

Howard Fletcher Pilot 15/01/08  
 Missing Voices Project Interviewed by Mike Cadman

	TAPE ONE SIDE A
Interviewer	Tell me a little bit about your background, where did you grow up, do you have a large family, or a small family, English speaking or Afrikaans speaking?
Howard	I was brought up in Johannesburg. I had a father who was in the RAF and my mother was a musician. My sister is 4 years younger than me. We both went to private schools and I ended up in Natal in Michaelhouse and did the normal things that people do at school. And then I went to university where I did a degree. And after 3 years of doing a BA I decided that I wanted to fly. At which stage I approached my father and got his suggestions on it and he was a little bit apprehensive about it because he said it's not a particularly well paid job, but in the event that I did want to do it he would approach some guy, some Brigadiers or top senior staff in the airforce, and see if I could get an interview prior to going to the army. And I was interviewed at that stage, a brigadier...I can't remember his name, but he interviewed me. He later became a general. And he said that he was satisfied that I would make the grade and suggested that I go through the pilot's orientation course.
Interviewer	What did you study at university?
Howard	Law and politics.
Interviewer	And your dad had contacts there from his business links?
Howard	Well yes, not directly contacts himself but he knew how to...I suppose from previous experience of being in the RAF he knew how to find his way around at the time.
Interviewer	Did he fight in the Second World War?
Howard	Yes, he was initially at Dunkirk, and then when the forces withdrew, he was a meteorologist at the time, and he then went to El Alamein, Tobruk, and also into Italy, and then towards the end of the war he ended up in Bulawayo where he met my mother. He was on the RAF training course there and he flew Ansons and Hudsons and things like that. And eventually when the war ended he did a few maritime missions but his experience was limited.
Interviewer	Then, when you said to your dad this is what you wanted to do, - you'd just studied politics, what was your expectation of going in to the military? Did you want to do it purely because you wanted to fly?
Howard	Yes. There was no expectation other than to go and fly.
Interviewer	So you do the pilot's orientation course and you obviously did

	quite well.
Howard	Yes, I did reasonably well and got through it and then towards the end of the course I indicated that I wished to go and fly transport with a view to maybe going to SAA. But as the politics in the airforce would have it, they wanted me to go and fly helicopters so that was my...maybe because I was English, they didn't want their Afrikaans brothers to suffer as much as we did ( <i>laughs</i> ). I'm being a bit facetious on that score. But I didn't get what I wanted and that's not uncommon in the airforce. You're assigned to an aircraft which is not necessarily your first choice.
Interviewer	How long does pilot orientation take?
Howard	The first part which we flew on Harvards took about 9 months. And you had to fly 128 hours to become solo. Once you'd done that, and like the previous years where you went on to Impalas for about another 9 months we went straight to Alouettes and we learned to fly Alouettes in Bloemfontein.
Interviewer	The orientation course, where did you do that?
Howard	It was at Dunnottar, and then Bloemfontein for the advanced flying.
Interviewer	Many guys who go into the military, the first thing that they do is basics, lots of physical exercise and stuff like that. Did you go through a basics process?
Howard	Yes. We went on officer's course, I think it was for about three or four months at the college. The college in Valhalla at the time. Robert's Heights as it was known prior to that. Then we went down...our course for some reason there was a delay. I think because of weather it held up the previous course...we ended up at Langebaan for I think a month and a bit to do navigation course down there.
Interviewer	And then so in your process through Harvards onto Alouettes, it's clearly very technical, you've got to fly these machines and so and so forth. Was there any kind of dropout? Did guys not crack?
Howard	Mmm. All along the way people dropped out on various academic courses, part even the flying classes. During the flying periods the guys dropped out over a period of time. Some for example became airsick, they didn't know that they couldn't fly. Some guys couldn't go solo. They didn't pass the solo. And every now and then you'd have someone drop out. Even at the advanced stage we had a chap who couldn't land an Alouette. He didn't drop out from flying but he went on to go and fly other aircraft.
Interviewer	The discipline...helicopters are very different to fixed wing.
Howard	Yes.
Interviewer	It's got something to do with the fact that you've got to have a knowledge of...a sense of not just motion in one direction, you've got to worry about your tail rotor doing one thing...

Howard	All the torque that is delivered by the tail rotor.
Interviewer	In the airforce was there a culture that the airforce was superior to the infantry?
Howard	Oh definitely. Without doubt. And on a par if not superior to the navy.
Interviewer	So it was an elite sort of profession that you were entering.
Howard	Yes.
Interviewer	With its own cultures and things like that. Some of the culture of the airforce, was it pretty much Royal Airforce sort of culture or was it a hybrid that had developed over the years?
Howard	It's difficult for me to say in that I don't know the RAF culture at all. But I could only assume it was built along similar lines. And they liked to think that they had the reputation of being amongst the best pilots in the world. Which I think they rated themselves as better than the United States airforce because the pilots were able to fly by the seat of their pants, whereas the US airforce the pilots were ( <i>inaudible</i> ), but the British pilots we rated pretty high as well.
Interviewer	Now the reason I ask is, as you know, many South Africans including your dad flew in the Second World War, flew at the RAF, flew with Allied forces, and then of course Korea came along in the fifties, but that was a more of an American orientated war, so I'm just curious to know if there was any sense that you were carrying out sort of old RAF traditions?
Howard	Look there were a lot of traditions, whether they were RAF or not I don't know.
Interviewer	So you finally go from Harvards to Alouettes. How long did it take you to qualify in Alouettes?
Howard	About 9 months again. That was done at Bloemspruit. And it was quite vigorous training in terms of the navigation, the tasks that you were assigned to do, cargo slings, and just flying a helicopter, because the Alo wasn't an easy helicopter to fly. Particularly initially when you've just come from fixed wing aircraft.
Interviewer	Yes, that was French made and the first ones flew in the early fifties didn't they?
Howard	Yes, that was the Alo 2 and then the progression to the Alo 3.
Interviewer	And during that time you would obviously do exercises in different conditions in the mountains, on the coast and so on and so forth.
Howard	Yes.
Interviewer	Then there were...at that stage...what year are you talking about now?

Howard	1982.
Interviewer	So by this time the bush war is in full swing.
Howard	Yes.
Interviewer	You've had a couple of big operations in Angola, everybody knows that there's a war going on and you're learning how to be a combat pilot.
Howard	Mmm.
Interviewer	Was there any emphasis on the political reasons for why South Africa was fighting or was that incidental to what you were doing?
Howard	There was definitely an underlying political agenda in that we had the Total Onslaught that was fed to us quite vigorously. But I don't think it was as intense as with the army because the pilots there were for a reason. We knew that at some stage if there had to be fighting there was a reason they were fighting, and they were professional people. So the political agenda wasn't as strenuous as you would have found in the army. We had to motivate conscripts. We weren't conscripts.
Interviewer	Sure. You were there because you wanted to fly airplanes.
Howard	We were relatively well paid by comparison to the rest of them.
Interviewer	At that stage were you on the Permanent Force of the Airforce or on a short term contract?
Howard	We were on a medium term contract which was for 10 years. So that superseded the short term contract which I think was 3 years, and the Permanent guys which were permanent.
Interviewer	And so then you go through this process, by the time you were qualified on Alouettes I presume that you weren't any longer just a soldier being chased around by corporals, doing PT and stuff and like that? I presume that your status as a pilot gave you some protection against that?
Howard	Well once you qualified you became a second lieutenant... a lieutenant with one pip. And that then gave you officer's status as opposed to being a candidate which you were on the course. And then you progressed to co-pilot on Pumas, which was another course all on its own. And that we dealt with at the time of 19 Squadron in Swartkops, Pretoria.
Interviewer	And the Pumas were the standard transport aircraft of the SA airforce?
Howard	Yes.
Interviewer	When did the Oryx come in, 1990 or '91?
Howard	Somewhere around there, yes.
Interviewer	Ok, so through your entire experience you were flying...

Howard	I was flying Pumas and there was a CJ and K and I think the L class, as well. All with different permutations of advanced technology on the aircraft.
Interviewer	So then once you've done your Alouette you go on to Pumas as a co-pilot, was that purely exercises or were you starting to fly into operational areas then?
Howard	You flew into operational areas immediately. As a co-pilot and... I took a year and a half off and I went as an instructor to the airforce college, as an instructor to the candidates, which I was told would stand in good stead because..... I wouldn't have to do it and everyone was going to do it at that time. Little did I know that it actually impeded my progress in the airforce from a flying perspective. So I should have actually stayed on Pumas flying first hand. But anyway that's what I did. And when I finished the year and a half at the airforce college I then came back and started flying Pumas again.
Interviewer	Now your training thing, you would get new intakes, show them what to do and then take them through their course?
Howard	Yes.
Interviewer	At the same time a lot of your colleagues were flying operationally in Angola and you felt that you wanted to do that?
Howard	Yes.
Interviewer	Was that for the excitement of it, or because you just felt it was more challenging as a pilot? To go to the operational area? Were you tired of teaching students?
Howard	Yes, look I was allowed 18 months, that's what they asked me to do and I said that's fine, but now I want to go back...and that was a ground job, a land-based job, I wanted to fly. A lot of my friends were flying operations at that stage.
Interviewer	So then after this period you get up there and...your first sort of operational flight, can you tell me about what was expected of you, what did you do?
Howard	Well, you know, as the co-pilot you have to plan the sortie, which was overseen by the commander. Quite often the commander and you worked in conjunction with each other. You'd plan the whole operation, the fuel, the time of take-off, expected time of departure, or time of arrival, where you would be landing. If you went for example to Jamba which was Unita's headquarters, or for example we flew a lot along the Caprivi dropping medical supplies, we flew into southern Angola and eastern Angola, doing night drops with the engineers. And the night flying was quite hairy because you'd be flying at about 100 foot and you'd be navigating on rivers and...there were no lights until maybe 2 hours into the flight and you would suddenly see some headlights in the bush. And that's where you were, that's where you landed.

Interviewer	How did you know those were the right headlights? <i>Laughs</i>
Howard	Well, based on time and direction. And if you didn't get that right then you're at the wrong place.
Interviewer	Isn't it exceptionally difficult because there're no lights but also southern Angola is very, very flat.
Howard	It's very flat but you can navigate by your maps and rivers, and the rivers are quite well marked, and if the wind was blowing or the moon was up you could have a pretty good idea where you were. And obviously be flying information so you wouldn't...it's very rare...in fact you'd never fly on your own. You'd have another helicopter with you, and you would be comparing notes as to where you thought you were and whether you're left or right of track.
Interviewer	Where were you based?
Howard	On the border. I think, firstly, we at 19 Squadron were based at Swartkops. And from there you did your general flying training, you did your cargo slinging, you did your navigation, you did your emergency procedures and so forth. And then you would do flights within the boundaries of South Africa at the time. You'd go to wherever you needed to. Quite often there's station pilots...which at one station there was 60...which was considered to be a very big squadron. It was the biggest squadron in the airforce at the time. They did flights around South Africa and then we would also do ferry flights to Ondangwa where aircraft needed to be returned for major servicing. So you'd fly via Keetmanshoop and Upington. It was a 9 hour flight, and you'd refuel at Keetmanshoop, Upington, back to Swartkops.
Interviewer	In other words you flew within South Africa, then you flew due west to get up into Namibia. So you avoided crossing Botswana?
Howard	Yes, we never crossed Botswana. Flew to Ondangwa, take an aircraft that had been serviced and then we'd return with an aircraft that needed a major service. And that's what we did. Fly straight over Etosha. That was quite exciting thing because we used to fly at very low level over Etosha. It was like flying in the snow, and you could almost eyeball the gemsbok as you went past.
Interviewer	They must have died of fright.
Howard	We came across them before they could have died.
Interviewer	And just for the record, it looked like snow because of the salt pans.
Howard	Yes.
Interviewer	But over and above that, flying from Pretoria to Ondangwa must have been quite a nice tour just to see the countryside from a helicopter.

Howard	You know, if you do it often enough it becomes boring. It had its pros and cons, but a 9 hour flight in a helicopter was a very demanding...you feel physically stuffed.
Interviewer	What is the range of a Puma?
Howard	Well, it depends...I can't remember to be honest, but we used to have ferry tanks, which gave us...I can't remember all the exact...
Interviewer	Not serious, I'm just curious.
Howard	It's probably about...we could without...and it was all dependant on whether we had passengers or not. I think our maximum range was about three and a half hours in those days.
Interviewer	I was just curious to know how many times you would have had to refuel between Pretoria...
Howard	Twice. We went to Keetmanshoop and then Upington.
Interviewer	That was it, ok. So that was routine work which as you say, while over Etosha was quite fun but became boring after a while. And then a lot of your day to day work would have been, as you say, ferrying supplies, ferrying people from one base to the next, be it Jamba or elsewhere.
Howard	Mmm.
Interviewer	Were there restrictions on..., in order to get permission to fly to Jamba, which was in southern Angola, what was the procedure? Were you just instructed, take Puma 234 whatever it was and off you go?
Howard	Correct.
Interviewer	And did you ever deal with the Special Forces guys?
Howard	We dealt mostly with the...well I dealt with the Parabats mostly. Occasionally with the Recces. But not with the...well, the Recces if you...
Interviewer	They're Special Forces. And what would your task have been, to drop them at certain locations in Angola or at a fire-fight wherever it might be?
Howard	Yes.
Interviewer	Did you ever talk to the guys? Did you ever meet them in the pub afterwards and...?
Howard	Often. We often compared notes and compared what had happened at a certain fire fight for example.
Interviewer	And how did you get on with them?
Howard	Very well. There was a good rapport between the...particularly the Parabats and the airforce guys.

Interviewer	And the Parabats, as you know, are parachute trained, but parachute jumps were limited, I think.
Howard	Yes, they never jumped out of a helicopter for example.
Interviewer	Well, I was going to say, they seldom even jumped out of C130s or C160s. Casinga in '78 was a big one, and there were limited numbers of drops. Most of the time they were helicopter borne troops.
Howard	Mmm.
Interviewer	What was it like when you were picking up guys, knowing that you were going to be flying into dangerous circumstances? What went through your mind?
Howard	Well, I think initially you thought about it but then...I found myself also just...I was paralysed by fear at some stage. And then eventually your head just took over and said, listen, I've just got to just get through this, and your training puts you into a space where all you do is think about your flying and you are on a high state of alert or adrenalin high because you are looking out for all sorts of things you could come up against. Yes, but eventually you just accept fate. You say, well, if I'm going to get taken out I've got to accept it. It's what you there for.
Interviewer	And the soldiers, the Parabats or the Recces, whoever it was that you were flying, when you spoke to them afterwards, did they experience similar feelings, or did they never talk about it?
Howard	They, from my recollection, there was always a sense of excitement, adrenalin, I think had taken over. And actually that's what motivated them to doing what they wanted, because they had this esprit de corps that bound them together and they thought that together they could conquer whatever this world threw at them. I'll give an example: when I was at Rundu, a number of our Special Forces had been killed. And they were brought out by a Dak ( <i>Dakota, DC 3</i> ) which had gone in to retrieve the bodies. And there was one chap in particular...his name I didn't remember, wasn't told...but he was an extremely, extremely tall guy and he'd been shot, he was very badly wounded, and his companions in the Recces, dragged his body for 3 days through the bush. They weren't going to leave him behind. He eventually died and I'll never forget seeing his body on the ground, and in fact we took his body and we had to move them to another spot, in the Alo, and his legs stuck right out the door. That's how tall he was. But what really struck me was the fact that this guy, in spite of his weight, these guys just carried him. There was that kind of camaraderie.
Interviewer	From talking to guys they were very strong, particularly the Recces, they had very specialised training, they were very specialised soldiers. What year did you first start flying operational?



Howard	1983.
Interviewer	So you would have come in at the start of some big operations like Operation Meebos, Operation Super...
Howard	Yes. I didn't get involved in those per se but a number of my contemporaries did.
Interviewer	But those were the big operations. There was constant conflict going on all the time.
Howard	Yes.
Interviewer	You talk about this Special Forces guy, did you ever come under fire yourself?
Howard	Not on Pumas but certainly on Alos, yes. From small arms fire.
Interviewer	And Alouettes were the primary gunship of the SA airforce?
Howard	The only gunship. From a tactical flying point of view and a ground support from a helicopter.
Interviewer	And were you the commander of an Alo?
Howard	Yes. We used to fly in pairs, mission leader and a support guy, and we always flew in a sort of D pattern. In fact, we'd fly in a pattern that overlapped so that you could from any one angle you would always have complete visibility of the ground that you were covering. So you would fly a circle like that, D-shaped, and your colleague would fly in a D shape as well. So you would have complete coverage. And what you would do is you would fly in front of the Koevoet guys, and Koevoet guys had the trackers, had these red caps on so you could see who they were, and the bushman trackers would run ahead of them picking out the tracks on the ground.
Interviewer	And the Casspirs would be behind them, or the Wolf Turbos actually.
Howard	Yes, with the .30 calibre Brownings.
Interviewer	And in your chopper would you have a .50 Browning or...?
Howard	No we always had...well, on one occasion we flew with 3 helicopters. I was in the observation helicopter above the other two, because it was quite a big contact, and the other two flew below with 20mm cannons and then I flew with the .303 Brownings above it. But that was unusual.
Interviewer	I know that depending what was available they sometimes had .303 Brownings, sometimes, very occasionally .50, but the 20mm cannons was favoured.
Howard	Yes, it was almost always a 20mm cannon.
Interviewer	And the fire power from those is devastating.
Howard	It's huge.

Interviewer	And you say the .303s, that was flying with Koevoet?
Howard	Yes.
Interviewer	So was that in Ovamboland itself or elsewhere in Namibia?
Howard	Yes, through Ovamboland and into Marienfluss?
Interviewer	That's the Richtersveld.
Howard	Yes, Richtersveld. There were limited operations in there, it was mostly Ovamboland, that's where their main infiltration areas were. And then also north of that, over the cut line, just south of Ondjiva and places like that. And then also as far as...Rundu didn't see as much from that point of view. In fact they saw very little. So to the east of Ondangwa, probably about 200, 300 kms and that was it.
Interviewer	Yes. ... talking about flying in Alos over Ovamboland and things like that. What was the pattern there? You'd be at base, a radio call would come in saying that they needed air support and you would then...what's the term? Scramble.
Howard	Yes, there was always one set of pilots on alert. And alternatively we'd go out to forward air command posts, where there was a contact area designated and there was known that there were terrorists in the area. And in particular during Operation Typhoon, we knew that there were large numbers of very young terrorists coming down who were basically the equivalent of Kamikaze squad guys who would just shoot and kill for the sake of it. And we had to eradicate these guys. There was no chance of taking prisoners. These guys were killed on the spot.
Interviewer	They were trained as sort of, as you say Kamikazes, because there was a big push, they wanted to get south of the red line which was Tsumeb.
Howard	Correct, yes.
Interviewer	And so you'd either be at a forward command airpost and then you'd get airborne with whoever your gunner was, and then make radio coms with the guys on the ground.
Howard	Yes.
Interviewer	How serious were those fire fights?
Howard	Those things sometimes went on for days. And in some cases...although really, some of the terrorists were held with a huge amount of respect by the Koevoet guys, because some of them just managed to evade them for hours on end, running non stop, ducking and diving under trees and walking along logs to avoid getting...putting their footprints in the sand, and doing all sorts of extraordinary stuff. I must say the Koevoet guys really admired some of them. And in fact, if a chap had been running long enough there was almost a sense of awe for this guy and they would try and capture him as opposed to shooting him.

Interviewer	And they'd capture him because they wanted to turn him to make him one of theirs?
Howard	Well yes and no. I think, there's always the knowledge that if you manage to turn him it would only be a temporary thing. because even if he became part of theirs, they realised that at any stage he would run. And we had an example of that. now one of the...and it's amazing all of this stuff is coming back now...in terms of qualifying as a Recce, you had to go and attack a town in Angola. That was your final part of your training course. And we were based in Ombalantu, the pilots, and I think the Recces launched an attack on a town, I think it was...not Xangongo, it was one next to it, a smaller town.
Interviewer	I know where Xangongo is.
Howard	But there was a smaller town, and this group of Recces had to go along, and in that group of Recces they had a turncoat. They had one of the Angolan guys, or the SWAPO guys. Anyway, what happened there was that they set up this ambush along the road heading directly south. And there was a kink in the road and they decided that they were going to set up the ambush for any trucks and tanks that came down. And while they were doing this, this ex SWAPO guy, took a gap for it, and ran into town to warn the Angolan troops that these guys were waiting for them. Anyway, realising this they then rearranged their ambush and the trucks and the tanks came through the bush as opposed to on the road, but nevertheless the Recces realised this and they shot them up to pieces. That was my first more conventional...from an Alo point of view...that was my first really conventional kind of contact, although we weren't brought into the attack. The whole night I sweated, I couldn't sleep, because this is serious stuff now. Now we're really fighting.
Interviewer	So you said at times you were paralysed by fear but then your training took over and you knew you had to fly the machine.
Howard	Yes.
Interviewer	Can you paint me a picture of it? You get in your chopper because there's been a call about a contact, or you're backing some guys in Angola. Can you explain to me what it's like? What's it like from the air, when people see the fire-fight, the radio coms and so on?
Howard	Generally speaking you could almost categorise it into different types of contact. One where you were tracking one or two terrs. And generally speaking that would be a methodical kind of march through the bush where you were just chasing one or two guys, and occasionally they'd split up, and then you'd split up your forces as well, and that would roll on for a couple of hours if you hadn't managed to catch the guys. You had to be very patient. A lot of flying, and sometimes you'd go on the next day. Then you had another situation where you could come across a few terrs and there was just immediate contact and there'd be bullets flying

	<p>everywhere. I think my first contact was probably as good a contact as I'd ever had in the sense that we were at the forward air command post just in Angola and we got a call out at about ten o'clock in the morning. And our Koevoet guys had been tracking, and these guys had stopped for lunch at this kraal, and they'd been monitoring these guys and then they called us out and as we pitched over the kraal, these 3 guys...they were in rice uniform that was supplied by the Tanzanian army...Chinese rice uniforms. I hadn't seen these guys, I didn't know what a terr looked like. And I thought, my god, is this a terr or not? All I could see were these guys running through the bush. And eventually we were turning over...my mission leader was ahead of me...we were turning, I saw this guy running into the bush, and I said to my (gunner?) just shoot that bush. And we actually killed the guy, that was my first kill. And while we were turning I saw another terr dive under a tree, but there was a Casspir that had been following him and they couldn't find him and by now the other Alo had turned and also not in a position to put down fire. So I said to the guy in control of the Casspir, I said, reverse, reverse, he's almost under you! The guy was sitting there with an RPG literally under the Casspir. And the guy reversed and he saw him and he just took him out with the Brownings. And there was a third guy that had got shot by the Alo. And when we got back we landed...that took all of about half an hour in total. Landed, and by 12 o'clock we were sitting there and the Casspirs came back with the guys tied to the bumpers, bodies over the bumpers, and they parked there and they just threw the bodies on the ground. That's how we carried on.</p>
Interviewer	<p>When you saw the bodies attached to the bumpers of the Casspir and then on the ground...from the air, in the heat of the moment, you're flying your helicopter, you're talking to the guys on the ground, the things are happening very quickly...when you saw the bodies afterwards, what was your feeling? Was it just a day at the office or...?</p>
Howard	<p>That was my first contact with real dead bodies. Ever. And I looked at these guys and I thought, you know...also because I have a sort of political...I'd had a chance to think about life from a more academic point of view being at Wits, which was different. and I had this sort of dichotomy of trying to think, how do you rationalise this? And I think more particularly not just from an academic point of view or an emotional point of view, but I remember looking up at the sky and there were these beautiful white clouds...I thought, shit. <i>Long pause</i></p>
Interviewer	<p>That's why I ask, because when you're flying your helicopter they're a long way below you and it's a very different situation. But then you were back at base and the next day you were back on call and you're ready to do it again because that was your job. Was there anytime when you felt shit let me go home, and fly for Anglo American or...?</p>

Howard	Umm...yes, I think there was that.
Interviewer	Do you want give it a break for a while? <i>Tape turned off</i> So that was your first experience of seeing the results of a real contact.
Howard	Yes.
Interviewer	But nevertheless you were there, you were doing your job, in your mind, and you carried on. Did you talk about it with the Koevoet guys afterwards? Did you talk about the contact, what they were experiencing in the Casspirs and then chasing after them?
Howard	Often we did, you know, from their point of view there was a combination of a hunt and fear. I can remember very clearly on one occasion they caught a guy, a young guy, couldn't have been older than about 19, and he'd had his middle finger shot off in this contact. And he was sitting in the back of a Casspir and we'd landed to refuel. And I got out because there was a lull in the operation there, and I said, have you caught someone? They said, yes. I said, I'd like to go and see this guy. So we got into the back of the Casspir and there was this guy who was just like you and me. And he was holding his thumb and I could see the bone sticking out of his middle finger, and I just had a chat with him and I turned to one of the leaders of the Koevoet guys and I said, what are you going to do with this ou? They said, we're going to let him run. And what that means is they let him run and they just shoot him in the back. So there was no quarter given from that point of view.
Interviewer	Did you feel you could influence the guys? Do you feel that you could have said, listen, I'm a pilot, I'm a lieutenant...
Howard	No. Not at all. There's rules that...they would have just laughed at you.
Interviewer	I mean Koevoet have got a frightening reputation - is some of it is a product of time. Were they as ruthless as people said?
Howard	More so, I think. I think that...and I think that part of the reason for their effectiveness was that they struck serious fear into the terrs. They would think nothing of capturing a guy and tying him to the bumper of a Casspir and just driving through the bush. You know, we also operated with 101 Battalion, and they had Buffels. These guys also had their own methods. They would take the tyre out of the back bin, turf the terr in the back there, and drive around for a day until the guy expired. It's probably 50 degrees in there. And eventually the guy would die.
Interviewer	That's the bin on the back that opens and you can lock it with a...
Howard	Yes. And we would come across kraals and they'd do a bit of panel beating, as they referred to it. That was a regular occurrence.
Interviewer	Did it strike you as strange at the time, if you look at Koevoet,

	<p>Koevoet was primarily white officers and black soldiers, primarily Namibians... 101 was black soldiers. Three Two Battalion was black soldiers with white officers. Did it strike you as odd at the time that much of the day to day fighting... I'm not talking about the big operations like Protea or Modular and those ops... was actually being fought by black men.</p>
Howard	<p>That was the point was that we didn't want to waste our own white men. Which I think if you were to look at it rationally that's the right way to go. Also from a political point of view, it also meant that you weren't having to answer for why people were dying at home. Which is probably why a lot of those kind of operations were quite well hidden. Owing to the fact that a dead body being black is less answerable than a white body when you've got guys in the lands... particularly if you listen to Forces' Favourites, what was her name? Pat Kerr. On occasion you'd have, this guy's passed away maybe, but the real statistical data of black and white (<i>inaudible</i>) being lost in the bush.</p>
Interviewer	<p>I think that's a good point. In the National Party government's point of view, the death of 5 or 6 black Angolans, was very easy to hide. Whereas had it been white guys from South Africa, they'd have had to tell their parents. Beeld or Die Burger would have heard about it and that would have been much harder to justify. But it's become apparent to me in the reading I've done and so on, I don't think at the time I realised how much black guys were doing the day to day fighting.</p>
Howard	<p>It was probably as high as 80%, of the actual contacts, were done by black people on black people themselves.</p>
Interviewer	<p>The National Party after 1994 seemed to forget about everyone. If you look at the situation... and I don't justify either side fighting the war... but if you look at the Three Two Battalion guys who thought they were doing the right thing, they've been dumped in the Northern Cape, the Bushman guys have been dumped... so it must seem to them that what they were doing was just... they were betrayed. And I know that from Jan Breytenbach, if you read his books, he clearly feels betrayed.</p>
Howard	<p>I can tell you why he also feels betrayed because I had the honour, if you wish, of going to casevac his son and Paul Harris, if I can recall, on that particular day, I think it was, they had this call out from Ondangwa, and we took off and went into southern Angola, and once again it was a beautiful day, an absolutely spotless day. And these guys had had their contact, 101 Battalion, and we landed and there was this chap, you just see this red blood spurting all over the place, and he'd been hit by an RPG from a very short range, from a terrorist who'd been sitting in a tree and shot the RPG straight into the Casspir. And all this metal had blown up and taken out his throat and his arm and he was blind in both eyes and he was deaf. And you could see his jaw moving and he was breathing through a gaping hole in his neck. And casevac'd him out, and when we landed in</p>

	Ondangwa...I think actually we landed in Oshakati...there was his father.
Interviewer	And do you know what happened to the young guy, did he die?
Howard	I don't know, I've got a suspicion he lived. And he's probably blind in both eyes, can't eat, probably deaf in both ears from the explosion. I've got no idea what happened to him.
Interviewer	You're right, it's something of a...not a contradiction but it's a harsh reality when it's a beautiful day, the sky's blue, the eagles are flying around, and life is great and this sort of stuff is going on. On both sides actually.
Howard	Correct.
Interviewer	Do you ever think about it now, about the other side, the guys on the other side who were fighting for what they believed in. Do you think about their situation?
Howard	I have, but not a lot...I think, everyone is after his own preservation. And I think that these guys must have just looked up in wonder and thought, well, here I am and maybe two or three of us versus 101 Battalion, or a lot of Koevoet guys, what are your chances of survival? Pretty bloody slim. If it was 2% it was probably a lot.
Interviewer	And over and above that, you've got all these guys on the ground, and you've got helicopters up in the sky...many of them I think must have been...essentially that they had no chance.
Howard	And in fact even if they'd broke through those defences, where were they going to go?
Interviewer	Namibia is a very large country, and what where they going to do, get to Windhoek?
Howard	And we had operations going to Tsumeb as well. so there was always a backup throughout that whole war.
Interviewer	Were you frightened of Koevoet yourself?
Howard	No.
Interviewer	You never felt threatened by them?
Howard	No.
Interviewer	Even when they'd been in the pub all night and...
Howard	No. No, I think Koevoet had a respect for the pilots. No, I never feel threatened by them.
Interviewer	Would they have had a respect for just some National Serviceman...?
Howard	I've got no idea what they would have thought. They were in a different league. They were so involved in fighting on a day to day basis I don't think they gave it a second thought.

Interviewer	In terms of maintenance of the aircraft, was there ever a time when your guys were saying to you, listen, we don't have spares for this or that? Were you stretched operationally in terms of aircraft availability?
Howard	No. In fact I can't ever remember a time when we were stretched like that and even if we were there were spare helicopters.
Interviewer	So the international arms embargo didn't seem, to your mind, operationally to have much impact.
Howard	No, no, definitely not on the helicopter side. I think they did a very good job from the servicing point of view.
Interviewer	I understand there was some difficulty with aircraft like the C160...
Howard	Correct. The Transals and maybe the Mirages and stuff.
Interviewer	And it was hard to get those spares. It was just interesting how the military at the time managed to get around it. I know that their radio monitoring equipment and their radio...their signals equipment was very, very good.
Howard	Yes. It was exceptionally good. They had Hopping facilities on the long range frequencies and stuff, which was far in advance of most other countries of this day.
Interviewer	I understand they had digital equipment in the mid eighties when everybody else was on analogue.
Howard	Yes.
	END OF SIDE A ( <i>counter at 512</i> )
	SIDE B ( <i>counter at 12</i> )
Interviewer	We were talking about the mindset of Koevoet, what it was like flying with them. So in Namibia you'd have flown air support for the guys like Koevoet, 101 Battalion, and so on. And then externally you would have flown primarily Special Forces or Parabats...that also did internal stuff, didn't they...at least inside Namibia?
Howard	Yes, yes, absolutely. And we often had fireforce contacts.
Interviewer	Can you take me through what a fireforce contact is. How does it work?
Howard	Well...you could have anything from two-four Puma helicopters ready. There would be a call-out and you would run for the helicopter, jump in, Parabats would leap in, and we'd get going. We would be given the landing zone co-ordinates and you'd plug them in and work them out on the map, and we would come in at about 50 foot, and with about a kilometre to go we'd actually pitch and then just turn and land at the designated area. Quite often it was marked by smoke flares and things like that. The Parabats



	would dismount immediately and...
Interviewer	Would you land?
Howard	Yes. Parabats would jump out and depending on the circumstances we would either take off and go and land at a ( <i>inaudible</i> ) designation or fly. And then these guys would take...quite often it was a big kraal, for example, where there were known terts and it was maybe too big for the likes of Koevoet or Koevoet weren't in the area to handle. And then the bats would surround us and quite often there was a shootout.
Interviewer	And how many guys could you put in each Alouette?
Howard	In an Alouette or a Puma?
Interviewer	Well, both.
Howard	We would never take armed guys in an Alouette, for fire fights, it was always done with Pumas. You generally fly with about 6-8 in each helicopter.
Interviewer	And then you would usually move off to a safe area, and then they would stay in radio coms and call you back when they'd done with whatever they needed to do.
Howard	Yes.
Interviewer	And I mean, you would then fly on to another contact or back to base depending on the circumstances?
Howard	No, generally back to base. It was very seldom that you go from one to the other.
Interviewer	So it was in and out. And then when you got back to base, would you still be on standby for further work or would you go for a swim and whatever?
Howard	No, you would just go back to the Ops room and mooch around. Go back to your bungalow, but if you were on standby then you would be in an area close to the Puma, where you could literally jump in and get going.
Interviewer	And then at the end of each day, would you have a debriefing from a senior officer who said, well what happened today, how did we do here, how did we do there?
Howard	Yes. Well you generally have a debriefing at the end of your flight and on occasions more likely the next morning you would have a combined debriefing as to what had happened, in the Ops room.
Interviewer	And during which you would analyse what had happened...?
Howard	Yes.
Interviewer	Sort out areas...?
Howard	Yes. How many killed...as far as that, you analyse it.

Interviewer	And then did you ever fly into Angola for example where you would have to overnight at bases in Angola?
Howard	Yes, fairly frequently. I often went to Jumba. And Luiana we went to where Jonas Savimbi's mother was based, while she was still alive. She died, I think if I remember correctly, in the late eighties. But she was very sick at one stage when there were medical supplies that were taken down to her and there was a doctor that was flown to her. I met Jonas Savimbi on a couple of occasions. He was a very nice guy, very talented and educated person.
Interviewer	Well he spent a long time fighting, initially against the Portuguese and then...
Howard	Yes.
Interviewer	At one stage he even sided with SWAPO, before the bush war started in seriousness...but you were flying for his mother, that's quite interesting.
Howard	And on occasions we'd fly down the Okavanga River at various areas where we dropped off medical supplies at, for example, they set up hospitals...the South African Defence Force set up hospitals. We'd go and supply the hospitals on occasion. I remember we flew at Bagani where 32 Battalion was based. We did a whole...it was an evacuation, and we were practising evacuation procedures and we flew literally for 2 hours just moving troops from one area to the next. It was about 10 minutes flying away. We must have done 15 or 20 drops. It was an exhausting flight, but it was all part of getting the guys ready to fly in helicopters.
Interviewer	What year would that have been? That would have been 1984?
Howard	It was about '85.
Interviewer	And soon after that was when the MiGs started flying around southern Angola.
Howard	Yes.
Interviewer	And they also had Hind choppers and stuff like that.
Howard	Correct, yes.
Interviewer	Did that change the way you operated at all?
Howard	I think from the pilot's point of view, yes, we learned evasion tactics in terms of if a MiG was on your tail you would drop your collective, and turn sharply, that would give you a better chance of survival. But I think that was just to give you some hope. Because I don't think you had any hope if a MiG was in your sights of evading it.
Interviewer	You as a helicopter, you're a fairly slow moving creature by comparison.

Howard	Yes. So I think yes, we were...I can remember one occasion during that Ops Typhoon where...I was really worried about the MiGs, they were flying a few kilometres north of us. But we were assured that the Mirages were on standby, there were a few contacts that they had, particularly with Arthur Piercy. We definitely came off second best. Because they had that forward seeking radar and they could shoot ahead, I think it was about 10kms or 10 nautical miles ahead. And they never got into a dogfight situation.
Interviewer	Whereas the South Africans only had heat seeking missiles so you had to be behind the guy.
Howard	Yes. So we had a huge disadvantage because most of those pilots were Cuban pilots and they didn't have the same ability to fly that we had, but they didn't need it because they were controlled by the ground.
Interviewer	And also over north...I mean, over Lubango and then Cuito itself, they had radar coverage.
Howard	Correct.
Interviewer	So the South Africans were at a disadvantage. But the South African radio controllers in Ondangwa and at Rundu would have told you guys if there were MiGs in the area.
Howard	Yes, we were advised on a couple of occasions and to that extent they'd put up Oerlikon batteries ( <i>anti aircraft weapons</i> ) and so forth. But we knew they weren't radar directed and so forth and these guys hadn't had serious ground to air contact. So it was a bit of tongue and cheek kind of...if these guys really came at us we'd be fucked.
Interviewer	In other words, we've got to do something, we don't know what but... <i>laughs</i>
Howard	Put some bullets up in the air and hopefully scare them.
Interviewer	That's something you can't dwell on too long as a pilot because if you do you're not going to get off the ground.
Howard	No. Not at all.
Interviewer	During this whole time that you're flying up there, how often did you get home to Joburg?
Howard	Well, we would go on camps for between 3 and 4 weeks, and you'd do that probably 3 times a year, on your normal annual commitment to the squadron. That was particularly during the times when there was a lot of action on the ground. So you're probably up there 3 months a year.
Interviewer	So you're most of the time based in Pretoria but go up there on days...
Howard	Yes.

Interviewer	So you would come home...did you ever talk to the guys at home or your family and say, geez, do you know what's going on up there?
Howard	No, I don't think we did. Well first of all we were told never to discuss what had happened in pubs. Because that's where spies and the like lurked. And no, we were told never to discuss these issues with anyone in fact. What I can remember when I went on my officer's course in the army is I went to Valhalla to do my basics. I remember looking at the railway station and thought, geez, there's a lot of Buffels and vehicles that were very badly damaged. And all these flat bed trailers. I thought hell, there's some big stuff happening up there. And that was my first introduction to knowing quite what was going on.
Interviewer	Which is interesting, because there you are, you're a well educated person, you went to a very good school, you come from a good family, and so if anybody was going to be informed you would be, yet it was something of a surprise to you - extent of what was actually going on.
Howard	Yes, absolutely.
Interviewer	It's interesting how it became a war that was hidden from the majority of the country.
Howard	Yes, it was very well hidden. Also, I think, by virtue of distance.
Interviewer	Yes. Well that's an interesting aspect of it, during that time there was a lot of stuff going on in the townships. Did you fly in the townships at all?
Howard	Mmm. I flew in KwaNdebele, and that was also in the late eighties. And that was a political nightmare, because you would have these morning conferences and...you know my mind's gone blank about all that stuff now but, there was ANC, and there was various political parties, and then there was the tribal issue, and then there was the airforce and there was the army, and there was...
Interviewer	And the police I'm sure.
Howard	Yes, the police were there, that's correct. These guys on the ground patrolling the townships...in KwaNdebele it was a nightmare. There were people getting torched and burnt and the guys in the Buffels were getting shot at. I think to some extent that was more nerve wracking for the guys because they were in...similar to Iraq these days, in Baghdad in the towns where you never know what's going to happen to you around the corner.
Interviewer	And there you would have been flying what?
Howard	Alos. We flew Alos, I was doing operational command there and you'd fly over the township and tell the Buffel where to drive if there was a contact if you will. But I think on that score I also flew Pumas and we went down to Katlehong once and I flew old Vlok,

	<p>who was the Deputy Minister of Defence of the police at that stage. And we flew him down to Katlehong, and we landed, and I will never to this day forget...we landed, and we got out the helicopter, every street I looked down...because we landed on the soccer field, and it was surrounded by the police...ever street I looked down there were these swarms of black people. It was scary as hell. Because I thought if these guys really wanted to just overpower us, forget the bullets...I mean, some guys would die...they would get there and they could take over the helicopter. I thought it was take us a good 4 or 5 minutes to get the thing going and take off and these guys could have swarmed over us by then.</p>
Interviewer	<p>But you had no clear indication whether they were friendly, enemy or neutral? There were just lots of people.</p>
Howard	<p>Well, I can tell that by virtue of their behaviour they certainly weren't friendly. They were obviously...they distanced themselves out of shooting range by and large, but there were thousands of people. It was quite scary.</p>
Interviewer	<p>The SABC didn't cover that very well at all, the newspapers tried but there were all sorts of restrictions on what could, and couldn't be written. Did that surprise you, that here you were, you were less than ten kilometres from the centre of Johannesburg and it was like it was a different country?</p>
Howard	<p>It never really dawned on me because I think that there was such a...it's interesting for me to say that because we were so embroiled in day to day stuff, it didn't matter if it was on your doorstep or in Angola itself, you were just flying and that was it. You didn't question from a political point of view, you didn't question from the ANC's point of view, SWAPO's point of view, you just never questioned these things, you just got on and did what you had to do every day.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Do you question it now?</p>
Howard	<p>I don't think so...in the sense that it's history. It's behind us. And you can question and question it but history has written itself, in the sense that it's done.</p>
Interviewer	<p>There's nothing you can do to change it.</p>
Howard	<p>The only people that can really question it are...and I don't know if they'd learn anything from it, as history generally proved itself is that, people don't learn from other people's mistakes. And all I can say is that mankind will make the same mistakes in years to come.</p>
Interviewer	<p>So you're chopping and changing, you're flying KwaNdebele, South West Africa, Angola, suddenly you do this trip to Katlehong. So you didn't question it but still, as an intelligent person you must have thought, my country is undergoing some change here. or at least some difficulties. Did you think about it</p>

	that way at all or you just...?
Howard	<p>Never. Never questioned it. I always thought that we were in the right and having gone to a pretty left wing university, I was actually tired of listening to their Marxist crap, because I'd been through politics 1, 2, 3. That was my major. Wits at that time was very left wing and Marxist. And I was tired of that stuff. I wanted to have a balanced kind of view of politics, a balanced view of law, and generally speaking a lot of the law that came out of our judiciary at that stage or the laws that were enacted by the government, were very...I wouldn't like to say trivial because they affected...the Immorality Act and the anti Communism Act, all those acts were designed to only enforce the government's tenure. And they weren't normal laws in the normal run of things. They were temporary issues that the government used to validate it's existence. In my view it was such a waste of time. I believe I wasted my life sifting through all this legal crap such as Immorality Acts and things that government has justified its well being. Now that I look at it I think, it was a complete waste of time. That wasn't proper law. Sure it was law at the time and there were jurists and there were lawyers and there were policemen who were all involved in that. But that wasn't normal law. And it wasn't a democratic country at that stage, I accept that. That to my mind was a waste of time.</p>
Interviewer	<p>And your flying experiences, I mean, some of them I'm sure were great fun but some of them were, as you've explained, quite difficult. Do you regret those?</p>
Howard	<p>I think...I don't regret any of it, because to say having regretted...I think there's a deep sense of sadness in that it's changed my life. It's affected how I behaved in my marriage. I think that alcohol in my earlier years had a big influence on me trying to subconsciously just wave the reality away. To get away from...and I didn't have strong political beliefs, I was quite a neutral kind of person in the sense that I believed that democracy should hold sway and I believed that people should have normal lives. That's the kind of school I went to. And the reality of it was nothing like that. But I don't think I had the moral character or sense of justice that I needed to, in those days, to have really questioned all of this. I had a lot of political friends at Wits who were incarcerated...Firoz Cachalia, Lisa Seftel, all people with really strong moral backgrounds who were persecuted by the police internally. I was tired of all that stuff. This is not life. And it was something that was so foreign to me, I think I was very much a Peter Pan of my day. And even today I feel like a Peter Pan. I feel like...my marriage is...I didn't do sensible things. Maybe because I never went through a normal transition from university to a serious working class life, where I went into doing my articles...my whole life. My whole life, I sort of chopped and changed as I went along. And I think that was part of the experience with the airforce, part of the experience after that where I didn't settle down and have a proper job even. And that</p>

	was it.
Interviewer	Now you've touched on some of what you saw in Angola, that first contact...that was in Namibia with Koevoet. And clearly that has had a deep and lasting impact on you and there must have been other incidents that you haven't discussed at the moment. But those obviously affected you as an individual. When you came out of the operational area there was no counselling, there was nothing like that...?
Howard	Nothing. Not at all. And in fact I was working...my first job was with a property sales business where unless you'd had quite a few years experience... <i>interruption</i> sales business where you only earned income by virtue of commission. And I'd sold my house in Rivonia which was all paid off, had a very secure life at that stage. This is in '88, '89. So I took the proceeds of that house and I lived off it trying to make an income through selling factories. And then I got involved in the real nitty gritty of business life, which I didn't realise was as severe as it is. It's open war out there in a different kind of way. It's a financial war. Guys are at each other's throats, everyone will screw each other. I didn't realise how serious it was. And in one of my fits of temper, I lost it with one of the directors because he was trying to take money from me, and he was trying to impose his position in the deal, which probably now I look back on and he probably had a right to do it because he had the knowledge. And I didn't. Anyway there was a lot of money at stake and he managed to do the deal and then he excluded me from it. And I didn't realise quite how seriously people took money. And to this day I've never done it. I've never actually appreciated just what a dog eat dog situation it is out there. Because I was in this closeted kind of environment. I didn't have a salary, I've always been in a commission earning scenario so I didn't have a salary. And I've lost a lot of ground because of that inexperience.
Interviewer	And when you say you were in a closeted environment, the airforce had certain rules, helicopters have got strict rules about how you fly, break the rules, you crash. But you know what they are.
Howard	Yes. And you've got a salary XYZ.
Interviewer	So that was your life for a long time. When did you...you started flying '83, when did you leave the airforce?
Howard	'88.
Interviewer	And that's when you tried to go into property and so on and so forth.
Howard	Then I went to Liberty and also went into commissions, and eventually I think I did have a drinking problem. My wife's always said I had. I've tried to deny it. But...I think I have had a drinking problem and I think part of it...part of a combination of factors affected my marriage. The fact that I had two affairs in my

	<p>marriage. And I was quite...even to this day I'm surprised at the fact that she won't stay married to me because I had two affairs. It's a sort of naiveté in itself that undermines itself because that's the way marriages are. If you have an affair you've fucked it up. Simple as that. I didn't know that. I sort of had this sort of Peter Pan kind ethereal kind of thinking that, oh well, why didn't she come back to me? Because I only had an affair. I only had sex with another woman. My mind was still there.</p>
Interviewer	<p>And you think this comes from your military, your airforce background where you were part of a team, you were part of this elite as it were, and everything actually just worked according to the rules that you'd been taught and everything was almost forgivable. If you made a mistake in your helicopter, your commander would just say, listen here Howard, this is not the way you do this, now don't do it again tomorrow.</p>
Howard	<p>Well, yes and no, in a sense that you never, very rarely, would you lose your job.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Correct. Unless you do something outrageous.</p>
Howard	<p>Correct. And that's a very good analogy because I think that...yes, I think that that's the way we thought about it. And in particular if you look at the converse of that, you had this regimented kind of background where you couldn't lose your job, unless maybe you'd shot one of your own guys by huge mistake, but by the same token you had this completely separate set of rules where in war there are no rules. And when you're actually fighting anything goes.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Sure, because you need to stay alive.</p>
Howard	<p>Yes. I mean, it's a very interesting kind of dichotomy that you live...well I've lived with, in the sense that I've never actually had a set of rules that said, if you stuff it up, these are the financial, emotional, spiritual, and whatever ramifications. I've never had to look at life in the face like that.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Why did you leave the airforce?</p>
Howard	<p>Because I thought I could go and make more money on my own. And it's a lot tougher out there than I ever gave it credit for.</p>
Interviewer	<p>When you left in '88 that was already at the end of the battle for Cuito Cuanavale, with (Operation) Modular, Lomba (<i>River</i>) and all that stuff.</p>
Howard	<p>Correct.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Were you involved in that at all?</p>
Howard	<p>No, I didn't get actively involved in that. In fact my friend, Rob Hunter, was involved in it, and this is when I told you he got shot up. And in the last year that I was in the airforce there were reports coming back of all sorts of extraordinary things were...at Cuito the guys...they'd been under attack for quite a few months,</p>



	there was no food left in the town and they sent the tanks out with the crew literally handcuffed to the tank itself. And they said to them go out and go and fight.
Interviewer	This was the Angolans?
Howard	Yes. And in the same breath we sent in some Olifant tanks that got hit in the minefields, and they had to pull them out because of their gyroscopes that you mount in turrets, so they could shoot on the move. They had to go and extricate these tanks. Which was also a huge event in itself.
Interviewer	After the battle of El Alamein, which was the largest armoured warfare in Africa's history. I know that the pilots...you probably did it yourself...were flying into Mavinga with medical supplies for the doctors to treat Unita guys and so on. So there was a huge amount of stuff going on there. At that time, did any of that impact on you or did you simply say, well listen, I'm tired of this nonsense on an airforce pilot's pay, I'm going to go out and make cash? Was that your primary drive?
Howard	I think so, yes. I was tired of war, I also...I think the association of flying and killing people prevented me from going to fly for SAA. Other than the fact that I didn't think that I was going to make much money in SAA. I was wrong because now airline pilots are held in the highest esteem, they make good money particularly if you fly overseas. So from that point of view, I also made some big mistakes. But having said that, I think that from my point of view, the association of flying and killing people was just so close, that I really didn't want to have anything more to do with it.
Interviewer	When you see...well these days it's an Oryx but it looks similar to a Puma, and occasionally an Alouette goes overhead, what do you feel?
Howard	You hear that sound and it immediately evokes...whereas an Alo you can tell it's an Alo, you can tell it's a Puma...it brings those memories back immediately, but almost as quickly they go. Because you're now back into doing other stuff. But I think one thing that did strike me was that we were flying in joint monitoring commission, from Onjiva when we were flying with the Angolan airforce. And this is towards the end of the war they were trying to create parity, a border area where SWAPO wouldn't encroach. And we evacuated a platoon of 101 Battalion guys. Now, I'll never forget these guys when we landed, as I said, they'd been in the bush for 4 weeks or 5 weeks, they said, they will never forget the sound of a Puma coming to fetch us. And even to this day I will never forget that, just how thankful they were that we came to fetch them.
Interviewer	Interesting you raised that, because I spoke to a doctor the other day who said exactly the same thing. He was dropped with a Special Forces unit and the sound of the Puma coming to fetch them, they were under fire, and the pilot landed and took off

	under fire, and he said exactly the same thing. To him that Puma appearing above him in the bush was in his mind sort of a miracle, and he won't forget that either. Did a lot of the soldiers say that to you? When we saw you guys coming over the trees?
Howard	Yes. It's like, this is an angel that's arrived.
Interviewer	Since leaving the airforce, have you ever flown again?
Howard	I flew part time as Citizen Force. I flew for 17 Squadron for about 3 years after that. And that's when I did my KwaNdebele trip and a couple of other trips in Angola.
Interviewer	So even though you left formally in '88 you were still flying until 1990, or '91?
Howard	Yes, around about there, yes.
Interviewer	And with the Citizen Force trips, you say you were also in Angola?
Howard	Yes.
Interviewer	That must have been during the withdrawal?
Howard	Yes, that's right. Those were very sporadic.
Interviewer	And those would have been logistical flights, getting people and stuff out and in.
Howard	Yes.
Interviewer	All these years later have you sat down and spoken to a professional counsellor or anybody about these experiences that clearly have impacted deeply on you?
Howard	More recently in the failure of my marriage, definitely, I think that it's been a huge source of sadness for me that my marriage did fail, because I thought I finally got to a person who loved me absolutely. She just loved me to pieces. And I fucked it up, big time. And I think that going through the counselling sessions with 4 or 5 different counsellors alerted me to the fact that civilian life is actually very different to military life. In that military life is very rigid, it's controlled, you're brainwashed to the extent that you don't have to think too much about money, because you can go to bed...sure you can study and all of that stuff...but civilian life is a much more dynamic situation where you're left to your own devices and if you can't fend for yourself, then you'll never come to grips with civilian life. And I think that's been part of my problem. Is that I got involved in a business where I bought a business. I paid a lot of money out and I didn't realise how much money that involved and the effort that took to make that money. I've been completely naïve as to how difficult it is to make money, and lots of it. And what it takes from an intellectual point of view. You need to be on your best every day. You need to give correct advice, you need to do all of that stuff to make a lot of money. I've never really come to grips with that. It was like this sort of half

	<p>attempt to...because in Angola in the airforce or the army you could get away with not thinking about things. It was an act. You went out and flew and you did something that you've been trained to do for 2 years and that's what you did. But here you need ongoing education, you need to give your clients appropriate advice, you need to be up to date, you need to be proactive, you need to be aware of your financial situation, every single day. And I lost that plot. In fact I've lost my whole estate. I lost everything I inherited because of carelessness like that.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Have you ever spoken to your wife about your flying experiences?</p>
Howard	<p>I've tried, but ironically enough, she never wanted to know anything about my military experiences. And I don't know why that is. I think she did on one occasion say that she was too scared. But, I always wanted to know about her scholastic experiences, and her other boyfriends and what she felt and what she wanted, but she never asked me about what I went through. And I don't know what prompted that. But when I went into business and I was married to her and we had kids and we had...all the...I suppose, I didn't think it was a normal marriage in the sense that we were exposed to a lot of trauma in our marriage in that my father died and she was pregnant, she got retrenched, my mother died when we were (<i>inaudible</i>). There were deaths in (<i>inaudible</i>) and her best friends, and I think this marriage was destined to bomb out. I couldn't handle the stresses that were imposed by normal civilian life. That wasn't normal as such. So much happened in such a short period of time that I don't think I could handle. I think that getting back to your situation, were you advised, were you counselled? It would certainly have helped but I don't think it would have been the defining act in me saving my marriage or...I still was quite naïve when it came to really running a normal life.</p>
Interviewer	<p>What I'm really getting at is to what degree did your first contact experience for example, and other contacts, .....and you do it all again. I'm just wondering if you hadn't done that experience, had that experience, how your life would have panned out?</p>
Howard	<p>I think people react in one or two ways. Either it strengthens you either to the fact that you have had these experiences and I can only tell...there have been very successful pilots and Mirage pilots who've had that determination to make their lives succeed. Cecil Margo, wasn't a jet pilot, but he became a judge. People have come out of this quagmire of shit in their lives and because they've been bright and driven...me on the other hand I've actually gone through the opposite end of the spectrum where I've actually fucked the whole lot up. I've lost my family, I've lost my father's estate, I didn't understand the value of what was given to me, or appreciate. Even now I bought this house down the road and I look at it and nothing's set out, I'm living a bachelor lifestyle. And I'm quite ashamed at what's happened. I</p>

	went from this very proud person who went to a good school to...I might as well be living in a squatter camp. It's actually a joke. It's a complete joke.
Interviewer	Did you always want to fly as a kid?
Howard	Yes, I think there was that innate wish for a thrill, being released from the clutches of the ground and gravity. But I think what killed it for me is the fact that I ended up on helicopters facing those guys face to face. And on one occasion, and I mentioned to you, we had that scenario where there were three of us. I was flying with a 303 Browning, and I'll never forget this because this is one of the few occasions where I saw the guy face to face. And what had happened was these guys had all split up. There were three or four of them, and I said to the guys on the ground, Koevoet guys, I said, we'll track the one lot. And the gunships went off one way and I went off with the other guys. And this one particular terr, he'd hid in this bush, and I said to my flight engineer, just shoot at the bush, but he didn't get it right, he often was actually a terrible shot. I think he was probably more accustomed to shooting with the 20mm. So he's shooting with the Brownings, and I could see the tracers doing this sort of thing, dipping. Eventually he shot the whole panel of 250 bullets out. I said, what on earth are you doing? This terr was jumping out of the bush every now and then with his AK47 shooting at us. I said, for fuck sakes, take the oke out! So I got him settled, I flew in a steady pattern just around this bush. I said, I'm going to fly at 65 knots because that's the speed in which we're supposed to fly, load the gun properly and then you shoot him. This guy came out and we just let rip, and this bullet hit him, two bullets, and he just flew straight back into the bush. And that was one of the few times that I'd actually seen the guy face to face. I think he was just in this...mindset where that's what he was driven to do. Inasmuch as that's what we were driven to do. Logic doesn't prevail, you just go and do what you...
Interviewer	I think you're right. He's on the ground, he's got his assault rifle and there's this giant beast flying around. What option does he have? You can't run away.
Howard	No.
Interviewer	Did you ever speak to your flight engineer afterwards and say, how did you feel about that?
Howard	No, never.
Interviewer	It was just part of the day's job.
Howard	No, he was a non-commissioned officer. He was there to do the job of handling the guns. Cannons. And servicing the aircraft. I was there to do my stuff. And other than...we would on occasion sit in the bar afterwards and chat but it was very rare to really get involved in the emotional aspects of it.

Interviewer	And now, you've mentioned a couple of pilots and things like that, but are you in touch with any of the guys at all?
Howard	Yes, from time to time. But not all of them were Alo pilots or Puma pilots.
Interviewer	You don't have squadron reunions or anything like that?
Howard	No, no, not really. I think that things have just become too diversified in terms of people having families and things. And that's all behind us now. Most people have moved on.
Interviewer	And the political aspects now, you enjoyed the flying because that's what you wanted to do, you wanted to be a helicopter pilot...
Howard	I didn't want to be a helicopter pilot, I wanted to be a transport pilot. I wanted to have the comfort or maybe sitting in a DAC and maybe sitting in a 747 eventually.
Interviewer	but if you look at it now with regards to the political reasons for the war, do you think that the government of the day led you up the garden path?
Howard	I think we got into a situation where the bullet was firmly in the breech. In a sense that the bolt was now closed and you couldn't reverse the situation. And had they reversed it, then there would have been first of all, acceptance that they were wrong about their political beliefs. Which you know, in retrospect, probably wouldn't have been a bad thing, but how would they have then extricated themselves, which they did do in 1994 anyway. They had to do it, because the country had become ungovernable. So had we in 1948, and I think it goes back to the 1900s when the English came to this country and they fucked up the Afrikaners. The Afrikaners were so upset and this is something that I picked up early on in my time in the airforce, was that amongst my contemporaries in the officer's course, Afrikaans guys who had a certain amount of resistance to talking to English guys, and by virtue of the fact I was very friendly to all of them and I spoke Afrikaans quite well, I overcame those barriers. But there were clearly barriers probably in the army as well where the Afrikaans guys felt that their forefathers had been hard done by, by the English guys. And I think that's where a lot of the problems arose was when English came into this country and they formed concentration camps. And out of that came this desire for the Afrikaner to impose his will on this country. And unfortunately the blacks were in the way. And I don't think that that was naturally his intention to do that. He just wanted to assert himself in terms of the territory that he had at his disposal. And blacks and the English speaking classes were there to be had, or to be overruled.
Interviewer	In the airforce, was English the common language or was Afrikaans...?

Howard	It was both.
Interviewer	And if you were communicating on radio in the aircraft and things like that?
Howard	Generally English.
Interviewer	Because if you were speaking to a control tower and stuff like that, English was the language you used?
Howard	Yes.
Interviewer	But if you were talking to, say, a Koevoet ground unit?
Howard	You could use both.
Interviewer	And there was no preference? Although I should imagine while the guys on the ground were under contact they'd revert to Afrikaans because most of those commanders were Afrikaans.
Howard	They could be talking Afrikaans to you and you could be talking English to them. but my Afrikaans is quite good. I quite often just used Afrikaans under the circumstances.
Interviewer	How come? You went to Michealhouse?
Howard	I felt an obligation to talk in the prevailing language at the time.
Interviewer	I'm just teasing you about Michealhouse.
Howard	I think English have got this...inextricable right to speak the language.
Interviewer	When you were flying up in Namibia particularly, were there foreign pilots?
Howard	There was an Israeli pilot that had come through, and he'd come to fly on Pumas. And he flew a few ops with us and he went back to Israel. I don't know on the jet job side of things, but I presume there might have been pilots...
Interviewer	There were two who came down at one stage to fly on Mirages.
Howard	I know for certain there was a guy...his name was Clay, and he was working with the Recces and he had an American accent. I met him a couple of times and he'd been shot a few times by the SWAPO guys. And by virtue of the fact that he'd been shot had sort of given him a validation for being with the Recces. But in fact this guy was an informer for the CIA. And I can't believe how naive our Recces were...or our intelligence department, to allow this guy to sit amongst us and feed the CIA.
Interviewer	Perhaps they thought the CIA were on their side?
Howard	Well, I think that's also a very naive thing to assume, because the CIA have only got one nation's interest at heart.
Interviewer	Sure, that's America.

Howard	And they were obviously in the long run trying to protect oil in the Congo, oil in Kinshasa, oil in northern Angola. That's where the American power rests, is in real wealth, minerals and oil. They will do anything to protect it. I've got absolutely no doubt in my mind.
Interviewer	So Clay was flying with the Recces, seeing what was going on first hand. Sitting in the mess afterwards...
Howard	Getting shot up by SWAPO...it was quite fun.
Interviewer	Did you ever fly into Zambia or Botswana, because the Recces did some raids in those countries?
Howard	No, I flew very far east in Angola but never into Botswana.
Interviewer	Or into Zambia.
Howard	That's not to say that there weren't flights there, but no I didn't.
	END OF SIDE B TAPE ONE (counter at 532)
	TAPE TWO SIDE A
Howard	I think we used to have danger pay which came to somewhere about two to three hundred rand a camp. Which in those days was like quite a lot of money. But most of us had spent it by the time we came back. we just spent it on alcohol. None of us thought of actually saving it. In fact I can't think of one person that actually saved it. There might ? like that. All of us spent it, it was like your SNT allowance. And we all spent it. Particularly me. I drank the whole lot to pieces. I got drunk often. They had a Hansa promotion, the beers were five cents. Even those days that was cheap. Five cents a beer! And we got absolutely trashed. And the whole idea was...I think subconsciously we were forgetting about all...not necessarily forgetting about the past but we were in a situation where you could do it, so you did it.
Interviewer	And it wasn't just you, it was everyone. It was the norm rather than the exception.
Howard	I think I was probably as bad if not worse than some of them of the guys. And rules were there to be broken. I can tell you on one occasion for example, my 25 <sup>th</sup> birthday, we're at Rundu, and we went out on a flight late in the afternoon, came back, I was on Pumas. And I must have drunk, I don't know...some of these Australian cricketers get credited with drinking 50 beers on a flight. Let me tell you they are chicken shit. They are chicken shit. I saw a guy drink a bottle of Whisky out of a tumbler in the space of five minutes.
Interviewer	And he didn't fall down?
Howard	His eyes went red and I think his face went a bit red, and that was it. He was ok, and the next day he was ok. I've seen alcohol abuse in extreme and I think we were part of it. there were a

	number of guys that did it. But unfortunately I think I did, and I don't think it's done me any favours at all. And I think I've got a fairly addictive kind of personality which also hasn't helped.
Interviewer	But once again, under the circumstances of the time, there was nobody to go and talk to and say listen, I think I'm going a bit badly and I need someone advice.
Howard	I don't know about that. you know for example, I went on a flight with Terry Chapman. We flew to Jumba, picked up some guys and flew well into Angola. We came back, and I'll never forget, we got back at about 12 o'clock at night, and at Jumba there was the main table and they had these commanders from Unita sitting there, and I was a co pilot and Terry who was at school with me, he was the commander on our flight. And Wayne Kennedy and I got trashed that whole night. And at 6:30 we climb in the helicopter and I couldn't even read out the start up procedures, I was so fucked. Terry Chapman had words with me and said, listen, if you ever do that again I'm getting you ( <i>inaudible</i> ). And that was the flight back from Jumba to Rundu. And I think I was bloody irresponsible, more so than many.
Interviewer	But Terry, was he older than you and more senior in rank?
Howard	No. He was more senior in rank but he'd been in the airforce longer than me. We went to school we were the same year.
Interviewer	So it took him to say to you, listen, this is not the way to do things.
Howard	Yes, I was out of order. I was completely out of order, without doubt.
Interviewer	But there was nothing in the structure of the airforce that required him to go and say to his commanding officer, listen, I think this chap needs either a bit of a break or...?
Howard	He could have done it.
Interviewer	But he decided not to.
Howard	I think he just felt that he'd done enough by saying, listen, I'm not going to report you, but you get yourself sorted out. Not necessarily from the psychological point of view just from don't drink while you're flying. But we had guys... I mean, Ralph (Platter?) was one guy, who was so drunk that there was an ops call out, he was in 5 Force, taxied down the runway, and he kept taxiing, kept taxiing, although all the other helicopters had taken off, and the co-pilot turns around, and he'd passed out. He'd passed out! So the co-pilot flew most of the op with the commander pissed.
Interviewer	That's quite frightening.
Howard	Not really, that's why there are 2 pilots.
Interviewer	I suppose so. but I don't think that would have been in any of the



	operating manuals. In the event of commander being pissed, co-pilot takes over.
Howard	I think you have to, to save face. But I can remember also, we had a plan 5 Force on one occasion all on Pumas, and we were supposed to have the choppers lined up and fuelled and everything and ready for take off at 6:30, I think it was, I the morning. The Parabats were destined to climb into the things at 6:30 and we were supposed to be at...and this was tied in with jets and the other army ops and all that stuff, to be over the border in another 15 minutes, it was short. I can remember all of us, all the Puma pilots were so trashed the night before that someone had set his alarm for 6:30 and by sheer luck we scrambled, got the Pumas going at 6:35, but we were crapped on. We were crapped on!
Interviewer	But it's a frightening thought that there you are flying these very expensive machines, hard to find machines, carrying people and you weren't necessarily in your best condition.
Howard	Often in our worst condition. I mean, I can give you examples of, the jet jocks were always very paraat, as we used to say, and they'd got to bed early and they'd be ready for their ops and stuff like that. There were occasions where the chopper pilots, and Rob Hunter will back this up, we had the lawnmower going over these corrugated roofs. We did extraordinary things. One guy put a thunder flash in a watermelon and rolled it into the officer's room, the jet jocks, and it exploded. You can't believe what went on. We had a guy that stole...Nick Louw...he stole meat. He knew how to get into all the catering facilities. He stole boxes and boxes and boxes of lamb shanks. And we fed off this stuff for days on end. We had a potjie going for 3 or 4 days where we just had lamb shank going into this thing. In our quarters, in the officer's quarters, we just fed off this thing. We ate fantastic food.
Interviewer	So you were young men doing crazy things.
Howard	<i>Break-tape turned off</i> ...it transpired, and I presume that I'm not the normal kind of example...I find myself in the most amazing situation where I was very comfortably well off, had a mediocre kind of business, I didn't have to fend for anyone. I did inherit a reasonable estate from my parents. I thought it was a lot of money at the time, it wasn't. I didn't have huge demands in life. And out of the blue I got married to this woman who loved me unconditionally, I had two affairs, we suddenly got married, we suddenly had kids, suddenly my parents died, and now I've got this huge financial burden, putting these kids through private schools, that I'd quite innocently set up in the sense that, at the time if I looked at all those things I had the ability to do it. I had this extra business that I'd bought but the cash flow was severe and I'd lost some of the business as a result of pressures. And now I'm in a situation where we've got divorced, the finances are in a complete shambles, and it's a most bizarre kind of situation that I've got myself into. And I think she's feeling the strain

	because she knows that if my business goes through the wall or I can't handle it or whatever, that she's the one that's going to have to take the strain of putting these kids through private schools. She understands the stress, the pressure, she's had that pressure before. She's said to me as well, she said, you've never had pressure. And I said, of course I've had pressure. But she was right, I've never had the financial pressure, I've had other pressure but not financial pressure. I've never had financial pressure because I was too naïve.
Interviewer	And the pressure of fighting a war was very different to this situation.
Howard	Totally different. And I think that we spoke past each other in many regards about things that had affected our lives. But you know, you can have these arguments but the fact is your kids are the guys that are affected. They're the one that are going to take strain because they can't go to a private school, they've got to have school changes and stuff.
Interviewer	How old are your kids?
Howard	9 and 7.
Interviewer	Do you look back and think, well, when you left varsity instead of flying, had you gone and furthered your career then, life would have been very different?
Howard	Yes, I would have been very successful, I would have known what to look for, I would have had the drive to do the right stuff. I just lost the plot. I lost the plot big time. And yet, I make reasonably good money. I want to tell you, I make roughly now about a hundred thousand rand a month. I work my ass off but I make a hundred. But there's expenses, office expenses, the telephones, there's this, there's that. School fees are 8 or 9 thousand rand a month. Then there's tax, then there's this, then there's sort yourself out for retirement. And I gave my wife the house. Naively as well, I gave it to her, in hope of getting back together. I look at my whole financial situation, it's a joke. It's an absolute joke.
Interviewer	When you were flying in the airforce, you never sort of thought, well, what am I going to do when I get married or what am I going to do when I...?
Howard	Never gave it a single thought because I thought there was a natural progression that when you left the airforce you would maybe go to SAA, you'd become successful in your business, you'd marry and you'd do the right stuff. My whole life just fell apart from one thing to the next. It was a complete joke.
Interviewer	Do you know other guys who saw some things you saw who've experienced the same sort of trauma, because that's what it is, it's trauma?
Howard	Well, I think there's lots of them. How they've dealt with it is I

	<p>think a little bit different to me. With a view that I think that some of the guys didn't have the...it's not intellectual knowledge or the emotional background, but I think I was...I'm a Pisces, I've got these emotions that vacillate in that also I've got a little bit of a compulsive behaviour and I drink too much and all that stuff and I think that part of it...all of this stuff swims in my head, in that I think of those things, I mean, shit, those were bad times when we were shooting people. And maybe some of my contemporaries or colleagues have put that in the back of their minds, well that's the way the world is. face it on more a realistic point of view, said, that's the way the world is. They didn't question all that stuff. I often used to question it. What is the meaning of this world?</p>
Interviewer	<p>Isn't questioning it sort of contrary to military sort of practice?</p>
Howard	<p>Yes. I used to question a lot of stuff that went on when I first joined the airforce. I remember calling our testing officer on Alos when we did our test, I said to him, he was puerile. That was a word he had never heard in his life probably. So they went to the dictionary and said, well that's not a very good word, it doesn't cast a good light on us. It was in my report as the...we are on a certain course and I was the leader of that and we had to give a report back to them telling him what we thought they'd done. Billy...I can't remember his surname...was at Bloemfontein, he'd asked for a report and I said to him, I thought the officer was a bit puerile, I thought that they didn't treat us in a way we deserved to be treated, as some officers, but maybe that was the way they carried out their business.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Did you have conflict with the senior officers when you were discussing things because of their mindset, because of the way that they viewed the world or were you all just airmen together?</p>
Howard	<p>Well the whole intellectual and academic arena was never questioned because flying is not a...unless you are designing aircraft. It's not an academic question. It's, this is how you fly an aircraft. It's not a matter of, would you prefer to fly with the flaps down or up? You fly with the flaps down if you're going to do a normal landing. You fly with the flaps if you're going to do a flapless landing. That's how it's done. The rules of aerodynamics are fixed.</p>
Interviewer	<p>So your discussion with your colleagues and your superiors would primarily be about flying and flying issues, and occasionally I'm sure you'd talk about sport and everything else.</p>
Howard	<p>Yes. And the politics of the country were taken for granted in we were flying for the government and we were in the right and the total onslaught was underway and they were in the wrong, and no-one really questioned from a political point of view who was right and who was wrong. The Afrikaner who was part of the airforce and part of the army and maybe part of the navy, that's why they were there. It's because you go back to the 1900s where the English fucked them up. And they knew why they were</p>

	there.
Interviewer	If you were to take ourselves ten years down the road and you wanted to explain to some historian about what it was like being in the airforce and doing the work that you were doing, what are the most relevant points you would say to that person? What was the impact of your airforce experience on you as the individual, if you can encapsulate it in a nutshell?
Howard	Certainly the fact that we had an effective airforce, in particular the ground attack airforce, the variety of helicopters made a big impact on me in the sense that we could contain a guerrilla war very effectively. And that impressed me no end, although it was a very destructive and very often bloody war. I knew that we were very effective. And I think that I knew that we were reasonably safe with our Mirages and the guys had good flying abilities. The fact that we could be taken out by a MiG 25 and even a MiG 27 they had later, the Sukhois what have you, but eventually a lot of this world is beyond our control, if a government wants to take over somebody and they've got the ability and the power and the money they will do it. And in effect that ( <i>inaudible</i> ) another government's got reasonable ability to prevent them from doing it.
Interviewer	So your view is that, while you were doing the mechanical side of a war, you were flying machines, governments had their own agendas and you were merely a...
Howard	Absolutely. A prime example of that is when the South African forces got just outside Luanda.
Interviewer	Yes, in '75.
Howard	Yes. and then got told, don't enter Luanda, by America. Who's calling the shots there?
Interviewer	I think that happened a lot. The battle for Cuito Cuanavale was fought with a limited number of South African troops because they wanted Unita to take the brunt of it. And they didn't want to expose themselves, as we discussed, to big losses. So the politicians made all the decisions.
Howard	I can tell you, there was another battle that went on with 57 Battalion on the Angola side. And they had a whole battalion which the Recces had been tracking. This battalion was coming in to take on Unita at Jumba. And the G5s and G6s got involved in this. And they wiped out a whole battalion. In a ravine stretch. When they got in the Recces were sitting in the outposts and they'd just plotted the co-ordinates, sent them through and this whole battalion was wiped out. And they said, all you could see was just charred vehicles for kilometres.
Interviewer	From what I understand the FAPLA forces, and to a lesser degree the Cubans because the Cubans were mainly advisors and pilots, but they saw huge losses, particularly at the hands of the artillery. But also the air strikes. The Mirages flew lots of air strikes...the Impalas as well. So from that point of view it was an

	exceptionally bloody war that was fought in a really remote part of the world. If you look at it on a map, you're far away from Luanda and very, very far away from South Africa.
Howard	And far away even from Grootfontein where we...far away from...even Ondangwa. We had obviously the troops, but the main battles were fought on Angolan territory.
Interviewer	When you see a movie about war these days with helicopter pilots doing things and stuff, what are your feelings about it?
Howard	I think that...I was watching a movie the other day and this...I don't remember what it was called...even Full Metal Jacket and things like that, and there was another where the guy watches the bullet coming towards him and it hits him in the eye. There was one particular American movie, and I couldn't watch it. I just turned it off. I thought, this is too real and I had to watch these guys getting taken out.
Interviewer	What will you tell your kids about war?
Howard	It's the most depraved kind of...behaviour. But I think all it does...whilst I think it's depraved, I think that it's the way...all it does is to highlight the fact that we're still linked to the primates. All we've done is to find another way of killing each other. Not ripping each other's throats out and biting and...we just do it with ammunition now.
Interviewer	Yes, or million dollar machines.
Howard	Yes, and I think it's...America has got this fantastic democracy but they find the most extreme ways of managing to wipe out people without having to come into contact, and this is where they become so good at it. Is that, the emotion of seeing body parts and the heads exploded and arms ripped off, has become so remote to them that they can conduct a war...and I think this is no necessarily part of their plan it's the way technology has evolved to allow them to do that. But you become so distanced from how a person actually dies. All you can turn around to yourself one day and say, well so far you reckon that 7 billion have inhabited this earth, other than the fact that there's 7 billion now, but they think that homo sapiens have been about 7 billion, have all done it. Not to mention the dinosaurs and all the other people and animals that have preceded them. We've all done it in one way or another.
Interviewer	It's a scary concept that we have, we've taken people to...
Howard	We've televised it.
Interviewer	It becomes a video game doesn't it?
Howard	But I think more than that, it becomes a sense of...it's not just a video game, because if you look at video games now, there's a sense of sort of enjoyment...
Interviewer	In blowing things up and people.

Howard	Yes.
Interviewer	Because there's no consequence. You can do it on a screen and then you switch it off and go to bed. Whereas you and many other soldiers have seen the real side of it.
Howard	I think in particular when I look at my father who'd experienced probably more concentrated examples of war than myself: he'd been at Dunkirk, he'd been blown off the bridge, he'd gone to El Alamein, Tobruk, where big battles were fought. And he'd seen those consequences...I never understood why this guy chain smoked. And he used to smoke 120 cigarettes a day. He chain smoked but he was driven. He was an A type personality, he was driven I think by trying to succeed in spite of all odds against what this world had to offer. He was a very successful person. And unfortunately I didn't have that same drive, maybe because he'd done it all for me, so I didn't have the same drive. But when I see the way he dealt with his depression. He had depression. About how...and he read all these books: Ice Station Zebra...I can remember all the books piled up. He read about war until he knew every aspect of it, that he hadn't experienced. Why did this happen? Why that happened? And all that. I think he was immersed in death, in how people died. And I said to him one day...he was in hospital, he'd had a stroke...I said, dad, what do you believe in? He said...and I think he'd lost his trust in God...because he said, all I've been is a real estate agent, and he was a bloody successful real estate...he was a good township developer, he had achieved a lot. He said, I don't believe in anything. I think he was so disillusioned with the way...
Interviewer	Has religion played any role in your experience of the world now or as a young person and now?
Howard	Well, I like to think of myself as a thinking person and the more I see or understand what people are looking for these days, I think that religion has definitely undermined, as I say...religion has caused more deaths than anything else, or caused more wars. And Marx used to refer to it as the opiate of the masses. In more contemporary terms people prefer to refer to our awareness of a being out there as spiritualist. It's not cast in stone. There's not a set way of getting to heaven and having gone the other side if you've committed wrong, as you have in Christianity or as you have in other facets, or Buddhism and whatever. So I think people are more relaxed from that point of view. Even to this day now I'm starting to wonder if there is really a god that is...and I think there is a god but I don't know if there's a god that's interested in our personal well being. Although having said that, I had a very extraordinary experience when I was going through my divorce and I ended up renting this townhouse. I was very, very emotionally fucked up from this. And I remember going to bed one night and I was having these flashbacks and all sorts of stuff, and I remember having this conversation with my dad...we weren't talking, there was this communication on a mental level,

	<p>and it became so real for me that eventually I woke up and I was touching him on his chest. I said, but dad you're supposed to be dead. It was so real to me. And my mother always had this...she was very spiritual, not necessarily religious. She always had this innate belief that there was a god out there that had this...benign kind of approach to us and it was always there for us. I'd also experienced a situation where we...my mother believed implicitly in spiritualism...we'd gone to Rhodesia and one of her friends, her husband was a medium. He went into a trance on this bed spoke I voices, and I can't remember which voices they were because they were known to my mother. But he never met these people before, he spoke in voices to my mother that my mother understood completely. They were relatives of hers. Now why would someone do that? So there's a juxtaposition between believing that there doesn't have to be something like that, but there probably is... <i>interruption</i></p>
Interviewer	<p>...because thinking about your recounting of the story when you saw those dead guys after your first contact there, you actually physically saw the bodies. And I recall you making reference there how you looked at the clouds and the clouds were white and remembering that day. And often some of the guys I've spoken to say, they thought about God that time and God was on their side. Did you ever think that you were being backed by a god on your side?</p>
Howard	<p>Never. I think you've got to be bloody naïve to think that. Because every government in power has used that as a ruse to get their people to go and fight, thinking that God is on their side. It's a load of crap. Why should God be on your side and not the other side?</p>
Interviewer	<p>Well correct. Did you ever have padres giving a sermon before you went off flying?</p>
Howard	<p>No, never, but I think the religious aspect, particularly from the Afrikaners point of view, was very strong. And I don't think that the Afrikaner thought that he had a pre-emptive right to his religion per se. Although they have a very strong tie with God. I don't know if...I mean, there were aspects of the Afrikaans Dutch Reformed Church. They thought that God was only on their side and no-one else's. But there are a lot of very bright Afrikaners, and don't kid yourself, these guys, the Beyers Naudes of this world and what have you, weren't idiots, they were very, very bright guys and they could look through all of that shit.</p>
Interviewer	<p>I was just curious because I know that some of the infantry battalions they would have a service before they went into a big operation.</p>
Howard	<p>I didn't know about that. No doubt they would. That's not uncommon in all sorts of...</p>
Interviewer	<p>All armies do it to a degree. I just wondered if it ever filtered through into the airforce?</p>

Howard	No, not really. We also had quite a lot of religious indoctrination at school. But to say that it was...politically driven, I don't know.
Interviewer	In your business, when you bump into black people and you meet them socially for a meal or something, has anybody ever asked you, were you a soldier, did you serve in the military?
Howard	Most of the people that I come into contact today are younger than me. The result is that...forget about the black people, I was visiting a friend of mine whose stepson is all of 27, 28. He said to me, what was that all about in the eighties and seventies? What was that all about? Because...
Interviewer	That's astounding. He was born in 1980 in that case.
Howard	Yes. What was that all about? I said, well a lot of people died, there was a lot of bloodshed, there was a lot of distorted, contorted, dismembered bodies that flew around as there are in any war. Our war was small by comparison with the likes of the Russian war, the Pogroms that went on and those things where millions of people...when you think of the loss of life there, it was done with such disdain. Not between Germans and Russians, between Russians and Russians.
Interviewer	But nevertheless a 27 year old youngster didn't have a...
Howard	Hadn't a clue what we fought for. But I'm not astounded. I think that these days, the whole war scenario is...unless you're in Croatia, unless you're in Serbia, unless you're in Rwanda, places where serious war has impacted on your life, I think most people these days are oblivious to what war does, what it can do.
Interviewer	When Mandela came out of prison in 1990, and then of course in '94 became president, the National Party, the ruling party seemed to forget the military conflict quite quickly. Do you feel any way betrayed by them?
Howard	I feel betrayed by myself. Not by them. In my own naïveté I allowed them to dictate to me what I should have actually been able to overcome myself. I should never allowed them to pre-empt my thinking. I should never have allowed that. I was pretty naïve I think.
Interviewer	Hasn't the system tilted against you? I'm not making that as an excuse, I'm just saying the whole system, the propaganda machine of the government controlling the SABC, of what was banned, of this constant threat about the Communists were under every bed, things like that, were you not just like any other young South African and you did what you needed to do? Or do you think that because you had a good education, came from a good family, do you think that you actually should have thought your way through?
Howard	I should have thought my way through it, no doubt. A lot of my friends have and been successful even those that didn't really think their way through it, have been reasonably successful. I



	<p>don't rate myself as a success at all. I've actually fucked it up, personally. Because of my marriage situation, my financial breakdown, all that stuff. it's a mess. When I looked at it in real terms, I've got three hundred thousand rand backing my retirement at the moment and I'm 50. Who in his right mind has got that amount of money in a business that if something happens to me tomorrow the whole business goes? Where's the financial planning, where's the business sense in that? It's a joke.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Going back to the military thing, I've pretty much gone through most of the things I wanted to talk through with you at the moment. Is there any aspect of what you saw, what you experienced, what you feel about it now, any aspect that we haven't touched on? I think we've covered quite a lot just on the 3 hours that we've been talking. Is there any aspect that we haven't covered do you think?</p>
Howard	<p>Well we have touched on the fact that America had a role in this whole thing and I think that it was more apparent than if you ask other people you'll come to grips with that. I can also remember there was a private jet that flew up, I think it was from Rundu, with two black Americans. And it wouldn't surprise me in the slightest if they were involved in the various aspects of the war that were way above all of us: the financial aspects, the resources that were being negotiated. I can remember very clearly, even at a more basic level, there were guys that had farms in southern Angola, game farms, that lost fortunes, that Unita had taken over the farms, the sawmills and stuff that they'd used to promote their war. And I don't have any doubt that maybe in later years when Unita were (<i>inaudible</i>) maybe these things were handed back to them. But yes, there were ramifications on a massive financial level, far bigger than our little defence force, around Angola and around South West Africa. The drive for resources is massive. When I look at nowadays, and I've been more aware of what the meaning of minerals is to a country, to people, it's huge, it's massive. That's what drives people. That's why you have lawyers to protect your rights, that's why you've got engineers to mine those rights, why you've got governments to protect those rights.</p>
Interviewer	<p>But essentially the war that you fought in was a hub of war of the Cold War being fought in Angola...</p>
Howard	<p>It was an extension of that.</p>
Interviewer	<p>And South Africa's particular ideology in protecting that what they believed to be their way of life. Or the National Party protecting that.</p>
Howard	<p>Yes.</p>
Interviewer	<p>But in terms of personal experiences and things like that, I think you've given me a very strong picture of what's made...what you experienced in those times. But if there's anything that you want to add, and we don't have to do it now, if there's something that</p>

	you feel is relevant, just give me a shout. And what I can do, as soon as this is transcribed, I'll give you a copy for your own records.
Howard	I'd like that.
	END OF INTERVIEW ( <i>counter at 359</i> )

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