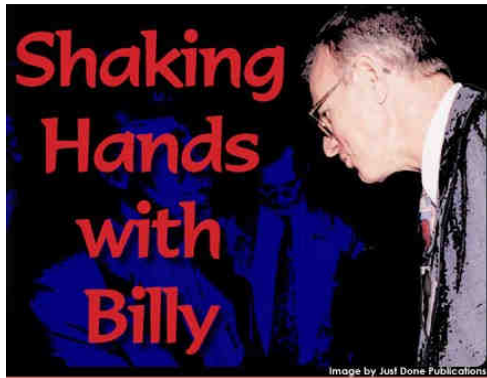


Prologue from Shaking Hands with Billy



When one reflects back on life, any thinking man is bound to link moments in his own relatively insignificant existence with events unfolding in the bigger world around him. For me this is no different. As I move into my sixth decade on this planet, I reflect back on my own innings, and as a means of charting its often convoluted course, link specific moments of my own evolution to events of historic significance, simply because they stand out as landmarks on the map of life.

Thus I recall the Sharpeville massacre, along with the various tortured pieces of that unfortunate portion of our national history, including our independence from Britain, as one of my earliest memories. This filled me at once with a conflicting set of emotions: a sense of awe at my own relative insignificance; a feeling of insecurity of primordial magnitude; a deep-seated confusion about issues of identity; and yet also a belief that within the diabolical confusion of that event, I had a place that I could call my own. From that moment on I started to become a thinking person – not yet a man – but an inquisitive individual who eventually evolved into what I have now become, an Afro-optimist.

This small seed of self-awareness germinated as the Rivonia Trial started to unfold, intimately linked as it was to Sharpeville. This meant that without knowing it, the name of Nelson Mandela, and all that this entailed, became indelibly imprinted on my young and impressionable mind. And so the sapling grew. This was punctuated some years later when Hendrik Verwoerd was assassinated. While I never understood the significance of this event at the time, it often haunted me as a young boy, because it betrayed a pathology of violence in our national political psyche that I came to experience first-hand as a young soldier on combat duty and later as a peace-maker trying to end the war and stabilize a very volatile situation. On top of this, like a midden of historic debris, came the shock of the Soweto Riots, re-invoking the porridge of emotions into which I had been flung during Sharpeville, specifically reawakening my sense of primordial insecurity and fuelling my quest for answers about burning issues of identity once more.

What did it mean to be a young white man growing up in Apartheid South Africa? Is violence endemic to Africa? Or is it but a temporary interlude in a longer timescale? Do we dare hope for a future that is better than our past has been? Do we have the capacity to forgive and thus to grow into a robust nation?

It was these emotions that haunted me during the period of South African history that subsequently came to be known as the Total Onslaught into which I was thrust, along with the rest of my generation. With great vividness I thus recall the passing of the architect of the Total Onslaught schizophrenia that consumed my entire generation, an event that is associated with the rising to presidential power of F.W. de Klerk. His political views came as a breath of fresh air, wafting across a nation divided, teetering at

Prologue from Shaking Hands with Billy

that time on the brink of full-scale civil war. The release of Nelson Mandela is deeply etched in my mind, watching, as I was, from a mountain retreat in the Alps, busy with a highly sensitive special operation. The sight of a dignified man, walking with a slight hobble that hinted at the existence of arthritis, came to symbolize the hope of a nation of which I was part. The emotional relevance of this event was that I had played a small but significant part in his release, and this was the moment of truth, symbolizing the turning of the wheel that Sharpeville had come to mean to me. His views on his jailer, specifically that he was as much a victim of an unjust system as Mandela was, represented a lifeboat on the stormy and turbulent sea of South African politics to which I clung as if my very life depended on it, because indeed I believed it did.

To top this off, the night that the old South African flag came down for the last time, celebrated in secret by a number of special operations officers in a Pretoria-based safe house known as Eikeboom, counts as a monumental moment in my life, because while we celebrated this historic occasion, we were also imbued with a sense of foreboding at the possible consequences of our actions. Would there be blood on the streets the next day? Had our strategic assessment of the fundamental drivers of South African politics been correct? What if we were wrong? Would the terrible things that happened to the dreaded Securitate in Romania also befall us? Were we possibly wrong about the strategic significance of the collapse of Communism, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the ending of the Cold War? Could we keep control of the wildly bucking bronco that we had helped unleash? Could we indeed have a peaceful transition to democracy? These thoughts pulsed through our minds as the whiskey flowed and the officers toasted an uncertain future that they had helped to create but could no longer control.

These private memoirs are a reflection of these events, and in particular an attempt to map out my own life using the beacons of these monumental historic occurrences. I offer these memoirs to those I care for the most – my immediate family – in a humble attempt to account to them for what I have done with my life, while I am still capable of reflecting on it. To explain to my children why I was not there for many of the important moments in their early lives, I offer these thoughts as some consolation. To share with my family (and any other reader) the sense of belonging to the South African Rainbow Nation that I have managed to inculcate, in the hope that they will be as comforted by this as I have been. Finally, I offer these private thoughts, to honour my comrades-in-arms, those faceless men and women with whom I served in silence and in secrecy for many years, as an officer in the Security Forces of South Africa, all of whom worked with total conviction and unquestioning devotion, to create the enabling conditions for the transition to the democracy of which we can now all be so proud. To my parents I strove at all times to be a good son; to my siblings I tried to be a good brother; to my wife I did my best to be a good husband living in turbulent times; and to my children I acknowledge that I have been an unusual but hopefully adequate father. To my country I have tried at all times to be an honourable citizen, using constraint and being guided by the values that I had learned at school, most notably St Martins where I was encouraged to think

Prologue from Shaking Hands with Billy

critically. It is thus with these many personal blessings that I say with considerable pride, I am a 12th generation African and a thinking son of the democratic South Africa.

It is with these thoughts in my head that I pen the hidden history of South Africa's transition to democracy as I experienced it, for no reason other than to seek to understand it myself. It is with considerable pride and a deep sense of humbleness that I commit a piece of the as yet unknown history of the Chief Directorate Covert Operations (CDCO) of the National Intelligence Service (NIS) to writing. This is done, not with the intention of engaging in an orgy of kiss-and-tell self-aggrandizement, but rather as a humble record for those interested in such things, in order that they may know about the hidden world that was shrouded by intense secrecy that pervaded the very best years of my entire generation.

I dedicate this work to the memory of my comrades-in-arms in the three Security Force formations that I had the privilege to serve in – the Light Horse Regiment (LHR), 81 Armoured Brigade of the South African Defence Force (SADF); the Chief Directorate Covert Operations (CDCO) of the National Intelligence Service (NIS), also known as Chief Directorate “K”; and the South African Secret Service (SASS) of which I was a founding member, specifically serving within the Chief Directorate Covert Collection and Counter Intelligence (CDCCCI) – in a sincere attempt to explain our complex history as accurately as I am capable of.

The SASS phase has been dealt with as delicately and responsibly as I am capable of. I record these events as accurately as I am able to, not with any malice in mind, but rather to document the successes and failures we had, in the hope that we can learn from these as a young nation. The other two structures (LHR and NIS) are dealt with in more detail because they no longer need to be protected by the high levels of secrecy in which they were shrouded when I served in them. Those were times of war and secrecy was necessary. We now live in times of peace and democracy, so we can reflect back on the darker days, in order to make sense of them. This is part of the history of our country – a history that is at once complex, dark, optimistic and rich – and I record it with pride, reverence and as much objectivity as an academically-trained individual is capable of when referring to events that occurred so close to himself.

While no longer a member of any of these three Security Force structures, I still consider myself to be bound by the professional code of ethics to which all former special operations officers subscribe. This means that names (and in some cases geographic places) have been altered where deemed appropriate, in order to protect those persons who have not decided as I have, to acknowledge their actions in the past.

I have found that knowledge sets us free. I have also discovered the catharsis of acceptance, acknowledgement and forgiveness. It is for this reason that I carry no anger, malice, bitterness or revenge in my heart. Instead, I claim full responsibility for those things over which I had direct control, while I have tried to explain my own response to those things in which I was caught up over which I had no personal control. In both cases

Prologue from Shaking Hands with Billy

I accept full responsibility for my own actions. More importantly, I write from the premise that any thinking person, who has cringed under the insane screech of shrieking shrapnel, on any battlefield, knows that in death we are all equal. I therefore claim the ultimate catharsis by recognizing the suffering, sacrifice and human dignity of my former “enemy”, and I salute them as men and women of conviction, courage, pride and integrity.

The title, *Shaking Hands with Billy*, refers to a code-phrase used during a special operation, designed to bring the planner of the Pretoria car bomb to justice. I experienced this event as a turning point in the Armed Struggle, because I saw a major shift in Security Force response as a direct result, in a way that is remarkably similar to the contemporary American-led War on Terror. Using this analogy, the Pretoria car bomb was our mini 9/11 and nothing was the same afterwards, including the angry response by government that was hell-bent on finding a culprit to hold accountable. As an intelligence officer in that special operations team, I was confronted with many contradictions, so over time the notion of *Shaking Hands with Billy* came to symbolize to me the political transformation that occurred in South Africa, when we faced our darkest hours. I later came to respect the operative who we code-named “Billy”, and was pleased to see him take his rightful place as a democratically elected Member of Parliament. We never brought Billy home to trial as intended, because the peace negotiations aborted all aggressive operations, allowing us to give our full attention to sustaining the momentum towards peace instead. Thus, for me, *Shaking Hands with Billy* came to eventually represent the transformation in our own society, as we moved from endemic violence to what appears to be a stable peace. I believe that is a noble pursuit and so I share it.

This book is not a kiss and tell affair. It is also not a romantic view of our history. It has been written as an honest account of the experiences I have had over an entire lifetime. It therefore seeks to tell it the way I have experienced it. At times this is light hearted and at times pregnant with apprehension, but these changes reflect the mood I was in when I was experiencing the specific series of events. Nowhere do I glorify violence. Instead, I have tried to understand it, and more specifically, to take the reader into that intimate space that is the life of a soldier on combat duty. I have tried to capture the sensations, moods, images and disjointedness of combat, not because I wish to present it as a noble pursuit, but because I wish to illustrate just how confusing the fog of war really is; and more importantly, what it does to the human beings that survive, including their families, because I have come to realize that they often pay an even bigger price. The short stories have thus been selected from a larger repertoire written by me over time, precisely because they illustrate this disjointedness.

As this book was emerging from the depths of my soul, many friends, colleagues and ordinary people seemed to be eager consumers of the material I was generating. This encouraged me to be more diligent as I crafted each new iteration. One thing that struck me most however, was the sense of catharsis and closure that many of the readers expressed. Women whose brothers had been involved, mothers who had lost sons and young adults who had seen their parents become traumatized by long-term exposure to

Prologue from Shaking Hands with Billy

what in effect was institutionalized state-sponsored violence and an angry response by the victims of that violence. It is in the hope that closure can come to others that I have finally decided to elevate this work above a simple family affair, to be shared by a larger audience.

Dr. Anthony Turton