** Yes, from the South African border North West...on the right hand side of the river...and it was one of the key garrisons because if you take Savate away, all the other towns opposite South West on the Cuvango River would be cut off...so that was a strategic idea behind taking out Savate. If they could take out Savate all the other towns further down the river would basically have to fall as well, which actually happened afterwards. Ulshich's problem was that Army HQ wasn't going to allow South African forces to attack Savate and UNITA as I said wasn't able to do it at that stage. So whether deliberately or not they in the end it worked like this...they ...the impression on the ground was that Army HQ had authorised us to attack Savate...with the condition that there would be no air support and that the whole operation would have to be done in such a way that FAPLA would think it was UNITA and the outside world especially would think it was UNITA ...so it would go under the flag of UNITA but it was us

basically, 32 battalion which would do the attack, and we were actually suited to that because our troops were Angolan's, they spoke Portuguese, and we had a good cooperation with UNITA. Now the intelligence that came down to us when I was first briefed by Commandant Ferreira was that before we attack Savate we must make sure that one its occupied...because UNITA wasn't sure whether it was occupied at all. The strength of the garrison was assumed not to be too strong, they normally don't have a lot of people there, and one battalion should be enough to take them out...and their big problem was to launch a big operation in turn to find that there is nobody there...so I was tasked, the reconnaissance wing was tasked to first establish whether there was any enemy at Savate and where they were...in relation to the airstrip and the river, and then secondly another team of ours to recce the route in for the battalion, because they obviously had to come afterwards and move into position to attack, and thirdly our blokes were to form a stopper line, that if FAPLA withdrew from Savate that we could basically stop them, now the composition of a stopper line gives you the indication of what was expected, what strength was expected, because we had 10 stopper groups of three men each...30 men...so you don't put up that sort of stopper line if there is a whole brigade, which is basically 3 battalions, 3000 men...so our intelligence whether it was a deliberate attempt to mislead on UNITA or not I don't know, but we were under the impression that it was at most a small garrison of 100 or 200 or 300 who were holding the town. Our main mission was to establish whether it was occupied at all, whether there was somebody there. So we ...at our level we planned the operation and we got

everybody organised and into teams and prepared our kits and did rehearsals and then we had a guide who was supplied by this organisation that was helping UNITA ...a guy called Mr. Lob...Mr. Lob had a vehicle which could travel through the Angolan bush and he apparently we were told he travels regularly up and down and knows the Angola bush like the back of his hand, and he took us over the border, north of our base which is west of the Cuvango River ...that vast area there is no or very little population there, just a few bushmen...the only population there is along the river and Savati was along the river and the idea was for Mr. Lob to go north, west of the Cuvango until he is opposite Savate and then further north, and then he drops us off about a nights march from the Cuvango and then we march onto the Cuvango river and we launch our boats, kleppers, collapsible canoe type of boats that the British SAS they also use...its probably the best boat of its kind because you can do a man pack, you can carry it through the bush and when you get to the water you can assemble it and launch it. So when the time came along Lobs took us aboard, I think he had Unimogs or whatever, and he took us on board and dropped our reconnaissance team which was 5 people, two whites, two blacks from our reconnaissance wing and then one UNITA guy...who was supposed to be the guide, and he travelled first, we got to **Lagore [Portuguese] which** was a UNITA training base, fairly close to the border and from there north, and I spoke to him and we sort of discussed the plan and he knew that he must drop me off west of Savate but north of the town so that if we walked due east, because the Angolan bush there is a featureless country, you don't have mountains or rivers or ...its just one flat

piece of bush on Savana land, so you have to navigate basically by town and distance so from the border you plot yourself you just go north for a certain distance...and then you must be more or less there, and then you go east for a certain distance, and then you should reach the river and you can just launch your boats and go down to the town. So that's basically what we did and Lob said okay here we are now....this is where you are, if you walk due east from here you should be north from Savate and ...so he took off and left us and we got our ruck sacks and started walking and we walked that first night ...and then we laid up by day....and we didn't reach the river, we didn't even come close to it in the first night, so we knew that something was wrong, but we didn't know what and we still assumed that we were north of Savate, and then during the day we heard vehicles right east, in other words in the direction where we were going, so we assumed ...well it cant be Savate, because Savate must be south so it could be a convoy which is basing up there north of Savate...so we decided that we didn't want to walk into that convoy so we go off slightly to the right, its slightly more soft to miss them, and to then launch our boats. But what actually happened was he had dropped us off far to the south, not north of Savate but south of Savate...not actually opposite Savate, in other words where he had dropped us off if you draw a line to the east we would have walked right into Savate itself. The vehicle that we heard were actually vehicles at Savate itself...so when we veered off to the right the next night we continued walking and then in the middle of the night we got to the river and we launched our boats. We saw tracks and a little road, and I think we even heard vehicles that evening

again...but that time from where we launched it would be north, but we just assumed that it was just a vehicle convoy there and we still assumed that Savate was to the south, so we rowed downstream through rapids as well...at one stage there were rapids there and we made good progress but the guides ...all the time the guides were ...he was puzzled, and I asked him where are we now, because all along the river there are Portuguese names and old towns, most of them deserted...and a few towns that had buildings, and I think I remember, I think the name of the village that we eventually ended up in was Pedro...I am not 100% sure but ....it could be **Pundae**...lets leave that open because I need a map to make sure...but it was the first town downstream that had buildings which was an old established Portuguese town with brick houses and I think it had an airstrip, I am not 100% sure, I think it did...when we got to that specific town I thought it was Savate...you know it had buildings...and that's when the guide finally realised where he was, and he said to me no, this was so and so, and we looked at the map and we realised we were south of Savate...instead of going to Savate we were actually running away from Savate. Now this was in the early hours of the morning because we walked into the town to have a look and there was nobody there, it was totally deserted, typical Angolan town which after the Portuguese pulled out was just left to ruin. Then the guide said no he is 100% sure we are at such and such a place and so Savate is actually north of us and we have been going away from Savate. So that was a hell of a shock to us and we decided the only thing that we can do now is to go back...and I still don't know until today how we actually managed it, because we rowed back against



the upstream, through the rapids amongst other things and just ..I think we covered about half the distance back to Savate...before it became light and we pulled up on the other bank on the left hand side and laid up and based up for a day. Then during the day we heard vehicles coming down from Savate probably patrols or whatever, on the other side of the river...because we were on the opposite side of the town....and we ...I cant remember if we actually made coms that day or if we struggled to make coms...but sooner or later we told HQ that we ...that there has been a delay and that we need another night to do the reconnaissance but we also knew that the battalion was already on the march...that they were committed and that we only had one more night to do the final reconnaissance and then the battalion would arrive early ...it was supposed to arrive early in the morning. So we decided to go in that next night and we had basically two tasks, the one was to establish the mortar position where arbitrary mortars were to be set up...so they could plot themselves and from there they could plot the enemy...and also to establish the perimeter of the garrison...so when it became dark we pushed the boats into the water again and rode upstream and we arrived opposite Savate and got on...there was along the river a sort of open...the houses started a bit further back, and at night I think we got going just after midnight and it was fairly quiet so Piet van Eeden who was a mortar man he went off to one side to establish a mortar position and I took another guy, the other troop that we had Paulu with and we went all around the trenches....in other words the perimeter trenches that the Angolan's had dug all around Savate...we went all the way around until we got to the airstrip and then

walked down the airstrip back to the river...and in the process we established the extent of the base ...which was far bigger than we expected and also that they must have some heavy weaponry there...it was not just a normal little garrison. Then before first light we withdrew across the river...because we got the message ...no we didn't get any coms...we were supposed to have coms because the battalion was supposed to be there early in the morning before first light they should have been in position...but we couldn't get them on the radio because if you are close you should be able to them on a smaller radio...which you weren't able to, there was no coms at all. So we knew that the battalion wasn't close so we had to pull out...we got to the other side of the river and based up in some thick bush there and put up a big radio to get coms and that's when we heard that there has been a delay and problems with the route in and so on, and that they would only be there later that day. So we basically stayed in hiding on the other side and waited for the battalion...eventually I think after ten or whatever, they did arrive and then the shooting started and the battle started and we acted as forward observation post for the mortars, and when the mortars landed we corrected where the mortars were supposed to go to. Basically that was our task done...and then when the battalion had finally taken Savate with big losses, for us it was big losses...I mean we lost 15 people and a high percentage of whites ...it was the biggest amount of losses that they apparently ever had in one single day. But in the end FAPLA withdrew and they basically withdrew through that stopper line of our blokes, reconnaissance blokes of ten teams and one troop, a black troop got killed ...but that was all, we had no other losses

which was quite amazing if you think that the whole brigade walks through or moves through a thin stopper line of 10 three man teams and you only have one dead...I still don't know how they managed, but they did very well that day, and then when everything was over we rode back across the river and joined the battalion and basically that was it.

**INTERVIEWER:** What did you find when you joined the battalion?

**WILLEM RATTE:** You mean morale wise or

**INTERVIEWER:** What was the situation, what was the atmosphere....

**WILLEM RATTE:** They were in control, FAPLA had pulled out and basically we had a look at what was there, we found a lot of **Monakashitas**... which are these rockets, Stalin organ rockets...and explosives, guns and so on, and basically the normal mopping up after a battle where you have a look whets there and get hold of all the enemy weapons and ammunition and whatever you find, and get everything done before you pull out again, because we were supposed to hand over and we did hand over to a small unit, they were supposed to claim the success and we just quietly withdrew and disappear, and they would then take over Savate and the whole operation was supposed to have been done under the flag of UNITA ...that they had actually done the fighting. But Army HQ was very upset when they heard about the losses because the big difference between us and SWAPO and also FAPLA was to the South African Army a loss was always something to be avoided...they were very sensitive because of public opinion and also because of our whole tradition, you know human life means a lot in our civil society. SWAPO and FAPLA I mean it ...they ...any loss as far as

their government was concerned, as far as the hierarchy is concerned they couldn't care less whether 800 of people are dead or not, they just carried on, it wasn't a factor in their planning and their decision making...while with us it was a hell of a factor, because the Government was exposed to public opinion...15 guys of which I think 10 ...about two thirds might have been whites, it was a high percentage of whites and the people back home didn't take kindly to that sort of loss, so HQ came down on this like a ton of bricks and wanted to know who gave permission for it...and there was a lot of arguing about that and the military who was involved said but we did have permission and Army HQ pulled back and said we never gave permission, we only gave permission for a reconnaissance...so the normal game of trying of blame somebody else, but I think in retrospect obviously the losses were painful, but the fact that a battalion like 32 took on attacks and defeated and chased out a whole brigade, the dug in brigade with a sort of support that they had, they had mortars, they had monakoshitas, rockets, they had everything that opened and closes and that 32 Battalion defeated them was a hell of an achievement. And it put 32 firmly on the map I think of the war in Angola, because there was no air support, nobody could say we only won because we had air support, and so on.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did FAPLA ever discover that the South Africans were involved?

**WILLEM RATTE:** I think they knew, I am sure that they broadcast the news that the South African Army attacked them and the South African Army as normal probably denied it. But I think FAPLA knew very well...especially because of the

casualties...I mean the high percentage of whites, there are some of the whites that weren't found at first ...in the end no white was captured or abducted and FAPLA never succeeded in taking a body with, but they must have had a good look at some of the casualties, they must have realised that there were a lot of whites involved. So they definitely knew that it wasn't UNITA ...funny enough that battle also put UNITA on the map, because even though they didn't do the work, from then onwards UNITA became stronger and actually fought their own battles, and it may have played a role in motivating them to ...from now on not to use South African troops but to do their work themselves...which happened after that. They fought some very good battles and it took ...like at Kuito Cuanavale they took after that...or no some other bases where there was no South African involvement apart from obviously the supplied and the training and so on.

**INTERVIEWER:** So in effect UNITA basically took the credit for this operation?

**WILLEM RATTE:** No we never officially, in our circles in the military, in the South African Military everyone knew that 32 had attacked Savate, but I think officially it was never admitted. I don't think so, but one could go back to the newspapers at that time and find out, but I don't think ....officially it was a UNITA operation and UNITA took the credit for that.

**MALE SPEAKER:** In fact I think I still have a clipping of that...that operation, I must have a look, it was done under the UNITA banner.

**INTERVIEWER:** So this did eventually reach the press back from South Africa. Did ....

**WILLEM RATTE:** I will make you a Photostat and email it to you....

**INTERVIEWER:** But there wasn't a lot of international publicity around this, was there...I am comparing it to Cassinga which had a similar number of losses because of SWAPO.

**KEVIN FITZGERALD:** Shortly after the operation a British chap who was in 32 deserted...I can't remember his name, Willem can you remember his name...Edwards deserted and I think through his desertion the Savate battle then had some problems, but as a stand alone battle itself it passed international credits...I think that had much to do with the South African manipulation of information and anything else. For the NPLA it was a major disaster, I think they had much to be known so they kept it pretty much under wraps, UNITA didn't really go into the towns in a glorious fashion in fact I don't think they really occupied the town much subsequent to that, did they?

**WILLEM RATTE:** Not really because from then on until I stopped at Caiundo...Caiundo is further north, at least another 40 kilometres further north and their supply lines stopped at Caiundo and what happened after that, because Savate fell away and the whole route north and south of Savate wasn't available to FAPLA any more. There garrison times along the Cuvango were taken one after the other, the bases were taken out.

**KEVIN FITZGERALD:** What was the one opposite Rundu?

**WILLEM RATTE:** Calei

**KEVIN FITZGERALD:** All of our garrisons eventually went.

**WILLEM RATTE:** They all went, and they didn't really have a chance...and UNITA did well after that, Savate was a turning point, up to Savate UNITA was a

bit of a joke...I saw the recruits being trained there at **leboa des elefantes** it was very primitive and it was ...I mean the weapons they had was not something that you could rush home about, you could see it was a rag tag, barefoot army, but after Savate they really got going and they fought some conventional battles against FAPLA which they won. So Savate was a turning point in more ways than one.

**KEVIN FITZGERALD:** In years to come UNITA took a lot of glory for the battles of 32 [inaudible] but on this one I think they put an infantry [inaudible] of playing the PR game because Savimbi certainly played his PR game very well in the years to come...and a lot of the battles that 32 won, UNITA took credit for, Savimbi made sure that the World Press got to see them. I think this came a bit early in that evolution of the PR game, and Savate never got International PR coverage, but UNITA later ...around further events that 32 were very prominent in showing victories on their behalf...so Savate came and went and got a blip on the radar screen because of the high amount of casualties. The amounts of deaths of whites was extremely high, abnormally high and of the 16 or so killed it was probably 10 or more white officers and NCO's and 6 were Angolan troops.

**WILLEM RATTE:** That's why they deserted, he thought it was all glory and no danger, and he realised that at Savate you might get shot because that's probably why he ran away this Edwards character...but there is something else that I remember from Savate funnily enough, the trip down...okay up you didn't really have time to look anywhere, you just sweated and struggled to row upstream, but the way down when we were actually rowing away from Savate it

was one of the most beautiful trips that I ever had, you can just imagine, its dark, pitch black and you glide, okay you row but you don't have to row very hard because you go with the stream, you have got a typical African river bank along the sides and I remember at one stage we were sort of rowing down with the canoes more to the left hand side and the next moment we looked up, you know you feel so small, you sit in the canoe and you glide down and the next moment you suddenly see these elephants drinking from the side, and its huge, they are like skyscrapers on the side, you just look up and you stop rowing and glide past and just look at them, it was quite amazing.

**INTERVIEWER:** So this was on the way home luckily....

**WILLEM RATTE:** No we didn't row out, once we were finished and we joined the battalion we drove up, this was on the row down when we thought we were going towards Savate but we were actually moving away from Savate downstream, no it was beautiful.

**KEVIN FITZGERALD:** You did contemplate rowing out and I think Falcon put a stop to that didn't he.

**WILLEM RATTE:** I don't know.

**KEVIN FITZGERALD:** I can remember you did contemplate rowing all the way back to the South West Border, but I think Falcon put a stop....

**WILLEM RATTE:** It would have been nice because there was nothing there, it was totally deserted, and no people...and the whole area was deserted. No the African bush is nice, especially at night...and when you are on the river like that.

**KEVIN FITZGERALD:** You were actually doing a recce itself, and as I said to



you on many occasions previously ..we never really chatted about this....but when you were doing the recce itself ...were you quite confident in getting about and getting the business done knowing that here you were, you had realised by that stage that this camp is not in the transition phase as initial information [inaudible] this camp was actually full with as many as 3000 enemies.

**WILLEM RATTE**: Yes but remember we walked outside the perimeter, we moved around the perimeter, all the time staying close to the perimeter, in other words the trenches and the fires and the guards and so on, but trying to keep out of earshot, that they don't realise that we are there, just watching and seeing there is a trench, there is presence there, there is a fire there.

**KEVIN FITZGERALD**: Yes but coming down the runway.

**WILLEM RATTE**: Coming down the runway it was going on to early morning and normally that's the time when nobody moves and we just openly walked down the runway and just checked on the side, there is presence there and there is presence there, and we just carried on because we didn't have any time any more, we just had to leg it back to the river.

**KEVIN FITZGERALD**: A bunch of questions in the circumstances, [inaudible] as much as he was a student assessing the situation saying this time of the day nobody moves, they wait until the sun peeps its head up before they get going, so we more [inaudible] and can do that.

**WILLEM RATTE**: They don't expect you to do that anyway. It takes time to move around the perimeter like that...it takes hours to move along.

**KEVIN FITZGERALD**: How big would you estimate that base was Willem.

**WILLEM RATTE**: We said to them it's impossible to say, we just told them it's a big garrison, its not just 100 or 200 people it's big and there was no ways that we could put numbers to it.

**KEVIN FITZGERALD**: The day after when we were doing a sweep through the base, I was absolutely amazed by the size and scale of the base, it was massive. In intelligence that we were given remembering at the time you were buys with the recon and we were getting our briefing with intelligence that we were given was that there might be at max 300 people in the base ... and that this thing should be over within ...thank you very much done and dusted, your town is out. And that then evolved into a full scale day battles ...with still skirmishes the next day...we were still laying skirmishes and pot shots here and there and everywhere, and I remember the [inaudible] getting into a few skirmishes ...as we were moving south towards the base to join up with the main body ...active in the base there, and I remember coming across Cliff who later joined us and he was laden down with documents...the guys were carrying out sacks of documents, I mean we must have got some very good intelligence from them...did you get any feedback on this?

**WILLEM RATTE**: No we didn't get any feedback, all attendances were probably taken by ...what was the organisations name that helped UNITA ..What did they call them....CSI....[inaudible] the whole support for UNITA was controlled by Chief Staff of Intelligence.

**INTERVIEWER**: Which was part of the South African Defence Force.

**WILLEM RATTE**: Yes but it had its own organisation...its own structures and

everything.

**INTERVIEWER:** So this Chief of Staff of Intelligence you never had any contact with them.

**WILLEM RATTE:** No they were separate...every unit...

**INTERVIEWER:** Were they briefing Ferreira at the time.

**WILLEM RATTE:** Yes they only had contact with Ferreira at his level...at the commanding level...they....

**KEVIN FITZGERALD:** The chap that Willem mentioned earlier at [inaudible] he was ...

**WILLEM RATTE:** He was the chief of that Chief Staff Intelligence Organisation in Rundu, so he would at his level talk to our commander, but they wouldn't talk to us further down the line, we just did what our own chiefs told us to do. The intelligence was given at the top level and then filtered down to us...

**INTERVIEWER:** So ostensibly this information was coming from UNITA...I mean who were their sources...who was CSI sources

**WILLEM RATTE:** I don't even know, that's why I am very reluctant to say there was from UNITA's side there was deliberate misinformation because the Angolan bush is big and at that stage there were not really, the organisation was still in its infant shoes and they were trying to build up and the set up we saw at **Lagoris and Quantas** was still very primitive and they had a few guys working to try and build UNITA up supplies wise and intelligence wise and so on, its quite possible that they just didn't know...typical in any Army especially with UNITA they don't want to appear, they don't want to lose face...when South Africans asked them

listen do you know what's going on, yes...we know everything, but in reality they probably didn't know and they just made an estimate according to what they thought would be ...its...one cant be 100% sure that it was deliberate.

**INTERVIEWER:** I am a little confused here, was UNITA relying on the South Africans for intelligence or were South Africans relying on UNITA intelligence.

**WILLEM RATTE:** No, we relied on UNITA all those years...we relied on UNITA for intelligence...some of the intelligence turned out later, especially when they became a better force, was very good and we could rely on the info...now even, I mean its logical they are the Angolans we are the South Africans, its their country and we relied very much...take Mr. Lob...Mr. Lob was my guide, I relied on him implicitly...he knows ..he said he knows the country like the back of his hand...

**INTERVIEWER:** And did you trust him?

**WILLEM RATTE:** Yes, of course you trust him, and ...

**KEVIN FITZGERALD:** You say that with an incredibly straight face, I must say.

**WILLEM RATTE:** Yes, I mean afterwards we can laugh about it and we ...it was a standing joke Mr. Lob...his navigational abilities became a standing joke, but at that time we didn't know any better I mean he was the guide...he knows, he has been there and he is driving the whole ....

**KEVIN FITZGERALD:** But later on we learnt to question the intelligence that came through, we asked pretty pointed questions.

**WILLEM RATTE:** Yes and we also became more experienced, remember that was in 1980...it was the first major operation that I did in 32 in the reconnaissance wing...the first major operation, and I think for the other guys it

was one of the first big ones that they ever did. So later we got more experience, especially with FAPLA ...but as I said for a battalion like ours to take on a brigade, a dug in brigade with the support they had and to chase them out takes some doing...I think it's a hell of a feather in the battalions cap and it was seen like that as well. I mean at the end of the day I think Savate made 32 battalion...they really gave it a hell of a reputation and rightly so.

**KEVIN FITZGERALD:** Were you following the coverage of the battle over the radio, and from your vantage point did you see the battle.

**WILLEM RATTE:** Yes we could see, but we couldn't see a lot of detail...we could see judging from the smoke where the ...and we had a map obviously and we plotted where the base was according to the perimeter, so we could guide the bombardment onto the target more or less, but it wasn't like a high mountain...you could just see there was smoke there and there, and it must be more or less here and so on...and the noise and the smoke, from that we could get a picture, but it wasn't ideal **opi**...put it that way.

**KEVIN FITZGERALD:** From that point when did the intensity of the battle seem to peak at what point in the day?

**WILLEM RATTE:** It peaked around mid day but by the afternoon it was won.

**KEVIN FITZGERALD:** That sort of cases our experience...we had a busy morning and mid afternoon, mid day it became the most intense ...the blokes were heading north cleaning up ....

**WILLEM RATTE:** But I still say that the training of the reconnaissance wing and the whole way of operating was proof to be good, because there was only one

casualty that we had...and the guys did very well.

**INTERVIEWER:** How was the ...this is the first major operation of the reconnaissance...or wasn't it.

**WILLEM RATTE:** No there were many, that was the first battalion assault that ...on an established base like Savate that the battalion was involved in for UNITA basically doing it for UNITA. Now previously before my time for example they had some hairy ops in the south of Angola which I don't want to comment on because I wasn't there, but all I know is there were difficult operations, very difficult operations because there they also didn't have proper air support.

**KEVIN FITZGERALD:** And I think it will be fair to say that returned [inaudible] and on your map there Amahoni and that conglomeration of Shawn north of [inaudible] was possibly where we [inaudible] as a recce group, where we saw very intense action. At some stage a number of the recce groups were given to platoons and together with those platoons, some of the guys were hitting something like six contacts a day, and this went on for days. So by the time that Willem arrived to assume command we were pretty battle hardened group and as Willem said we weren't aware of it at the time, and being the kind of person Willem is, he never let you get a big head about this...but as Willem said by the time he arrived at the unit, we had already fairly well established reputation, and Savate went on for the unit as a whole to show that their reputation was [inaudible] we were good people to have in the battle, having found [inaudible] that easily and I think that was one of the big things in the recce group in the years to come, that the guys who phoned us, Peter and so on and so forth, found

a big difference in the platoons to the recce group. The recce group were pretty dogged and determined and didn't just simply say okay guys its starting to get a bit difficult, its time we called the choppers in to come and pull us out, and we try again in a week or so time, that kind of mindset didn't exist with them, you persisted and got your operation done...you go along with it...

**WILLEM RATTE**: And did he persist?

**KEVIN FITZGERALD**: Yes we did, and that's where the reputation of the recce group was further entrenched and people that came and followed us on and took the recce group forward, I think possible the [inaudible] are part of the topic today. That basis stood the unit and the group in good stead in years to come...you set that standard and you set that ethos, that mindset that people that follow come into the existing mindset that says hey don't give up in this little place, you go here and the only time you stop is if a bullet stops you, and that is just about it...there is no excuse of running out of water, or we haven't eaten for three days or its terribly hot out here...it didn't work that way and the guys in the platoons ....they used to try and [inaudible] the recce groups ...I think we were just amazed by the mindset [inaudible] if things got tuff it was pretty easy to tell the guys lets call it up and wait for the choppers and we will wait for the choppers tomorrow and we will regroup and this and the next thing...a recce group didn't work that way...you pushed too, and that's what endeared us to Ferreira ..I think he was a big fan of the recce group ....

**WILLEM RATTE**: I think Ferreira plays a bit role, he was commander at Savate ...now correct me if I am wrong, he took over not long before that, when did he

do the take over?

**KEVIN FITZGERALD**: He came into command shortly after we arrived, Nel was gone....

**B SIDE**

**WILLEM RATTE**: But not long before....

**KEVIN FITZGERALD**: Peter in his introduction actually came to us by way of the Parrabats....and he picked up malaria during the....

**WILLEM RATTE**: So they kicked him out of the Parrabats and [inaudible] I am just joking....[cross talking]

**KEVIN FITZGERALD**: Piet you arrived in the recce group in 1979...

**PIET**: Yes in 1979.

**KEVIN FITZGERALD**: But I think that Ferreira realised what the Recce group had given far sooner perhaps than any other commander would have, and he worked us and he could think, he got a lot of success because of that, the Recce group brought a lot into him you know.

**WILLEM RATTE**: Something that always struck me...one thing that was characteristic of our unit there was the sense of humour...we really had a good sense of humour and that was what a lot of things bearable ...that sort of gallows humour ...to a certain extent, we never took ourselves too seriously, and that is the only way that you can survive, otherwise you go bonkers.

**KEVIN FITZGERALD**: I told Angela when she did the interview with us, nothing but nothing was sacred, we were all open characters.

**WILLEM RATTE**: Yes, and this is good, it kept our feet on the ground and



Ferreira was in my eyes the best high ranking officer we ever had in the South African Army...I don't know of any other commanding officer that was as successful as he was, and the reason for his success, the one single factor for his success was a simple thing like he was one of the few high ranking officers in our army who was prepared to listen. Once he knew you, and that doesn't only go for myself, anyone that served under him, you could go back to him at any time and his door was always open, he would never chase you, you were 100% sure that he wouldn't chase you out. And that made him such a good commander because he got the info, you see I compare him now to, I don't want to mention names, to somebody else who also commanded for some time...that somebody else had a hell of a temper...and you know you just stopped going to him because you didn't know whether you would get an ash tray flying at your head...but with Deon Ferreira, I am talking for myself now, but I am sure it was the case with a lot of other people as well. I knew that if I picked up something that I think is important I can go to him and knock on his door literally and have it opened up and he would make time for me. And I know of at least one, ag more than one case where...things that I, I was at a lower level and I could still ...I was still in touch with what was happening on the ground and for example at one stage the sector which he was commanding had a plan to lay a minefield between the Cuvango and the Owamboland. At that stage Owamboland was infiltrated by terrorists but Cuvango was still clean ...and he was in charge of Cuvango...so his advisors, his staff told him that the best way to solve a problem is to lay a minefield on the border between, internally, not the Angolan border, its

internally north/south between Cuvango and Owamboland and that actually had gone quite far in the planning and preparation stage...until I heard about it and I was at that stage at **Napala base** and I have a certain background from Rhodesian where we did use minefields, and I know what minefields are like and I know what they can do...and I know the advantages and disadvantages...so as soon as I heard about it I rushed off and I went into the HQ and I virtually knocked on his door, and said I want to speak to him. He said yes, sit down the door is also open. At that stage I was a Captain and he was a commandant, and I told him, I said commandant this is not going to work, it didn't work in Rhodesia and basically at the end of the day your minefield causes more own casualties than it causes enemy casualties and they are still able to breach. The only minefield that is effective is the one that you can cover by fire and you can by personnel...and with these distances involved both in Rhodesia and South West, its impossible to cover a minefield with own fire and personnel. So a minefield is laid and it stays there and then first your casualties from your own personnel laying it...there is always sappers that die while laying a minefield because they do make mistakes, they are only human. So you lose a lot of sappers laying it...then once its laid you lose a lot of local pops and own people who try and cross it even if it's a planned crossing ...like I remember in Rhodesia we crossed a minefield and one of the mines had slipped out ...washed out by the rain and the guide walking behind me blew hit foot off...it went off and blew his foot off...the mine wasn't supposed to be there, it had washed out in the rain. And the biggest disadvantage of the mine field is it antagonises the local

population...they get horribly upset because their cattle stray, their little **magibas**, their little **picanins** go into the minefield and as I said minefields also wash out, you don't even have to go into the minefield you can step on a mine outside of the minefield...because mines move, they get washed out and so on...and I spoke to him and said its not going to work ...he is going to make a horrible mistake and he listened and he stopped the minefield, he stopped the whole operation...saving him the embarrassment that another commander in Owamboland ran into when he laid a minefield and it was a total failure. So that's one of the reasons probably the most important reason why Deon Ferreira was the most successful unit commander and later the most successful sector commander because he was the only commander of a sector, sector two zero, where he took over a sector that was infiltrated by terrorists and when he handed over three years later there was not a single terrorist left, he had cleaned up that whole area.

**INTERVIEWER:** What were the parameters of sector two zero....

**WILLEM RATTE:** Two zero was Cubango...in other words the eastern part of the border area in the north of South West and Owamboland is the middle, there was where the bulk of the population and also the SWAPO heartland is. Sector one zero....

**KEVIN FITZGERALD:** And to the west?

**WILLEM RATTE:** To the west was sector three zero ...that was Kaokoland and then you had four zero was the Caprivi...no, no, wait now I am getting confused, what was the Caprivi....anyway those were the important ones, one zero was

Owamboland and two zero was Cubango and they stayed the important ones right to the end of the war, and then there were other sectors but they were minor ones. No it was interesting...as I said I think the ...Deon Ferreira had a lot to do with the success of Savate as well, the fact that he was the commander, because he was unflappable, he was a round little man, he was quite chunky but he just carried on, he wasn't ....

**KEVIN FITZGERALD:** and he smoked Gunston Plain I think...he used to smoke.....all the time.

**WILLEM RATTE:** You see a unit depends very much on the leadership and he provided best leadership that I have ever seen in any military unit.

**INTERVIEWER:** So did the success at Savate, did it change anything for the battalion ...

**WILLEM RATTE:** Yes, it made the battalion.

**INTERVIEWER:** What happened afterwards, I mean did it change the reputation within the South African Defence Force?

**WILLEM RATTE:** Mainly it changed the outlook of the people in the battalion, they knew they could do something like this, it created a sense of pride which is very important in any unit...you know you have to have the speed of call...and that has built up a hell of expeda core [unsure] Savate ...

**KEVIN FITZGERALD:** Over and above that I think within the greater body of the South African working machine, all of a sudden 32 was getting logistical support that it never used to have before, choppers were made available to us and choppers were a very scarce commodity when we were...we were always in the

first priority and that had never been the case before, we had chopper cooperation and chopper support but it was as and when kind of thing...if we had choppers available sure you can get one...all of a sudden we were the first option all the time, every time suddenly you find that a company it being trooped into the bush by air,

**WILLEM RATTE**: And the airforce were fighting too...to do ops with us. They wanted to do ops.

**KEVIN FITZGERALD**: The Alluette residence, and the Alluette pilots lived in Ondangwa...quarters at Ondangwa for people who stay in HQ...we had a very close cooperation with the Allu guys and the Puma chaps as well...but I think it had its bedrock possibly in Savate...or within the SADF itself...suddenly this 32 unit is no longer a band of ex Angolan bandits...its now suddenly this mechanised [inaudible] and with a hell of a reputation and also all kinds of people wanted to become associated with the unit and we saw our equipment suddenly picked up, we started getting new equipment, easy access to equipment....all that kind of stuff. The weaponry that came through, all of a sudden we were getting weaponry that we always struggled to get our hands on, ammo supply and all that kind of stuff...I think Savate in retrospect now Willem highlighted in fact had a hell of a benefit for the unit, not only in reputation but in terms of where we were at and seen...most important seen by the SADF hierarchy...all of a sudden things started happening, they realised this unit...

**INTERVIEWER**: It was a far cry from the origins of the battalion ...Jan Breytenbach just mounting machine guns [cross talking]

**WILLEM RATTE**: That was the turning point.

**INTERVIEWER**: Did you get a lot of visitors after that...from

**KEVIN FITZGERALD**: No not from Recce group...the unit might have.

**INTERVIEWER**: So you guys were essentially quite separate from the unit.

**WILLEM RATTE**: Physically separate, you must imagine Amoni was our base...it was a small base in eastern Owamboland then you travelled 250 km to Rundu east, Rundu is the HQ only, the commander stays there and all the admin personnel by the airstrip, then you go another 250 km to Buffalo...so we were 500 kms from the company base and we were basically on our own, we were left on our own. But as long as you have a good personal relationship which we had ...we enjoyed a very good relationship between the HQ and us, we always used to joke...with Colonel Ferreira if you ask something, and I mean we had special needs, like the boats...take the boats for example...I got to know and appreciate the klepper...which is the collapsible boat that we used in Rhodesia in the Rhodesian SAS and as soon as they got to 32 I put in a request that I wanted those boats...obviously the first answer I always got, whenever I asked for something the standard answer from Deon Ferreira was no...wat wil jy nou weer hê Ratte...that was his standard response....wat wil jy dit voor hê....and then he thought about it and sometimes I went and saw him and explained to him and tried to motivate it more and a lot of times I suddenly I got a signal...those kleppers that you wanted, they are on the way pick them up on such and such a day....the same with the parachute course...I wanted our guys to be trained in parachuting...so I literally mounted a campaign to try and convince him because

his first answer was “wat wil jy nou weer gaan...jy wil net gaan jollie patrollie hou” and then we pushed for it and I remember we had a big function in Buffalo, a Christmas function I think it was or something...where we had a formal dinner...and I wrote out a note and put it in an envelope...and it would say “formal request to the commander of this unit to please consider sending us on a parachute course” and put it under his plate. So we obviously all sat down and he looked at this envelope, now where did this come from, opened the envelope and read the note and started laughing, and we got our parachute course.

**KEVIN FITZGERALD**: Willem has been a bit humble here, but he engineered to use [inaudible] to swing things...[inaudible] and what he used to do he used to leave notes on Ferreira’s desk while he [inaudible] he used to ...[inaudible] get the parachute course on the way...these kind of things, and eventually quite apart from wanting to appease Willem perhaps and get things done ....

**MALE SPEAKER**: Get him off his neck.

**KEVIN FITZGERALD**: Where he also saw the advantage of what Willem was suggesting and how they could translate into good battle games for us...so a game of parachute courses as we said when Willem wasn’t here initially...part of the character offered to the guys at Oudtshoorn and they did individual recruiting drive, that the guys who went into recce group would also become para [inaudible] and the of course as most things were those days, just a empty promise and Willem for good strategic reasons then pushed the unit to get us on that course because it would be a good battle advantage for us and it proved to be that.

**WILLEM RATTE**: But take the boats for example, if it hadn't been for the boats, we asked for them and we got them eventually and if it hadn't been for the boats, the reconnaissance of Savate would have been impossible, because in that sort of terrain its featureless, there is no lines where you can hide, you have to walk in the bush and they pick you up. If you want to do reconnaissance you got no chance of doing reconnaissance just on land because they will pick up your spoor because they do 360's all the time and they will chase you and catch you. So the boats gave us the ability to literally move in such a way that they cant pick up spoor, because you move at night on the river and you base up on the other side ...there is no spoor, the water doesn't leave any spoor...so those boats proved to be a hell of a good investment for us.

**INTERVIEWER**: It sounds like you were allowed to work a lot on your own initiative?

**WILLEM RATTE**: Yes, but not....

**INTERVIEWER**: Can you think of any other....

**WILLEM RATTE**: Not operations, you mustn't think that we were able to decide that today we are going to take on Savate, that's not one.

**INTERVIEWER**: No, how you worked within the parameters of the strategic objectives.

**MALE SPEAKER**: We shared a lot of internal operations around Amoni those were Willemhofs.

**INTERVIEWER**: Tell me about the Willemhofs....

**KEVIN FITZGERALD**: That kept us in good stead....that was the purpose of....



**WILLEM RATTE**: Chris Willem, because we used to just get back from the bush and he would say listen we have to practice laying mines again...and we would go and practice laying mines, and then we would do ambushes....and then we will do this, as I say in retrospect I mean....

**KEVIN FITZGERALD**: We made a comment last night that we are all still here today mainly because of Willem and that's not in any way to polish his brass, that's a fact of life, because Willem motivated us in such a way to understand the seriousness of what we were involved in....you talk about adventure, that adventure was wiped out of our eyes very early on, we realised what we were involved in here and what is significant, and what was required of us wasn't an adventure, what was required of us was to apply our minds in a serious way and understand what we are involved in. Now we practiced our drills incessantly, if ops came up we packed with our ambush drill, and there was no other unit I am telling you now...the guys from any of the recce units could come to us and we would put these guys to shame with our drills and so forth. I was telling you about Francois...and their practice of dumping all their ruck sacks in one place...and that backfired on them and not once or twice, but a number of times...a stray mortar round would hit it or a vehicle would land on top and burn all their radio equipment etc., and drills that Willem taught us were practiced adnauseum...and yes ....

**INTERVIEWER**: Didn't you get absolutely sick of it. [cross talking]

**KEVIN FITZGERALD**: But we knew when the crunch came ...all the shit that had been doing at Amoni ...would pay dividends when it counted. Willem never

got...and you can correct me on this....I am talking about the original recce group ...Willem never got a cross word out of any of us, none of us ever went up to him and said listen you are wasting our time, lets rest, did that ever happen? That never happened.

**MALE SPEAKER:** And Willem didn't know a Saturday and Sunday...there was nothing about a Saturday and Sunday in Willem's days.

**KEVIN FITZGERALD:** Michael and I often speak about that, I kept my checklist and Michael has kept all his stuff, all his note books and everything, he has still got them, and you go through those checklists and those checklists are incredibly comprehensive ...and we left nothing to chance, we took nobody's word for anything, you physically double checked....you physically walked up to each person, somebody checked your stuff and ...I would check Willem's stuff and Willem would check mine...and he would take one guy and I would take another guy and check it...our drill at the vehicles was, you didn't simply put your hand under the tap and open it and drink water, you didn't waste water, you put a fire bucket under it...we thought progressively, we thought ahead...we went to such extremes as practicing how to open up your **mashiela**..so you didn't make a noise. That can save a life, so we practiced that and we held [inaudible] posts...how to switch your gas stove off so you wouldn't have a surge or get the woosh and that bright light that all of a sudden lit up...all those things were practiced, they weren't simply given to you in notebook form and said hey you...see this procedure manual here...read it bud, that's what we do in the bush, and that was the last of it. It didn't work that way, we practiced what we

discussed and we practiced until we became proficient in it...and with that proficiency that I was telling you about gave us confidence in what we....

**INTERVIEWER:** But Willem where did you learn all this stuff, I mean how did you remember it, did you keep your own notes...did you...how did you retain all this information, I mean these tiny little details.

**WILLEM RATTE:** I mentioned earlier on, I went to Rhodesia and I was in the SAS for five years, and that was a good school...

**INTERVIEWER:** Who trained you in the SAS, was it the British?

**WILLEM RATTE:** No, the Rhodesian SAS started off as a squadron in the early days when the ....

**KEVIN FITZGERALD:** With which squadron originally....

**WILLEM RATTE:** When the Federation was still in the Common Wealth, C Squadron in Rhodesia was part of the broad British SAS...I think A Squadron was in England ...C Squadron was in Rhodesia, D Squadron was in New Zealand and that sort of thing, and then when Rhodesia became independent and they broke, or when Britain broke with them...they sort of went on but they kept the traditions and the standards, especially the standards...they had high standards...the SAS was an excellent.

**KEVIN FITZGERALD:** You know that blikkies SAS never changed them in order of battle, C Squadron was never given to anybody else, that C Squadron designation remained empty...in honour of the Rhodesian SAS.

**WILLEM RATTE:** You see the tradition, the British Army in my eyes, people might disagree, but the British Army is far better than the American Army their

standard because they have got this tradition behind them and they have got...I think a lot of people will agree with that, that the whole approach and the training standards and the standards overall of the British Army, which the Rhodesian Army took over or followed because they basically started off as part of the British Army Commonwealth Armed Forces, and so anybody who gets his training in the Rhodesian SAS would basically learn a lot and if he applies his mind can pass it on....which we basically did. So I had the training, I had good school that I went through in Rhodesia and the big thing is that Kevin now pointed out, you cannot or you must rehearse, you must physically test, you cant just accept it. I think the best example to illustrate this is what happened after I left the reconnaissance wing and I was basically 2IC in Impala which was a base close by which was responsible for a certain area in Eastern Owamboland and Western Kuvango. We had to dominate a certain area, and to do that we established small bases and the company base was responsible for say three platoon bases outside and one of the things that they had to do was to keep a reaction force that if a small base gets attacked obviously the big base has to give support otherwise the small base would be overrun. So we had drills and we had written out those drills in detail ...and the company commander if he gets to the company base, this is what he has to do because the troops trained every three months so you had to get it on paper. Now you can give them the orders and I mean he is a trained soldier, he has gone to Oudtshoorn, he should be able to understand them and apply them, and this is how most of the people worked, but it's not enough. You have to physically get on the ground and you have to

check it, and if you don't do that, it's not going to be done. Its just a fact of life, and its actually quite funny because you ...I remember it was long after Kevin [inaudible] we had this one company base which had deployed its troops and the company commander was a young lieutenant or captain ...I cant remember, and I was 2IC of the battalion, responsible for that area...and I went and visited them, got there to the base and I said to them okay...and he was showing me the ops room and on the map all the lines of these are the patrols that they walk every day and everything looked good, I mean you look on the map and everybody who looks at this and listens, they are impressed....this guy is doing his work, its working. All the lines are drawn on the map where the patrol each day and the symbol for reaction force is here, there the vehicles for the reaction force, it looks good. So you listen to this and when he is finished with his briefing you sort of say to him okay....now its lets say ten to eight now....I am going to walk out from here to the gate...I am going to leave now and I am going to the gate. This is not reality but it's an exercise ...three spoor have been picked up and I showed him on the map over here, remember this is not for real but it's an exercise and you have to treat it as reality. A spoor has been picked up here and your reaction force has to move to this spoor and follow it up asap, immediately, you have got your reaction rules, you told me you got it, its on standby, it can deploy everything is ready, now I want you to do it, physically send out the reaction force now. I am going to the gate and I want to see when you leave...and you walk through the base to the gate...and as you walk chaos erupts in that place because the first thing this guy realises that he hasn't got an alarm system...he

now wants to get...because all the people earmarked for the reaction force are now busy with all their tasks...the one is cutting wood, the other one is sitting on the long drop, the other one is have this and they are all spread out over the base, and the company commander is running around the fact shouting and screaming and trying to get his reaction force together because he suddenly realised he hasn't got a siren that everybody can hear and straight away see okay I have to run to the reaction force now. So you walk through this and you stop at the gate and you wait...and inside the base its chaos...people swearing at each other and kicking ass and running around, and eventually they get the two reaction forces together and come driving out...in the gate just outside the gate....the base itself has got hard ground and you wait for them to come out into the proper bush road where you have this deep sand, as soon as he gets into the deep sand we stopped them...right are you all ready....no we are ready to deploy now and chase the spoor. Okay, right...first thing is driver, your wheel is flat, no he said this wheel is not flat....I said listen this is an exercise your wheel is flat, now change is as if it was flat. So then he rushes around and cant find his jack and eventually finds the jack, pushes it underneath and he starts jacking up and he finds that the jack disappears into the sand because he hasn't thought about a piece of wood that must go under the jack...so the driver is in a funct, and then you call the medics and say have you got your medical pack, no he has got his medical pack.....so you say right come here troop....lie down on the ground, you are now shot in the femur in the leg, which is something that can happen and if he is shot the medic has to save his life...so right you are shot, medic put up a

drip....so if the medic cant put up a drip you will sit there and swear and curse and he will just have to prove that he can put up a drip.

**INTERVIEWER:** And everyone is watching at this stage.

**WILLEM RATTE:** Everyone is watching it, and the commander of the reaction force looks at this and he realises that where he thought he was ready, and he thought everything was hunky dory, he suddenly realises that it's actually a stuff up, he is not ready. So you point out these things and then eventually you say to them, right laat dit vir julle 'n les wees....and you send them back. The next time you come around the company commander is actually eager ...he just waits, he is like an eager hound waiting for you to start this exercise because he wants to show you how jacked he is...and when you say to him right this is now an exercise I want your reaction force out, two minutes and they are there....tell them to change the wheel, and .....off two minutes the wheel is changed.

**KEVIN FITZGERALD:** And they have got all the stuff to do it.

**WILLEM RATTE:** You create a pride, they know they can do it, and it's a way of building him up, he now knows he can do it, because if its only on paper it will stay on paper and he will always have that nagging doubt, he has never really done it, and when he has to do it in a real situation, he ten to one will stuff it up, because he has never really rehearsed it...so the secret of the whole, in our line of work was basically rehearsal, practical realistic rehearsal. Like for example, I don't know if Kevin remembers ...you will probably remember Peter...the length we went through to practice ambushes...now we were the first sub-unit who actually took out a vehicle, in an ambush....shot out a vehicle on the road, and to

practice it we used to take a Buffel and a long rope and some derelict wreck....we rigged up something that looks like a vehicle but obviously no personnel in it and something that you are not sorry for...and then we had this Buffel drive up and down the road....runway....and then we physically shot at it, in other words we could shoot at a vehicle now and do it while the vehicle was moving because there are a lot of things that you pick up when you have a moving target, its different to the normal thing, and that way you can actually rehearse so that if you do it for real you have got all your teething troubles sorted out a long time ago. It was quite interesting...he was actually the first one, you took out the very first vehicle that 32 battalion took out....

**KEVIN FITZGERALD:** I was also the smallest guy to carry an RPG don't forget okay, thanks to you...what the hell did I do to you....Rick had it initially but for the duration, the longer term it was me....

**PETER:** Wasn't Rob the first one.

**WILLEM RATTE:** I don't know, I can't remember, I just know that Kevin had the RPG ...Rick also had an RPG now that you mention it, yes.

**PETER:** Rick took the first one out.

**WILLEM RATTE:** Do you know that whenever we entered an area in Angola which was not authorised because sometimes it happened by mistake, like we got dropped off in the wrong place, like for example we were supposed to work in this area between this road and that road...her is the Angola South West border and we were supposed to ambush that road, and we were dropped off here...we were supposed to be dropped off here, walk west to the road and do an ambush



on this road...any traffic on this road we were supposed to take out...okay, and to cut a long story short the chopper made a mistake and instead of dropping us off here, he dropped us off here...this road had no traffic on it at all...when we got to this road, thinking it was this road, that was where we shot out the first vehicle...as soon as we got to the road there was a vehicle going down, which came back up but we were too late for it going down, and when it came back up we took it out...and from thereon we hit one contact after the other...one SWAPO group after the other, to such an extent that we had to ask for resub, more ammo a day or two later...

**INTERVIEWER:** But you were on the wrong road.....

**WILLEM RATTE:** Wrong road in our ...and when we called in the chopper...remember we still think we are on this road, so when we call in the chopper with resub...the chopper gets over the area and says where are you...what do you mean where are we...we cant even hear you yet...no he said we are over where you said you are...we said no we cant hear you...and then one of the troops eventually picked up a noise there far in the east....and we said to them you are totally off the wagon...no we are not we are right where....we said come west you are far to far to the east, so he was acting on where we thought we were, we were actually in a totally different area. During ops Askari we had a few Buffels, the reconnaissance wing acted on its own with a few Buffels that we mounted with machine guns and mortars on, and we got info of a camp north of Tetchamutete, north of Cassinga, quite far way north of Cassinga...but it was outside...we were given an area and the area that they

specifically told us not north of this line we were supposed to work, but this camp was there....and I cant remember why we did it, whether it was lack of communication or whether we did it deliberately or whether there was no time or what...I think it was a time factor, we knew that if we don't act on it now we first ask permission it will be too late...so higher HQ was not aware of us going in there...we went there and everybody was sleeping...we caught them in their sleeping bags and normally when we hit a base, the base was either empty or they were waiting for us....

**KEVIN FITZGERALD**: Recently empty.

**WILLEM RATTE**: Yes, so its...there is definitely a case to be made out that in our own army, in our own upper military echelons in the decision making there in Pretoria and Windhoek, info was given to the enemy about where South African troops are deployed, because everybody who got deployed was actually deployed on orders from higher up...even a battalion cant just decide...as soon as it was over the border they had to get clearance from Pretoria...so Pretoria knew exactly which areas we were working. But as soon as you move out of the area, and it happened so many time that it couldn't have been coincidence...

**INTERVIEWER**: Really....

**WILLEM RATTE**: No ways, and if you take that with Pik Botha...take Pik Botha for example...Pik Botha was the Minister of Foreign Affairs...as soon as he took over Foreign Affairs South African never ever made a stand again...they smeared us in the propaganda wars made against us, and South Africa just never defended itself...I was on the German Embassy once in ...African

Embassy in Germany once when I was touring with my wife and kids when our rand was still worth something...and I went to the Embassy in Bonn to get a video which I knew existed ...there was a video which was made by a foreign TV crew of the necklace murders...of a typical necklace murder, a gruesome movie, it carries on for over an hour....really gruesome and typical of what the ANC did at that stage in the townships to intimidate the people. I went to the Embassy and I said I want that video...I get flack, people are telling me why don't you treat the blacks better and dear old ANC why don't you hand over to them and so on....and I want to show them what the ANC is really like. They refused, they said no ways we aren't giving you...and the whole Embassy, there was no name on the Embassy there was no effort to really promote South Africa, no. So we ...I think the worm was in our hierarchy...we fought a good battle on the ground, I think we really did well and we had a good cause as well.

**INTERVIEWER:** When did you sort of...a lot of people used the expression of seeing the writing on the wall, when did you start to experience that...that there was not really harmony between what was going on the ground, and what was going on in Pretoria....did you get a sense of this when you were out in the bush?

**WILLEM RATTE:** You see there were a lot of things that we couldn't understand, we couldn't put two and two together, in fact we probably subconsciously we refuse to put two and two together, I mean it's a hell of a thing to realise that your own government is working against you. That you are wasting your time as far as that is concerned, not that I think we wasted our time I think what we did, even if it was only for a few years...was good for everybody

concerned, especially for the people on the ground, but there is a lot of things that didn't make sense. We talked about training, parachute training...one of the things that I realised was that we can use parachute jumping is internally, because of the areas in Owamboland where the terrors were running around controlling the area...and whenever we try and get in there they hear us for miles, they hear us coming, or if we walk in they pick up...the locals pick up the spoor, and the locals are totally intimidated by the terrors and they tell the terrors straight away, so you can't achieve any surprise but if you have got parachute trained soldiers you can drop them in by parachute, they don't leave any tracks and they can really achieve total surprise inside and we didn't get permission from them, they refused permission. They refused permission...a simple operation internally, I mean you don't have to ask Embassy's it's your own country, you can do it internally.

**INTERVIEWER:** So your feeling then was that South Africa was sort of fighting half a war...

**WILLEM RATTE:** Of course...

**INTERVIEWER:** Why would they bother to carry on with something that they, I mean if they knew in Pretoria that it was a losing proposition, why would they carry on?

**WILLEM RATTE:** Yes but when you say they, it's not everybody, but I believe certain key elements ...the elements around Pik Botha for example....Pik Botha was definitely a traitor right from the word go....because in the army it was common knowledge that counter intelligence had a file this thick on Pik Botha

and it was all at first destroyed. He was probably recruited while he was in Sweden for Foreign Intelligence Organisation ...Pik Botha was definitely not on our side, he was working actively against us. Take another example, Lusaka...when I was in Rhodesia we went into Lusaka with six land rovers...we shipped them across Kariba, we beached them, got onto the ground, followed the dirt road onto the tar road, and we drove at night into Lusaka and took out two depots, terrorist depots plus the house where Nkomo was staying, this was after Nkomo's terrorists had shot down the airliner and murdered the people who survived on the ground, I don't know if you remember that, the Viscount Echo...and as retaliation we went in to take Nkomo out he wasn't there...you see the Brits knew about it and they warned Nkomo, I am convinced that they warned Nkomo...anyway, but the operation was done, in other words we went in with six land rovers...bit of machine guns mounted but still its only six ridiculous land rovers against the whole Zambian army...and we got away with it...we drove at night on the main road, into the city of Lusaka between all the other vehicles, obviously blackened up and with Zambian camouflage, but still ...and then shot these places up and drove out again and went all the way back to Kariba and got choppered up. At one stage in Lusaka ...a bomb went off in the main street and Kaunda arrested South Africans, Germans, Australians, Britain's, any white face that he could get hold of and that he had any suspicion of, he threw into jail in Lusaka....totally illegally and totally went overboard. We were sitting in the Caprivi compared to the Rhodesian army we had everything that opened and closed, we had bridge building...we could throw a bridge across the Zambezi

within an hour...we had big choppers...we could chopper a whole battalion into Lusaka...never mind six ridiculous land rovers...we could get armoured cars across the Zambezi and drive up that road, and be in Lusaka in a few hours...we could have gone and rescued those people out of jail in Lusaka with the Zambian army not being able to do a thing about it...I mean you must know what those states are capable of ...their reaction time, their military capability, its laughable compared to what we had...why wasn't that ever done. If you really want to win a war, I mean can you imagine the effect if you did that...and you had a news conference at Jan Smuts...you bring the white prisoners out, that includes now foreigners, Britains, etc., you bring them to Jan Smuts Johannesburg and you have a conference....what happened to you...who rescued you, like the **Itebe** raid which was done by Israelis...we could have done that, we could have ...another thing that I never understood, why did we never attack the ANC's help camp at **Quarto** they had a camp at Quarto...where they imprisoned the ANC people that they suspected of being spies for South Africa.

**KEVIN FITZGERALD:** So called dissident ANC.

**WILLEM RATTE:** A lot of them innocent, where they tortured them, they had incredible torture...there was a black Zulu who wrote a book about it, who was there as well...Olivia Forsythe....there was a white woman who worked for South African Intelligence and got sent in...very courages, very brave woman,

**KEVIN FITZGERALD:** She was a British Passport holder...

**WILLEM RATTE:** And she went into the ANC as a South African agent ...she was a South African agent and she was probably betrayed by these bastards in

Pretoria...that worked against us and she got imprisoned and she got thrown into Quarto....she was raped, she was tortured, everything happened, I mean we had the military capability, because we knew what we were capable of ....we could easily have gone into Quarto...there is no ways that Angola could have stopped us...got into Qyarti, we knew where it was, we had enough captures who told us exactly where it was, what the guards were like and everything...we could have just launched an operation got those people out and brought them back to South Africa...it would have been a hell of a propaganda coup for us to have it done. The war was kept at a level where it was just ticking over...all the time as soon as you have success, they tell you no, stop here you cant go beyond that line. They kept us just ticking over...and as soon as we really started hurting them, when we took Tetchamutete as part of Ops Askari ...we took Tetchamutete, which is 200 kms inside Angola, we took that town. As soon as we had advanced so far...Pik Botha couldn't run fast enough to Lusaka to sign a treaty where we were going to go back. So there was a hang of a discrepancy between the military objectives and the political objectives. The political leadership just was not fighting the war as it should have been fighting, and there was no reason why it couldn't...there was no limitation.

**INTERVIEWER:** To what extent...how far did the political control or ...I guess what I am trying to ask you...who was commuting with the politicians...I mean were there people among you, did you actually work with people who you knew were....

**KEVIN FITZGERALD:** A few were the puppets of the politicians.

**WILLEM RATTE**: A few people were caught out being spies...but those were small fish...the big fish...the only thing that you can with a reasonable amount of certainty say, Pik Botha was definitely a traitor, which is proved, he joined the ANC later when the ANC took over. Remember after the ANC took over, the worms came out of the woodworks, there was no need for them to hide any more. So Pik Botha was definitely one of them, I mean he was a Minister, he was in on all the decisions, every single operation had to be approved by the State Security Council...and as soon as it went over the border Foreign Affairs had to sit in...so every operation on the other side of the border he knew about...Foreign Affairs and Pik Botha knew about it. That's something that we never...as I said there were a lot of things that puzzled you while you were there, and didn't make sense, but we never put two and two together, it was only when everything was sold out that we suddenly realised that hang on, what's going on.

**KEVIN FITZGERALD**: I think we did have our suspicions, even in my day, something was rotten, not just at one or two levels, but at many levels...because that's what I said, I think we need to emphasise it...it wasn't just one or two operations, it was many operations that we arrived ...the camp was just deserted, or they were waiting for us, heavily armed. And that is not because they picked up an indication that a base attack was coming, that was because a warning had come from much higher echelons that a certain area is going to be based, because they had to give approval for this kind of operation, and the unit would arrive there and the base would be deserted, and just deserted within hours...or ...



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