

Project name: AL3283

Date of interview: 9 February 2009

Location of interview: Garsfontein, Pretoria

Language/s of interview: Afrikaans

Length of interview: 1 hour 14 minutes 56 seconds

Name of Interviewer: De Wet Potgieter

Name of interviewee/s: Colonel Vic McPherson

Name of translator (if any): De Wet Potgieter

Name of transcriber:

Notes on access and use (if any):

Audio file name/s of interview: AL3283_PTA_MCPHERSONVIC_20090209_3

Interviewer	I am talking to colonel Vic McPherson about the incident with the London bomb when he and several other agents were involved in. Vic tell us..
Vic	Here in the late 1970's, 1976, was the soweto uprising and all the school children and youth leaders protested about being taught Afrikaans in schools. They didn't want to know anything about Afrikaans. They revolted and a lot of them fled the country and ended up in bases for training by the ANC, SACP and Cosatu to manufacture bombs for a war of terror against South Africa. PW Botha took mr. Louis le Grange, he was then minister of police, outside the Union Buildings and said he wanted to tell him something on the steps. If you are America's Obama as president and if you are gordon Brown of Britain, there where you stay, there where you sleep, there where you make speeches- everything that a president says, all his telephone calls, and because in the Union Buildings, parliament building, everythings are being recorded and transcribed the next day to be arvhived. This is the history of this country. What each and every parliamentarian says, everything are recorded and transcribed. He then talked to Louis le Grange on the steps and said he was

	<p>concerned to see how many black policemen are being killed at their homes in the black townships. The ANC throws hand grenades at their houses. Although they were armed, there were no bullet proof vests in those days and they are being shot at with AK-47 rifles.</p> <p>Botha said he was concerned that the black police would start to think that the whites stay in luxury suburbs while they had to live in the townships where they have no guarantee that the community would protect them.</p> <p>He then said go on, talk to your men and see what you could do. The commissioner of police at the time was Johan Coetzee. At that time the minister was still in the Civitas building. He said to Coetzee that Botha, the president, wants to know what we could do to the ANC to send out a message that we could harm them anywhere if they blow up our post offices, police stations and other installations. He (PW) did not want to prescribe what to be done, but something should be done.</p> <p>General Coetzee then called Craig Williamson into his office and explained to him that this was coming from right at the top. We had to do something. What do you think what could we do? He said they had a proper dossier on the ANC offices in London. We had a surveillance team there on the ground operating from a modified Volkswagen kombi with an elevated roof and one way windows and an extra vantage point from the elevated rooftop.</p> <p>We knew what times people like Joe Slovo, Chris Hani, Solly Smith, he ran the office, and Gill Marcus visited the premises. That team was always there, every day. Craig indicated that he would draw up the plans. He said they had enough intelligence and other information for proper planning and requested Coetzee not to tell anything to the minister.</p> <p>So what happened then, what we did was, Craig started very selectively to identify people within our ranks because only the chosen ones would've known what was going to happen. Nobody else knew anything.</p> <p>We couldn't trust anybody because if you go over to do a job in England and you are caught it is straight twenty years- meaning that I wouldn't be able to set foot in that country for the next twenty years.</p> <p>Craig interviewed all the people he identified individually and briefed them on the operation.</p>
Interviewer	Who were the team?
Vic	<p>The team was brigadier, at that time colonel Piet Goosen, commander of intelligence section D. He had other sections also under his command, but we were directly under him.</p> <p>Good, he went, Craig, me, Vic, Eugene de Kock, John Adam and Jerry Raven- the most important man. Yes. We were six.</p> <p>The reason why we chose Eugene de Kock and John Adam was</p>

	<p>we did a lot of visits to Koevoet in Namibia. I think the issue was also discuss with colonel Wandrag, the then commander of the special task force. We needed protection on the scene, you know, we were not fighters, we were not used to killing people, but we needed people around us who knew how they act instinctively.</p> <p>They wanted to give us a guy from the special task force. I have a lot of respect for them, but I told Craig those guys have short hair and that typical "rifle eyes" that would be a dead give-away.</p> <p>I then said, no, when you want to do such a job firstly their English wouldn't be good enough. Secondly you have to be able to blend in with the people in London. You have to look like an Englishman.</p> <p>I had to drive the getaway car. Apart from the daily reconnaissance we had to look physically at the people. We even scouted the routine of the police hardly 100 meter from the ANC office to see what times they changed shifts and their frequent patrols. We checked them, their times, what times were they not close to the ANC offices. That was eleven in the evenings.</p>
Interviewer	But you say you wanted specific people to protect you. Who were the people fit for such a job.
Vic	<p>For those people we had chosen Eugene de Kock. We went through all our courses together. We came a long way together in the force, and of course, also John Adam, who I've met at Koevoet. They don't hesitate when they see here comes trouble, just like that "tweek" and the neck is broken.</p> <p>I told them, no, nobody from the task force. In the heat of the moment he may slip up and address me as colonel. You know, they were not used to living another kind of life. He had to get a new false identity and when he makes a mistake signing his real name in front of a bank official, or some slip-ups like that. But if you are a different person you also have a cheque book, traveller's cheques or American Express under that false name. You had to be conditioned to automatically sign your name as Klaus Dietrich. You do not go and buy travellers cheques from your own bank manager. You drive all the way to Johannesburg where nobody knows you.</p>
Interviewer	How did the planning went ahead, how was the bomb smuggled to England and how did you go over.
Vic	<p>Let us first talk about the way the bombed reached England. In those days they already had sniffer dogs at Heathrow and all the European airports. If you try to smuggle plastic explosives or detonators through those dogs would've sniffed you out.</p> <p>So we had to make another plan. We talked to Wahl du Toit and the technical section who worked with explosives and things like that.</p>

We explained that we had to get a bomb through the embassy into England. Wahl said he would look at Russian explosives which comes in small blocks and detonated through electric impulses.

He said he would build something. You cannot put the detonators with your explosives. If lighting strikes the plane and the detonators are packed with the explosives- BOOM- there goes the whole plane. There had to be much more safety measures being put in place.

Wahl then built us a wonderful radio. Firstly he took a piece of metal and put the detonators into it and welded it up and sprayed it green. Then he started building a ship's radio for our yacht in London. He built it in such a way with all the necessary wiring that it worked as a real radio.

Everything was in place then, sealed, no dog would smell those things, welded. X-rays, they only see the radio. It didn't have to go through X-rays, though, because it never went through customs because it was in the diplomatic bag for the embassy. We packed it properly in a box. What happened then- foreign affairs started to implement certain precautions- it was because certain individuals were using the diplomatic bag to ship bottles of KWV wines back to South Africa. During those years KWV wines were not available in South Africa. It was an export product.

I then took this box, and this is what I mentioned earlier, you had to open the box for the foreign affairs official to see what was going into the diplomatic bag. It was an overweight man who worked there on the first floor where all the diplomatic bags were delivered.

I opened the box and told him that I was not allowed to tell him, but we were busy building a yacht in London. No. That was quite alright, he said, and there was the bomb in the bag.

It was addressed to the military attaché in South Africa House.

We knew him well and when he received the box he would've known it was for us.

Peter Casselton was the man on the ground. Peter would go to the embassy. He frequented the embassy to pick up such secret packages, or he had gone to the embassy to seal things for us going back to South Africa.

What happened then was the bomb was on the plane and Peter made sure to pick it up at the embassy.

Now the bomb was there... we had different apartments, to have a place to assemble the bomb. The reason that Jerry was there already- he flew out a week earlier- was to build the bomb.

Back in South Africa everybody flew in to Pretoria and we set them up at Daisy- that was intelligence's training farm- we

trained all our agents there who were placed at university campuses and in the ANC's transito houses . They stayed in those safe houses and watched who were coming in and who were going out.

All those people were trained on our farm. When somebody was in training, it was only them and the training team there. No other people were allowed because the agents didn't know about each other. Everything was done individually.

And then we all got together and we went to Daisy farm for a week of training. We slept there, ate there and planned things. There were big photographs on the wall. The London road map, street guides, all the routes, the tube's routes we had to learn by heart, the routes of their red buses, how their taxis operated. Anything to do with transport we had to sit down and memorised.

Well, I've been in London on several previous occasions, but this time things were much more serious. We received our passports. Mine was for Klaus Dietrich.

New legends and new identities were created for us and everybody had a new background.

Jimmy Taylor, who came to help me, I've known him for years in Durban, would come and help me with the driving of the getaway car and reconnaissance.

We got our Nedbank American Express credit cards, cheque books. In that week of training and psychological preparation, we only addressed each other on our false names in order to get used to it.

Now, this one friend of mine had a book shop for university students and I asked him to write me on a letterhead what books he couldn't get in South Africa and wanted me to buy for him in London. That was my cover.

He wrote me a nice letter listing all the books he was looking for. When I arrived at immigration I made sure I looked impeccable with my double breasted jacket and grey pants, my hair and beard neatly trimmed.

We all passed through customs without a hitch, but some or other reason, I don't know if it was for Eugene and John's beards or the fact that they were well tanned, but Special Branch took them to an office for interrogation.

They were interrogated for three hours, but their cover stories and legends held water and they were finally released.

We already left the airport, but didn't see them anywhere. We only learned much later that they were detained. Special Branch subsequently put a special team monitoring their movements.

They entered England as tourists.

So now we had a week before the bomb had to be planted. We

arranged a week prior for us to walk certain routes or we had arranged at certain tourist spots at certain times, we don't talk to each other, we only check each other, we had pre-arranged places to meet like this. You sit there and drink a pint and you see, ooh, Eugene is alright, the brigadier is alright, Craig is alright.

You know, in this way we all saw each other and Jimmy and I stayed together. In this way we saw each other. So now we knew. We could relax. We saw each other in movies; we were at Madame Tussaud, the whole team, but never together. We never made eye contact, but Eugene did indicate that they were under observation.

So after the third day they indicated that they were not followed any longer. So we convinced that lot eventually. Little did they know they were watching the right people still plotting something. A kind of security block. Even if they pulled out your finger nails, torture you. When you do not know something, how can you tell?

We all stayed in different hotels. Jimmy and I in a guest house, no, a luxury apartment. It was paid in advance by the travel agency. Everything was paid in advance, the car as well.

The following 13 days we walked the routes, we travelled on the tube trains to familiarise ourselves with escape routes. We knew how to get out of England via the channel and to regroup in France when something went wrong.

We did surveillance. There was a pub next to the ANC offices, there did we, Jimmy and I consumed numerous pints while watching who were coming and going from the premises.

We also made a point of to locate the places where Chris Hani and Joe Slovo were living. It was open surveillance and we took photographs of the places.

While we were busy with surveillance, Jerry Raven and Peter Casselton, put a huge piece of plastic in one of the rooms of the flat they were staying in. And then Jerry Raven took two Zobo watches, he wanted to make double sure the bomb would explode, and he bought batteries, he bought wiring, he bought pliers. All these goodies to build the bomb.

And then it was just the final step to set the Zobo watches. They assembled the bomb and took that plastic they worked on to make sure nothing gets on the carpet. They folded that whole big piece of plastic up and put the bomb inside it.

It was the Friday night before we had to do the job. It was pre-arranged that we would leave our address at a certain spot, a newspaper somewhere with the address written on it. The last Friday they all knew where Jimme and I were living.

Now everybody had to report back. Everybody gave their inputs. What do they think? Where were there shortcomings? The one that bothered us was when we were previously at the pub next

	<p>to the ANC offices we could see taxis parked inside with the gates to the building wide open. When we checked that day before, the gates were closed. Were they suspecting something? We wondered.</p> <p>But, we decided to carry on with our plans. We were there and may as well get the job done.</p> <p>Everybody gave their feedback, the routine of the police beats-luckily the area was semi industrial and nobody were staying in the area.</p> <p>We bought pizza for the team. I also bought some south African wines and a bottle of KWV.</p> <p>While we were relaxing before the action, we talked a lot and then the brigadier suddenly interrupted and said, yes, it's all systems go. He would communicate in a coded way with Coetzee and tell him it was on.</p> <p>That night I parked the getaway car around the corner to keep it out of sight. Here comes the team. Eugene had to protect and assist Jerry. Peter Casselton had to bring the bomb to me. It was in a big tog bag, a green one, made of canvas.</p> <p>Now Peter hand me the bomb, and Jerry was thereand I could see Eugene is at his post, and john Adama at the other post and that everybody were ready for action.</p> <p>Now they first had to get over the gate, this is Eugene and Jerry. The only person on the premises was a guerrilla fighter on the fourth floor guarding the ANC offices.</p> <p>At that stage the adrenaline was pumping through our bodies. It had to be done quietly and swiftly. There I could see Eugene and Jerry disappear around the corner.</p> <p>They were at the door where they wanted to put the bomb, but the bomb was still with me. All I could do was to whistle in order to draw their attention.</p> <p>They came back fetch the bomb and Jerry did his thing with it. We calmly ly walked back to the getaway car. You never run, you stay calm in such situations.</p> <p>What we did with all those off-cuts wiring, pliers, battery containers, virtually everything that could link us to the bomb were in fact blown to smithereens with the bomb. All that was left, was a pair of shoes. We were travelling along the Thames. All the gloves, the shoes everything that didn't went up in the explosion were put in a plastic bag and thrown into the Thames. We were suppose to go to the Netherland for a relaxing four days after the job was done. We were booked into a luxury guest house in Amsterdam, but orders came that we should head back to South Africa.</p>
Interviewer	Now, why did you have to return to South Africa?
Vic	We were supposed to go to Holland, OK? The next morning we were all on the same flight to Frankfurt, but we didn/t sit together or communicated with each other.

	<p>When we landed in Frankfurt, it was still early; we were hungry and wanted to have breakfast. At that stage we were together and still under the impressikon we were going to Holland.</p> <p>While we were having breakfast, we heard over the loudspeakers: "Wilst Herr Joseph Slovo bitte nur kom ankumst." And there we saw Joe Slovo walking past us. We were at the same airport and there he was.</p> <p>Eugene said we would never get such an opportunity again, we have to kille right there. We all were carrying these old yellow Bic pens with us.</p> <p>We were taught if you stab somebody with a Bic pen just under his chest ribs you would be able to push the instrument right into his heart. He said Jimmy and I must keep an eye on him in case ge went to the toilet; we just grab him there and kill him. I then said to Eugene that is allright, he was at that stage South Africa's biggest enemy. I explained to Eugene the fact that he was called to reception meant that the bomb did explode. At that stage we still had no contact with South Africa to find out if the operation was successfull.</p> <p>I told Eugene we should leave his plan for another day. There will be another opportunity</p> <p>Then brigadier Goosen came back and told us that general Coetzee told him the whole world were looking for us. We were not going to Amsterdam and had to rush back to South Africa.</p>
Interviewer	What the Sunday morning?
Vic	<p>Yes, the Sunday morning. WE had set the alarm for the bomb for eleven hours. The Zobo was set for ten hours.</p> <p>Arriving back in south Africa, a driver was waiting at the airport to take us back to Daisy farm. A few generals and other people were waiting for us there.</p> <p>We had a braai (barbeque) and drank beer.</p> <p>The funny thing was we didn.t know yet if the bomb did in fact exploded or not. Now, the chap driving us from the airport told us that the news of the bomb was all over the news.</p> <p>The bonus was the fact that Jerry planted the bomb at a spot next to the offices where the ANC's printing press wa s standing.</p> <p>A month or so later we all received a decoration, the Police Star for excellent service.</p>
Interviewer	And all of you, the whole team, were granted amnesty for the London Bomb?
Vic	Yes, amnesty and all, because we all testified.