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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**: In Pretoria 25<sup>th</sup> May 2005...first can you just start by telling me where you were born.

**COEN RIEKERT**: I was born in the suburb of Crosby in Johannesburg, western wuburb of Crosby.

**INTERVIEWER**: Okay, and did you go to school in the same place?

**COEN RIEKERT**: Yes I stayed there basically all my life; I went to primary school and high school there as well.

**INTERVIEWER**: Okay, and what did your parents do when you were a child, can you describe a bit of your family life.

**COEN RIEKERT**: My father was a production manager at a meat processing factory and my mom was working for a medical fund in Johannesburg proper, I had a very happy childhood I would say, just a normal suburban life nothing special, nothing exciting, very happy I would think...

**INTERVIEWER**: Okay, and did you have any other military people in your family?

**COEN RIEKERT**: My grandfather used to be in the military, in the First World War way back and my brother was in the Police and then later on in the army as well.

**INTERVIEWER**: And was this your older or younger brother?

**COEN RIEKERT**: Older, a few years older yes.

**INTERVIEWER**: Okay and he was in the Police Force.

**COEN RIEKERT**: Yes, he joined the army later on.

**INTERVIEWER**: So he was in the army before you then?

**COEN RIEKERT**: Yes I can't exactly remember when he went there, he might have joined the army basically the same time as I did, but he had some experience with the Police then. We joined basically the same time in 1979.

**INTERVIEWER**: And this was to do National Service?

**COEN RIEKERT**: Myself yes, but he joined the permanently, he was Special Forces, he joined them there.

**INTERVIEWER**: Okay, how did your parents feel about him joining the Military and joining Special Forces?

**COEN RIEKERT**: Well they weren't too concerned, I don't think they quite understood what Special Forces was all about, I mean we didn't volunteer much information either, so he was in the Police Special Task Force before, so they were sort of used to that already, and so they didn't have much to say.

**INTERVIEWER**: Okay, and during what period did you do your National Service, can you just tell me?

**COEN RIEKERT**: I joined in 1979...I was called up for 1979 / 80 for two years.

**INTERVIEWER**: So it was two years of National Service.

**COEN RIEKERT**: Yes.

**INTERVIEWER**: And how did you feel about doing National Service, did you have any resentment about it or was it just something that you had to do and you accepted?

**COEN RIEKERT**: No it was quite exciting to me, I was actually looking forward to it a lot, before I was called up I wanted to become a paratrooper I think, very seriously, I couldn't join of course because you weren't called up to the parachute

battalion, you had to volunteer to go there. So I actually looked forward to my National Service, I had no qualms going on that, I found it quite exciting and I enjoyed it very much. I did join the battalion soon after that I arrived at Bloemfontein I was called up to the First Infantry Battalion which is right next door to the Parachute Battalion, so I stayed there for about two weeks and then I went to the Battalion.

**INTERVIEWER**: Okay, tell me if there hadn't been any National Service would you have done something different, would you have not joined the Military?

**COEN RIEKERT**: I probably would have still ended up in the army I think...probably I would have joined still yes.

**INTERVIEWER**: Okay, and tell me about the National Service training and what it involved more or less?

**COEN RIEKERT**: Well it's obviously infantry training and then you obviously do the parachuting with it. I was in a platoon...a path finder platoon which received a bit more training than the average troops in the battalion did, more specialised, they were a small group that went on small reconnaissance training but I think it was very well presented the training...its professional, and with more hindsight now I can actually say because I have seen Military people all over the World since, and I think our training at the time compared with the ...certainly with the rest that I have seen.

**INTERVIEWER**: Tell me a bit more about Path finder training, what was that about?

**COEN RIEKERT**: The task of the path finder is basically the battalion was for

airborne of assault operations, the path finder would go in first, secure a landing zone and then call in the main force, the assault force, so we go in and mark out a landing ...a helicopter strip or whatever is required and then reinforcement would follow.

**INTERVIEWER**: So at that stage there was no ...it wasn't tracking or contraband searching or anything it was just going in and...

**COEN RIEKERT**: Yes, it was a specialised task for the battalion.

**INTERVIEWER**: Okay, what do you remember the best about that period, those first couple of years in the Military, what stands out for you?

**COEN RIEKERT**: Well many things about the training obviously and the operations that followed later and I think even above that later years the friends that I made, I still have many friends that I met there and we are still friends. Its now 25 years later and the guy that just called before this I met him in the army and we are still very good friends, and I think that is the one thing that stayed. Memories are in the operations obviously, some incidents are fun...some incidents during training etcetera, things that come to mind.

**INTERVIEWER**: Can you think of something funny that happened during training, something specific?

**COEN RIEKERT**: There are quite a few...in basic training was always funny, I mean the guys screw up and you get entangled in one of those parachutes and they are screaming and shouting at you and at the end it comes out well...its a scream...one could clear in operations for instance a guy who throws a hand grenade into the bungalow and follows straight behind it, because of all the noise

you get confused and somebody has to drag him out and the hand grenade explodes and he could have been killed but screaming with laughter afterwards, more of a nervous giggle really.

**INTERVIEWER**: Its kind of a way of coping with narrow escapes, isn't it?

**COEN RIEKERT**: Yes that would probably describe it better, yes.

**INTERVIEWER**: Did you, at this time were you exposed to any sort of political messages, I mean did you have a sense of purpose that was sort of political or would you describe it as patriotic.

**COEN RIEKERT**: You wouldn't, well I don't want to use the word indoctrinate...it was nothing like that, we had lectures of course and that sort of thing came up, but there was no indoctrination whatsoever...it was ...we were a bit of I suppose secluded and didn't go much out, we didn't get hold of much news. It was only during my phase that Television was allowed in the unit, before we didn't have television before, so you were sort of cut off from the news but apart from that nothing, it was nothing like that now. Just during lectures of course we were told who the enemies are and nothing much more than that.

**INTERVIEWER**: Right, how was the enemy described to you?

**COEN RIEKERT**: Well it was called in broad terms the Communists ...sort of thing from the ...at the time it was Rhodesia that was still going and of course Angola and South West Africa and SWAPO and it was the guys ZANLA and ZIPRA and Rhodesia. Basically they were the enemy and we were the good guys and we had to sort them out sort of thing...nothing in-depth, it wasn't a political indoctrination whatsoever.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, so then when your National Service was finished you decided to carry on in the Military and this was an easy decision, was it an obvious decision for you?

**COEN RIEKERT:** I actually left when my National Service was finished, I left the army and I worked on the Gold Mine on the West Rand for seven months or so I think ...I was going to study Geology but after working there for seven months I decided it was not what I wanted to do...so that's when I went back to the army.

**INTERVIEWER:** What did you miss about the army while you were working on the Gold Mine?

**COEN RIEKERT:** Well the mine I was working underground and some days I missed the open places of Ovamboland and I actually wanted to go back there and just to be outside and the camaraderie and so on ...its a totally different setup and I missed the guys and the excitement of the army.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, during the [inaudible] when you went back into the military, this time while you were a civilian, did you start to become more aware of what the political situation was in South Africa?

**COEN RIEKERT:** Yes but that only came much later, because when I joined 32 I stayed in South West Africa at the time ...I hardly ever came out so you didn't have much news even then, I mean we were already [inaudible] it was few and far between, I was in operations most of the time so there wasn't close contact with home so I didn't get the news all that often. Only later years when I was in Pretoria that that became important, I mean only then did I sort of realise where this was going and how it was probably going to end up, but at the time,

nothing...it was just day to day existence...I wasn't thinking about it too much either.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, so when was your period of service with 32 Battalion?

**COEN RIEKERT:** I can't remember exactly, I think it was around 1982...beginning of 1982 I joined and left towards the end of 1984...there was a bit of a transition period there ...I didn't actually ...the 32 Reconnaissance wing which is where I served, was sort of disbanded at the time...and was taken over by South West African Special Forces, but we remained in the same camp with the same people but nothing really changed, that was towards the end of 1984 if I remember correctly. So it's 1982 to 1984 roughly.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, and was there something that drew you to 32 Battalion?

**COEN RIEKERT:** Yes with my year of service with the Parachute Battalion I had obviously seen these guys in Ovamboland all the time and in Angola and they seem to have been the guys that whenever something happened these guys were in sort of thing, so I thought that apart from Special Forces perhaps these would be the guys to join if you want to get involved in Operations, because they were involved in everything.

**INTERVIEWER:** Right okay, so who was your commanding officer?

**COEN RIEKERT:** Ferreira.

**INTERVIEWER:** It was Deon Ferreira.

**COEN RIEKERT:** Yes when I joined, later on it was Eddie Viljoen.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay so your commanding officer was Deon Ferreira...what do you remember most about him?



**COEN RIEKERT**: Well he was very much for the operational guys that were his main priority I think, some other things maybe but mainly operations was his main priority. I never actually had much to do with him myself, he was in Buffalo and Rundu obviously where the HQ was and we were in Eastern Ovamboland ...500 kilometers away from Buffalo so I didn't have all that much to do with him personally. But if I can remember all the black members and all the whites they had the greatest respect for the guy.

**INTERVIEWER**: Okay, I should have asked this question before actually but...so you were in Eastern Ovamboland.

**COEN RIEKERT**: Yes.

**INTERVIEWER**: Can you remember your first day of deployment with 32 Battalion?

**COEN RIEKERT**: Deployment in operations?

**INTERVIEWER**: Yes.

**COEN RIEKERT**: Yes I can, it was a reconnaissance ...we were going to look for an enemy base in the Bupa area in Southern Angola and at the time it was quite a deep ex filtration for me because I used to work more for a shallow operations before and there was a lot of apprehension with my first operation, I had to carry the radio and a very heavy pack and lots of walking. I was very apprehensive and somehow Angola is totally flat...so I was used to before at Bupa when we approached Bupa you could actually see some hills and you get into the hilly, you have a few hills around and that was totally strange to me, I remember that...from the Helicopter you could see the hills and I thought we

were very far away from home now, because where I used to work there were no hills and it was totally flat, so suddenly there was apprehension and the way we worked at 32 I didn't do the selection course as such, I was just taken into the group and we were evaluated on operations by the rest of the team. If you didn't perform up to standard then you were sort of told thanks, but goodbye, so I had to prove myself on that operation and there was a lot of walking, some without boots, we had to do an anti-tracking so it was not an easy operation for me ...I was really tired, my feet were totally done afterwards, and we only went in and the next day we had to go out again...because we were compromised about it, we got radio intercepted and our infiltration was compromised and we had to walk all the way back again. That was my first operation with 32, not a very successful one but a lot of walking.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay....what was the atmosphere like on this operation...I mean was there general apprehension or do you think you were the only one that was apprehensive or ?

**COEN RIEKERT:** I think there is always a bit of apprehension before an operation with anyone but I think myself more so than any other guys because it was my first and the other guys had been around a bit. I wasn't going into a specific target or area we can say ...I don't think for the rest of the guys it was all that much, for me yes because mostly because it was the first one.

**INTERVIEWER:** And were you, did the people around you seem quite confident and did you have confidence in them?

**COEN RIEKERT:** Oh yes, my immediate commander was a guy called Willem

Ratte and you may have heard about him, he was a very competent soldier and you don't know him obviously it was before the time so I could see what the guys were going for, there was no qualms working with him at all...very professional I thought.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, tell me a bit about the Angolans that you were working...who obviously at an earlier stage were memories of a liberation struggle, were part of the liberation struggle, the FNLA in the same way that MK or FAPLA or SWAPO were all fighting colonial governments, and now suddenly you find yourself side by side with these people, how did you, what did you think of this situation?

**COEN RIEKERT:** It wasn't a problem for me as such, I didn't have any problem working with the Blacks as such, I mean in later years I also worked with UNITA for instance ...and they also they were in a liberation struggle before, fighting against the Portuguese and the same thing on the ground level its not much of that...the guy is a soldier or he isn't...but from your side there is no hard feelings there and there is no animosity and I have a lot of trust in the guys, they were all very tuff guys and professional.

**INTERVIEWER:** And never any doubts about their loyalty.

**COEN RIEKERT:** No, none whatsoever.

**INTERVIEWER:** Do you recall any times when there were new black recruits?

**COEN RIEKERT:** Yes we got in new guys all the time from the Buffalo where the companies were...we were very much a smaller group probably about 20 blacks at any one time when I was there and their guys, some of them came and

they didn't stay all that long because we did generally more bush time than the other companies, they did a six week and then went back for six weeks, for re training etcetera. We tended to work differently doing longer trips than that and spending less time at the base so some of the blacks didn't stay all that long, they did a few deployments and then they wanted to back to Buffalo, they preferred Buffalo, it was a nicer camp and their families were there for obvious reasons. The families couldn't join them where we were, so they never tend to stay that long with us, they have a few deployments and then they go back to Buffalo. New guys came in all the time and they did basically the same thing that I did, they went on operations with us and then they were either found suitable or not....

**INTERVIEWER:** What happened to them if they were unsuitable, were they moved somewhere else or were they sent on their way or.

**COEN RIEKERT:** If they were not suitable for our sort of work then they were still suitable for the company work, because that's where they came from initially and so they normally went back to their companies. They weren't gotten rid of altogether...they went back to their companies.

**INTERVIEWER:** Right...

**COEN RIEKERT:** It wasn't actually requested down there, they reviewed a few appointments and then they requested direct to the companies and the were let go.

**INTERVIEWER:** So Buffalo base was their home then.

**COEN RIEKERT:** Yes, they stayed there for...they had shopping centre's and

everything there. We didn't have any of that our camps were a bit primitive compared to Buffalo.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, so when you wanted to go home you had to travel back to South Africa but they were there.

**COEN RIEKERT:** Yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, you said earlier during the National Service you weren't too much exposed to political messages and a little bit cut off from what was going on around you, would you say it was pretty much the same situation while you were with 32 Battalion....

**COEN RIEKERT:** Yes in some cases even more so, I was more cut off ...certainly as I said in the Mohania(?) there was virtually no contact with home except writing letters. I couldn't speak to the family, I couldn't phone of course but there was nothing, you have to listen to the radio but that was it, otherwise it was guys coming back with the paper, you see a paper so that was basically our only contact and obviously you hear things word of mouth but very little contact. During the time when I was in Mohania I was ...I cant think of one period of time of more than two weeks that I actually spent in Mohania we were on operations all the time ...I was actually living in Ogiua for quite a part of my time with 32...we were controlling Southern Angola completely at the time and Ogiua was our base, so I didn't even go to Mohania between operations. We operated from Ogiua and then went back there to prepare for the next one. So I was away from camp for months at a time and not much contact around...

**INTERVIEWER:** So what was your understanding of what was happening in

Pretoria of South Africa's role in the cold war of the presence or support of the Americans and the presence of Cubans in Angola...I mean were you aware of the dynamics of this?

**COEN RIEKERT**: Yes I was aware but the Cuban thing in 1994 wasn't much of an issue...they were there, but further north was a lot of concern to us and what we maybe a bit later towards Ops Askari that was quite a big operation. We went right up to Cubalai and casio [?] right in the north, about 250 kilometers and the Cubans then became an issue with, but before then it wasn't really an issue because we ...I never personally had a contact with the Cubans, I never even saw them. They were there but not much of a threat...as such. The Americans were sort of in the background as well, they were supporting UNITA to some extent, and the French were, but that was also just a rumour they were all landing a Jamba and [inaudible] what is flying in now but much more than that it was equipment etcetera but basically no contact ever. We felt that they could have done more but it was sort of a feeling that they should have stuck with us in 1976 and we would have finished the job then, but nothing more than that. It's sort of a vague thing in the background.

**INTERVIEWER**: So you didn't come into contact with any foreign soldiers, because I recall in Jan Breytenbach's book he talks about before there was any alliance between UNITA and South Africa, UNITA was using French Mercenaries I think.

**COEN RIEKERT**: I remember the incident, it was much earlier, around 1976.

**INTERVIEWER**: So did you imagine yourself running into any of these

foreigners?

**COEN RIEKERT**: I wasn't expecting not with UNITA but I wasn't expecting it of them because a bit earlier I think Angola was more chaotic than this, we had more factions going...by the time I joined it was basically UNITA on one side NPLA on the other side with SWAPO sort of in the middle and us, so it was more clear cut so I wasn't really expecting to run into possibly a Cuban, not in the sort of operations that I was involved in, it was mostly reconnaissance work...a few camp attacks but maybe its like strategic camps, well not strategic, operational camps they were sort of 200 SWAPO or ...very unlikely to find Cubans in a situation like that, they will normally concentrate in the bigger areas and further north like Kublai and unfortunately it was like that...which we only went on very big operations and sort of took on those sort of bases, otherwise it was reconnaissance work in ...tactical reconnaissance so we never expected [background noises]

**INTERVIEWER**: And you didn't have much contact with Americans either, I mean they never were sort of with you on a technical level, you knew there was support coming but.

**COEN RIEKERT**: Unfortunately not, I never saw one and I never spoke to one.

**INTERVIEWER**: I wonder if they were really there.

**COEN RIEKERT**: That's what I heard, they flew in quite a bit of people into Jamba...the French and Americans, that's also just hearsay I can't prove that.

**INTERVIEWER**: Right...okay so in the meantime you still have this understanding that you are keeping the spread of communism under control

even though the MPLA is now the government in Angola...more or less.

**COEN RIEKERT:** Yes at the time in 1994 in sort of the early days it was certainly so, yes because South West Africa was still South West Africa, that's what we wanted to protect first of all and keep that from becoming Namibia because we would be next in line and we preferred to keep the war there...at the time I was still sort of confident that it can be done indefinitely knowing possibly in the back of my mind that politics will probably decide the thing in the end and military wise there was never a question about us being able to do the job.

**INTERVIEWER:** What was your understanding of the communist regimes were doing in Africa at the time, what was the ...obviously there was some fear behind this.

**COEN RIEKERT:** Yes, I am not sure it was fear really, it ...you became accustomed to a lifestyle and you prefer to keep that, I mean everybody knew what Africa looked like at the time ....Zimbabwe was still doing well at the time ...it was actually, everybody thought that was they way it was going to become then its maybe not too bad ...I mean it wasn't too bad then. It only changed later because it was more a case of preferring what you have and not...you didn't know what to expect really, what it is going to be like...who knows, rather keep what you have because you are quite happy with it, so why change it. It wasn't really a fear of anything, communism as such, my personal case it wasn't a fear it was just a case of not wanting to become like the rest of Africa, to stay....

**INTERVIEWER:** What do you think would have happened if this war hadn't occurred, I mean lets imagine for example that none of this had taken place and



Namibia and South Africa had become ...sort of been handed over to majority rule and if you think if there hadn't been this resistance would South Africa be a different place today?

**COEN RIEKERT:** Well the end result would probably have been pretty much like it is now I think, there would have been...the war happened and you can't wish it away and then I think on both sides it must have left a bit of a ...call it a grudge if you like, with some individuals at least. I don't think the overall result would have been much different than it is now, so I would like to think it really is. Hindsight it would probably have been better not to have it I think, not to go to war at all, but politics were forever deciding and it was very rarely that the military, that a thing like this was decided on a military basis only...so I don't know, I think from the individuals point of view there must remain some of the animosity both sides ...but you get used to it and live with it.

**INTERVIEWER:** Let's talk a bit about some of the operations you were involved in, was there anyone that you thought was particularly brilliant or successful or that for some reason just remains very clear in your mind for some reason. Can you describe?

**COEN RIEKERT:** Well there were a number and the first big operation that I really went on I ...my first operation was in Rhodesia at the time, so I was still in the Parachute Battalion but also just tactical operations basically what they call Fire Force...operational or observation posts...spotting the enemy and people flying in, and hitting the base, that's what it is. There were a few of those that were very successful and 100% kills and spots were very successful. Its tactical

operations, very small ...in and out the same day, easy work. They ones that stick to me in my mind more is the first big one I went on was also with the Parachute Battalion was operation Protea...which was an invasion basically, a very large force sort of invading Southern Angola and took over all the towns and [inaudible] a few ambushes on that one was very successful, I remember those very well...we were on vehicles, we were a saviour operation on vehicles...with 32 Battalion a few reconnaissance operations we did but actually got the required results, finding enemy bases and sort of satisfying...Operation Askari later which is similar to Protea another invasion into further north, a much bigger one than Protea...I thought that was a very successful operation and a very exciting from our point of view because there was contacts virtually every day...so I remember that one very well, also basically my last big operation that I did with 32.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you feel there was recognition coming from the higher levels of what you were doing?

**COEN RIEKERT:** Yes, every now and then we had people visiting, Generals were obviously coming and going and throughout they were always full of praise for 32...understandably mainly every operation that was done, was basically done by 32 or part of it was done by 32 Battalion, so I think there was a lot recognition yes, appreciation from Pretoria.

**INTERVIEWER:** Do you feel like there was any animosity between 32 Battalion and sort of the rest of the military operating at the time was there any rivalry or competition...

**COEN RIEKERT:** There was some strangely enough between operational

battalion and 32 battalion there was always a bit of animosity, one considered itself better than the other one, there were a few incidents I believe where it became quite violent and it came when they shared camps and it happens and its also completely [inaudible] totally black unit with a parachute battalion totally white ...no blacks whatsoever...so there was a bit of that...the other units we got on very well with Special Forces ...there was no animosity there, there was actually good cooperation always where I was involved. We didn't have to much to deal with any other units operationally so I never got to see them too much, the Air Force we got on very well with always, there was a bit of animosity I think, possibly a bit of jealousy on the side of some of the other units because they weren't involved as much as 32 was.

**INTERVIEWER:** And probably weren't really showing the same results were they?

**COEN RIEKERT:** Certainly not.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you ever work with 31 Battalion with the Bushmen?

**COEN RIEKERT:** No.

**INTERVIEWER:** Can you remember any particular person who you worked with who was outstandingly brave or who inspired you in some way or who gave courage to you and to the people around you?

**COEN RIEKERT:** I have a few, my commanders always I was fortunate to work for very good commanders and I was fortunate to work with Colonel Breytenbach on operations, he would be the first one I think, not that I was in 32 at the time, but before and after 32...Willem Ratte was another one in 32, he was my

Reconnaissance Wing Commander and I learned everything I knew about Reconnaissance work from him basically, I mean this guy was brilliant, not a very popular guy for many reasons but a soldier while he was, was excellent. Those would be the two that stick out yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** And among the black soldiers?

**COEN RIEKERT:** Many of them, basically all of them ...you get the odd one that doesn't inspire one, but I can't recall names...there was one group that I worked with them in the team many times and there was one person in my teams that [barking noises in background] so you know there were arguments backwards and forwards because remember I had to carry the radio on the first operation...that was always the rookies job and very heavy and you haven't got room for your own water and food basically. So we start sharing out equipment and I ended up with about four batteries and the radio and its just impossible to carry it so I sort of handed it back to the black guys in the team and they sort of...I think they were testing me basically, they sort of brought it all back to me again and there was a bit of shouting match, but all above board and after the first operation it turned the other way and it was totally different and they, from then on it was a share thing.

**INTERVIEWER:** So they were testing you.

**COEN RIEKERT:** I don't think so, afterwards I thought that maybe what it was all about...they knew very well that you have to share it out, one guy can't carry it all.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, is this something that happened to new people a lot,

they were sort of given something to do that wasn't...

**COEN RIEKERT**: Yes, not the recce groups so much I think, maybe before operations yes...because once you are on operation you do the thing and you come out...I believe in the companies it was maybe more so. They also had to do the selection course before they were deployed; it involved a lot of walking for the rest of them, which I never had to do fortunately. But certainly the new guy has to prove himself that's either on operation or before and if he doesn't fit in he had to go.

**INTERVIEWER**: Okay, so you didn't actually spend much time at Buffalo base really did you?

**COEN RIEKERT**: A few [inaudible] just for a small boat course on the Okavango River would have been a rehearsal for operations but I never actually lived at the base on a permanent basis.

**INTERVIEWER**: Okay...but tell me a bit about camp life when you weren't on operations, what was the atmosphere like in the camp, was there....

**COEN RIEKERT**: It was all very relaxed and appreciated, I didn't spend much time in the camp but I don't think ever more than two weeks at a time...it was very much appreciated because we needed the break and we did training obviously but it was always a sort of casual walking in shorts and T-shirts, no regimental things, parades or something like that. So it was get up in the morning, do a bit of PT to keep in shape and then rehearsals for training, radio training and signals training, weapons training...and basically in the evening a few drinks ...I remember it was quite nice in the camp the few times that I spent

there.

**INTERVIEWER:** Was there something, can you remember anything that was particularly damaging to the moral?

**COEN RIEKERT:** From the operational point of view only ...I have done quite a few operations where we were given hot information supposedly...and then finding nothing. When we get to a base it has been evacuated the day before...something like that, all a waste of time and you can't walk about, so its disappointment ...and that damages moral a bit and it happened a few times but you get over it and the next one is successful and then...but otherwise in the camp it was always a good time, we always had a good time in the camp, we had barbeques etcetera so we were all very relaxed and non regimental, it was quite nice.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, so there was nothing you, there was nothing about the logistical support or the living conditions that...

**COEN RIEKERT:** No we had these wooden bashes were put up by the guys before me and food was normally quite good, by the standard of the army and the other camps I think, but also we were looked after...there were movies every now and again so it was quite good.

**INTERVIEWER:** So you feel like you had the support of Pretoria and that they understood your role and that you had quite an important role in this.

**COEN RIEKERT:** I think so yes, I ...General Geldenhuys was a very pro free to [inaudible] as well and he was the senior General at the time. So I certainly agree that he knew all the sport and [inaudible]

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, when ...32 Battalion moved from Buffalo base back to South Africa, what did this mean for you.

**COEN RIEKERT:** I had long left the unit by then, I wasn't involved, but I understood that it was necessary; they couldn't stay where they were obviously. I wasn't too happy with the fact that they went to Pomfret even though I wasn't involved, I thought Pomfret was a bit out of the way ...they could have possibly gone to a better place but I don't know of any place like that, but they might have constructed a camp with a better place than Pomfret. Like I said I wasn't in the unit then and I had very little information about what was happening, so I just accepted it as a fact.

**INTERVIEWER:** So you left before that, why did you leave?

**COEN RIEKERT:** Well like I said the unit actually disbanded...the recce group was temporarily, it was formed again later, so the South West African Special Forces then took over the unit as there were a few individuals left, but the whole group stayed with Commander everybody included and got a new commander to the one that we had before. But all the guys stayed and we stayed in the same camp and everything remained as it was...it was just a new unit called something else, so I preferred to stay for a while. Eventually we moved from Armani as well to another camp, I suppose it wasn't a choice of mine to leave but the unit disbanded temporarily or the reconnaissance wing was. The company carried on working as normal, but the group that I worked with as such that wasn't moved to Buffalo it was disbanded....it was later formed again in Buffalo...but I had already left and I wasn't going back there.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay and was it at that stage that you ...was this shortly before you left the military?

**COEN RIEKERT:** It was actually quite a way before that ...it was towards the end of 1984 and I remained with the South West African Special Forces until 1987 I think and that was also disbanded so I had to leave again and I joined the gorilla training camp in San Michele on the Cuando River there...[inaudible]...I got a mate of mine and he actually included me on a visit to our camp one day and I went and joined him, which was training basically nothing more than that.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay...when did you leave the military?

**COEN RIEKERT:** I left in 1993...after 1989 the pull out already started, I was moved to Pretoria...I was involved with CSI then for about three years, best [inaudible] I worked for a director called Special Tasks and we did training and thereafter a bit of travelling involved. It was quite alright then, but in 1993 I was doing purely a desk job because I was then qualified for the last eight months and I called it a [inaudible] it was also just before the election before the new army, the National Defence Force...and I didn't want to be part of that because I thought their standards were going to drop and as it turned out it did quite a bit and I wasn't going to be part of that at all, so I [inaudible].

**INTERVIEWER:** So this had some influence on your, this decision?

**COEN RIEKERT:** Oh yes certainly.

**INTERVIEWER:** The political changes to leave the military. How did you feel at the time of this impending transition, sort of 1992, 1993 and you saw things were going to change, how did you think ...what did you think of the way things were



being negotiated on behalf of the armed forces.

**COEN RIEKERT**: I was a bit apprehensive at the time because by then I was in Pretoria so obviously I knew a lot more of what was going on and I had access to news...and I was a bit concerned about a civil war breaking out because in a way I was concerned about people being persecuted after the election, depending on who was going to win, I mean the ANC was going to win, there was no question about that. I had no doubt in my mind about that...we had a few lectures, not lectures, we had people talking to us from the military telling us what the situation was and not in as many words were telling us basically that the South African [banging noises] is gone and [background noises] so I was a bit apprehensive about what was going to happen afterwards, and what was going to happen to the guys like 32 Battalion for instance, I wasn't involved with them then but I sort of saw that even then there wasn't going to be much future for those guys, I mean I was concerned that they would be persecuted and as it turned out there wasn't too much of that, but I think to some extent some [dogs barking] disbanded, Koevoet was disbanded, all the Special Effective Units were disbanded, I don't know if the members were looked after, I know Koevoet a lot of the guys stayed behind and where are they now? I was a bit apprehensive about that, not to be personal...I was a standard unit ...I was a [inaudible] but I was given a posting that I wasn't trained for and I couldn't possibly stay on, not because I didn't want to but because I couldn't perform the task properly...so there was a bit of apprehension and uncertainty of the future.

**INTERVIEWER**: Do you feel that people were being encouraged to leave the

military from within the military itself?

**COEN RIEKERT**: Yes, I think in my case definitely it's a good example, I was ...not from my immediate commander but maybe from the top because they wanted to get rid of the old members, people like me, because I didn't have too much to offer at the time, I was in an operational unit before, I didn't have too much to offer in Pretoria quite frankly, I understood that, but they could have possibly done it in a better way giving the guy a bit of a pension maybe...tell them to go or whatever. I had to resign in the end just to leave because I was given a post that I wasn't qualified for and I didn't want to spend another day, so I left and I think that saved them a bit of money. I definitely think there was a bit of encouragement to go from within the Army.

**INTERVIEWER**: So do you remember more or less the moment that you realised ...a lot of people called it the, they say we saw the writing on the wall...I mean was it a sort of gradual understanding for you that things were changing or did you have any particular shocking moment where you realised that things are going to be very different from here and I better decide what I want to do with my life?

**COEN RIEKERT**: That was a gradual thing for me, it wasn't ...it was gradual, it started way back in 1989, we pulled out from Angola at the time and we sort of knew the political thing would take its course and so into that...so from even before then I mean even way back before then if I think back about it now...many other guys in the unit were there just for the hell of it...its just like, it wasn't an ideological thing ...it was...these guys were just...they thought it was fun fighting

at the time, but even after I left 32 in 1987/89 round about there, I sort of realised that it was maybe going to last a few more years, but inevitably it was going...it was a gradual thing.

**INTERVIEWER:** So at the time were you making sort of plans for life after the military, did you have an idea of what you wanted to do?

**COEN RIEKERT:** Yes I looked out for a bit or work, I hadn't found anything by 1983...then an opportunity presented itself and I took that, but I don't want to talk about that much.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, and what is it that you are doing now?

**COEN RIEKERT:** I am actually doing landmine and bomb clearance work for a company in Iran...called E&I...it's an environmental company, I do bomb disposal...its a very small section of the large International Company...I started doing this kind of work for Denel before just after I left the army... about 7 months after I left. There was also a few contacts that I built while I was still in the army and we did in liaison with Denel we developed weapon systems etc. And I was for a period of that time I was doing liaison work between the Army and Denel and I met all these guys from Mecced [?] which is a division of Denel...and after I left the army I was offered a job because I had demolition courses etcetera...so I had an explosives background and I got a job in Mozambique and I stuck with them for about eight years and left now to go and work in Iran.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, good...I think that is just about it...thanks very much.

**COEN RIEKERT:** Thank you, hope I have been of help.

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