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## TRANSCRIPTION FAX SHEET

CLIENT: UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND  
SUBJECT: HISTORICAL PAPERS  
IDENTIFICATION: TAPE 03 – COL JAN BREYTENBACH  
CONTACT PERSON: MICHELE PICKOVER  
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Please note:

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

**INTERVIEWER:** It is June 11<sup>th</sup>, and I'm interviewing Colonel Breytenbach in Sedgefield. Col Breytenbach, first tell me what was the significance of Cassinga, why Cassinga? Why was it such an important place?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Well, Cassinga was the tactical headquarters of the Dimo Amaambo who was the head, military head of SWAPO or Plan, as they call it, and ... also Cassinga was the real logistics place for SWAPO, which supplied their fort bases, where they used to get their log via the, some of these to the Echo(?) railway line, and they would move down from there by truck to Cassinga. Then also it was a training area for young recruits and it was also a rest-up area for guys coming from the front. It had other facilities as well, for instance there was a hospital where the wounded could be treated, and so on, and a school, actually the school did not really work. Well that's the reason why we, when we discovered, when we found Cassinga, we thought it was a very fat target, tactually speaking, the best target of them all at that point in time.

**INTERVIEWER:** And what was happening at the time in Cassinga? What was the intelligence telling you about Cassinga ...?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Well this is the sort of thing I just mentioned, they were actually stocking up ... I don't think they knew it then, but I spoke to the log officer, of who's there in Cassinga at the time, and he said they were stocking up for an offensive that was going to be launched within a few months.

**INTERVIEWER:** A few months being ... or less?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** From May ... the attack was on the fourth of May, so they ... by June, July they would have launched a tremendous incursion of SWAPO guerrillas into northern ... what was South West Africa, to sink the election that was going to take place at the end of the year, towards November they were going to have the election, they wanted to almost take charge, or take hold of the whole population of,

especially Ovamboland. So that is why it has been stocked up in such a way ... they, from there, the log officer told me ... well actually he wrote about it in his book as well, which is *Waiting in the Wings*, he was then Joseph Ngobo, he's now a bishop, he was then a captain, not in SWAPO, he was a captain in Umkontho we Sizwe, and you remember there was ... there were ructions in Umkontho we Sizwe in Angola because they were dispatched, many of them, or some of them at least, to work with SWAPO, and some of them refused and they were (inaudible) to base and so, they were locked up and so forth. So anyway, they were ... the Cubans were there, he made friends with the leader of the Cuban team, and the Cubans were actually playing in ... this incursion, there were two major bases to the south, one was called Chetaquera and the other was called Aheki(?), each of them had their satellite bases, obviously. So they were supplying to Chetaquera and Aheki, from there to the forward bases, stocking up the bases with equipment, and then sending troops down there to man it ... so we thought if we take up machine gun, we're knocking out their ... the major pillar on which this whole thing is going to stand, you see, hence the operation was launched. The Defence Force probably didn't know all of this that I'm telling you now, at that time, they guessed most of it you see, but then was not really concerned, most of it was not concern, but obviously from the air photographs, it was very ... it was very obvious that something big was going to happen ... the area photographs they took of Cassinga, and of the other ... Chetaquera, they couldn't find Aheki at the time ... it was clear something big was coming, they did not know how or when ...

**INTERVIEWER:** So the area photographs, were they your main source of information on Cassinga?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** No they have captured some SWAPO ... SWAPO kept on talking about this place called, they called it Cassinga, they were the only one who called it, they called Cassinga we would have clicked exactly where it was, but we knew about Cassinga. Cassinga is a town that everybody knew about, it was in the centre of the iron  
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ore ...that (inaudible name) centre of the iron ore business that was going on there, and the railway line starts in Techowa (inaudible) ... taking the ore through to Moçamedes, (now Namibe) so we knew about that. We knew about a major base, we didn't know what the name was, we didn't capture many SWAPO so they were, they started looking for it, because they knew about this and they started flying air recces, and deployed some recces as well. But air reconnaissance eventually found the Cassinga base ... what the cameras flying mostly, you see they just take photographs, took strip photographs, air reconnaissance wound ... when we examined the air photographs one time at Channick(?) they found one of them but this was Cassinga base which is very obviously a fortified base, and then ... but it could also be a FAPLA base you see, because it was fortified, but they saw a (inaudible word), that was stuck in white stones, white rocks ... white-washed there out the ... the outer perimeter of South West Africa at the time, so then ... we picked up their... what is the word, their countless people and get them into motion, and they sort of confirmed that this is a training base and so on. I suppose it went back to the (inaudible ...) ... and of course we also intercept, made an intercept you see, which indicated ja, something is going on there.

**INTERVIEWER:** And he said there were Cubans there, I mean ... at what stage, the Cubans were principally there to support FAPLA, were they not?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Ja ...

**INTERVIEWER:** And did this come as a surprise to you, that SWAPO was also receiving Cuban assistance and support?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** No not at all ... no, you see, the whole thing was, strategically speaking that was the whole idea, to get Angola under the control of MPLA which by then it was, and now, as I talked about it yesterday, the aim had been to go for South West Africa and ... so phase 1 would be completed, now phase 2 is South West Africa you see, so that is why the Cubans came in.

**INTERVIEWER:** Do you figure that this was a signal to Pretoria that this communist

expansion was something to be taken seriously ...

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Ja ...

**INTERVIEWER:** ... that it wasn't going to stop at Angola ...

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Ja-a-a ... you see, politically at that time they had the five Western nations who, I've forgotten now what their names were, but they were involved in trying to convince Africa to grant independence to South West Africa, it's now Britain, France, America, I think Canada, one other country I know which one it was, I can't remember, but anyway they were all trying then to get South West to grant independence, you see they wanted a ... they put pressure on them, via ... diplomatic means and threats of I suppose, of sanctions and so forth, and to some extent ... I mean with a gloved hand as it were, not openly ... and eventually South West came around to it, they wanted ... SWAPO consisted of two branches, they had the internal SWAPO branch within South West and the external one, called PLAN if you like ... the military side of them, and they wanted the internal side of SWAPO to take part in the elections, which were going to be at the end of the year, November thereabouts, they formed the DTA, the Turnhalle Alliance, which consisted of several parties, and then of course there was the Nationalist Party and others as well, and they were going to take part in the elections in November that year. Now it wouldn't have served the interests of the Cubans or the Russians ... so they came from the other side and they instigated Sam Nujoma to be against it, and to actually almost force the internal SWAPO political organisation to reject this approach, so ... the South Africans and the five countries decided they are going to go ahead anyway with the elections, you see, whether they take part or not, and because South African at that time wanted to get rid of South West, and of course the five interested parties, they wanted a democratic government there and so on, they always wanted to keep the communists out ... hence the aggressiveness, as it were, from SWAPO and from the Cubans, and the Russians you see, hence the complete, shall we say disinterest, or abhorrence of what was going to take place at the end of the year,

from the SWAPO side, they didn't want to take part in the elections, they didn't want that undemocratic elections, because they were claiming that South West Africa was their territory as it were, because it was accepted in the United Nations at that time that SWAPO are the only people who can speak for South West and they are the ones that should be in power there, it belongs to them ...and they didn't want to ... and they kept on hammering on that thing, and the United National obviously is not the same as the five interested western parties, they were more communist oriented, as it were.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay ... so tell me about the planning of that Cassinga operation. What was the name of the operation in Cassinga?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** The overall operation was called Reindeer ...

**INTERVIEWER:** Reindeer, that's right ja. Operation Reindeer ... that included Cassinga, Chetaquera and ...

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Chetaquera and some of Chetaquera's satellite bases, because they could pinpoint them, and Cassinga ...Aheki they couldn't find Aheki at the time at the satellite bases but they were, they were left to 32 Battalion to log in there and to find them and destroy them, to fire with butterfly type operations, you see. The planning ... it is a very intricate plan, it is a very intricate plan because you've got the air force, you bring them in with different types of aircraft, fly at different speeds, at different heights and all sorts of things, different patterns and different ...in and out and so forth, so you get jets, and you get choppers and you get hospital aircraft ... so that is technically speaking, makes it a fairly difficult thing, then we've got the paratroopers we have to drop and we had to drop anything can go wrong and then you have to actually take up position. So what one does is, you ... this kind of planning ... you look at the target which is Cassinga, and you determine how many troops you would need to take it out, to destroy the thing. Then you try and fit those troops into choppers, because extraction is very important you see, so now you've got the choppers and you find how many choppers you need, how many chops are available. The availability of the choppers determines the

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size of the force in the end, you see. So ... and the numbers of lifts they can make, obviously if you can make three lifts you could take more troops, if you can only make two, they can only take ... less troops. Now the Air Force said immediately that they are only allowed two lifts, because the day is too short and choppers don't fly at night, so ... we ended up with 373 paratroopers which could be lifted out. Of course General Viljoen went ... on the battleground he pitched because he wanted us to bring back the parachutes ... I was against that because I mean I could take more troops, leave the parachute behind. Anyway you start with that, and now you've got ... you determine the number of troops after you determine what sort of attack you're going to launch on it, you need attack companies and you need cut-off groups and so on, so you come to that figure in that way ... so I came to a figure of about ... 500, a whole battalion ... and that was then reduced to 373, which is a bit ... cutting it a bit fine. Now you start looking for descents(?), because you've got to get them onto the target quickly, and we are not too concerned about descents really, in Angola we could ... as long as you don't drop into the water, you drop them into the mountains into trees is not a problem, you see we ... It was not a problem for us.

**INTERVIEWER:** Tell me quickly how was the terrain like around Cassinga?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** It is quite flat, ja ... ja it's quite flat, and bush ... typical Ovambo type forest, tall trees ... but there was a river on the western side of it, so we were restricted by the river on the one side because you don't want to drop the guys on the wrong side of the river, in that respect ... but otherwise we had no restrictions about the descents and so forth. Now, right you've got that sorted out. Now you must, you have selected a time during the attack phase, you selected the time that would be the best time to attack and in this case it was eight o'clock in the morning, seven o'clock their time ... because they are on parade and we want them to be flattened by the bombers you see, while on parade. So, now you can begin with the fire support plan, and that is where the bombers come in, you know the Canberras and the Buccaneers, and then of

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course fighter bombers like the F1's ... that was the air force task, and they decide how many aeroplanes you can allocate, in this case they allocated four Canberras and they allocated six Buccaneers, of which only five took part, to flatten the place ... and then they had a flight of four Mirages. The Mirages were also there to prevent interference from the Migs, because the nearest Migs were at Rivungo (The Angolans had Migs based at Lubango which would be about 15 minutes from Cassinga.), and they could get there within a quarter of an hour or so ... and so we had to have them on standby ... to come and shoot the Migs down. ... Right, now, you've got ... this is now sorted out, and the other thing of course which I didn't mention now is the helicopter situation, we were going to be lifted out in two lifts so we had to have an area fairly close to the target, which we call the helicopter administrative area, where these chops would come in, lift the first half of the troops and fly them back to drop them there and come back to get the rest and fly them out. They must be fairly close to Cassinga but not too close because by the time they've come back again, maybe take the first lift under attack by ... FAPLA ... so of course also the thing that affects the attack very much and your composition of your force, is the enemy side, the enemy threat that maybe ... there was a battalion, a battle group, you can call it a battle group in South African terms ... a battle group that was based at Techamutete which is about 25-30 kilometres to the south with tanks, and with BTR's and now you've got to measure their reaction, how long it would take them to react, to get from Techamutete to ... Cassinga, and this will determine how much time you've got available to clear out of the place and be gone ... you see we didn't want to fight against FAPLA ... so we determined that if we jump at eight, we can expect the first of them to arrive around one o'clock in the afternoon, because we took into account that they are pretty slack you see, they are not very on the ball and so on and so forth ... it is only 30 - 35 kilometres away, but first of all they've got to recover from the surprise, they must hear about it and recover from the surprise, get all the guys out from the coca shops and so on and into the tanks, and then start driving you see ... and none of them were too



eager to get into a scrap and that sort of thing, but we reckon about 1 o'clock, so we gave ourselves until 12 o'clock to do the job, to finish it off. What convinced me initially that ... the 373 paratroopers would be sufficient to do the job, that was what the Air Force told us, they had alpha bombs in the Canberras, the four Canberras, downstairs like this, in the airbus, that would take out the ... all you had to basically do is you have to jump and count the bodies, you see, so ... which was unfortunate because it didn't work out that way ... (chuckle) ... anyway ... so that is what they told us, so we thought now 373 you just, you know, consolidate what had been achieved by the Air Force, that is what the Air Force told us. Right, so now ... the route is in, the deploying NVA(unsure), the force, we call them mounting phase ... we decided that Grootfontein airfield would be the ideal place to mount the operation from, because we are fairly close to the target, we couldn't fly from South Africa, although we could reach, but you couldn't fly from South Africa because the guys would be too tired, you see, by the time you get there, sitting with a parachute in the aeroplane all the time, by that time you are ... stuffed. So we used Grootfontein, for security purpose we had to arrive after dark, and we had to fit chutes and things, and stay there for the night, and then the next morning early fit chutes and then fly from there to the objectives. If the Canberras and the Buccaneers could fly straight from Pretoria, to go and do their thing, afterwards they would come back and the Cans would go straight back to Pretoria but the Buccaneers would go to Grootfontein where there were enough ammunition dumps to on a stand-by basis to assist, the Mirages had to fly in the night before the attack to be in Ondangwa because they haven't got the range you see, and that's where they would clear off. Right, so all this planning was now done, and we had a lot of discussion about that and so forth, then the security ... attached to it. Now to move a lot of aeroplanes around and to call on ... we were calling on CF paratroopers, and they were from civilian life you see, and this is a great gamble when it comes to ...

**INTERVIEWER:** Citizen Force paratroopers, CF Citizen Force paratroopers?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Ja, Citizen Force paratroopers ... I had a small number of 1 Parachute Battalion as well, but most of them, I found most of them at CF you see, so that we called up and we had to rehearse, we had to train, we had to brief them and so on, and they must rehearse the plan over and over and over again ... what I forgot to mention is, you always have a reserve, so the CF, I'm talking about the guys who are going to jump and I also had one aeroplane with a reserve of paratroopers who could jump when ... if it was necessary. Anyway, so we were called up to Letaba Ranch, that was in Mpumalanga, on the Letaba River, it was a private ... ja a private game reserve but it was a game reserve, and a training area for the military as well. So we did our training there and we did start jumps in Pietermaritzburg, get some jumps in and the jump sequence and that sorted out, and then Magnus Malan attended a function in Stellenbosch, a cocktail party. One of the professors came up to ... and say what are you guys up to because some of my students had suddenly left, they were called up, what are you guys going to do, what are you guys up to? So that was ... that stopped the whole thing right there in its tracks, so we all had to go home again, because of the security problem surrounding it you see, so anyway all went home. And that was .... I've forgotten now, we were ... ja, this was February, March, I think it was either end of February or beginning of March. Then in April we were called up again, and this time I knew what was happening, because I was a dissident(unsure) commander, but the troops didn't know what to ... where they were going, they hadn't a clue where they were going to, when they were called up the first time they didn't know, they just knew that they were practising for something big that was coming off ... then in April, we were called up again. By this time they were launching an exercise called Quicksilver. Quicksilver was being conducted in Kimberley area, so they were called up for Quicksilver, they were mechanised troops and so on, and all the attaches were being invited to come and look at it, because it was the first time they were going to use G5 guns as well. They were very interested in this whole situation and there was new equipment in South Africa as well.

Anyway, they were called up in April and they came to Bloemfontein, to Die Brug, which is the high concentration area, and we started training there ... but the troops thought all along they were going to take part in Quicksilver, so it is fortunate we had that as a cover you see. Some of the ones who were called up for the ... early on didn't pitch up for the second period because they were ... pissed off, quite frankly .... but others, being paratroopers they pitched up without having been called up, because they thought there is something funny going on here, you see, they wanted to be part of it. So anyway so now they had Quicksilver (inaudible) bench clearing, were doing attack, we're doing parachute assaults and so on and so forth, and box formation, the seal of the target, and so on, and this went on for about three or four weeks ... meanwhile we're getting more information coming in about the targets, and I went up to Pretoria, that's where the plan was being finalised, I went up to Pretoria quite often ... and then some of the guys didn't want to stay that long, they left and in the end I had a certain number of paratroopers left over which was well within our capability, and then ... what you do then before an operation, you seal off the whole area, so I had the area sealed off ... I think it was about the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May, I sealed it off, no, the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, sorry, the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, sealed off and nobody was allowed to come in, nobody was allowed to go out, or telephone or anything, and that's it you see. And then I told them what is going to happen, I didn't tell where exactly, but I told them we are going to attack a SWAPO base, a big SWAPO base and they of course all cheered because that what they ... they thought they were to take part in Quicksilver, now they are going to do what they are supposed to be doing, see, SWAPO base. The attack was supposed to go in on the 2<sup>nd</sup> May, I must have informed them at the end of April, 2<sup>nd</sup> of May, but that was postponed, because of new information which they had, I think it's to do with the possible interference by the Migs from Rivungo, and that is when they added the Mirages. So ... yes, 3<sup>rd</sup> of May came and went, postponed again ... no the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May came and went and then was postponed again, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May they said go. So we went to Bloemspruit Air Force base, and we ...

got into our C130's and C160's and we flew up, we landed in Grootfontein the evening after dark the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May, and the next morning we fitted chutes, from about 3 o'clock onwards, and in our aeroplanes about six, taking off half past six, seven o'clock – our time, that is – and then we flew up ... now you've got to, you've got two aeroplanes coming, we had to ... our PR, the PR is when the first paratroopers steps out of the door, was 08.01, our time.

**INTERVIEWER:** One minute past eight ...

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** One minute past eight, ja. The last aeroplane would have been ... they were supposed to be the Mirages, were pulled up out of its parking and attacked at 08.00, you see ... you want to jump as soon as possible after debarking, because the defenders are now still stunned from it, you don't want them to regain their composure and so forth you see, because ... the parachute jump is a very organised thing, when you've landed you've got to find your guys on the ground, and organise them you see, and get them together as a fighting organisation. Right, so when we flew in, but that time the choppers had already gone out, choppers were already in their helicopter administrative area, which is some 20/25 kilometres to the east of Cassinga ... and they landed first light, because they didn't want to fly in by day, they went, you know, in pairs, they fly in the dark, they don't like to fly in the dark, but they landed in pairs, and they didn't want anybody to know the choppers are around you see, so they came in lower, they landed. As a matter of fact two of them nearly straight into Cassinga but evidently Cassinga didn't take notice of that, and they landed. So they were sitting on the ground ... with the choppers obviously went the protection party which the 1 Parachute Battalion a couple of platoons of them, to protect the helicopter administrative area ... and also with them, souped-up medical team. At that time we didn't have a capability yet, of dropping in a strong medical team, because we didn't have enough doctors qualified as paratroopers, we only had two, and we needed more, because our estimation of casualties were in the region of ten per cent of the attack force, so we needed a medical

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team that was souped-up, but they couldn't jump so they had to go in the helicopter admin area and then be flown in, with the first lift of choppers coming in to come and attend to the wounded. Right, so ... the choppers have gone in, they were first going, long after we cross into the what's its name the jets came in, because they are fast you see, first the Cans, four of them, they attack from north to south, the route they flew was way off to the east and turned in and came from the north .. line abreast, and they dropped their alpha bombs and they went on ... they came in low, dropped the alpha bombs. After them came the Buccaneers, five Buccaneers, when there was number six had a problem at take-off so it joined much later in the day, but in the meantime they take on bombs ... they dropped thousand-pounders. And then came the Mirages, they did some rocketing of certain specific areas, amongst others a tented camp which I had picked up on the north-western side of the base where we fought the ... what's the name ... the forward troops, SWAPO troops, coming (inaudible word) there for rest and preparation, so they were veterans you see ... so they took them on.

**INTERVIEWER:** But what were you hearing from the pilots at this stage, as they were dropping the bombs?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Well not much, I mean you don't hear much, the whole thing had been worked out you see, so they ... they had their release points, it had all been worked out and the ...

**INTERVIEWER:** And this went on without a hitch?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Without a hitch ja, the bombing went off without a hitch, ja. Then came the paratroopers, then ... by the time as I say, the last aeroplanes were going, we were turning in to drop, I was sitting on the free end step and I was looking out the door. I saw a Mirage pulling up, pre-light came on, but I could also see there was something wrong with the drop, because I could see ... Cassinga, was drifting past us, as it were ... because I'm seeing the aeroplane .. sticking too far to the rear of the aeroplane now ... so we dropped late. Anyway I went out the door and landed, I landed, only just

across the river, I'd fortunately had a steerable chute mostly we didn't have steerable chutes, so most of the ... two thirds of the attack companies, Alpha and Bravo companies landed on the wrong side of the river ...

**INTERVIEWER:** On the wrong side of the river?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Ja ... now the river was between them and the target, you see ... across the river base ...

**INTERVIEWER:** And this is precisely what you were trying to avoid?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Ja ... Right. Anyway that was the first cock-up, the second ... on the eastern side, we were on the western side of the drop, on the eastern side of the drop some stoppers Charlie company drop, the Alpha Bravo company, which dropped on the western side, I was with them ... Charlie company dropped on the eastern side of the stoppers, and they also dropped late, then we wanted to ... raid ... (inaudible statement) they wanted to close of the bottom and the top ... that before right, the C160 dropped the guys at the top, because of the air of the wind, there was quite a, fairly strong wind, they had blown into the town, the northern end of the town and that wasn't too serious, and the other C160 dropped the anti-tank platoon and Delta company at the bottom end. So, right now we hadn't sealed off the place, because now Charlie was out-of position and we are out-of position ... what we had in the air also what you call it, Telstar, it was a Cessna, with a paratrooper officer in it, Archie Moore, (Commandant 1 Parachute Battalion) who was supposed to help me to re-organise my battalion on landing ... and I couldn't make coms with him, I could make coms with the pilot, and I heard the pilot saying to him, The Colonel is calling you and he kept on telling him but he can't hear me, you see ... I don't know whether it was true or not, but anyway he couldn't hear me because he was being shot at by ... at the aircraft guns, it was the first time we realised they had anti-aircraft guns in the base, we didn't know that you see ... (chuckles) ... and, so the pilot then said he was forced to fly back to South West Africa, so we lost him. So now I was completely in the dark as to where my paratroopers were,

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so in the end, and the attack would have gone in from west to east, against the flank, as it were, of Cassinga. Cassinga is a long ... it is a town, usually laid out next to the road, so it is a long and a thin town, so we were attacking from west to east, across it's length, or it's width rather ... and so I had to change the, because of the time is getting on, I had to change my attack axis from west to east, to south to north, I had to attack from the south, because most of my troops were on the south ... I got most of the troops eventually through the river, and now we formed up, Bravo company on the right, and Alpha company on the left, now we attacked from south to north. Which meant that the western flank was wide open you see, so guys could get out. The Charlie Company, meanwhile re positioned them south having easier because they just, they didn't have a river to cope with, so they got into position, and sealed off the eastern side. So by the time the attack went in, which was about, instead of in twenty minutes or so, it was now about an hour later, so now they were ... had recovered from the shock of the attack, and so now we are facing SWAPO now fighting for their lives you see, so it was now a much slower situation of the attacks going not as smoothly as we thought, and in any case the bombing wasn't all that effective anyway, I discovered.

**INTERVIEWER:** Can you .... I'm now going back to the bombing, as you came into the town, can you describe the scene and can you describe what you encountered?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Well ... we encountered a lot of small fire, guys fired from the trenches ... but not all that many bodies laying around ... for instance the so-called parade ground where they were formed up, all of them have formed up I found three bodies laying there ...

**INTERVIEWER:** On the parade ground?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** On the parade ground.

**INTERVIEWER:** And you were anticipating a lot more bodies on the parade ground?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Ja ... most of them to be flattened, because they say we're

just going to count the bodies, but I counted three, fortunately I can't count so far so I didn't have a problem in counting three ... but now the camera pass were very upset and I told them that, I said well they've asked me how many bodies do you see on the ground, I said three. Are you sure we are talking about the right place, I said, ja, I'm talking about the parade ground, there are three bodies lying there, and they say but the place was soaring with troops when they dropped the bombs, the alpha bombs ... I said there were only three bodies ... (chuckles) ... so they were not very happy with me because ... but there were three bodies, that's all there were, you see. I never quite ... a lot of them are no doubt full of whims (wounds?), the alpha bomb burst and then it .. it is all shrapnel ... quite a number of them were leaking ... blood or whatever you want to call it, so ... ja that happened but not all that many, that's why they put up such a good fight you see, ... we were going through it very, very slowly. Now my other tank platoon was in the southern end of town to set up a blocking position for if those tanks from Techamatete are going to come in, to plant the mines there, and they had RPG7's ... in the ambush position so they could shoot them out.

**INTERVIEWER:** And what were they seeing at this point?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** There was nothing there, they were just ... relaxing there, I mean nothing was going on for them, they were ... most upset because the fighting was going on in town, they were not experiencing anything at all, you see. They were tanning there, some of them, and very unhappy because they were not taking part in the fight. The company actually took the two platoons, dropped them off, they came in quickly and they cleared their part of the objective, from the north up to a certain point where they had to stop the stoppers, to stay there ... Charlie company came in, they formed up and they took position on the east extremity of ... eastern boundary of Cassinga, but they said to attack up, (inaudible words) ... Delta company basically took two platoons, they dropped with the anti-tank and they were alright ... they were supposed to clear what you call the engineer complex in the southern side of Cassinga, which they did, and they then took

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up stock positions. They were ... I then used them as my reserve because they had done their job and I could use them as we go through ... immediate reserve. The reserve in the air was in one of the C160's and coming with us for a drop, and after the drop had taken place they were not needed and they went off ... to Ondangwa where they sat and waited in case they were needed, you see ... so there I think they were very upset about it ... I said to them, look in my experience a reserve is always needed because something always goes wrong ... all right a lot went wrong, but I still didn't need them ... (chuckles) ... anyway we fought our way forward and ...

**INTERVIEWER:** And this now, you're taking small arms fire ... from SWAPO soldiers ...

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Ja, now we had to do bunker clearing and trench clearing ... so we were into the trenches and so on, and into the bunkers, and threw hand grenades into the bunkers and so forth, and they were ...

**INTERVIEWER:** Had you taken any casualties at this stage?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Well, at the beginning not, but apart from ... I think one guy which we think was missing ... we believe killed in action, we never found his body, and I think he fell into the river and he drowned, but we don't know ... because even to this day we don't know what happened to him, so ... but we didn't know then that he was a casualty, I mean it was difficult to say ... because of the attack you see when you're in a situation like that you don't take an overview really ... you have to ... rely on your radio. I carried my own radio, my command, my battalion command net radio, A55, I had another chap who carried my KIA48, which is my real link to Rundu because the overall commander of the operation, this General Greeson, and he had Blackie de Swart who was his air force commander, he was commanding the air force side of it, so I should have been able to talk to them but my guy with the KIA48 disappeared, I don't know what happened to him, so I couldn't talk to anybody in Ondangwa ... I couldn't give them feedback either you see, what feedback they got initially was from the aircraft ... the one

Buccaneer asked to stay aloft, after he dropped his bombs, he was armed with rockets,  
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to stay aloft in case the tanks were coming in and so on, they changed this Buccaneer during the course of the day, another one come up with rockets and some of them stay there ... the Mirages went back, because they've got short endurance and they sat waiting on the runway, to refuel for the Migs 19's coming, and the Mig 21's to come in, if they were going to come in. Anyway, so ... it was going very slowly, we fought from bunker to bunker, and clearing the trenches ... we were shooting a lot of them, I mean after the battle, there were the filler guys of the English trenches and some guys lying on top of the other had been shot, you know SWAPO fighters, because they couldn't really go anywhere, because they were hemmed in by now, so they fought with their back to the wall, as it were. Right, so we are going up, as we fought we ran up against the anti-aircraft divisions, machine guns, there were about three of them, one was a 14,5 and two 12,7's ... some people reckon there were some 23mm as well, but I can't confirm that, some reckon there were more 12,7's than I thought there were, but anyway I was in that, I ran into them, by myself, all by myself, myself and a couple of docs who were ... the doctors who jumped lost all their kit in the river, it fell into the river, into the water, so we didn't have any medical cover and they didn't have weapons so they were just ... they were wet so when they saw me they were so glad to see me they just latched on to me and stayed with me the whole trip ... (laughs) ... so we ran into this, because the Alpha company was supposed to ... they were on the ... the axis of the attack was the main road through the town, they were supposed to clear the whole area to the west of this axis, and they had given ... they had skipped around this, they went around this so that I was in the middle of Alpha and Bravo companies, between the two companies ... (inaudible statement ...) so I was very upset because the Alpha company didn't clear this ... these guys out. So that held up the attack, because Bravo company was under strain because they were taking anti-aircraft fire, so was Alpha company, they're all going down, and now I was ... not at my wit's end, but I was trying to get to go forward, but none, I couldn't get them. Now our mortars, we had a group of four mortars jumping with us, it is now

60mm mortars ... they lost three of the mortars in the river as well, and only one mortar left, so now ... the thing is this 14,5... (inaudible statement at beginning of Side B of Tape 3) ... fortunately it couldn't dip its barrel to get at me, so I was fairly safe .. the doctors of course were down on the ground and they thought I was tremendously brave standing up, but I knew these buggers couldn't reach me, they couldn't dip that muzzle enough to take me out ... (laughs) ... so ... but they didn't know that, so I left them with that impression that I was a moer-of-a brave guy, you see, standing up around the fire ...anyway, so ... I was at my wit's end because I couldn't ... the mortar would shoot all around it, but of course they were in a trench position, and I couldn't drop a bomb into the trenches, or into the area where the gun itself was, 14,5 ... well it bought us a aerial weapon but I mean, you give correction for fire, degrees and that sort of thing, or mils depending on what sights you are using, or up and down the 100 metres or down by the 100 meters, but here I was co rectified by "come left a tiny little bit, just a twitch", so I was trying to get this thing onto the target, I couldn't get it right ... in the end my ... my Delta company commander would listen out, they had cleared the area of the so-called engineer complex, he came up and said well, Colonel you need some help there? I said ja, okay bring up your company ... I though he was going to bring up his two platoons but he brought up only one platoon ... and they went in. Now from what I gather, I spoke to my (inaudible) missing a story, he and another guy cleared this position ... of the machine guns, and they shot them up and they killed just two of them, they left the rest of the platoon outside, and then he started clearing the whole bloomin trench, he and this other chap, cleared the whole trench ... he used the platoon that he had, he had been covering fire, to make sure that when these guys run away, they get shot down you see, but .... all right the trench are very narrow, I mean it is a one-man front you are fighting on. I didn't know this at the time, but that guy should have got the Honoris Crux Silver for what he did that day ... I only found it out a few months ago, he should actually have got the Honoris Crux Silver, his name is Tommie Lamprecht, he is a captain. Anyway he did

a very brave thing there and he cleared ... and then we got momentum again, we started cleaning up ... but in the meantime while this was going on, we were still clearing the rest of the objective, I ... I must retrace my story a little bit now, there were two brigadiers who jumped in as well, I was a colonel, a Du Plessis and Botha, Hannes Botha and Martiens du Plessis, they wanted to come along for the ride, but Martiens du Plessis was also the commander designate of 44 Parachute Brigade, although they were still called 1 Parachute Brigade you see, it hadn't been formed yet. So he started to take a hand in this bloomin thing, which I didn't know. He called me on my radio, on my net, he wasn't supposed to have F-53's but anyway he called on my net, and said he is going to bring in the first lift of choppers now to take out ... while we're still fighting for the objective. So I got a bit angry, I said don't bring in those choppers, because the choppers come in here, they're going to get ... we are going to lose choppers, because they are still fighting for the objective. Now he wasn't there, he was way back ... he wasn't there where the fighting was, I was where the fighting was taking place ... anyway, so he evidently didn't take notice of this, he brought in the choppers, and I had an extraction plan worked out ... after the battle, after we'd consolidated our position on the objective, certain troops, the first lift would be the guys who had taken part in the attack, Alpha and Bravo companies, they would go to certain LZ's which we had pre-selected from the air-photograph, so they ..those LZ's were under fire you see ... landing zones for the choppers, so they couldn't come to the LZ so they had to go somewhere else, and the result is that now my troops are still busy with the fighting, the first lift, they couldn't be extracted. So they extracted some of the other troops now, now the same Martiens du Plessis was then taken hand, just filling the choppers and so forth, without my knowledge, although I knew the choppers came in, I mean I could hear them coming in, but I knew about them because they were there already ... so they filled up the choppers and they went, and the next minutes I saw ... a chap walking around on the objective, he looked very familiar, and it was General Viljoen. So he'd come in with the first lift of choppers you see ... all

right these what I thought then was the first lift of choppers. But something more serious had happened, the ... my Casavac plan was based on taking out the ... the badly wounded guys, with the first lift. Because the first lift ... not taking out the badly wounded guys, the first lift of choppers would fly chaps ... but not to take out any of the wounded, they stayed where they were, because the medical team was coming in, in the first lift, and they could now establish the medical aid post, where they could now do the necessary things ... my doctors had lost all their equipment anyway, so it was very important then that these guys must get to the wounded. But Du Plessis had arranged, it seems to be Du Plessis, it could have been Gerber, who is my 2IC, without my knowledge arranged it ... against my orders, that the wounded would go out with the first lift ... so they went out with the first lift, the choppers would offload medicorp, and now they were separated from the medical teams now sitting in Cassinga ... so the chopper's pilots ended up running around putting in drips, there were no medics, in the helicopter admin area ... see what I mean? When you get interference from a bastard who is not supposed to have been there in the first place, I was in command but he was taking over ... trying to take over you see. By that time I had also been wounded but ... I didn't worry ...

**INTERVIEWER:** What happened to you? How were you wounded?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** I was shot through the wrist by a sniper, but I mean that didn't worry me, I carried on you see ... so it ... it wasn't a serious thing, it didn't take my hand off ... (chuckles) ... anyway, so now Viljoen is walking around there and I've got a problem now, if something happens to Viljoen, who is the Chief of the Army, who is going to be responsible for what's happening to him? I'm going to be responsible because he shouldn't have been there in the first place, secondly even worse, if he gets captured, and ends up in Luanda ... (chuckles) ...

**INTERVIEWER:** Why do you think he was there? What, what persist him to come?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** I don't know. I asked him, he said he just wanted to see

what was going on and so forth, but I think he was ... he was getting worried because I had no coms with the real coms because my TR-48 guy was missing ... all they could hear was what they heard from the pilots, who were flying overhead. Then I think, at least he was panicking a bit, and he came to see what the hell was going on, so anyway he got there and everything was under control, because I went to him and said what the hell are you doing here? By that time I had already been wounded you see ... so he said no well, ja I just came to see ... I said well you get behind that bloody building there and stay there ...

**INTERVIEWER:** Was he convinced that you had everything under control, do you think?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Ja well he should ... well later on, I interviewed him fairly recently, he said ja, he left Pretoria, he thought everything was under control ...

**INTERVIEWER:** In spite of the fact that you were obviously bleeding from a wound in your wrist, and ...

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Well it wasn't seriously, I mean, the bullet went right through ... (laughs) ... left a hole ....so anyway, so I said to him you stay behind that building and you don't come out of that now. We stayed there. Right, now ... this is now when I discovered, when I did my research for the book, the helicopter admin area, James Kriel who was in charge there, he became chief of the air force eventually, he was then a Commandant, he had his hands full with these bloomin wounded ... and some of them could be croaking any minute you see, so ... he decided to detach, there were two choppers had been dedicated to Casavac, the wind that you see directly to the field hospital in Ondangwa. So he loaded these guys into these two ... what's it's name ... Super Frelons and they went off. Now that means for a second lift there are two Super Frelons now short ... which means that we can't dispatch these choppers to come and take out a second lift until the Super Frelons had returned. So off they went, all the way ... we were 250 kilometres north from the cutline , from there, the cutline to Ondangwa was still another 50 or some kilometres, so we are talking about 300

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kilometres flying there, and 300 kilometres flying back, so it take times you see. Anyway so we took them off, dropped them off in Ondangwa, not the same ... one of the originals and another Super Frelons came back with also fuel. So by this time we were well over our 12 o'clock evacuation time, and well after 1 o'clock already, and well after 2 o'clock already, nothing had happened at Techamatete and then suddenly the tanks appeared on the scene ...

**INTERVIEWER:** But the Migs hadn't appeared?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** No they didn't, no.

**INTERVIEWER:** Oh okay. So the tanks were coming from ...?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Techamatete ... the tanks and BTR's and so on, and so the first tank drove over a mine which my guys had planted, and the others swerved around it, and they started the ...

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you see the tanks arriving?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** No that was to the south, I was now still fighting in the north ... this was the southern end, down the road you see ... I knew about it because they reported to me what was going on ... and so three BTR's were coming from the flank ... obviously what happened there, they had seen these choppers taking out the first lift, or heard them and seen them, and they'd been waiting, and they thought there was nobody left in the place you see, so they came in, unorganised... disorganised, open, drive in ... and that's how we caught the one tank, and we caught a couple of BTR's and RP7's ... because the troops, they were Cubans, were sitting on top of the BTR ... you know looking out, standing around and so on, the one BTR, so we shot them out, and the other ... you know shot another one, and their crew, infantry, were running into a building and they were mowing there as well ...

**INTERVIEWER:** Did they .... were they approaching as if they were moving into a battle, or do you think they were ... coming to see something that was finished already?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Ja ... ja, that's what they initially ...

**INTERVIEWER:** Right ... so they were hoping to catch the tail-end of this ...

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Ja, they thought we were gone ... because, by that time I had already consolidated you see, and the shooting had died down ... in the ...

**INTERVIEWER:** Why do you think they didn't dispatch the tanks a bit sooner?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** They were waiting for us to go ... (laughs) ...

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay ... so, I mean there was no defence really put up for ... by ...

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** No we had defence you see, because we were still in position ...

**INTERVIEWER:** Ja ... okay, but what I'm saying is the only defence that was taking place were the people who actually were at Cassinga at the time, and there were no Migs coming, there were no ... and the tanks only came when they thought that you were ...?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Ja, but we ... we were still ... we had now consolidated, we were now, all our defence were positioned, you see we were waiting for the second lift of choppers, so we were prepared, although we ... I mean we still had (inaudible) because they hadn't pitched up yet and it was getting late you see ... and I was getting worried about the fact that those guys, they arrived on the scene, the Tech a ma tech(?) ...

**INTERVIEWER:** Tell me, at this stage, what was your perception of the number of enemy casualties, did you have an idea ...

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Well the bodies were lying all over the place, we didn't bother to count, because ... the idea wasn't to see how many heads you can get, the thing is we flooded the whole place you see ...

**INTERVIEWER:** Mostly ... mostly lying in trenches and anywhere ...

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Ja, in the trenches Ja ...and they were lying open as well, not that many, but a lot of them in the trenches you see ... and AK-47s lying around all



over the place ... so I knew the casualties were heavy, that I knew, but I didn't know how many ... so, then they came, they attacked us with the south, as I say we took out the one tank stopping on the mine, we took out a couple of BTR's, and then the ... I'm still trying to figure out who cooked up what, because you know ... it is difficult to get the whole picture, but ... there were at least five tanks, one we've taken out now already, so ... and RPG-7 team took out another one that we know of ... now the thing is, an RPG-7, when it takes out a tank, it doesn't mean to say it starts to burn, because it depends on the fuel load that it's got on board, and where you hit the thing, I mean if you hit it in the bogey so that thing stops, dead stands, you see ... so if you hit it in the turret it goes through to the turret where the ammunition is then it starts building up and eventually it explodes ... so the tank stopped. And so several tanks were taken out, either one or two by the Buccaneer who is aloft with rockets, you see ...

**INTERVIEWER:** That was the one Buccaneer that had stayed behind?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Ja, because they were relieving each other you see, now this Buccaneer ... this Buccaneer was actually on its way to Chetequera when the attack went in, and by that time, the pilots reported to Ondangwa, that the attack had come in from the south you see ... the other Buccaneer pilot, on his way back, that the attack was coming from the south and he hasn't got any fuel left, he is now returning. So this one Buccaneer came up ... fortunately he had, he had changed his rocket from, he was going to rocket Chetequera, he was going to use anti-personnel rockets, but then ... he insisted on anti-personnel and anti-tank, a mix, fortunately for us you see. Anyway so he took out either one or two tanks ... so by that time four tanks were knocked out, and there was still one left over ... the BTR's had withdrawn, the Mirages scrambled, they came in and they shot up the BTR's, fortunately for us they were ... I think a couple of Mirages came back, and it shot up some BTR's and a lot of infantry, so the Cubans, the Cubans were mostly in the tanks, in the BTR's and a lot of infantry were FAPLA, so they were getting ... they were taking heavy casualties as well at this time. Of course we were enjoying it because

we were waiting now for the second lift to come and fetch us you see ... but now the problem is that there is one tank still left, and we didn't know how many other things were still left, and this tank had come up onto the LZ, the only LZ we could use ... I in the meantime, we had ... a contingency plan, if they should attack us from the south and we had to withdraw quickly, I was waiting for choppers to come and the choppers didn't come, and the Cubans and the FAPLA were coming closer and closer and they were getting ... we went to engage them on the edge of the LZ, so I decided this contingency plan was now to be put in motion, which basically meant we vacate the whole of Cassinga on foot, taking our casualties with us ... and we moved towards the helicopter admin areas, say 10 kilometres out, and then they would come and pick us up there, just to get clear of the enemy, because I know that what would happen is, once they had taken the town, then they would start moving around and consolidating and counting bodies and see what is going on and they wouldn't constitute a pursuit force to come after us ... that is the way their minds work you see. Right, so we are on our way now to withdraw towards the east, when suddenly the choppers arrived, en masse; it was about 4 o'clock in the afternoon ...

**INTERVIEWER:** And you've got a tank on your landing zone ...

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Oh we've still got a tank running loose, ja now, this tank was now shooting the choppers ... (chuckles) ... the choppers didn't know that the tank was shooting at them until they saw the spurts of ... you know, all over the place, and there were still some machine gun fire, incoming fire from the rest of the FAPLA force ... and the Buccaneer that was aloft that run out of ... ammunition, out of rockets ... now I remember so well, as I was going out of Cassinga onto the LZ, I saw in front of me, at eye level, a Buccaneer streaking past ... (sound indicating speeds) ... at eye level, I tell you ... so this, he couldn't have cleared that, the ground at more than a couple of feet ... he was flying towards this tank ... I thought this guy is now a kamikaze, he has gone off his nut, you see, this kamikaze pilot ...

**INTERVIEWER:** Do you know who was flying that Buccaneer?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Ja, Andries Marais, Dries Marais ... no he just wants to ... because they're aiming at the choppers you see, and he wants to put them off, off their aim, just before they hit him, he flew up, he flew over them you see ... it was so close, from what I gathered subsequently he knocked these bloomin crews in the heads, above the head-and-shoulder above the turret, he knocked them down ... (laughs) ... and he did it again, and again, and again ... he got the Honoris Crux for that, but that type of flying low ... his navigator was crapping himself in the back ... (laughs) ... in fact he was flying so low that the shockwave from the tank gun that was firing, that was coming up from the bottom of the fuselage, he had some holes in the fuselage you see ... (laughs) ... when he got back, his commanding officer decided to court-marshal him, in the end he got a Honoris Crux (laughs) ...

**INTERVIEWER:** It's a fine line isn't it?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Ja ... anyway, so now the choppers are now ... because we are now withdrawing, I was walking, withdrawing, the (inaudible word) drills had been bugged up because now we, we were allocated to go to specific chop numbers, because there is a big chop number on the chopper where you go into, but now choppers came all in so now we just rush to the choppers and we got in and the choppers took off ... I was with General Viljoen in the last chopper, a Puma to take it out ... and I remember him being worried about any troops left behind, there was one guy left behind, but ... he was picked up by one of the chopper pilots, because they kicked him out because the chopper was overfull ... and they said there was still one chap left, so John Church, another chopper came back to pick him up, they were under fire by ... FAPLA you see, under machine gun fire. So this guy was picked up and they got him out ... but John Church got a Honoris Crux for that you see, for taking him out under fire. So, anyway, off they went, and we went. Now we were flying ... also he went to pick up this other guy ... right so we got out of there ... after 4 'clock, half past four we , 16h30 there

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about ... and then we flew down straight to Enhana, the troops flew to Enhana and the casualties which should have been ... life casualties you see, we had ... the other casualties were still sitting in ... no, no they had already taken the heavy casualties, taken to Ondangwa, the light casualties were now flying through to Ondangwa itself ... so we flew to Enhana, because it was closer, we weren't supposed to go there, because the chopper had to turn around quickly so he can fetch other guys before it got dark, he was sitting still in the helicopter. Anyway, so they turned around, they dropped us off and they went to Enhana, they went to fetch the rest of them, so by the time they came back it was dark, the choppers ... it was quite dark you see, they weren't supposed to fly in the dark, and there was noise, it was early days still, they've learnt to fly in the dark later on, but not then ... so they came in and they, those guys went through to Ondangwa (inaudible) ... now you see, the next day, we flew from Enhana to Ondangwa, we got a bit of a de-brief, and then we had the first intercept coming through, which stated we had to shell (?) these listening posts, all along the cut line, listening out for radio traffic ... the first intercepts coming through, one of the first intercepts said that they had gone into to area, this was FAPLA, gone into the area and six hundred and eight of our comrades had been killed, so that is what the casualties were, comrades being killed you see. They didn't say anything about women and children ...but six hundred and eight comrades, of our comrades, have been killed. That day there were women killed, that is a fact, I mean but quite a number of the combatants were females, especially around the anti-aircraft guns, quite a few female were manning the guns ... in uniform, in SWAPO uniform ... that there were civilians killed, there must have been, they were killed by means, especially by the bombardment, but what I found also was there was some school children, they had been abducted a few months before from St Mary's Mission, about seventy of them, I believe ... and there was a young girl, she was about fourteen or fifteen or sixteen years old, she wanted us to take them back ... I couldn't take them back because the choppers were full ... of paratroopers, so ...

**INTERVIEWER:** How many school children?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** About seventy of them had been ... abducted.

**INTERVIEWER:** And they were being kept at this camp?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** They were kept there you see ... because now, UNICEF supplied them with food and all sorts of goodies, but there had to be a school you see.

**INTERVIEWER:** UNICEF was supplying the school, or supplying the ... camps?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Supplying the school ... but now, they had to have a school you see, to be supplied, in other words it was one way of SWAPO to, first of all get recruits because they were abducting the young people, you see ... secondly to get also .. they had some supplies you see ...

**INTERVIEWER:** I see ... so in other words SWAPO were ...

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Misusing the UNICEF for their own purposes.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did they ever set up a school, was there a school in Cassinga?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** I didn't see a school ... I didn't see a school, there was no school there ... and the ... one of the chaps, he served in 5-Recce, he was there, he was a young child on that day, he'd been abducted, he became a SWAPO and he was captured by Koevoet and eventually he was recruited by 5-Recce and he became a very (inaudible) rock at this point in time. Now he said that when the ... attack went in, when they came in, the schoolchildren ran away, but they ran through the paratroopers who were attacking from the south, the paratroopers didn't shoot at them, so they didn't bother to shoot at them, quite a lot of them were out of their place, to the south you see ... so they were never shot at by the paratroopers as we were coming through, the paratroopers just ignored them, because they could see they were children, so they didn't shoot them ... his name, I call him Johannes Toyville(?), that's not his real name, because his family is still living in ... still in Ovamboland and obviously he doesn't want to have his name known, he is an ex-recce guy, and he is now serving in Iraq. But now

there is another thing which I discovered ... Joseph Corbill(?) wrote the book, Waiting in the Wing, he said ... his description of the attack on Cassinga was something as follows ... he said ... he went to Cassinga as a lot officer, because he .. and to organise as I said before, the lots to supply four bases, which Chetequera and Eheki (?) and their satellite bases, because they were (inaudible) invasion as it were, later on you see ... he said he went down there with this Cuban pal of his, who showed him around because his Cuban pal had been there quite a while, at Chetequera and from there they went to the border, they actually looked at South African troops beyond the cut line and so on ... and came back, and they were stocking up. And sometime during this job there, we decided he had to go and fetch some more logistics at Serpa Pinto, which is the end of the railway line from ... Moçamedes. So he took a convoy to Serpa Pinto (now Menongue) and he loaded, came back, and this I confirmed with him because his book is not quite clear about it, he stayed overnight at a base what used to be known as Ito de Piva but now is known as Cubango, which is on the Cubango river, which is probably about ... I would say ... maybe 100 kilometres north of Cassinga. They left early the next morning ... when they got close to Cassinga they could see the place was under attack, they saw actually the bombers going in, so he stopped ... (laughed) ... his convoy, and they weren't going in at all, they wanted this whole thing to finish off, and then, he said they saw the bombers going in and the place going up in flames and the choppers coming in and what have you ... and taking the guys out and so on, and then ... he heard from behind him, where they were stopped, the sound of tanks coming, from behind. The tanks came up to them and they wanted ... the tanks wanted to shoot them out, because they thought they were UNITA you see ... so anyway they convinced the guy in charge, he was a Cuban, they are not UNITA, they are actually FAPLA and so on ... now this Cuban ... those were T-54 tanks, tanks who attacked us were T-34s, so these were T-54s from the north. Now this Cuban was coming in to relieve the guys who were fighting at this stage against us ... but he was the only Cuban in charge there evidently,

and the rest were all FAPLA and they refused to budge because they were not going to go any closer because it is .... I mean this is not the place to be in, this sort of thing ... and they didn't have much sympathy for SWAPO anyway ... so they refused to budge, the Cubans are getting angrier and angrier by the minute and so on, but they ... they just stuck it out there. Now ... so the second lift came in, they only went in after the last chopper had left, then they went in, so they didn't actually attack ... Cassinga from the north, or us ... I didn't know about this. Now I checked up with Corbill several times, are you sure? He said there was an attack coming from the south, by tanks, he said he knows about the attack, this is another attack he is talking about, from the north ... well if I accept that, it means that we were very lucky that we weren't caught between two pincers, one from the south and one from the north ... which would have wiped us out you see, or could have wiped us out. Anyway, so when they went in, he says the whole place was a shambles, he never saw his Cuban pal again, he believes he's been killed, the place was burning, all their log been destroyed and the whole operation which they had planned, had been wiped off the slate because of this attack in Cassinga. So ...he also, I asked him ... was there refugee camps there? He said no there was not a refugee camp, it's a log base for SWAPO and it is a training base for SWAPO and that was where the headquarters of Dimo Amaambo where he planned with the Cubans the upcoming operation. Dimo Amaambo had gapped it early on ... now I think what perhaps happened is that he went ... there was a battle group deployed at a place called Jamba, not Savimbi's Jamba, but another Jamba to the north ... I think he got away, and he went up to Jamba and he informed them that this ... they are going to attack, and they just mounted an assault from the north as well. They were perhaps about 50 or so kilometres away, 50/60 kilometres away, so it took them longer to get there than it would have done at Techamatete, because they were only about 20/25 kilometres away, but they also got them in the end, because of a delay ... Yes, anyway, the problem is now, we were supposed to take part in the second phase ...ja first of all there was a ... in the first phase,

or during the first phase, a mechanised attack went in at Chetequera, and they overran the place ...what's his name ... Fran Bestbier(?) is in command there, and they killed some 270 and they captured a few of the SWAPO's there ...they also ran out of time because of the fact that we were being delayed ourselves so they couldn't get the air support earlier, so they ... to attack the satellite bases, so they also ran out of time. So the ... that the operation was successful in this respect that we stopped the build-up for assault, for incursion, was quite clear, it could have been more successful if you want to think in terms of heads taken and so on, which is ... if we, if things had gone to plan, we would have been out there by sort-of 12 o'clock, then they would have had more time for Chetequera and the satellite bases to sort them out properly as well. As it is, Chetequera was taken, and they took quite a number of ... well I don't know how many, but they took some prisoners as well. Now ... all right so you learn ... I then discovered by research now recently, that the reason why we dropped our chaps on the wrong side of the river, was because the scale of the air lift, the plan of the effort ... as an example, if we say, if we made an assumption the scale, I can't remember, was 1 in 2000, we assumed ... is 1 in 2000, if you measure them on that 1 in 2 000 and you selected these, which I did, I selected these at say 1000 metres long, which is about the bare minimum ... which you need, and about one on the western side was 400metres wide which was ... wide enough to take three aeroplanes in vic formation, dropping the (inaudible word) ... similarly here on the eastern side, the other sides also, these at super beam(unsure), but they were not, they were actually 500metres long ... so it was, argument, I mean I didn't know what the scale was but they were one in a 1000 instead of one in 2000, put it that way ... so the target was smaller, the size of it, there were a lot of people in it, but it was more compact that we thought it would be, firstly, and secondly these were shorter, which accounted for the fact that the guys dropped late ... because what the dropping plan entailed that the C130s and the C160s would come in low, tree-top level ... now about say 1 minutes out, they'd pull up ... steeply, level out and the



red light would go on, because down there it's just short of the initial point, and as you cross the initial point the green light would go on. Now, the digits being so small, they pulled up too late, you see, because they were already passing the initial point ... (chuckles) ... because they thought they were going to pull up so many hundreds of metres from the beginning of the descend, meanwhile they were pulling up half that distance, you see ... so they were over flying the initial point, so the green lights went on late, that is why they dropped late, you see, and ...

**INTERVIEWER:** And why you ended up on the wrong side of the .... river?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** A lot of them, about two thirds of them, the Alpha brown company ended up on the wrong side of the river ... and of course it was a wind from north-east as well, and it was drifting across the river too, so ... we had two thirds of our guys on the wrong side, ... and the river was deep, it doesn't look like that from the air, but it's deep pools ... it was quite a job to get them, to get the guys on the right side of the river.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you go back to Cassinga ... afterwards?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** No ... I didn't go back, no ... I didn't have the opportunity to go back, but it's been vacated, there is nothing going on there on, that I know ... the whole place had been vacated.

**INTERVIEWER:** But shortly after the attack on Cassinga there was a lot of controversy?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Yes there was, I mean ... the immediate thing was that we attacked a refugee camp ... I mean this is why UNICEF came in so ... handy you see, because UNICEF was involved with the school and that sort of thing, and they brought in journalists from ... no right kind of journalists, after they sanitised the place ... they couldn't show them the women and children that had been killed, but they assured them there was a mass grave with women and children in it, which had been concreted over ...

**INTERVIEWER:** So there were no photographs taken of open ...

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** No, there were photographs taken of the guys lying in the trench ... in a hall, which, once they've been collected obviously, but there are women amongst them but one or two women had dresses on, but the rest were all wearing uniform ... they were carefully putting them on top as well, you see, so they could take the photographs of those ...

**INTERVIEWER:** Amazing ...

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Ja ... no they were definitely ... the one photograph I saw, you could see about three ... civilian women, in uniform ... there were civilian women, they were prostitutes, and I know some of them were killed, because I saw one of them with a baby, that had been killed ... the mother and the baby had been killed ... the baby had no damage on the body, so I think it is probably of the explosion of one of the bombs ... 1000-tonner bombs, which killed her and the baby ... the only one I saw was this women and the baby, I didn't see any others, but there obviously were others as well ... because what sparked (inaudible) did, was ... especially school girls, they were sort of 16, 17-year old school girls, they had a technical college as well, (inaudible) Oshakati, where they abuted women regularly to become ... soldier's comforts, as it were, in the bush, and they had a special place set aside for them, we called it the prostitute area, of course they can't help it that they are prostitutes, they were not ... they did not go there willingly, they were forced into prostitution, and, so we had that problem. So there were some there, and I think they were the dresses, some of those that were killed and ... children, I saw the one baby, one of my ... Gerber, he grabbed a baby that was running around crying, and he carried this around during the attack ... (laughs) ... he was quite happy, the child was ... then he gave it to somebody else you see, I don't know what happened to that child, but anyway he carried this baby around with him, because he didn't want the baby get clobbered ... another paratrooper, a couple of paratroopers, they found some children in one of the huts, and they pushed them under the table, and told them to stay there, and not to come out because there is a fight going

on, and they stayed there ... they gave them sweets from the ration pack and so forth ...  
(laughs) ...

**INTERVIEWER:** About these school children, okay St Mary's was a school not far from Cassinga, where the 70 children were ...

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** No St Mary's was in Ovamboland ... they came from Ovamboland ...

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, so these children were abducted from Namibia and taken into Angola ... they were Ovambo children?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Ja. Over 200 kilometres, St Mary lie south of the cut line, it is an Anglican mission station ...

**INTERVIEWER:** And that mission station, is it still standing?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** Ja, it is still there.

**INTERVIEWER:** Have you managed to find any of the people who might have been working there at the time?

**COL JAN BREYTENBACH:** No ... I didn't no ... you see we went back to South Africa, and I was then signing up for 44 Parachute Brigade, I didn't go up there again, because ... I don't know whether the, 1 Military area or Sector 1-0, as we called it then, whether they went there to find out what was going on, I don't know ... I didn't bother to find out ... but it was an Anglican mission station ... and that is why I wrote a very thick thing to our bishop, I'm an Anglican, I wrote to the Bishop of Pretoria, because I fell under his diocese, about the march made by Desmond Tutu ... I said this is what happened, and you've heard his story, now this is my story, you see ... so he wrote me a non-committal letter back, he said it must have been terrible for you to have been there, and that sort of ... crap, it must be terrible for you, it must be a shock to your system and so on and so forth, I said but this guy is talking rubbish, Desmond Tutu. Desmond Tutu was of course, you know the chairman of TRC they were always on about Cassinga, and

he convinced the shop when they produced their photographs, air photos of Cassinga, then he realised it was actually a very strongly fortified base ... we had attacked, so it took the wind out of his sails a bit, nevertheless he still recommended that Constand Viljoen and I be prosecuted for human rights ... stories and so forth .. nothing had happened so far, because I refused to go to the TRC, said I've got nothing to apologise for, so ...that's their problem, if they one day want to take me to court, that's it, then Desmond Tutu must come and prove that I was ... I was the butcher, or whatever .. there are a lot of guys who would prove the contrary ... even Bishop Corgall(?), because he is a bishop in another church, he said there was no such thing, it was not a refugee camp, and it was a military base, it was a logistics base, a command, tactical command of SWAPO was based there ... they shifted a whole lot after this to Cubango, after Cassinga, so that is where they operated from afterwards ... so anyway, I was very upset about the fact that this guy tried to interfere, this Du Plessis, there is another thing which he did, which was totally wrong ... we were supposed to destroy the equipment, you know all the equipment ... like for instance the anti-aircraft tanks, we couldn't do that, because we'd taken explosives with us, we had two engineer officers who jumped in, who had the detonators with them ... we never carried detonators and explosives together, and these two engineer officers were told directly by Du Plessis, in the first lift while they were walking around, that they had to get into the chopper and get out, because they were filling up choppers you see ... so there went the guys with our detonators ... so the heavy weapons we didn't ... the rest of the stuff we destroyed, I mean like the ammunition dumps and so on, that went up by itself, I mean when you start shooting up it start exploding, and so on ... that was a bit of a bind actually, that we couldn't destroy the other stuff ....

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