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Public encounters: the negotiation of ritual, risk and relevance in the performance of Johannesburg's National Remembrance Sunday ceremonies

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KBZ: I'd like to start with a bit of background. Can you tell me a bit about the history of your involvement in the military?

LB: I joined the naval gymnasium in Saldhana, I was a volunteer in 1956

KBZ: The gymnasiums were quite prestigious weren't they?

LB: Absolutely. There were three gymnasiums: army, air force and navy. I picked the navy because it was a thousand km from Johannesburg… and I've been a naval reservist ever since. So I went from being a trainee, to an ordinary seaman and then I didn't join the Navy's PF (permanent force), I joined the SAS Rand which used to be the Navy's reserve base. I joined in 1960. As a Naval seaman. I then became a Navy officer

KBZ: So this was all voluntary, in the time before conscription…

LB: Yes, we were all volunteers in those days

KBZ: But there was a balloting system where names were picked

LB: Yes they were balloted. And those chaps did 3 months, 90 days, and then it eventually became a year and so on. And then of course it escalated into fully fledged conscription in the 60s.

KBZ: But back to you…

LB: Yes. Then I was commissioned, and went all the way up the ranks, eventually commanded the regiment as a captain, in what was then known as the Citizen's Force. In those days the Active Citizens Force.

KBZ: While we're on that, can you clarify these terms a bit – Citizens Force, Active Citizens Force, reserve forces… they tend to be used inconsistently.

LB: The whole story about the Citizen's Force and the commandoes disappeared when the old Defense Act of 1957 was repealed by the Defense Act in 2002. The only two components in the defence force now are

the regular force and the reserve force – which consists of those people who used to serve in the citizen's force.

KBZ: So it is since 2002 the Citizens Forces no longer exist

LB: In fact they went on ice from about 1994 – when we started talking about the part time force and so on. Legally however they existed until 2002.

KBZ: How does the reserve force actually work? Is it a case of people signing up and then being available to be called whenever there is need for them?

LB: Let's take the example of the RLI for instance. The regiment has what you call a troop establishment, and it's about 300 strong. And it has an officer commanding, it has a second in command, etc. In other words it has a leading group of officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs). The senior non-commissioned officer is the warrant officer, who is normally the regimental sergeant major (RSM). And the officers and the NCOs are responsible to run the regiment in peace time. In other words they do the administration of the troops the corporals, those sort of people.

KBZ: And they do this on a part time basis, but it is paid

LB: It's all part time, some of it is paid, but some of it is voluntary. There is a certain budget which is given to the regiment, and they then have to use the money to run the regiment itself. But when they get call up to go and do training, and when they get deployed, say in peace support operations which are happening at the moment, then those troops get paid. So in peace time they do it over weekends, they do it in the nighttime, and they obviously have about 2-3 weeks a year when they do continuous training, they get call ups and they actually go camps

KBZ: So camps still happen?

LB: They happen and what we need them for is peace support operations where they get deployed for 6 – 9 months. We have two reserve units up in the DRC at the moment. And that's what they train for. But don't forget that we are now talking about a conventional Defence Force where we have specialist forces like the artillery, and we've got the infantries, which can be motorised, where there are vehicles in which the troops are conveyed, and the light infantries, which are actually foot soldiers… and then of course you have all the combat support units like the maintenance units which do logistics and different roles, the signalers… In any case, if you want to enroll in the Reserve Force you have to volunteer, sign a contract detailing how many days you are willing to commit yourself – it goes from about 12 days a year to an unlimited period,

you have to be medically examined, you have to fit the right profile, you have to have previous military experience or have appropriate qualifications to be enrolled in terms of the Act. Once you are enrolled you get your uniform, you get allocated to a regiment and you start your training.

KBZ: So you cannot choose the regiment you would like to join?

LB: You can. In the old days before 1994 your choices were limited. White males were conscripted in terms of the Act and they were the only people to who went into the service. And they were just allocated into regiments…

KBZ: While we're looking at definitions and technical aspects, could you clarify the meaning of the term 'Traditional Regiments'?

LB: The so called Traditional Regiments are those regiments who are 100 years old, some of them are 130 years old. There are two in the Eastern Cape, the Buffalo Volunteer Rifles who celebrated their 130 year anniversary this year, and First City, in Grahamstown, which is 131 years old. They were there even before the Anglo Boer War. Many of them fought against the Boers in that war.

KBZ: And they were self established, but supporting the British administrators, much like the Rand Light Infantry / Transvaal Volunteers in the Witwatersrand before they were officially recognised and British supported?

LB: Yes. A lot of our regiments, for instance the RLI, their predecessors were regiments who fought against the Boers in the Anglo-Boer War. The Imperial Light Regiment is probably the only surviving regiment from those days. So the Traditional Regiments are those longstanding regiments who either come from those eras or the First World War, even the Second World War where they have things like battle honours, they fought a conventional war and so on. So if you are a regiment that is only 25 years old than you are not really considered to be traditional… The Traditional Regiment is also one in which you have typical traditional regimental dress and so on. Like the Transvaal Scottish which wear a kilt, and the Witwatersrand Rifles wear tartan trews…

KBZ: The RLI don't seem to wear traditional uniform, with the exception perhaps of the mess dress…

LB: No, the RLI used to be known as the Bicycle Corps, and therefore that's why you'll find that they wear shorts, even in winter.

KBZ: I always wondered how they managed to ride the bicycle and shoot at the same time

LB: They had lancets!

KBZ: And the mess dress? Is that also a specifically traditional regiment thing?

LB: Well most regiments actually have mess dress. An infantry regiment for instance will wear the infantry mess dress, which is what the Permanent Force wears. So traditionally officers have mess dress. So they either wear the traditional ceremonial mess dress of the so called traditional regiment or the regiment has permission to wear regimental dress… There are specific regulations as to which regiments can wear what.

KBZ: So in the navy, how did this work?

LB: The navy does not have any distinctions. In other words, whether you are Reserve or PF, everyone wears the same.

KBZ: Were there any particular traditions at your regiment that do not feature anywhere else?

LB: We followed exactly the same naval traditions which prevailed, but what we did do, because we were exposed in the Witwatersrand to the Traditional Regiments – we were uniquely placed within a geographical area – the only naval base that is inland – we started taking on the traditions of the regiments – in terms of having mess dinners, in terms of getting the Freedom of the city of Johannesburg. SAS Rand – my naval base was in fact considered as – quote unquote – a regiment. Although we were only 50 years old. And we've been decommissioned... One of the things we started that was a first in the navy, we decided that when the officers commanding changed command, we need to have a symbol of this. What we did is we got an old telescope, and on the telescope, we had the name of the outgoing and incoming officer commanding engraved. So it was handed over as the symbol of command. That probably goes back to the 70s or the 60s. And the navy now does that.

KBZ: So traditions were changing all the time

LB: Yes they did. And many of our traditions were taken over by some of the other regiments.

KBZ: Any traditions that disappeared?

LB: Well, we used to all wear what was called the 'Square Rig' – in other words, the typical sailor's uniform with the bellbottoms, with the little square collar – all that has disappeared now. We all wear the

same uniform, whether you're a sailor or an officer. So that has changed. When I joined in 1956, these outfits were already gone.

KBZ: So does the Navy participate in the Remembrance Day parades?

LB: It always does, because it's part of the Defence Force. So it's army, air force, navy and in our case the South African Medical Services […].

KBZ: Can you tell me a bit about what the period of military integration was like?

LB: It just so happens that I was the last director of integration in the SANDF. I was called up as a reservist, retired from my full time job, and in 1994, I was approached to go and assist the newly established Defense Secretariat, making inputs into the white paper on defense. The country had to make up its mind what they expected its new Defence Force to look like what its posture should be and how it should serve the people, what they actually expect from their Defence Force. So we had to write a white paper on defence to say 'in our case the Defence Force will be…' Then we went into a big consultation process, which lasted a few years. We had to go to the various provinces and present it to people. It was an opportunity for them to make inputs, there were also public debates, parliamentary debates and that culminated in the Defense Review in 1999. And that eventually gave rise to the Defence Act of 2002. But for example, conscription was out. Volunteerism was in. And anybody in the country could volunteer to join the Defence Force, either as a reservist or a permanent force member. Now when it comes to integration, that was part of the negotiations that started once Mandela was released. There were lots of negotiations about the new South Africa and the establishment of new security services. In the case of the SANDF there were lots of discussions between the then commanders of the old SADF and *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, and eventually also APLA came on board, to determine what kind of integration process should be followed and how it's going to be done, and what were the criteria. So what they did, they said that all the members of the liberation movements of MK and APLA, had to be verified by a certified personnel register (CPR). And only those people who were certified and certified by their commanders, were given the opportunity to integrate. So there were two non statuary forces – MK and APLA.

KBZ: So the Self Defence Units in the township were not included?

LB: No. Because they were not considered to be MK cadres and they were not certified on the CPR. So that was the non statuary forces. Then you had the 4 independent homelands. The TBVC states (Transkei, Boputhatswana, Venda and Ciskei). Their defence forces had been trained by the SADF. They were known as the statuary forces. And then you had the SADF. So there were 5 statuary forces and 2 non statuary forces, 7 in all. And those forces, were integrated, in a process that started in 1994, and only ended in 2002.

Because they wanted to ensure that there was fair play, they approached the Brits to provide what was then known as the British Military Assistance Training Team (BMATT). They were the referees. And they actually had a representative on all the so called ranking boards. In other words, you had a conventional army with people with general down to private, all properly ranked. In the non statuary forces there were no ranks, there were only appointments. So everyone of those people who actually wanted to integrate into the SANDF had to go through a ranking and integration process. And they had to be scored according to about 9 criteria in terms of age, qualification, service, military qualifications, military experience, appointments held and so on. Based on all of those, people were then ranked… and lots of people who couldn't meet the medical criteria or many of the integration criteria had to be released. […]

KBZ: How did integration/ restructuring affect the Reserve Forces?

LB: The integration process had a huge effect on the reserves. At the top levels of the Defence Force – both the regulars and the reserves, we have previous MK and APLA senior officers. So obviously the transformation process also happened in the Reserve Force. It was much slower because it came much later. If you look at the RLI and some of the other regiments you'll find what we call the 'cremora' phenomena – white at the top, black at the bottom. You find very very few white troops – the levels of corporal etc., – at that level it's all black, and it's a very a sad story. Recently in parliament Minister Lekota noted that the whole question of equal opportunity, affirmative action and transformation, which affects the public service and also the department of defence and the regular Defence Force does not apply to the Reserve Force because that force is totally voluntary. Any person, whether they are white or black or female, are entitled to come and serve. And you serve on merit. Very interesting.

KBZ: But surely that doesn't relieve the responsibility of providing training opportunities and raising black volunteers to higher levels

LB: Absolutely. The whole idea is that you must train people. If you look at the RLI the second in command is now, not ex-MK, but a black officer.

KBZ: Officer Khanyile?

LB: Yes.

KBZ: Do you feel that the restructuring process involved the bridging of large cultural differences?

LB: Well our old regiments are based very much on British traditions. We tried to find a common ground of military ethos. To take account of where it comes from. If you look at military symbols, our badges for

voluntary service for example, it's now four spears, to indicate the 4 arms of the force (naval, air-force, medical and infantry), and that you get as a reservist. So symbols have changed. Language has changed. The fact that we now have 11 official languages means that although English is the operational language or the so called lingo-franca, depending on where you are, will determine which language you will use in the Defence Force. In other words if you are in the old Boputhatswana area, you'll find that they speak Sotho. It has been accepted that we need to accommodate other languages, traditions and ways of doing things. The food has changed.

KBZ: And in terms of formal services like Remembrance Day and the traditions practiced there?

LB: I can only speak for what happens in Johannesburg because I have been involved with Remembrance Day and the Freedom Regiments for many years. Being in the military at the time in terms of transformation and integration I said 'look, we mustn't wait, we must be proactive'. In terms of the city of Johannesburg, we made recommendations that were accepted way back in 1996 to rededicate the cenotaph, and there is a plaque to that effect, to say that we're not only remembering the dead of the First World War and the Second World War, we will in-fact become totally inclusive to remember *all* people who paid the supreme sacrifice, regardless of what conflict they were involved in and whose side they were on. If you sacrificed your life for your country, you will be remembered. That was the message of reconciliation and nation-building that President Mandela was propagating which we then took as our lead. And it was actually floated by the minister and deputy minister of defence, Joe Modise and Ronnie Kasrils who actually came.

KBZ: What was the event like pre-1996?

LB: In those years, in other words prior to 1994, we also made the point that the reserve force is a national asset that must be protected and maintained. And the ANC actually took that as part of their political platform, to say that we must have a viable, transformed and representative reserve force as part of the national Defence Force, and accordingly, the Act makes provision for that. So all those initiatives led General Meiring to say that we support the concept of remembering all those who paid the supreme sacrifice, so there is no difficulty there. The difficulty is in getting the MK and APLA veterans to come in numbers to Remembrance Sunday.

KBZ: And what do you think are the reasons for that?

LB: Unfortunately, the APLA and MK military veteran associations are dysfunctional at the moment. There are leadership and other problems. So it's very difficult to identify who the leaders are that should be attending as representatives. Fortunately for the Reserve Force Council, it has been totally representative

since it was started in the 90s as a voluntary organisation. It has a balance of people who were SADF pre 1994 and people who were MK. Now that the council has been made a statuary body in terms of the Defence Act of 2002, the appointments made by the minister are totally balanced between the previous statuary and non statuary forces. And there is a move now to move away from these definitions – we're all members of the Reserve Force Council. We must stop referring to each other as SADF or ex non-stats. Let us talk about members of the reserve force council. 12 years down the line, people don't want to be labeled anymore.

KBZ: Can you tell me a bit about your involvement in the Remembrance Day parades and what they were like at that time?

LB: I became involved when I was commissioned as an officer in 1963. SAS Rand used to be very much involved in providing troops for that parade. So it goes back that far. You must remember that in those days, it was still very much about remembering World War II. And we had about 2 – 3 thousand people in those parades. Veterans of World War II and their dependents. Of course it all changed. It was always inter-denominational. What happened was that the person leading the service was always of the same religion of the mayor of Johannesburg at the time of the event. So if the mayor was Dutch reformed it would be a Dutch reform chaplain etc. 'Black' religions, however– like we include today a Hindu and Moslem imam – they were never there.

KBZ: So you say that it all changed. Can you tell me about that?

LB: What happened was that the old World War II veterans, who would come in their thousands, faded away. They were not active anymore. If you look at the VE Day commemoration last year, we were down to about 300 veterans of World War II. And they were either in their 80s or their 90s. It's a bygone era. We took quite a dip in terms of the numbers of people attending because the new generation, in other words the chaps who were national servicemen fought an unpopular war so they did not particularly want to remember the fact that they had served. Or even remember the people who died. It was very difficult to persuade people to come and participate. The dip started there.

KBZ: Did tensions between Afrikaans and English speaking whites play a role in that?

LB: Yeah, sure, the whole history about why Remembrance Day and so on. It's an old British thing – but we kept it going, because we said that we need to remember the people who paid the supreme sacrifice. Because it says we will remember them. And therefore we must remember them

KBZ: What was the turning point of the event?

LB: From my point of view, it was the coming of democracy. The Reserve Force Council started talking to the different parties – the MK and so on – back the in the early 90s. To say that we need to have a strong reserve force. We also started an initiative that said that we must remember the sacrifices that the veterans made. Especially the MK veterans, because they had nothing. For 30 years they were in exile they come back to nothing. So we had to make provision for a viable reserve force and we had to put in the statute book legislation to look after veterans. On an equal basis. In other words everybody would be subjected to the same regulations, the same age and the same services. It didn't matter where you served. The context of this was the whole story of looking at veterans and other people who would not be able to integrate into the new Defence Force. So there was an interest in remembering. And there was legislation like the new South African Heritage Act where they were talking about inclusivity and so on. And that then gave us the lead to say that we needed to make it inclusive. Remembrance Day, the reserve forces, they need to be transformed like the regular force. I think that then started an interest going, and especially because people like Joe Modise and Ronnie Kasrils supported this, it became credible, and it was important that it would be implemented. To give you an idea, when we rededicated the cenotaph in Johannesburg it was in the presence of the then Chief of the Defence Force General Siphiwe Nyanda and Johannesburg's Mayor. And they were two blacks. And they were part of the struggle. But they were supported by the whites. So now we say a veteran is a veteran.

KBZ: So the move was initiated by the Reserve Force Council?

LB: It was in fact the Reserve Force Regiments who were participating in the Remembrance Day and it was the Mayor's task team. In other words we were saying 'guys, we've got to become relevant'.

KBZ: So would you say that it was a matter of survival for the regiments and the event?

LB: No I don't think it was that. It was to say that the times were changing, not to survive. What we were saying was that Reserve Regiments, prior to the turn of the century, had served different governments. They served under 4 different flags. All the reserve forces were saying was that as long as it is a democratically elected government, we will support the government of the day. We just want to have an opportunity to serve and we want to ask please we'd like to maintain some of our traditions which are still relevant, and to maintain certain military standards and so on.

KBZ: What were the difficulties experienced?

LB: Well, there were those in the old guard who asked us how we can work with these chaps who have just come out of the bush, they're untrained, they don't meet our standards and so on, but they were in the

minority. There were also voices from MK and APLA who said we don't particularly want to join a regiment in which the soldiers wear skirts, why would men want to wear skirts? So there was a bit of resistance on both sides. But of course one must bear in mind that if you look at the current composition of the SANDF, probably about 30% of those people don't come with any baggage. They are the new generation of South Africans who have joined the national force. Bearing in mind that there were 21 000 MK and APLA cadres who were integrated into the defence force and of those I think about half of them have left. So you are sitting with a 75 000 strong regular force, with say 10 – 15 000 ex MK/ APLA cadres. And so very quickly, those people will move out of the system and you'll have a South African National Defence Force made up of citizens who were not part of the struggle.

KBZ: I am aware that currently National Remembrance Sunday is managed under the hospices of the city of Johannesburg, which is somewhat of an anomaly – a national event managed by a municipality. Has that always been the case?

LB: It has probably changed by default because the National Remembrance Day should in-fact take place in Pretoria, the capital city. But because they do not have the support of the city's authorities, they've got a small committee. In Johannesburg, there has always been a close collaboration between the Defence Force and the city. In other words the Defence Force would do the organising – even up to this day, I am the chairman of the technical task team, I offer my services to volunteer and come and do it on behalf of the mayor.

Interview continued: 17 December 2006

KBZ: Specifically, why do you think this event is important to the Johannesburg?

LB: Well, Johannesburg is a premier city of South Africa. Because it's a big city it means that many of its citizens have been caught up in wars and conflicts. As far as the city is concerned it's important for them to honour the sacrifices made by those people. By its citizens. Now this has expanded in terms of other people being invited. So on Remembrance Day itself – the Sunday closest to the 11th of November, the city pay homage to its citizens.

KBZ: So it's a key cultural event for the city

LB: It's part of the fabric of the city, it's part of the heritage of the city.

KBZ: You spoke a bit about the process of reviving the event in our last interview, and while I recall that there was strong political backing for it, were there ever any questions from the city itself as to whether the event should continue?

LB: Well we first discussed it while Councilor Isaac Mogase was the Executive Mayor. As far as he was concerned and as far as the new council was concerned they were happy to support the idea. It was in fact the task team who made the suggestions that we need to become relevant. That was when we approached the Minister of Defence Joe Modise and his Deputy Ronnie Kasrils to ask them how they felt about it. Kasrils in particular was instrumental in crafting the final wording for the new plaque on the cenotaph. So there wasn't political pressure there was political support. When the new mayor took over – councilor Amos Masondo – he was very keen to get the communities involved, and the youth.

KBZ: I did notice that in the official council documents that you gave me about the event the 'strategic thrust' was at different times described in different ways. While some documents refer to the event as 'community development and health', others referred to it as 'good governance'! Quite interesting.

LB: Yes, it is.

KBZ: Can we talk about Rev. Carol Jack's involvement – what I'm particularly interested in is the disagreement that her sermons raised. Were there any other occasions or other issues on which disagreement surfaced?

LB: No, that was the first time. And it wasn't quite a disagreement, it was just that we felt that we hadn't given her enough to understand her involvement that it was an inclusive event remembering all those who had paid the supreme sacrifice. The other issue that came to the fore was that of religious sensitivity. There was never really any confrontation. The matter was discussed openly. In fact, when Warren Goldstein, the Chief Rabbi, was asked to lead the service we invited the Rev. to remain involved as the representative of the Christian aspect of the ceremony. By that stage she had already been recalled and was in a more senior position, and although she was pleased to having been involved in those years she was no longer available. It was really the Chief Rabbi, the MOTHS and the Infantry Association who contacted me to express concerns regarding the seeming move away from the main national and inclusive theme of the event.

KBZ: No other disagreements?

LB: No. In-fact, last year when we proposed that the chief Rabbi leads the event, there was full support. We've always made it a priority as a task team to motivate for changes. And the 2007 involvement of the police was very well received.

KBZ: I don't just mean disagreements with the council or other external bodies, I'm referring also to different opinions *within* the task team itself.

LB: Look, what happened was very interesting. The national Defence Force representative was very concerned about the fact that police who die on duty, are not people who are dying in wars or conflicts. He was just concerned that the Police Chaplain needs to be prompted quite clearly that the reference to the police needs to be part of a bigger message. So he was quite happy with the police involvement but stressed that it must be in context. We can't get away from the main theme and what the day is all about. We're prepared to support a specific event focused on police involvement, you can't have a Remembrance Day service exclusively dedicated to the police who died on duty.

KBZ: Who drives the task team and the event? Who are the people who bring new ideas and perspectives to the planning of the event?

LB: Well I think it's really between Eric Itzkin and myself. But other people also contribute and bring ideas. Warrant officer Tshabalala for instance was the one who suggested that instead of inviting many schools, we concentrate on just one school – let us go to a primary school from Soweto and get those kids come to the Remembrance Day – and we did tat this year and it was a great success. Because then we knew exactly – there were 60 people on the bus – in fact they squeezed 68, and we made them part of the parade. That is an example of new thinking. Basically Eric and I drive it, but people like John Hood who's now in the speaker's office – he has been involved for many many years – he comes with suggestions, and we listen to what people say and welcome their involvement.

KBZ: I do recall what you said about leadership problems in the MK, but isn't Tshabalala, as an ex MK veteran in the council and the task team, in the position to ensure that more MK vets attend?

LB: That's exactly the problem. As I explained to you last time, the leadership of MK and APLA are both dysfunctional. There are factions in the MK in Gauteng as an example. There are two sets of people who claim to be the leaders of MK vets in Gauteng. I don't think Alec Tshabalala belongs to either of them. So it's very difficult for him, from his level, to influence the MK involvement. Because we have no access to the chairman. The national chairman.

KBZ: I would think that his position and his level would allow him to do exactly that.

LB: They have their own things of doing things. We do our networking differently to the way they do it.

KBZ: I'm glad that you mentioned the involvement of the school kids. I have seen them in both last year's and this year's events. How do you think their involvement in the event impacts them? What values do they take home?

LB: Maybe I should go back a step. Traditionally the Junior City Council have always participated. In the past the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor of the Junior Council laying a wreath. For some reason that didn't happen this year, I don't know why, because usually they are part of the mayor's VIP group. And what we used to do and still do is get one of the uniformed people to attend one of the Junior City Council's meeting to explain them about Remembrance Day, what's it all about, then they get letters to take to their schools, inviting the school to send a selection of students from the prefects or class representatives, and we've had varying success. Sometimes we've had more and sometimes we've had less. The kids are always quite interested to talk about it and to hear what it is all about and why they should come and so on. So I think we've had quite a positive reaction because it's an historic event, it's a totally different experience. I have never spoken to the school kids to get feedback from them though. So I can only say that because we've had a response to invitations it's obviously successful if they are happy to come and attend.

KBZ: What have been the successes of the event?

LB: The greatest success is that we were able to rededicate the cenotaph, in a very formal manner and supported by the top levels – the Minister and Deputy Minister of Defence – and in the presence of the Chief of the Defence Force Nyanda and the then Executive Mayor. That was a symbolic move, and we were the very first council to make the monument and hence the event totally inclusive.

KBZ: So have other cities followed?

LB: I know that in Kimberly the event is inclusive. I also know that the event in Cape Town is also very well attended. And to my knowledge it's also quite inclusive. The other success is that it's an event that draws different people together who would normally not interact with one another.

KBZ: In what way and which people?

LB: It includes for instance both the Consol Generals of foreign countries, and the primary school kids from Soweto. So you have a range of people coming in. 100 wreaths get laid. And that is quite phenomenal. And people come and do it every year. So I think it's been an ongoing success in terms of community participation.

KBZ: So its success has been that it is able to draw different people to the same space, to in a sense grieve together, as well as feel pride together.

LB: Sure. It's also an opportunity for the Defence Force and particularly the Freedom Regiments to participate in numbers, in a combined parade, with a band.

KBZ: As the event organiser, who do you imagine your audience to be? In other words, which communities specifically are you targeting and expecting to attend?

LB: Well, I think in a way I've already answered that question. There are different groups of people. We would love to have the president attending. President Mbeki, in terms of the Military Veteran Affairs Act, is the Patron-in-Chief of all the military regiments. It is a role that previous president Mandela accepted when the legislation was drafted. The President always gets a motivated invitation for the event from the Executive Mayor's office, unfortunately he has been too busy. But that's the level at which it starts. And then you go down to ministers, we go to the minister of Defence, the minister of Arts and Culture, the Minister of Social Services. Busy people, so they don't usually come. And then you talk about the Chief of the Defence Force, Senior General officers in different regiments, they all get invited... It's important to have members of the Defence Force – they are the currently serving people paying homage to the veterans who were there before. Then of course the diplomatic corps is invited. We don't get the ambassadors because they attend the event in Pretoria, we get the Consul Generals because they are in Johannesburg. But we always get representation. The mayor also invited representatives of the surrounding cities. Then there's the premier of Gauteng, who normally sends a representative. So we work from that angle. And then you get to the regiments, and then you get to the veterans, who are obviously the most important people because it's really their day. So the focus is really on getting these groups of people to come. The community itself – busloads coming from Soweto, coloured youth coming from [not clear] and so on. And then there's a whole variety of ex-servicemen organisations who attend.

KBZ: But specifically, which communities in Johannesburg are targeted?

LB: It's all people from the community. The veterans are from the community, the members of the regiments are from the community…

KBZ: Ok, but when we talk about the community of Johannesburg, for instance, we are actually talking about many many different communities.

LB: Yes, and we can't invite the whole of Johannesburg because there is now way that we can accommodate all of its citizens. So you have to concentrate on the numbers that you can actually handle.

The mayor obviously expects his executive council to come. You must remember that the Executive Mayor is the patron of the event. It is a *civic* Remembrance Day. We in the military are there simply in support of the city. And that's the way it has always operated. We assist with the logistics and the coordination.

KBZ: What are the dangers and challenges to this event?

LB: I think the danger is that we need to remain relevant. In other words when the message begins to dissipate, where it becomes irrelevant and people lose interest. We had a very close call with people saying well if we're not going to remember the main theme of the day – remembering those who paid the supreme sacrifice – if we're going to talk about Aids or people who died in prison etc. – then we're losing what it is all about. So that is really the big danger. The other thing of course is that the event is a little bit personality driven. So we have to make sure that there is proper succession in terms of younger people who will be able to take over so I've always made a point of getting at least 1 or 2 people interested and motivated, and I've been very fortunate in that I've now got Godfrey Giles as a deputy, and he's very motivated. There are other people like Colin [not clear]. If I were to tell these guys next year that I'm not available, they can continue. And people like Eric Itzkin, he came from the other side and he was chucked into the deep end and he's incredibly committed. And we've always had some people like that from the council. Very passionate about this. So he challenge is to keep that passion going, to make sure that the event will always happen.

KBZ: I'm glad you raised the issue of relevance. There is a tension there, because while the event wants to keep its original intention, in many ways it has to compromise in order to retain this relevance.

LB: Let me answer to you this way: people were saying a couple of years ago why don't we have just one event? In other words why don't we commemorate all the battles? Let's take for example the battle of Square Hill, which is a big battle which took place in Palestine in 1918, where the South African Cape Corps were involved in a very difficult battle against the Turks, and all their officers were killed yet they nonetheless won the battle. That was a very strategic battle and a great battle honour for the regiment. Since then, this regiment always commemorates this battle on the 14th of September. Delville Wood is the 16th of July and has been commemorated on that day since the end of the First World War. There's the SS Mendi, which takes place in February every year. The question was raised as to whether we should combine all these memorials – and the MK ceremonies, and the APLA ceremonies, and the gunners and so on – and just have one combined Remembrance event. Very much like Freedom Park in a sense, which is looking at 6 different eras over the past 600 years. But then of course even Freedom Park remembers specific events. There was a long discussion about combining these events. The motivation was that it is the same people attending all these events. In this discussion it was also felt that people felt very strongly that those particular events that we remember on particular days, it's commemoration. They didn't mind also being

part of a bigger national event, but they didn't want to just be absorbed. They felt that commemorations must remain specific. Because that is what the veterans actually want. And it's the veterans' day. And while school children and other communities and stakeholders may attend, it's in support of that core concern. And it's no different elsewhere – in America, the UK, the ex-colonies – Remembrance Day is commemorated. And we're using that as a theme. That's also what we've got in Freedom Park now – we've got that wall of names

KBZ: But we have a situation in which World War II veterans are getting older and the few of them who are left will not be able to attend the ceremonies for many years to come. You have the MK and AZAPLA and AZANLA veterans, but even today their turnout is problematic, and it's unlikely to grown as they too, are getting old. We're thankfully in a situation in which not more people are dying in wars. Who will this event serve in the future? Who will attend?

LB: Well, you'll always have people who serve in armed forces, and you'll always have people who serve in the armed forces who will die, in conflicts or in battles. War has changed. The First and Second World Wars were wars where millions were involved and millions of people died. It was a conventional war, a war declared between nations. And fighting went on for years and years. Things are totally different now. But if you look at the African continent for example, right now, as we speak, there are probably about 50 or 60 different conflicts and civil wars ongoing. We've got a seat in the UN Security Council, there's the African Union, and we have mandate to provide peace enforcement or support. So things have changed, but you still have people who die. And what is happening now, it happened after World War I when the vets slowly faded away, then we had World War II, there was Korea, and those veterans who served used to come to Remembrance Day. So when their turn comes, the fact that you still remember people who paid the sacrifice, with current members serving and marching is important. The current members, once they retire, they join other military organisations and associations. There's a group who now calls itself the Military Association of Gauteng. And they are comprised of current members, who are no longer serving. But they are the new generations. They are the Godfrey Giles of this world. The generation after mine. And they believe that we should remember. And that's what will happen. Those are the people who must carry on the passion: those who ask do we still commemorate? Do we still remember? Do we still have to remember?

KBZ: You rightly note that the nature of conflicts and wars has changed. In trying to expand the relevance of the event, who decides that the police dead and the issue of crime can be included, and the question of the 'war' against AIDS can't?

LB: The police in the past have participated. It was quite interesting because we actually considered giving the SAPS the Freedom of the City. And then as part of the military march past they would be on par with

the Defence Force. Then we did a bit of research and discovered that the police already have the freedom anyway because they are here to protect the citizens. It's different to the way the military operates as the nation's security force. And they actually have to protect the citizens. Whereas the Freedom Regiments, are in fact invited to protect the residents of a particular city, only once they have offered. And then the police didn't have the time anymore, the police college was not producing the people who come and march, they were having operational problems and so on. So in the past 10 or 15 years, the police has not participated. Although they were always there to lay a wreath – either the National Police Commissioner or the local or provincial. After the event this year, the police have indicated that they would like to resuscitate that participation. So although in the future we will not remember specifically the sacrifices made by the police, they will certainly be part of the event. And maybe the next generation will then decide that police dying in the line of duty need to be remembered as any other security force member who has died. It will probably just be a natural evolution.

KBZ: So you are just taking it as far as you can, to the limits that make sense to you, and the next generation will continue the transition.

LB: For sure. And I've changed. I suggested in the early 90s that we look at the relevance of the day, should we still do it, are people interested in doing it, are people in APLA and MK interested, so I think we're getting there. But you made a very good point. MK and APLA's, or the military veterans associations are short lived because there's no feeder. The people who participated as cadres in those liberation movements, in the next 10 or 15 years, there'll be no more people left who would be active enough to even worry about. Even in terms of numbers, there are not too many of them. So with the MK and APLA military vets associations there is an end date. Like for instance the Korean veterans, if they all die, then we have no Korean vets anymore. So those members, will no longer participate. But if you are a gunner, or an infantry man, or a naval officer, those corps will remain, and they have a natural feeding. People are interested in joining military veteran associations. So that will carry on.

KBZ: But the character of it and what will be remembered will change.

LB: It will, because it will depend on the members and what their interests are. Our minister of Defence for instance is very keen to have just one military veteran organisation. Instead of the roundabout figure of 25 which we have. But the minister does not appreciate the fact that, for example, I'm a member of the Naval Officer's Association. We meet for a very specific reason. We're very happy to be part of a bigger federation and even become members in our own right, but not at the expense of us having to disband. And just become one big amorphous body of military veterans. He thinks that all people leaving the defence force now should join a new organisation. Because MK and APLA are no longer there. But what he doesn't appreciate is that there's a feeding into the other organisations that keeps them relevant.

KBZ: The most interesting thing by far about these ceremonies are questions of culture. Now, although the event is now days about community building and inclusivity, and is very much of an international event, it seems to me to come from a European, or at least a commonwealth tradition. It first and foremost refers to wars where Africans have largely been invisible, they make extensive use of European symbols and imagery – for instance poppies, forests, meadows. In addition, The traditions of some of the regiments more than others seem to lend themselves more easily to the practice of parading. When watching the event, one really gets the sense that those 'traditional' or 'freedom regiments', with their fancy uniforms, Scottish kilts and other paraphernalia, really have practices and culture that lend themselves more easily to this tradition of parading, as opposed to the AZAPO and MK veteran associations that almost seem to be marching in rags. Is it really a case of an inclusive event that integrates diversity, or is it more a case of one set of military traditions overshadowing and eclipsing another? Aside from what you mentioned, have there been other moves aiming to diversify and 'africanise' the symbolism of the event?

LB: Let me start with that. Military veteran organisations like the veterans and the MOTHS, they wear a blazer and a tie. And they wear it with a tin hat. And that's what they wear as a veterans organisation. Now MK said to me that traditionally their veterans do not wear jackets and ties. But they do wear T shirts. So this year we then sponsored 100 t-shirts for MK. Because that's what they wear, and that's what they feel comfortable in. And then of course the kids also wanted t-shirts. The shirt did not mention MK it simply said 'National Remembrance Day'. So we could wear it over and over and I think that's the story, that we are not expecting people to wear jackets and ties to come to Remembrance Day. And if you look at the Transvaal Scottish, if you look at the troops they are all black. So those black troops, wherever they come from, and they come from various tribal traditions and language groups, they bring their own culture into the Transvaal Scottish. So it has an impact.

KBZ: But how do they bring their traditions into the regiment?

LB: Well, I'm an Afrikaner, and Afrikaners didn't join the Royal Navy.

KBZ: So for instance, could they change the uniform if they wanted to?

LB: Well you still talk about naval star but that's tradition. It doesn't change. The fact that you have so many watches on a ship and they have specific configurations, and it's got a certain tradition in terms of the commerce of the sea, that doesn't change. But people change. The way in which you have your mess dinners might change, the food that you eat might change, the way in which you pray might change.

KBZ: So you're taking the view that change is a slow process. Is there not some impatience? Is there no resistance to continuing some of the traditions from yester-year?

LB: Well, some of the black generals are asking who are the funny people in the dresses, why do we have this? But a decision was taken when the SANDF was established where the regiments made a plea to say: there's a certain reason for why we follow certain traditions and we would very much like the new authorities to accept the fact that we come with a certain history, in some cases more than 150 years old, but we've evolved over time, and because we are transforming to the extent where we have new leaders, officers and NCOs coming in from other cultures and language groups and colours and so on. So those people will start impacting the way in which the Transvaal Scottish have been practicing their traditions for the past 100 years or so. So it just takes time because it depends on the leadership. And for the moment, people who join accept the way in which the Transvaal Scottish exercises its traditions. But the SANDF, as a bigger force, is now comprised of 7 former forces, whose officers and NCOs at various points impact on the way in which they operate, and what language they utilise, and how parades are run. For instance, bands have changed and they play different music.

KBZ: Really?

LB: Yes. They no longer simply play traditional European marching tunes. We've got aspects of african music and culture. If you look at the naval band, we've now added drums. Traditional African drums.

KBZ: So are these used for marches?

LB: No, that requires marching with instrument and you can't march with a big African drum. Don't forget that the bands do not only play when there's march. They participate in all sorts of military occasions, where they provide what is called musical honours. And the music has become African.

KBZ: But focusing on the Remembrance Day Parades, which is the specific occasion I am looking at, has the marching music changed?

LB: Well, if you march you've got to play a march. So if you don't have a march in Africa where are you going to look. You actually have to play something that's got a beat. I don't really mind what music it is. As long as you can march with it. And in fact the black troops like marching with the piper bands because it gives them a rhythm.

[…]

KBZ: and any other way in which the event has changed?

LB: The main thing is that we always used to have one chaplain, or Rabbi, who was the Mayor's chaplain or Rabbi, whereas now we have at least 4 representatives of main stream religions. So that is quite a substantial change.

KBZ: So the changes cannot happen overnight.

LB: Sure. And I as one individual can hardly effect the nature of the event. But the event has become inclusive, it's become relevant, it's become transformed. It's helped towards building a nation, it's part of reconciliation to say a veteran is a veteran is a veteran. And let's remember them. And that brings me to Freedom Park about which we have to ask some questions. We had a 30 day border war in Angola. The Cubans who fought on the side of the liberation movements, who died, their names appear on the wall. But the white male conscripts, who really had no option but to serve because they had been conscripted, and who also died, because you can't have a battle without casualties on both sides. And if we are now talking about our veterans regardless of which side they fought on, and we remember them in the same way, it seems that the Freedom Park is a little bit out of sync as far as that is concerned. They do not have any other names of the SADF servicemen who dies in the border war. Everyone is there except the old SADF. Now there is a question there, because these men are part of the SANDF's role of honour, which goes way back to the First World War. From the people who died serving in the Union Defence Forces, every single person's name is on the role of honour. And it's still being kept up to date. We are simply saying that if we are talking about Freedom Park being totally inclusive, and we're talking reconciliation and nation building, than this is out of sync. As the Reserve Force Council Association, and also for the Council of Military Veterans organisations, we've posed a question to the Freedom Park management asking why we should not have the names of those SADF conscripts on that wall of names. […]. It seems to us that if you really want to make it inclusive – what we understand is the whole idea – than you need to make it relevant to all the communities in the country. […].

KBZ: Going back to the Freedom Parade this year, it was different from last year's in that it included in the parade a tank and an anti aircraft…

LB: Gun. And it wasn't a tank, it was in fact the G6, which is a mobile artillery piece. It's a mobile gun. So it's self propelled. The other one has got to be towed. The reason why they participated is if you have a freedom of entry parade – remember what it means symbolically – fixed bayonets, colours flying, drums beating, flags flying – means that you are able to indicate your battle honours and our regimental colours. But the artillery – those people who fire guns – their colours are in fact the guns. So those two pieces of very large military equipment were in fact the colours of those two regiments. And in the case of the

Witwatersrand Rifles, the colours are actually carried on the pipe major's pipe bag. They do not have a banner. So they all have banners except those in the artillery because they don't carry a banner. The particular gun, which they man, happens to be their colour.

KBZ: I'm sure there was quite a substantial cost involved in bringing those pieces of equipment to Johannesburg for the parade. Do you feel that this expense is justified and brings sufficient benefit for that cost?

LB: Well, what was happening was that we were very thin on the ground. We had two parades, one on the Saturday and one on the Sunday. Now with the Sunday one, we concentrated on getting the people. With the Saturday one we concentrated on getting the military. General Anderson who is the Chief of Defence Reserves called to say that it was a wonderful parade and we got very good publicity in terms of media and TV and so on. But, the audience only happened to be the people of Johannesburg who were there on that Saturday morning. And so really and truly if we want to display the image of the Defence Force in terms of its troops and equipment and so on, next time that we have a Freedom Parade we need to specifically invite people to come and attend the event. We really had very few people there. In other words few invited guests. I mean there were 1000s of people who saw, but what the occasion and meaning was, they probably didn't even know. So we've picked up on that one, we need to be careful. The reason why we did the two one after the other was that it was the same people participating in the parades. Which meant that we could have one dress rehearsal for both events. And traditionally the Freedom Regiments want to exercise the Freedom of the City.

KBZ: So the idea behind showing the equipment was that of displaying a more impressive image of the military?

LB: Yes. Because it shows you that the defence doesn't only mean marching troops. People don't appreciate that people are actually there to fly aircraft, to drive ships, to drive tanks, to fire big guns – that's the conventional defence force.

KBZ: From what I understand, following 1948 there were some dramatic changes in South Africa's military – attempts to 'purge' the forces of British influence and inculcate Afrikaner culture. I also know that an aspect of this was the forbidding or World War I & II commemorations. How was Johannesburg's Remembrance Day ceremony affected by these political shifts?

LB: Let me comment on the statement you make because it's quite right. But the point is you cannot force it from the top. Although there were a lot of politicians and senior generals who were political appointments – because you are expected to be loyal to the government of the day – there was a huge drive

to Afrikanerise the military, where they even changed the ranks, they wanted to put everyone in the same uniform. I had the dubious honour for a very short time to be known as a sea Kornett, because they used the old Boer ranks. So they had the Kornet and the Kaptain and the kommandant and so on. And it just didn't work. […] They closed the messes down, and there were all sorts of other moves, but, despite their best efforts, they could not succeed in creating a totally Boer army. What did happen is that they started Afrikaans speaking regiments. […] Certainly those Afrikaans regiments became involved and they were supposed to carry the political ethos and traditions of the commandoes and so on, but then of course the commandoes did that. So it was accommodated in that way – through the creation of separate regiments to carry on the Afrikaner traditions.

KBZ: But with regards to the Remembrance Day parade? I know that for some time the apartheid administration tried to prevent World War I and II memorials as they were references to the commonwealth – how did Remembrance Day parades take place during those days?

LB: Johannesburg never played into that because don't forget that Johannesburg was United Party in those days. It was never a Nationalist council. So despite all those oscillations over that 50 year period, Remembrance Sunday in Johannesburg just continued.

KBZ: A technical question. The route that the parades take today, is that the route that was historically taken? Because in some of the documents I have seen that the route for parades went past the Braamfontien centre. Why did it change?

LB: The city hall to the civic centre was a route for the Freedom Regiments for the Freedom of the City Parade. It was practical because they have a huge piazza at the civic centre where the service could have been held. In other words the parade would have ended there. So the Freedom Parade march – its route – is different to that of Remembrance Day. The Remembrance Day Parade always starts from Harrison Street Bridge because it's the direct route to the cenotaph and allowed the soldiers to pay homage to the cenotaph on their right. So that's never changed. It's always from Harrison, to Market – Commissioner for the veterans so they take a short cut – and into the cenotaph site where they take up their places. I remember in 86, we had a big combined Freedom parade where we marched from Rissik street, past the city hall – that was before they did that traffic island in the middle of street – now it doesn't lend itself to a march anymore. You can't march like that. And some of the Freedom of the City marches have in fact been down Harrison. The only reason why they now do it in Simmonds street is that there are trees there – a place for VIPs. And the event does not incorporate the cenotaph.

KBZ: You mentioned music before and can we just go back to that for a moment. What are the particular tunes played during the Remembrance Day parades?

LB: We have been getting the Salvation Army, probably for the past 50 years, to participate in the event. And it's become a tradition. What we have done on a number of occasions we actually got the Soweto Choir to come and sing. But they are a bit expensive. So the council decided that it's not part of our budget unfortunately. But it worked well. I think we had them on about 2-3 occasions. The Salvation Army played the music and they did the singing. It was tremendous because they are colourful, and they sing well, and they move well, but as I say, the Salvation Army does not charge, and the Soweto Choir does.

KBZ: What I am referring to more is mentioned in documents that I have looked at, some South African produced, that say that something called the 'Windsor Chimes' is traditionally played on Remembrance Day. There was also another tune mentioned, I can't recall the name right now. Do these tunes feature in the Johannesburg Remembrance Day ceremonies?

LB: I must be quite honest with you, I've never been concerned with what music they play, I've only been concerned with what hymns they are going to sing – whether these meet the requirements of both the Christians and the Jews because there's always a thing about that. But what those are, who plays them and why they play them, honestly, I don't even want to hazard a guess. What we do is we play a lament, which is what the piper does, and that is just an ordinary Scottish lament, a very mournful piece of music to lament the dead.

KBZ: And with regards to march music, I understand that some regiments have a particular march music that only they march to.

LB: Yes, some of them have got their own regimental marches. In the event the bands play whatever is part of their repertoire. They come and do their own thing, as long as it's got a beat. We never ask them what march they play and whether it's Scottish or something else. I think the medical services band also participated this year. They also played whatever was in their repertoire. Whatever march music they actually know. And as far as the Westminster Chimes go, it's an interesting question that I'd like to pose to the musical people. The Salvation Army sings songs that are religious in nature if you like.

LB: Oh yes I also wanted to mention to you with regards to African traditions. Now we spoke about it at length. And what happened was that we then put a question to the council asking how they feel about the use of the poppy in the Remembrance Day event. Do they feel that in that the new South Africa it still has relevance, or do we need to look at another sort of symbol. It was debated, and the answer was that it's part of what happens internationally. And because our format is – as you were saying – based on the UK example, it was felt that the poppy is still relevant. Don't forget that thousands of black soldiers died – also in Flanders. And so if the poppy is a relevant to all soldiers, than the poppy is relevant. Because it also

remembers those soldiers who died. And what we had then done is we went away from the typical European poppy to an African poppy from beads. So that's what we have done.

KBZ: So are you aware of what discussions preceded the decision and who were the councilors debating?

LB: No. We just put the question to them through the available channels, via the Arts and Culture services or the speaker's office. What probably happened is that they sounded the mayor, who by then had gotten used to his poppy which he begins wearing a week before the ceremony, and he felt that the poppy was fine. This was a couple of years ago.

KBZ: Do you have any documentation relating to that discussion?

LB: No. […] It may have been that I spoke directly to councilor Christine Walters who was at the time the councilor for community development. So it was just a verbal question.

(Shows publications and publicity for 2005 event in Classic Feel magazine and pamphlets) informal conversation before interview.

EI: …In many ways the event repeats itself year by year. Last year's was different in some ways though from the previous couple of years. Prior to last year we had a person called Rev. Carol Jack officiating as the main cleric, and she was important from the point of view of transformation. She was an ex-MK veteran and she happened to be a Methodist minister and she's a woman. I think we had her for about 3 years – she officiated the event from 2002 to 2004, and I wasn't actually around for 2004 I was overseas I've been otherwise with the event continuously for about 4 or 5 years – but apparently Rev. Jack's Sermon at the 2004 event raised some heckles. I don't know if you about this. There are letters of complaint here which I've copied for you – one from a military source and another from the office of the Chief Rabbi – which say that they thought that what she said that year was inappropriate. It was harping a lot on the struggle and on Christian imagery and the idea of the service is that of an interfaith event that is inclusive… I wasn't there so I cannot tell you how justified I would find their claims but there were people there who were clearly put out, people who've been associated with the event for years and years. So partly with that in mind – and there were other considerations – we moved the religious side around for that year, we had Chief Rabbi Goldstein officiating as the main religious leader for the first time that year. I think that was significant and all of the thinking around that is may be of interest… (shows letters and comments on pamphlets) – You can see how we've moved the imagery from then to now [imagery shifted from pictures of real poppies to images of the flowers made of beads] I think that's a good move it's been well received.

KBZ: I was expecting to get a bead poppy when at the service…

EI: We did think about that but it would have cost about R18 a piece. We had a few made for the mayor and VIPs but for the rest we had the ordinary one that is used overseas, as seen on BBC and other media.

KBZ: I remember last year you distributed poppies made of fabric

EI: That's right. Those cost about R6 a poppy and the imported paper ones which has international acceptability costs R1 each. We have to look at cost savings. We actually cut back on quite a few things this year, but I think without losing anything essential. It was the best event I can remember for years.

KBZ: So the background of my interest in this topic is that I came across this event and found it to be really surprising. It raised a question for me of what place do these traditions have in contemporary post apartheid South Africa and what place do these memories and identities have. From what I understand, for

a number of years the event was close to a kind of 'death' and had been on a decline. I was wondering if you could start by telling me about the event during its popularity – in its good years – and about its decline and the reasons behind this decline.

EI: I don't know if I would characterise the event as undergoing a serious decline. You might want to talk to Admiral Bakkes on this and other issues because he has being associated with the event for much longer than me, and he could give you some sort of comparison maybe – I'm no sure for how long he has been involved but maybe even going back to the apartheid years – the latter years of apartheid. Maybe it's true to say that it was at a bit of a low ebb and needing to be revitalised. At the same time it's an event that has a certain constituency historically, who show continuing interest and loyalty and so forth. When I came in as an outsider I was given responsibility to manage this event on behalf of the city and, to be honest with you, I didn't have a very strong identification with it. I also had a lot of other commitments but I just had to buckle down and deal with it. As time has gone on, I have come to understand a bit more of what it means to the people who participate and who have an emotional investment in the thing, and I've come to share some of that as well – while also wanting to move it along and keep it meaningful. My feeling in taking it on was that it seemed to be quite a dry ritual with a lot of history – but not that much immediate relevance. There's always a danger in that, but at the same time I think that there is a good case why it should continue. The argument is that it's important in South Africa, especially for nation building. We've got a conflict ridden history, and very divided military traditions and this event has actually been successful in welding together very disparate forces and histories in a relationship that is reasonably comfortable… there's always going to be a bit of an edge to it and so on, but you had very different value systems and we've managed reasonably well to bring those together so that former guerrilla fighters and SANDF stalwarts from the old days are able to have some kind of shared understandings, shared symbols, shared rituals… all of those things are important.

KBZ: I said that the event was going through a decline because that was one of the things said on the SABC broadcast of the event, so there is that perception out there. The commentator actually congratulated the city on this year's event, saying that it is much more lively and getting new relevance... And that makes sense in terms of what you were saying about it being an old tradition with a particular constituency, that may be undergoing a bit of a crisis. I was just wondering whether during that period of decline – that I understand was the 90s and especially post the 1994 elections and change of government – whether there were there any questions or objections regarding the ideological framework of the event, or even questions as to whether the event should continue at all?

EI: I don't know going back that far… I think it would be very interesting to investigate that period into the early years of democracy and perhaps Admiral Bakkes can throw light on it. There are also other people within council who were involved – a person like John Hood would be a useful informant. He's passionate

about this event, and he's also very loyal to the ANC administration within the city. He's been associated with the mayor's office for a good few years. What I can say is that the present mayor, who is into his second term, is very positive about this event, I think it's unique in his calendar and he believes in it. At one point about 3 years ago, the question was raised as to whether the event should be moved elsewhere. The idea was to maybe have it for year at a site like hector Peterson, and the mayor's decision about that was 'No. It would remain here at the cenotaph'. The reason he gave was that he has a strong commitment to the inner city – it was a special priority at the time – and he thought that the event helps support that kind of commitment and make it visible. I imagine that if he had a real problem with the symbolism of the event or with that monument, it would have been easy to just take it somewhere else. People seem, I think, quite comfortable with the event. If you look at the leadership of the city over the last few years – I suppose it's always a matter of degree – you don't have most of the mayoral committee coming, but you have some of them but it's not as if people express any sort of problem or diffidence about the ceremony. If we take a long term view, it's a ritual that has been going in Johannesburg for 80 years and I don't think there's ever been a point where any of the political administrations have really moved away from it, so there's an element of strong strong continuity to it as well.

KBZ: That is quite surprising, taking into account that the Apartheid Government, especially in the 60s was so vehemently against any kind of references to England, and that included commemorating the world wars. From what I understand soldiers were not permitted to wear their world war badges and medals, and ceremonies of honouring the dead were not allowed.

EI: Yes… I suppose I haven't gone into that. There are many ideas embedded in the event which politicians could query or we could query. For example, the event really makes an equivalence between all deaths, and honours people who died for various different reasons, under different circumstances and on different sides in what became a low intensity civil war situation. So if we are going to pick away at the surface, there are difficulties. But what it does do is it provides an umbrella where we can all feel some sort of sympathy and understanding with people who've suffered loss, with the idea of loss, and the idea that we actually want to make a nation in the spirit of moving forward. So I think in the end it's that idea which is meant to carry it, and I think basically it is successful.

KBZ: Just as an aside and as a point of clarification, can you explain for me what the Traditional Regiments are?

EI: I don't know that term. What we have in Johannesburg and in other cities are the Freedom Regiments. Those are the regiments who have special recognition from the mayor and from the city. They're meant to be regiments that have been of special service to the citizens of that city in one way or another, and they are adopted by the city, and they pledge allegiance to the city and to the mayor. There's a long tradition to it,

probably from England. There's also a visual spectacle which involves the right being conferred to the regiment concerned to march through the city – it's like they have the keys of the city or a special ownership – they have a special phrase for it: they're entitled to march with drums beating, bayonets showing and colours flying. In the case of Johannesburg we have now 15 regiments that have that right, and they exercise it for the first time in a ceremony where they are given this honour and there's a special scroll presented to them. If you go to the council chamber in Braamfontien, there's a Freedom Regiment sword at the bottom of the building on the South side, near the miner's monument. The sword has the names of all of Johannesburg's Freedom Regiments inscribed. They've run out of space now, so they'll have to have some sort of plan. There's also the special scroll, and they might have a copy of some other memorabilia also associated with the event in the entrance to the council's chamber where the councilors meet. So there is a whole ceremonial aspect to this right, and it seems to mean a lot for the regiments. They are called out for special occasions, the biggest one recently was where Nelson Mandela was awarded the title of 'Freeman of Johannesburg' and some or all of them marched for him. That was a highlight. They show their support and commitment on Remembrance Sunday, so the two traditions are connected. Many of the regiments that turn out on that day are Freedom Regiments

KBZ: Can you tell me a little bit about the 'behind the scenes' activities of the events, who are the individuals/ organisations whose voices are represented? What are their interests? How are decisions made? Have there been (or are there) any points of disagreement about how the events should look, their themes or be organised?

EI: We have a Remembrance Sunday technical task team which convenes here. Admiral Bakkes leads the task team while I represent the city, and then there are representatives from the various military veterans associations – not just the traditional ones but also MK and APLA. I don't even know the backgrounds of all of the military people, but they're upholding their own traditions and the existence of the freedom regiments gives it a basis for support. What I've tried to do – and I'm as far as you can get from a military person: among my interests are non-violence and Gandhi, I evaded conscription, this is about as close as I have gotten to the military – apart from cadets as school – so it doesn't sit naturally with me – but I think it is important to have a mix of ideas and thinking. And maybe this gives me an ability to challenge some of the accepted things and to suggest some changes. I've tried to do that in a way that is fundamentally non-disruptive because at the end of the day we have to all deliver an event every year and these people are stakeholders as far as our department is concerned, so we have to make common purpose. This year is a good example because what I suggested was a fairly radical movement from what has always been: to say that we have to be aware of what is happening out there on the streets with the crime situation, and the terrible toll that it's taking on police people. Mostly this idea was accepted. There was some sort of disagreement that was raised at one of the last meetings we had before the event itself, and somebody said – look this is not what the event is about internationally and we can't just swing the focus away from the

military towards the police. My answer was that we wanted to keep the event meaningful, and Admiral Bakkes who supported this point of view, argued that the battle against crime is like a real war, and this reality needs to accepted. We also convinced the task team by saying that this is a special theme we've chosen for this year, and it doesn't do away with what the event has always meant and what it should continue to be. In a way this is a pity because what do we do for next year and so on. I don't want it just to slip back. We just have to keep alive and thinking as we move. We have made the event meaningful for a whole new group of people, and we hope to keep the SAPS engaged. Just today, I heard from someone at the metro police, that they are wanting to become more involved and the Chief wants to lay a wreath in future. Those are very important advances that we can point to. It's like moving between accommodation and challenge. I think, if we look at the event over the past few years, I think that bringing in the MK lady cleric, must have been something that some people would have not chosen, let's say. But the event is important for them, and they could at the end of the day accept it. It came to a certain point where her form of rhetoric and ideology went too far for them, but I think out of the process they learnt, and the event advanced, as it did while she was associated with it. Now this transformation is to keep going. All of these messages, like even the message from the police chaplain in this last year, are important [in the manner in which relate the themes of the events to contemporary issues]. I've got other ideas for the next time, to have someone from the Commission for the promotion & protection of the rights of cultural, religious and linguistic communities – Dr Guma, who's a very sensitive and enlightened person on issues of reconciliation, human rights and culture. I think that will be a great one. We were in fact going to have him this year but we have to move him forward because of the police theme and we wanted the (police) chaplain to lead. I think it's a learning process for the people involved. We shouldn't just see them as static, part of this process is about educating them, as well as broadening the event up.

KBZ: I recall that in last year's sermon the rabbi talked of contemporary battles, like that of the 'war' on Aids. As the event's organiser, are you happy with the turnout and levels of participation? Also, you say that the event has attracted new audiences. Who are they?

EI: It's going to shift from year to year, and you can't always read too much into it. Some years we'll just get a stronger response from certain constituencies. Even with the MK and APLA veterans, their participation goes up and down, and sometimes this fluctuation is due to internal issues that we don't know about. We don't know all of the causes. As I remember in 2004 or 2005 we had a strong turnout from youth. I think we bussed in one or two schools from Soweto, we tried to do the same this year. That year however we did try to emphasise women and youth, and the turnout was strong for youth participation. There are a lot of people who get invited year in and year out and participation will fluctuate.

KBZ: What do these new participants get out of attending, for instance the schools bussed from Soweto, what do they walk away with?

EI: It's not something that we've really tracked. We're trying to build a future audience and expose people. We don't have a budget to do all that we'd like to do. We would have liked like to do introductory sessions with them in the classroom and then follow-ups and all of that, but we are not able to do that.

KBZ: You could perhaps think of partnership with the Military History Museum, they seem to have excellent turnout from schools…

EI: I think their exhibits glorify war quite a lot. There's always a danger of this event also being a sanitising experience. I think on the whole, the message has been clear, and it should be actually an anti-war message. This is somewhat contradictory because you have military people involved who are passionate about what they do. Up to last year, and the years before, I don't know if you noticed this, but they used to have these big artillery shells as part of the décor on the podium. You would have these giant shells and chains between then. It was really in the worst possible taste… There was a play that I saw when I was an undergraduate and intent on evading military service, an anti war play called 'National Madness', incredible play, you can still trace the script for that. It's got a skit at one stage and I think there's this sort of gay guy who has done this whole decoration for something like an Armscor trade fair for people to come and look at the bombs etc, and he's put tinsel on all of the bombs and he's so proud of the arrangement….

KBZ: Most literature on the subject does speak of military parades as events that present a sanitised image of war: they show armies and weapons during times of peace, in a perfect display of order and logic, marching through clean and tidy streets with spotless and well ironed uniforms – nothing like the actual experience of war. This is also true of specifically Freedom of the City parades, which initially were aimed a recruiting more soldiers through these spectacles…

EI: I'll tell you what has come home to me from meeting with the military guys over several years now. They don't have much of a war. There are peacekeeping operations here and there, but by and large they are demobilised and having to kill time in the barracks. They need to maintain their dignity in some sort of way, and I do think that this event is quite important for that, just on a human level – to feel that there is recognition from the mayor and the city is important for them. I also think that from the Mayor's point of view – he's not always someone for great ceremony – but he does like the sense of tradition and he values the whole relationship that is maintained through this event.

KBZ: And other successes? What else have the Remembrance Day ceremonies contributed to the city?

EI: I have a primary responsibility for structures and monuments like the cenotaph, and things like that don't have value only in themselves. It's in how they are made meaningful for people. And this event talks directly about a community of interest and an aspect of heritage. The site of the cenotaph, that is mostly

quite depressed, comes to life o that occasion in quite a big way. The fact is that it's the national event for Remembrance Sunday – bigger than any of the other ceremonies held around the country, and I share in some of the pride that people show there. That space is very contested with the GPG precinct proposal and while the Beyers Naude square is very run down, if you actually look at the monument you can see that it's given care in a way that its surroundings haven't been. It was cleaned up a few years ago. I had that done you can see the contrast between the stonework there and the city hall for example. We had a new panel put in on the west side that was an attempt at that [points to panel in his office]. It was quite a headache or me over a couple years because initially we wanted to have the letters cut to match what's on the other side. We tried that and it was unsuccessful – it was just not legible. Unfortunately you don't have people anymore who do that work and it's very difficult to do this on a panel that's already laid in a monument. Another panel that was installed in 2002 was also an important attempt to make the monument more currently meaningful and inclusive. Although the cenotaph was rededicated in about 1996 I think, physically nothing changed on the monument, so it in itself still spoke only about World War I and II, and so it was important to make a physical intervention as well. In 2002 Mayor Masondo unveiled the additional plaque, but it was not that legible. To be honest we didn't know how to change it. Only recently we explored a new take and we got these polished letters done, this one (an example in the office) wasn't right because we wanted the typeface to match the plaque on the other side of the monument. But anyway, it's been cared for and it's had some restoration work done. And I feel that it's important. It's important for where it is, what it represents to a whole range of people. And the monument and the event support each other. There's actually been talk recently about removing the cenotaph from Beyers Naude Square and I would really fight that. There's often a comparison between this monument and the Anglo-Boer War memorial on the Zoo grounds. That monument was borne out of a wish to commemorate the British exclusively at the end of the Anglo-Boer War. It was a monument of the Rand Lords, which explicitly disowned the Boers who died – and anybody else, people didn't even talk about the blacks who died in that war. Various people have tried to remedy this bias and re-image the monument but despite that a lot of Afrikaners refer to it the khaki monument, and they wouldn't want to remember their dead there. The cenotaph doesn't seem to have that problem, at least not to the same extent. It's the closest we've gotten to an inclusive kind of monument at this point.

KBZ: Does the GPG proposal suggest that the Cenotaph be removed?

EI: Actually on the original provincial proposal it remained. It wasn't a major element – they hardly considered it. They were far more concerned with demolishing buildings and other things… but there was an idea to accommodate it and represent it in some way. I just think that it was marginalised in the provincial proposal, which obviously wanted to bring in a whole lot of new imagery. The idea of removing it was actually raised in the context of a possible alternative proposal from the city in which I wasn't involved. Lael Bethlehem had commissioned this proposal – which was nothing final it was just to say –

here's an alternative that we could look at and there could be other plans as well – and Lael just said that Eric won't allow this.

KBZ: What are the dangers of the event?

EI: I think the major challenges are that it becomes stale and just a ritual and that people lose interest…

KBZ: Are you happy with the current levels of participation and attendance?

EI: This year it was about right. I would always like a few more, but if you actually look at what the venue can accommodate – in terms of the marquee which is a major cost, there is some catering and so forth – so we can't really go much further at this stage. We actually want to ask for a larger budget as it has been static for years and maybe we could juggle it a bit. What I thought was a big advance this year – and it's amazing that no one really did this before – we had the soldiers and the police – the parade participants – actually come and join the audience to listen to the service.

KBZ: Wasn't that done last year as well, I recall soldiers sitting with us

EI: Well, it wasn't formally organised. We had a discussion about this issue this time. We'd love to bus in more kids and maybe we can – we did one school this time around. So we keep looking, and it's vital that we build the youth audience for the future of the event. I think we're making progress there. It's great to see the spread of age that you've got in these events. There's this very old black man who was in World War II, I don't know what his military rank is but his surname is Msibi. He's always there, with his medals, and he lays the wreath on behalf of the Soweto Military Veterans Organisation. He's their chairperson as well. I suppose that the military provided some sort of dignity and some worth so I won't knock it.

KBZ: The most interesting questions regarding these ceremonies are questions of culture. Although the event is now about community building and inclusivity, and is very much of an international event, one gets the feeling that it is rooted in a European experience. It first and foremost refers to wars where Africans have been invisible, its traditions make reference to European imagery – you know, poppy fields, meadows, forests and it puts on display practices that are often associated with the British military tradition. Further, when watching the event, one really gets the sense that those 'traditional' or 'freedom regiments', with their fancy uniforms, Scottish kilts and other paraphernalia, really have practices and culture that lend themselves more easily to this tradition of parading, as opposed to the AZAPO and MK veteran associations that almost seem to be marching in rags. Is it really a case of an inclusive event that integrates diversity, or is it more a case of one set of military traditions overshadowing and eclipsing another? Aside

from what you mentioned, have there been other moves aiming to diversify and 'africanise' the symbolism of the event?

EI: I personally quite like the international association of the event. It's not greatly played up in our event, but it links us with an international community. In general the value of honouring your dead is important it's part of what makes us human. It's not only so much a European tradition, it's a commonwealth history that we're talking about. You'll see it strongly I think in Australia and Canada. I was in Canada for the 2004 Remembrance Sunday, it's far more popularised and observed there than here, if you look the number of people who wear the poppy and its prominence in street life. I came back wondering whether we can we make more of all of this.

KBZ: How is the event framed in Canada?

EI: I don't know in great detail how it's framed. Canada has never been a major military country, although they have participated in a lot of international conflicts, and still have a presence in Iraq. What I found interesting there is that it's a very diverse society – I was in Toronto – so you have over 50% immigrant communities, and you would see Chinese people wearing the poppy and you sort of wonder what is their reference point. In a sense it doesn't even matter that much I think, in some level, it's that you're honouring the dead in general. We have a more challenging situation here because we come out of a divided past, where it is a very pointed question 'who are you remembering' and 'are you remembering all' and 'can you remember all equally' and in the same way and there aren't easy answers to that question. It's an issue how far we can take this event and to what level. It's a kind of an anomaly that a national event – what's billed as a national event – is located within a city administration. We run it, we invite national dignitaries right up to the top, and you'll have representatives from reasonably senior level from the army and so forth. We don't have the national minister. That points to something. There's some lack of recognition at that high level. But I still think that it's for the country and the city that we do this and so we'll continue to do it. We try to spread the reach as much as possible, but we're on a limited budget. We're lucky we get national radio coverage; it's picked up a bit in the media. Maybe we have to accept that we have some sort of ceiling for this event. But we do try to push it.

KBZ: Do you know whether other countries that were previously British ruled have this event? Nigeria, India, Zimbabwe for example?

EI: I lived in Zimbabwe and I don't believe it's there at all. They have a very strong anti–colonial ideology. India would be interesting, I'll find out. India is among one of the countries that consistently send their High Commissioner or other representative to the event. I don't know but it's interesting.

KBZ: As the ACHS you engage in quite a few nation-building projects. Can you comment on whether you feel this event to be as successful in terms of the reconciliation agenda as perhaps some of the other projects?

EI: I don't know if I can compare it easily, it's the only event that I manage. There are others within the department or the heritage sector like Africa Day, Heritage Day or Women's Day. Those things that you spoke about are important to me: to promote understanding, tolerance and so on – I try to carry that through all my work. With some things, like Sophiatown has been a big focus of mine, with Sophiatown there's a special constituency: the ex-residents who are at the core of that initiative, but then there's also a whole wider group, which includes almost anyone who has a soft spot for Sophiatown. I think the connection comes down to that general point I was making about communities of interest. I have to keep moving to uncover new sites, new interpretations, new audiences, making different interventions. The one thing that's good about my job is that I'm not tied to one institution like a museum. I can range quite freely and pick out what I think is significant, and try to build partnerships and make connections with people who are already involved or want to be. It's about touching people, dignifying history, developing civic pride – that's actually an important aspect of this event – it actually makes us feel that we're an important city, soldiers are proud to march through our streets.

KBZ: I guess the tension with this event is that we need to dignify history and we need to recognise the past, but on the other hand, there may be questions as to whether the military and military history is an appropriate vehicle for a nation-building project

EI: I have my cynical moments… I think we can't exclude them and there should be other occasions where we're maybe more probing on issues of war and violence. I don't feel guilty that we're glorifying war. I think that we just have to be aware of that danger and do it in a conscious way. You try to change people, but you've got to carry them with you to a certain extent as well.

KBZ: And without righteousness…

EI: People from various positions are all making an effort and making adjustments so that we can make an event together and that's really good so I think I can be positive about it.

KBZ: Could you fill me in on the first event that I missed out on?

GG: That was the centenary dinner, that was really run by the regiment itself, Colonel Voss the Honorary colonel coordinated the event. It's one of the first dinners we had at the Bryanston country club normally the military have their dinners at the Rand club, but that having burnt down presented a major problem. So there was a query whether the club could handle this event – because there's a lot of pompous ceremony that goes on with the formal dinner. The formal dinner starts off with everybody meeting before hand, where they will be given a glass of sherry to start off with, and everybody meets. You have the Mess President who runs the entire show, and you have a Mr. Vice who is the right hand man of the president. 10 minutes before we go in for dinner, he'll warn everyone that there are 10 minutes to go. There is a seating plan as it is a very formal event. There were well over 100 people there. The guests move in order of protocol, so the VIPs go in first and the lowly ones like myself go in afterwards. And then there is the first course, then there are a whole lot of speeches. The first was by Colonel Voss to welcome everybody, then Major General Anderson made a speech for the unit itself, congratulating it on its centenary, and it was also about what the reserve forces are actually doing. What the successes are, and why we still have a reserve force. Many people question why it is that South Africa still has an army. The reserve force really is the expansion capability of our defenses in South Africa. In other words we have a very small organisation that is there, running the regiments on a day to day basis, but if anything should happen, and I think a lot of people misconstrue it that it's just for a war, it's not for a war. You can also have it where there have been floods, so you've got a whole lot of bodies that can actually help you when there is a catastrophe. I've been used in a couple of big fires that have taken place in towns, where we were pulled off camps and got ordered to help with the firefighting as well. So it's really a structure for expansion. I don't think that we have a massive threat to ourselves, but we are now playing a very big role in peacekeeping in Africa. Since there aren't sufficient permanent forces to do it, the reserves have been key. General Dinner mentioned all of that, and we then had Selwyn Voss, Dave Voss's son, he also made a speech and then we had the tradition of the port being passed around. Now the RLI from the ex honourary Colonel before Dave Voss, many years ago, he brought in a tradition where they use a white port – everybody else uses a red port – it's the way of doing all the toasts, whether these are toasts to the state president or to the country and then to the regiment etc. There is a tradition of how you pass the port, the canter is put on your right hand side, your left hand underneath the table, you use one hand to pour the port into your glass, you put it in-front of your glass so that everybody can see it, then you move your right hand down, you get your left hand and you pass the bottle to the next person. The idea is that all can see that you are not putting poison into the bottle while you are moving it. So only one hand at a time is touching the bottle, always at the bottom, and

no where near the neck of the bottle. Coffee follows the main meal and people intermingle. It was an excellent function and I think a well worthwhile one.

KBZ: Any high profile guests?

GG: General Walker from the Infantry association was there, General Anderson – the most senior reserve officer in South Africa… For the Centenary and association/ regimental dinner a special invitation was sent out. People were selected with the aim to get as wide a sphere of influence as possible. Also present: Col. Job Chairmen of Reserve Force Council & Major Gen. Reggie Modise, Joe Modise's brother. I think there were some really special people there. You must get the list from David it will help you.

KBZ: Was the entire regiment there?

GG: It costs a fortune to put something like that on, so it was mostly VIPs. Only officers and warrant officers were invited.

KBZ: What was the dress code for the event?

GG: It was the regimental mess dress, others were there in black tie, we had ladies there as well so it was semi formal, and they looked stunning, the ladies always make the place look better we love it when the ladies are there! It was a very successful dinner and very unusual to have it there, so that made it special.

KBZ: So are you with the RLI

GG: No. I was originally with the South African Irish, I was with them for 18 years, then I left them and went to Johannesburg East Commando, which we converted to Johannesburg South Regiment, that was when I was at the Drill Hall. The Irish and the RLI often did camps together then when I went to Johannesburg South Regiment when we were bombed out of our headquarters I actually moved next door to RLI, so we used to have meetings and do shoots together. Later I went back to the Irish and now I'm involved with the Reserve Force Council. Also I was very involved with the Sandton commando.

KBZ: What are the differences between the regiments and the regiment association?

GG: The regiments are the people in uniform, and they are actually your serving officers. Your association is anybody who wants to be involved with the regiment, so the association is the group of people who are there to try uphold the traditions of the regiment and also do fundraising for the regiment as well. It's a way for the old boys to keep in touch with the regiment.

KBZ: So could I join the association?

GG: Yes you could, as long as you were prepared to uphold and protect the values and traditions of the association.

KBZ: So how do people actually go about joining?

GG: It depends. Some people fill out an actual application form and it goes through to the committee, others simply go to a meeting and announce that they would like to join and pay the minimal membership fee of R50 or so. A more official body is the council. You get a regimental council. It is formed of your ex commanding officers and the ex RSMs (Regimental Sergeant Major). That body is really there to advise the commanding officer as to the strategy and the direction of the regiment in years to come. The council also monitors the traditions and how they are preformed by the regiment. Most regiments transfer their valuable silverware – some regiments have magnificent and valuable collections – to the hands of the regimental association. That prevents these assets, which are accumulated through donations to the regiment, from possibly being taken away from the regiments by the army. If the regiment is closed down, the material remains in the hands of the association.

KBZ: so the council is like the board of trustees and the association is like the friends of…

GG: Exactly. And it also allows the friends of the regiment to get together during parades and special occasions and keep in touch. I don't think people understand the friendships that are created in the military. I don't think people understand the friendships that are created in the military… work friends you can put on a pretence or a false face for 8 hours of the day. In the military you are eating together, sleeping together, showering together, you have hard times together, you have celebrations together. So you find that your comrades know your true self more in the military as compared to anything else. Another thing in the military that I found, and I wish that conscription hadn't ended, because I think for anybody to go through something like that, it brings you – whether you are rich or poor, whether you are black or white or whatever you are - you all get pulled down to exactly the same level. And you're nothing. And you start and you build and it creates a friendship amongst each other where it's us against them (them being whoever is in charge) and you build bonds like you have never seen before. It then also has a way of teaching people to use their initiative. Many senior business people that I know, whether from World War II or more recently from the border war, are resourceful people with initiative. Sure, there have been some nasty things that have happened, I'm not denying it, but I think the positives that have come out of it are man-management skills. It's the most practical university I've ever been to, where one learns leadership

skills, managing people, using initiative, skills that are today expensive to train in and valuable to businesses everywhere.

KBZ: How big is the RLI? How many people are actually part of it? What are their backgrounds and why do the join? How do they feel about uniforms?

GG: I think there are about 300 men in the regiment, so it's fairly small. They are volunteers who have been recruited, we have pulled people mainly off the street, I would say 99.9% of them are unemployed. It is literally their way of surviving. Anybody in military uniform in Johannesburg can ride on the busses and the trains free of charge. So it means that they can transport themselves… to parades easily. It also gives them a sense of importance and the uniform is there. There have been a lot of negatives and I think that that's where many people have misunderstood some of the stuff especially when you look at some of the units like Irish and the Transvaal Scottish and RLI that wear short pants etc. There are a lot of people that sort of say 'who are these uitlanders' or 'where are these people coming from' and they don't understand that it's our own people that are actually there. A lot of people ask why don't we get rid of those traditional units and I think it's a little bit like a rallying flag. It's a sense of belonging to something different… In the army having a different uniform and traditions etc puts you apart from everybody else… you're actually something different. And that is something the MK never had. They never had ranks; they never had any sort of badges or anything like that. It's very interesting to see that now on the South African side, we are actually still adopting the traditional aspects and I hope it carries on. Because I think if you ask many of the new recruits that have come into like the RLI – they want to stay in the RLI. They're not going to move anywhere else – because we're different, we use a different badge etc. I think it's very important.

KBZ: Why were women excluded from the association dinner?

GG: [laughs] Way back in the past it was felt that ladies could not be in the military whatsoever. I think that's been broken down over the years. I think predominantly it's always been a men only affair. I disagree with it. I've always tried in the different positions that I've had to bring women in. It also comes to a cost thing. When you're putting on a dinner that costs you R250 per head, if you include partners, it's R500. If the person is not directly involved, then why should they be there?

KBZ: But if you are a female officer rather than someone's partner you still can't attend

GG: Exactly… There are many female recruits. I would estimate that at least 40% of new recruits are female. They are lower rank, but they are coming through. There are quite a few generals, the first woman pilot, the first woman parabat, so it's starting to come through but I do think that it's rather presumptuous of men to think that they are better than females.

KBZ: Can you talk a bit about the mess dress?

GG: Most regiments have got their own specific mess dress so it's part of the uniform code. There are therefore different mess dresses, even within the same regiments, starting with 1a, 1b going down all the way to 14. The mess dress is the colours for the unit, with badges and rank on it. Normally the frills are different per different unit. That is a heraldic sort of thing, that when you see someone you can immediately pick them out and identify which unit they are from. British soldiers, like Brigadier Keenen, who is with the British High Commission is the military attaché. He has got so much tradition behind him.

KBZ: How do the recruits feel about the Traditional Regiments' uniforms?

GG: I've spoken to some guys who have refused to join the Transvaal Scottish because they refused to wear a dress. It's not a dress, it's a kilt! It was against their upbringing, culture etc to wear something like that. When you go back and think that most men in the Celtic areas only wore kilts and did not have trousers, then why not? I think it's about creating an awareness. There was a problem where people thought it was colonial, and there are certain regiments who have tried to keep up the colonial traditions. There are some that keep on harping on the queen is their Honorary Colonel – that is dying very very fast because I think people are starting to realise that that's not who we are, it doesn't fit in with South Africa. It fitted in with a part of traditions and our history.

KBZ: It didn't fit in with the apartheid authorities

GG: It didn't, and they hated it! Despite that many regiments still have affiliations with their UK counterparts. In general, there is a big drive now for affiliations, Canada and Australia are also pushing for it. But this does not mean to say that you uphold all of their principles. It's a matter of a friendship. It's the same as South Africa now is friendly with Libya. In the past regime good heavens you wouldn't have done that. I think things are changing so it doesn't mean to say that you must believe all of their beliefs. There's nothing in the Irish (Rifles) or the Rand Light that's saying that this is now British. It was a phase, it was a Government that controlled us at one stage that we were part of. And I think that to me is what is so exciting about the picture of the history is how it's actually gone from the Anglo-Boer War, going through to the British to apartheid and now… to full democracy. And that's what regiments are there for. To defend the government and uphold the government of the day, irrespective of who they are. And that's where I think a lot of people do not understand and criticize people like myself 'how could you actually fight with the apartheid era etc'. I was looking after my family and my country. I didn't vote them in, I didn't bring them into power etc I was simply born in this country, and this is where I so staying so I defended it. Now that the government has changed I am defending the country and my family now. So it's irrespective of the

actual government of the day. So I think the traditions and stuff are more South African traditions, I find a lot of them are 'South africanised' and they're moving across. There are certain regiments that used to toast the state president with water. They wouldn't toast it with port. But they would toast the queen with port. I think those sorts of things are disappearing very very fast.

KBZ: How often do association dinners take place?

GG: We try to have them as often as possible. It is a way of ensuring that people got together. Now days budget constraints prohibit a regular frequency. There is another reason: especially people who fought with the SADF during the apartheid era are almost frowned upon. The guys aren't so keen to get together as much as they were in the past. I think it's because we're almost seen as 'how could we have fought against the MK' etc. 'It was an unjust war' etc and I think it's an understanding. The Second World War guys came back as heroes. The guys that fought in the border wars have never been claimed as heroes at all. And it's almost as if you're naughty why did you go and do it. I think that there's a lack of understanding as to what was going on why it was being fought etc. What to me is so nice about serving on the reserve force council is that now I am sitting with the Reggie Modisies and all of those guys that were in MK and fought there. And we're soldiers speaking to each other. I was in Angola on one side of the bridge they were on the other and we thought they had massive arms, they didn't have one weapon there, they were waiting for us to move so that they could come back and we laugh at each other. It's politicians that make us fight not anybody else.

KBZ: Can you tell me about the colours?

GG: Your colour is your rallying point. Whenever the colour is unfolded everybody in the unit and other units will salute it. It is the most important thing that we actually have. It is protected, it costs an absolute fortune to have them made, thousands or tens of thousands of Rands. This tradition goes back into the barbaric times or Roman times when no matter what would happen soldiers would follow their flag. It's still a tradition of that and that is what is revered in the regiment as the most important thing. So you have protection for it at any time, with fixed bayonets at either side of it. An RSM is normally the person behind it. Normally it is the senior junior officer who would be given the honour to carry the flag. Whenever it's on parade it must have a guard of honour at either side of it to protect it and those people should have weapons and in the old days would have fixed bayonets as well, and in fact would be armed. So if anyone tried to take the colour they would go for the person. Now it's more of a ceremonial guard of honour they haven't got bullets, they haven't got bayonets. So it's losing its ranking and importance but we try and keep it going. You will however find a lot of the troops have never seen the colour which is a pity. They don't understand its importance. The colour is unfolded whenever there's a major parade but that can be once every 2 or 3 years so it's not a regular thing. Troops are often not clear on the correct procedure for

unfolding the colour. Whenever possible a military band would play during the unfolding of a colour. Now there are very few military bands left, and in terms of cost you'll probably be looking at 30- 50 people, and the costs of getting them there of paying them are prohibitive. The number of bands are dwindling radically so it's also difficult to get them. Before the Permanent Force had bands and you could request them but not anymore. It's a financial prohibition more than anything else.

KBZ: Who were the VIP guests on Saturday?

GG: Firstly it's your mayor, because it is his freedom regiments, General Anderson was there, Admiral Bakkes, and Colonel Voss. My feeling is that a lot more people should have been invited and it should have been a much bigger event. It's something we've got to work on. Before, if you did a Freedom Parade, you would have tanks and vehicles. Parades of the Freedom of Johannesburg that I have been on had at least a number of thousand people on parade and the number of VIP's would have been more substantial than the number of those present at the Remembrance Parade on Sunday.

KBZ: So there was a problem with the marketing of the event?

GG: It was shocking, absolutely shocking. It's something that we are working on with the city. I don't think that the city fathers at this stage see the event as important. I think we gradually are breaking that ground where it is residents of Johannesburg taking part. It is the mayor's regiments that he's talking about. It's not somebody else's. And I think that the understanding and we haven't done a big enough marketing with the city to actually get them involved. I think the remembrance parade has helped to bridge it because at one stage they wanted to scrap the whole lot… It was going to be stopped.

KBZ: There seemed to be a lot of support from the city's arts culture and heritage services

GG: There was, but it needs to get a hell of a lot more. The cenotaph is a heritage site it's a cultural thing… and that is why I am so pleased that the youth is coming. I've suggested to them that we invite every school to bring head boy, head girl, the LO teacher and the principal to come to the parade next year and that they all participate. But then I believe that we've got to have a booklet that we hand out to each one of them so that they can go back to their schools and say what is it all about. So we start educating people. I think the military has got to start marketing itself. And this is where the military can do so much and I don't think we are doing it. If we were to take all of these unemployed people and… actually train those people to do for example firefighting, to do CPR, to do building of houses etc… One unit that has done a very good job is the 6 light anti aircraft. They actually trained guys on computers and they've taught them skills. About 60% of those guys now have jobs because of the regiment. So the regiment now acts as an employment agency for those guys. The beauty is that now they can get references and others to vouch that

they are disciplined and skilled. And to me this is now what the military has to try. From an Arts and Culture point of view when you listen to them singing, when they are waiting for something to happen… they start singing and dancing, it's amazing. And the skills we've got are magnificent… we need to harness those skills. And that's what I would like to do from a reserve council point of view, is to try and create a skills database. So that if someone requires something we can put them in touch with people and we can say that we know them.

KBZ: Do you think these are functions the SANDF should take on? Surely there are structures in place to address those needs?

GG: Well, it's like with all businesses. You've got your main focus and if you go one step out of your focus everyone will criticise you and ask why are you doing it. So if the military was to use its activities as a way of employing people or getting them employment, people would criticise the military for wasting the tax payers' money, why are you not using it for defence. The idea of defence is changing, and was traditionally what we needed to defend ourselves from is no longer that at all. I think that one of the things that we must be able to do is support the police and emergency services… I think we've lost that sense and aim of helping the community where we're living, and that's going to come back, slowly.