

CONTRABAND

*South Africa and the International Trade
in Ivory and Rhino Horn*

De Wet Potgieter



Acknowledgements

The Sunday Times
The Star
Mail on Sunday
Rapport
Doctor Jeremy Anderson – Former Chief, KaNgwane Parks Board
Colonel Jan Breytenbach – Sedgfield
Lieutenant-Colonel Pieter Lategan & his team at the Endangered
Species Protection Unit – Pretoria
Paul Lashmar – London
Doctor John Ledger – Endangered Wildlife Trust, South Africa
Ian Parker – Nairobi
Simon Pillinger – Natal Parks Board
Doctor Ros Reeve – London
Ted & Liz Reilly – Swaziland
Nico Snyman – Natal Parks Board
Alan Thornton – Environmental Investigation Agency, London
Clive Walker – Rhino and Elephant Foundation, South Africa
Suzi Watt – Environmental Investigation Agency, London

Special thanks to Marlène Burger for her help and support

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Prologue

IN SEPTEMBER 1988, Ray Joseph – then news editor of the *Sunday Times* – summoned me from Pretoria to the Johannesburg head office for a briefing on an investigation I was to assist a woman colleague with. From the outset he made it clear that the investigation contained an element of danger, to which the newspaper was reluctant to expose a woman working on her own. I accepted the assignment, little realising that it would forever change my life as a journalist.

For the first time in my career I became acquainted with the organised nether world of the international ivory and rhino horn smuggler. I came face to face with some of the men regarded as the “last white hunters” of Africa and rubbed shoulders with some of the most dangerous and powerful smuggling lords in their plush and lavish houses and offices. These are the nerve centres of vast smuggling networks, although the syndicate bosses are careful never to touch any of the contraband themselves.

Virtually overnight I was thrown into an alien world of corruption and deceit. I met characters from all walks of life, with tentacles reaching into the top hierarchy of erstwhile South African government circles. I was both shocked and dismayed by the obvious lack of concern shown by high-powered politicians and generals and their apparent lack of willingness to fight the heinous crime that was stigmatising South Africa as the main conduit of contraband draining Africa of its endangered elephant and rhino herds.

As my investigation into the networks dug deeper and deeper, it became a matter of particular concern that the government had handled this emotive issue with apathy, despite serious damage to the country’s standing in international conservation circles. At that stage there were already clear signs that apartheid’s days were numbered. Indications were that the international activist cause of choice, following the demise of apartheid, would be conservation – the green factor.

Organisations such as Earth Life had already started establishing themselves in South Africa, and chances were that the thorny issue of rhino horn and ivory smuggling would focus attention anew on the country as one of the world’s biggest pariahs. But despite these warning signals, and continued desperate calls by environmentalists such as Dr John Ledger of the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT),

Clive Walker of the Rhino and Elephant Foundation and Democratic Party environmental issue spokesman Rupert Lorimer, the issue was dismissed by those in government ivory towers as the alarmist cries of a bunch of green cranks.

Corruption and bribery were nothing new to me, but I was astonished by the way multimillion dollar syndicates would risk almost anything to gain superiority in the extremely competitive contraband market for a commodity like rhino horn – to satisfy the fallacious aphrodisiacal needs of clients in the Far East. It was almost laughable, but the dire threat of extinction of a prehistoric species like the rhinoceros was no laughing matter.

I have been an animal lover all my life and have no truck with the blood-lust of macho men running around the bush with sophisticated, high powered rifles, shooting at any wild animal that moves, for the sheer fun of it. This has traditionally been – and to some extent still is – a way of life for Southern Africa's white men, a custom handed down by father to son for generations.

In the course of my investigation, I discovered a peculiar sub-culture among this breed of men, generally portrayed as "rugged", their interests largely confined to rugby and hunting, with the occasional mistress smuggled in for late-night booze-ups and sex orgies, conveniently held behind security fences in the African bush, far from home and hearth. Members of this sub-species are jokingly referred to as the 1-2-3s, thanks to a predilection for one litre of Coca-Cola, two litres of brandy and three-litre Ford Cortinas.

The influential men in high places who held the fate and survival of Africa's wildlife – the endangered species in particular – in their hands, were for the most part firmly entrenched in this South African sub-culture of trigger-happy would-be Rambos. That is one of the main reasons why there was no rush in the 1970s or 1980s to stand up and be counted, do something to change the situation. Over the years, the malady had filtered down from the top – one of the most damning legacies of a government in power for too long.

Winter is open season for game hunters in South Africa and game farms in the bushveld of Northern Transvaal and Botswana are fully booked months in advance by local and overseas hunters. This is the time of the bloody massacre as modern-day cowboys move into the bush armed with expensive rifles, a healthy supply of alcohol and a bloodthirsty objective: kill any animal that moves.

Though born and bred in South Africa, I have never shot at any animal. It never ceased to shock me that season after season, top military men and politicians would take part in this senseless "sport", turning South Africa's bushveld into killing fields. I see

little wrong with annual safaris conducted in a disciplined and humane way, but find the random massacre of wild animals nothing short of revolting.

But in pre-democratic South Africa, playing silly games of hide-and-seek with innocent animals year after year was regarded as a way of unwinding by politicians and warlords in the defence force and the police, a way of escaping the stress of everyday life in parliament, on the battlefields of military training establishments or the strife-torn townships abutting all major metropolitan areas. This same influential group of people were among those who used South African Air Force helicopters year after year in militarised zones in Angola and Namibia to gun down herds of animals from the air.

Under cover of draconian security legislation sanctioned by the National Party for more than 25 years, abhorrent crimes against conservation and mankind were committed in the name of "Volk en Vaderland" (the Afrikaner people and the Fatherland). It was against uncaring bureaucrats such as these, that men of integrity – detectives from the South African Police Endangered Species Protection Unit – had to fight what amounted to a losing battle from 1988. In their efforts to bring the smugglers to justice, they sometimes had to face openly hostile opposition from colleagues in intelligence networks.

The odds were against them from the outset. Too much was at stake for too many high profile figures to allow the suppurating ulcer of corruption to be lanced and cleaned once and for all. For years, bureaucrats in South Africa had enjoyed carte blanche from intelligence agencies in smuggling almost any kind of contraband out of Africa in exchange for information that could be used in the ongoing campaign against the African National Congress (ANC) and the South West Africa People's Organisation (Swapo) – and at the same time, prop up the white regime's much vaunted battle against the so-called "total onslaught" of international communism, a concept devised and sold to the gullible white South Africans by then State President P. W. Botha and his brother in arms, former Minister of Defence General Magnus Malan.

In an era when covert operations and official cover-ups were the order of the day, "concerned" politicians, high-ranking military and police officers proclaiming to the world South Africa's solicitude over depletion of Africa's natural resources, were the very securocrats whose hands were drenched with the blood of thousands of elephants and rhinos mowed down all over the continent.

And to add insult to injury, a motley group of British war heroes were brought to South Africa for an undercover operation designed

to rout the rhino horn and ivory syndicates from Africa. As it happens, this ostensibly noble operation turned into a Frankenstein monster which not only inflicted enormous damage on the just cause of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), but also put certain influential international figures in high places in a very precarious situation.

The assignment I was given on that spring day in 1988 had the scenario for a tailor-made Sunday paper exposé. At the centre of the saga was a sexy platinum blonde, fresh out of the African bush in Botswana's rugged Francistown area. Dressed in her khaki outfit, this girlfriend of one of the most controversial figures in the African smuggling fraternity confessed that she had packed her bags and turned her back on her lover because she could no longer countenance him raping Africa for the sake of money.

She was a mine of information. She knew everybody and provided the most wonderful background information for my in-depth probe into the smuggling syndicates that is still in progress. Little could I imagine the reaction to a series of articles published in the *Sunday Times*, the largest circulation newspaper in South Africa. One day, it was merely another story I was working on. The next – literally the day after we published the first article – I found myself embroiled in a major investigation.

I was inundated with telephone calls, anonymous tip-offs, letters and other information about the smuggling networks. It became so exciting, so interesting and challenging, that my life was transformed. Since 1988, I have gathered so much information that I have finally been forced to discipline myself, sit down and tell my story to the world ...

Bubbly Brenda

IT WAS A WINDY DAY at the end of August 1988 when Brenda Voue walked into the *Sunday Times* news room in Johannesburg and told the news editor she was ready to tell all about the rhino horn and ivory smuggling underworld that used South Africa as a lucrative conduit. The striking platinum blonde had no illusions about the harsh realities of her decision to reveal everything she knew about the multimillion dollar international smuggling racket.

For her, there was no turning back. She had left behind a life of luxury and comfort in Botswana, after making the most crucial decision of her life. She knew anyone and everyone connected to the trade. For more than four years she had been the live-in lover of German-born Hans Beck in Francistown, acting as his assistant and confidante, handling all the bookkeeping for his nefarious business deals.

Brenda Voue told me how, on various occasions, she had driven a truck loaded with rhino horn and ivory through the Stokpoort border post near Ellisras in the Western Transvaal to Beck's curio shop in Johannesburg. Several times during the days we spent together, she described the people involved in the networks as extremely dangerous. She also recounted the network's constant fear that their truck, specially refitted with a dummy compartment, could be involved in an accident en route.

"They had nightmares about what might happen in a situation like that, with ivory and rhino horn scattered all over the road in South Africa," she remarked.

Up to then, I had never reported on rhino horn or ivory smuggling, and at that stage of my career, the fate of endangered animals was not a subject that really interested me professionally. Although bubbly Brenda Voue would change my outlook, the story was just another assignment at the time, one of many I had worked on over the years.

It was the overwhelming reaction from a concerned public and conservationists throughout the world that followed the *Sunday Times* article on September 25, 1988, that made the difference. Since

Colonel Jan Breytenbach

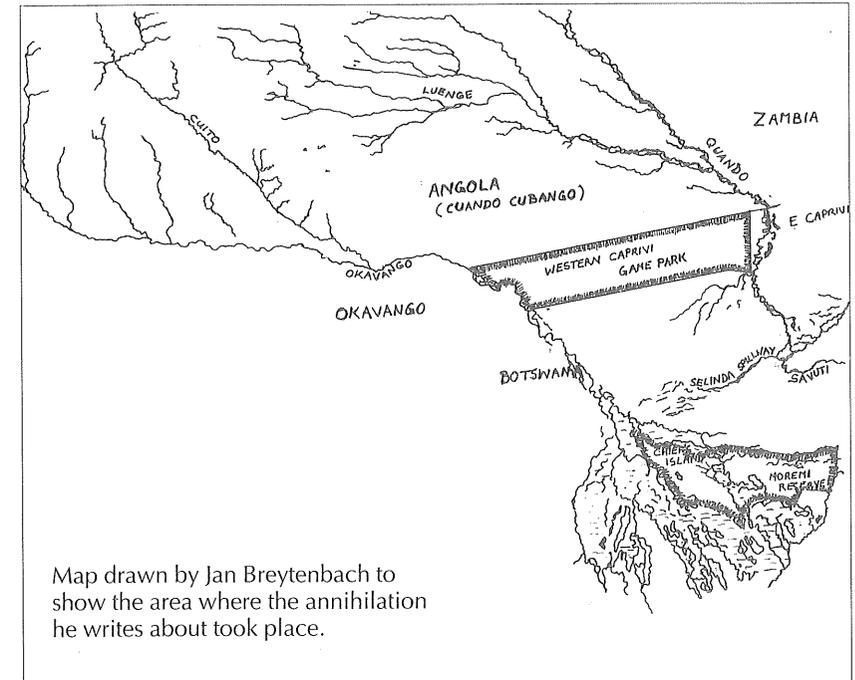
UP TO THE END OF 1989, Colonel Breytenbach tried to maintain a low profile so as not to damage the SADF's image, exploring each and every existing channel within the system to warn the military authorities and the politicians that red lights were flashing for nature conservation up north. But the huge consignment seized at Okahandja finally convinced the doughty ex-warrior that there was only one way to tell the world about the critical situation building up in Angola and Namibia. A week after the seizure, Colonel Breytenbach wrote a damning article in his inimitable style, outlining in detail the truth behind the Angolan massacre.

This highly decorated and controversial soldier, who had spent most of his combat career in Angola and the north of Namibia, had been an unquestionably loyal and brave SADF officer. So when this older brother of exiled South African poet Breyten Breytenbach decided to take his case to the public domain, it was a damning indictment against the South African war machine.

Jan Breytenbach was the first commander of the much feared 1 Parachute Battalion, better known as the Recces. In the 1970s he also founded one of South Africa's most redoubtable fighting units in the bush of southern Angola, 32 Battalion. Forged from the ragtag remnants of Holden Roberto's FNLA guerrilla movement, which had been fighting the Portuguese colonists for years, 32 Battalion – though now disbanded – became the most decorated unit in the SADF. An ardent penman, the colonel wrote two books on the history and achievements of 32 Battalion – *Forged in Battle* (published by Saayman, 1986) and *They Live By The Sword* (published by Lemur, 1990). He was also commander of 44 Parachute Brigade.

At the height of the Angolan war, Jan Breytenbach became a legend in his own lifetime. Soldiers serving under him had it tough, but although he was feared by his troops, he also enjoyed their unfailing respect. He was a leader who tolerated no nonsense, but took care of his troops with sincere camaraderie. "Most of my service career I spent on operations in the northern part of South West Africa and Angola," he told me in 1989. "I know the Cuando

Cubango and the Western Caprivi intimately, better than anybody else in the defence force. During my last two years of duty I was also appointed as a nature conservationist in the Western Caprivi." He became closely involved with other conservationists in combating the large-scale poaching of elephants, rhino and other endangered species and in trying to stamp out the "infernal" smuggling racket "to no avail, I am sorry to say".



On October 28, 1989, Colonel Breytenbach wrote a letter to the late editor of the *Sunday Times*, Tertius Myburgh, along with an article dealing with the elephant massacre in Angola. This was passed on to me and I subsequently wrote an article based on his revelations and an interview I had with him on November 19, 1989. Combined with an exposé of Frama Intertrading, the controversial story appeared in the *Sunday Times* under the banner headline: WAR VETERAN LINKS SADF TO UNITA IVORY SLAUGHTER. The subject attracted a great deal of interest and evoked a public outcry both in South Africa and abroad. The story was picked up by newspapers and television stations worldwide and the age-old issue was yet again highlighted in an effort to get something constructive and visible done about the plight of the endangered animal giants.

Colonel Breytenbach operated extensively in the Cuando Cubango region of Angola before it became a theatre of war and also after what he calls Unita's "massive extermination campaign" had turned it into a sterile green desert, cloaked in utter silence except for the "warlike noises made by the intruding Unita and Fapla forces".

"I have complained bitterly to the highest levels in South Africa and in South West Africa, but with no effect whatsoever. Savimbi constantly repeats the lie that he conserves his game. For this purpose he keeps a pocket alive and well in the Luiana area where journalists are taken to get shots of wild animals."

But according to Colonel Breytenbach, Luiana served simultaneously as the perfect hunting ground for some of Savimbi's selected and influential friends, mostly from overseas and South Africa. Referring to the Okahandja seizure, the big haul at Walvis Bay and other "piles of stuff" recovered over the years, Colonel Breytenbach said all the evidence pointed to "a place where elephants can be shot indiscriminately without any regard to game protection laws or organisations". While elephants were admittedly being shot in the Caprivi, Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe, the scale was too small to account for the vast hoards of ivory already confiscated, and these, in themselves, were only a fraction of the tusks that made it to the Far East. "The finger must therefore point to the Cuando Cubango. Of course, I have seen with my own eyes the state of affairs in that afflicted territory and so have the men who served with me through the years."

An empty land created for elephants

In order to share the emotion that flowed from the pen of Jan Breytenbach, it is necessary to reproduce the article, "An empty land created for elephants", which he wrote in 1989 when he was so incensed by what was happening in an area he knew well:

"Between the Cuito and Cuando rivers, with the Luengue river forming the northern boundary and the Savuti channel the southern boundary, lies a stretch of land made by the Creator especially for the African elephant. This land was not meant for man. To keep man out, the Creator infested the whole area with millions of tsetse flies. He also made the climate so harsh that only a handful of Bushmen elected to settle down in a region despised by the rest of mankind. He further augmented the defences of this elephant stronghold by placing it in such a remote corner of Africa that only a

few Westerners have trodden the sandy soil, particularly of the Cuando Cubango. The region teemed with a large variety of game species found nowhere else in Africa, not even in the Kruger National Park. It lies in a transitional zone between the northern humid and wet savannah and the southern scrub savannah thus incorporating flora and fauna species from both zones.

"There were herds of blue wildebeest, zebra, roan antelope, eland, giraffe and tsessebe. Kudus roamed through the savannah in their thousands. Bad-tempered black rhinos, reputed to be of a hitherto unknown sub-species, stood dozing in the shadows of giant trees or thundered off at the drop of a hat in fury towards a vaguely perceived threat. Prides of lions, up to 30 strong, claimed their territories throughout the region. Cheetahs ran down impalas on the edges of flood plains. Secretive leopards feasted like kings on an abundant supply of baboons and the equally numerous but more nimble monkeys. Out on the extensive flood plains of the mighty rivers, thousands of lechwe populated the islands while sitatunga moved secretly along well-hidden footpaths deep inside extensive reed and papyrus beds to get to the succulent shoots and grasses out of reach of waterbuck and lechwe.

"Up and down the lagoons and rivers, hippos snorted and chuckled obscenely at their own dirty jokes, while crocodiles slid along at periscope depth ready to sink prey which had dropped their guard for a fatal second. Huge impi of buffalo, sometimes several thousand strong, would appear during late afternoons in black phalanxes on the edges of the forests, pausing to spy out the lie of the land, while the sunlight flashed off the black shields of their horns, before making their way in long, densely-packed files to the water. Over all of this thickly populated wild domain hundreds of thousands of elephants lorded it with complete disregard for the lesser species around them.

"They raised illuminated dust clouds, which rose over the canopies of the trees as they shuffled along every afternoon, in thousands of herds to the cool sliding waters of the Okavango, Cuito, Luengue and Cuando rivers, where they slaked their monumental thirsts and gained respite from the enervating heat by splashing about in gay abandon in the deep, clear pools or by floundering around in acres of heaving black mud like giant-sized, naughty children. To view this kaleidoscope of African life on such a gigantic scale was a privilege sampled by only a few white and black men. Swallowed up in the deepest recesses of the savannah forests, however, were small families of Vaskela and Barakwena Bushmen who were as much part of this extraordinary world as the wild animals around them.

"Some native villages were clustered around the fringes of the last elephant stronghold, particularly along the northern banks of the Kavango river, but the blacks rarely ventured into the interior. From time to time Portuguese safaris would take hardy clients into this wilderness to hunt for trophies, but not too often and not for too long. The tsetses and heat made life very uncomfortable for pampered European and American hunters."

The butchers of the Cuando Cubango

Breytenbach's article continued:

"Then war came to the Cuando Cubango. At the tail end of the Savannah campaign, Savimbi's Unita forces moved into the only area in Angola still safe for them to live. MPLA never had a desire to occupy a region fit only for elephants and tsetse flies. Savimbi had hardly settled down, however, when he saw the potential riches in hundreds of thousands of tusks, flaunted innocently all around him by hundreds of thousands of elephants. He also relished the riches locked up in the scruffy horns of hundreds of madly charging black locomotives, trying to flatten everything in front of them. Volleys of shots rippled through the region, not the single heavy shot of the discerning hunter, but the tearing rattle of automatic fire from AK-47 rifles and machineguns. Elephants were mowed down indiscriminately by volumes of fire reminiscent of Vietnam war movies. Defenceless hulks crashed down in their thousands while their badly wounded comrades limped off the battlefields in terror, only to be cornered later by relentless bands of hunters. They shot everything; bulls, cows, calves, showing no mercy in a campaign of extermination never before seen in Africa. The hundreds of thousands of elephants became thousands, the thousands became hundreds and the hundreds only a very few.

"In 1986, during one of the 'episodes' in the Angolan war, I travelled throughout the Cuando Cubango, criss-crossing the area for 4 000 km. I found the spoor of five elephants, no rhino, some scattered spoor of kudu, a lone sitatunga, which was promptly shot by my Unita bodyguard, and two reed buck – nothing else. Even the birds had become so scarce that they were barely noticeable. Wildlife had disappeared, leaving behind the mute forests and plains of the savannah. The elephants and other game are still hanging on by their eyelids in the Western Caprivi. This includes the only five black rhinos still alive in the whole region. But even here the slaughter has at last caught up with these pitiful remnants. In the first three

weeks after the SADF closed down its bases, in accordance with Resolution 435, more than 40 poaching incidents were recorded. There are just not enough men on the ground to prevent this almost continuous slaughter. Fortunately, subsequent very heavy sentences meted out to a few captured poachers seem to have stemmed the tide for the moment – but for how long?

"Meanwhile, the streams of ivory and rhino horn continue to flow from the Cuando Cubango in a massive flood via Namibia and South Africa to the markets in the Far East. Unita, of course, cannot physically handle these vast shipments. Somebody else has to do it. The million dollar question is, who are the operators who man, or manned, the pipeline? There are some among us who have a very good idea who these greedy scoundrels are. Some of us even took urgent and necessary steps to stop this incessant haemorrhage. Every time success was in sight, however, we were either forced to abandon our efforts or, in some cases, quietly removed to other theatres from where we could no longer interfere in the operations.

"Today, a deadly silence has settled over the Cuando Cubango. Of course, the rattle of AK-47s and machineguns still continues as Savimbi trains his troops, or on those occasions when Unita forces are pitched against Fapla forces. But the trumpeting lords of the savannah have disappeared. There are no more rhinos to blow off steam angrily or lions to roar their claims of ownership to the furthest corners of their territories. The stampeding buffalo herds dwindled to remnants of the former proud impi and eventually to nothing as they were shot, skinned and cooked to feed thousands of Unita troops and their dependants. The other animals went the way of the buffaloes. The products from their destruction have either been exported or are in huge caches inside Angola, awaiting export, when the situation or the markets become more propitious.

"A remote wildlife stronghold finally collapsed totally with just a flicker of life still detectable in the one small corner known as the Western Caprivi. This flicker of life must be protected at all costs so that once again, when man has finally become tired of fighting a useless war in a desolate region of Africa fit for nothing else but tsetse flies and wild animals, it will be able to spread back into the vast empty spaces it inhabited before. This African paradise can be recreated, but it will need some resolute steps taken by us and particularly by our politicians.

"I consider myself to be a fortunate man. I saw the region as it was before Unita and Fapla ravaged it. Some time in the future, other generations may be as fortunate as I was. They will, perhaps, be able to stare in amazement at the vast numbers of elephants,

buffaloes and, with luck, even a new generation of charging locomotives. I will never see it again. Neither will the present generation of Vaskelas and Barakwenas soon to be uprooted or left out on a limb, deserted by even their former white comrades-in-arms when Resolution 435 was implemented with little regard to the born losers of Africa, the little Bushmen. The recent lack of agreement among the Cites nations, however, bodes ill for the Western Caprivi. The ivory market will no doubt be curtailed, but there are in many cases not enough elephants left to supply even such a potentially modest market, particularly not outside the recognised game reserves.

"The Western Caprivi is, in fact, a game reserve. Its boundaries, however, were determined by certain trigger-happy politicians to ensure that no inroads would be made into their traditional winter hunting grounds. The result is that in the dry season, perhaps 80% of the Caprivi's elephants gather in a strip on the Cuando's west bank, outside the protection of the game reserve, where they can fall prey to the guns of poachers and legal hunters alike. The piece of paper that declared the Western Caprivi a game reserve is, in any case, not worth much because nature conservation can't enforce the protection it is supposed to provide. They lack the manpower, and are additionally hampered by selfish political attitudes among local leaders who insist that the Western Caprivi should be opened for hunting and farming. The tragedy is that the Cites nations could have arrived at a practical and satisfactory solution if they had looked at the problem with less emotion and, sometimes, downright hypocrisy.

"There is much to be said for the well-known conservation principle that a renewable resource is only worth protecting if it can be exploited intelligently for the benefit of mankind, even if it may only be in the distant future. To protect just for the sake of protection is foolish, because it inevitably leads to a conflict between man's interests and the interests of the species being protected. To try and close down the smuggling pipelines is also non-productive because new ones are set up as fast as the old ones are being destroyed. To close down markets only serves as an encouragement for black markets to open and flourish in the dark where they can't be controlled. The answer is therefore to control the open market, not to destroy it. The best way to control the market is to control the buyers and the sellers of ivory.

"It should be possible to create a situation where ivory can only be bought inside the country of origin through official channels, for instance the respective Nature Conservation Departments. All bulk

buyers should be certified by the Cites countries and they should travel to the suppliers in order to bid openly against one another for the ivory or rhino horns available. A Savimbi-type ivory and rhino horn smuggling racket will never be able to develop when all game products, including ivory, have to pass through Nature Conservation for sale only to Cites accredited buyers who come all the way to Windhoek to bid openly for the products displayed right inside the conservation premises. If one can further restrict the craftsmen and the tradesmen to buy only from Cites accredited bulk buyers, then probable loopholes can be plugged, particularly if transgression will also lead to a summary loss of a licence for life.

Peace will be the answer

"The rehabilitation of the Cuando Cubango and the Western Caprivi can still be assured, especially if Savimbi and the MPLA can arrive at some internal solution to their conflict. Unita, however, must then be induced to leave the Cuando Cubango, wrecked as it is, to settle in the more amenable surroundings of their home towns and districts. The elephant may yet return to the bush of the Cuando Cubango, henceforth to be viewed by man as a valuable resource to be harvested intelligently with some compassion and with, at least, a certain feeling of respect for this powerful presence in an environment specially created for him."

The Start of it All

IN NOVEMBER 1988, the SA Police invited me to accompany them on a major joint operation with the Swazi police in the mountainous Ingwavuma region, to hunt down cross-border stock thieves and return stolen animals to their rightful owners in the neighbouring state. The operation was an annual event, primarily aimed at crime prevention, but simultaneously serving as a valuable public relations exercise, fostering goodwill with the Swazi authorities.

A specialist team of rugged detectives from the SAP Stock Theft Unit took part in the operation. A police helicopter was used as back-up, rounding up hundreds of head of cattle over a wide area and herding them towards a central mustering point. Waiting there were the Swazi farmers, who were then given the opportunity to identify their stolen livestock. With the help of the police the farmers took their animals back to Swaziland, and the cattle thieves were extradited to that country for prosecution. A team of narcotics detectives went along on the operation, scrutinising the virtually inaccessible mountain terrain from the helicopter in search of marijuana crops with a view to follow-up operations at harvest time, early the following year.

On the second night of the operation, over a few cold beers at the base camp, I met Lieutenant-Colonel Pieter Lategan, then still a captain in charge of the stock theft unit. We started talking about the smuggling routes through South Africa and I told him of my concern that the police and conservation authorities seemed unconcerned about the escalating international issue. To my surprise, he revealed to me a closely guarded secret: the Minister of Law and Order, Adriaan Vlok, had instructed him to take personal charge of investigations into the activities of the international syndicates.

That night, around the campfire with plenty of liquid refreshment in the cooler, the foundation was laid for a long and mutually trustworthy professional relationship between Pieter Lategan and me.

Detectives of the stock theft unit are a special breed. They live in the veld, know the farmlands of South Africa like the backs of their hands and are in many cases the sons of farmers, with an innate passion for the outdoors. At that stage I had no idea how deeply

involved I would become in the fight against the ivory lords. But the friendship that was formed that night grew into a close working relationship between a journalist and a policeman that I had not thought possible – the kind of relationship almost unheard of in a country where the police force was generally regarded by journalists with suspicion and, in some cases, hatred. For the most part the police regarded journalists with equal contempt.

In a world rife with corruption and deceit – where common criminals had become the sanctions-busting allies of the government – journalists had to question whether particular actions by the police were honest acts in the line of duty or simply smokescreens for unholy actions conceived in the fortified security of government chambers. We trod a minefield, ever alert to the danger of unwittingly falling prey to disinformation ploys. But Pieter Lategan, a hardened farm boy who grew up in the rugged semi-desert area of the Karoo, is a no-nonsense cop who believes in conservation and had for some time been involved in relentlessly hunting down ruthless smuggling syndicates. He was prepared to go head to head with the ivory lords who, since 1989, have realised they are up against a policeman who cannot be bought. His track record, and his good relations with investigators and conservationists worldwide, speak volumes. There are dozens of internationally respected environmentalists who would vouch for this man.

At our first meeting, Pieter and I chatted into the early hours of the morning under the clear skies high in the mountains of Ingwavuma. The campfire had already turned to smouldering white ash and the thin mountain air had chilled our bones when we finally turned in for a few hours sleep. These were the most perfect circumstances for me to get to know Pieter Lategan – out in the bush, away from the hustle and bustle of the city, with no telephones to intrude. We agreed to stay in touch once back in Pretoria, but at that stage I didn't really envisage that anything major in the form of news stories would be forthcoming in the near future. For me, he was just another good contact in the police force. But in the months to come, a series of developments would prove that he really meant business. Things started happening fast, causing near panic among the rank and file of the underworld.

John Ledger on the attack

Lategan ruffled feathers even among his own colleagues and in the ranks of South Africa's official conservation organisations. Some of

his targets had been on the receiving end of bribes by powerful syndicate bosses, while others felt their comfortable positions threatened. During this time, Endangered Wildlife Trust director Dr John Ledger publicly called for a police wildlife unit to stop the smuggling. He said the Department of Environmental Affairs had failed to stop smugglers "getting away with millions of rands". His attack came at a time when US authorities were trying to get the SADF trio of Major Marius Meiring, his wife Pat and Sergeant-Major Waldemar Schutte extradited for trial with their accomplices. "Rhino horn is taken from the Zambezi valley into Zambia and down into South Africa via Botswana, where it is sold to the highest bidders and smuggled off the continent," said Dr Ledger. "It is smuggled from South Africa because the country is the most economically advanced of the African continent, and so has the biggest crooks. The whole business is a matter for the police – it is too big an issue for conservation bodies to tackle." South Africa's reputation as a conservation-minded country was now "standing in tatters" as a result of the current scandal.

Arriving home from Ingwavuma, my wife Erika told me two men had been frantically telephoning me for days. They had left the number of the Sunnyside Park Hotel in Johannesburg, and said they needed to talk to me urgently before returning to Britain. Before I could return their call, Dr Jeremy Anderson, head of Kangwane Parks Board and an executive member of the Rhino and Elephant Foundation – whom I had got to know well during my investigation into the activities of Beck and Pong – telephoned me and said there were two Englishmen who wanted to talk to me about smuggling activities.

At the time, I didn't really regard the meeting as significant, and thought the visitors were just two more among the scores of foreign journalists and conservationists passing through South Africa and wanting to chat about the syndicates using my country as an international conduit. I expected the usual bombardment of requests for names of key smugglers in Africa, names of sources and other information about this emotive issue. In fact, that's exactly what happened, but the two men seemed somehow different from the many others I had encountered. It was a wet and cool summer's day when I met the two clean-cut gentlemen, immaculately dressed in three-piece suits, at the Wimpy Bar at Centurion Lake in Verwoerdburg (recently renamed Centurion).

Ian Croke and Kenneth Edwards didn't reveal much about themselves, but led me to believe they worked for "some kind of British intelligence organisation" investigating the smuggling



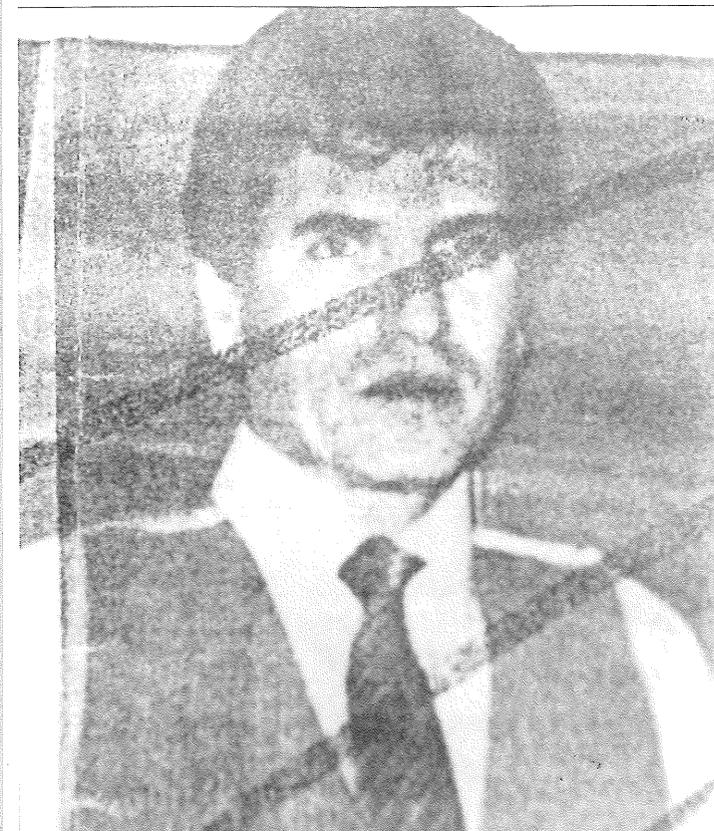
Right: The patriarch: Mr A. H. Pong sr. Photo taken from his ID book.

Below: Mr Nee and Brenda Voue.





Above: The Kazangula bust: a customs official inspecting the dummy compartment in the truck that carried Mr Pong's contraband.



Left Arlindo Maia, who together with Francisco Lopes ran the notorious military front organisation Frama Intertrading (Pty) Ltd.

networks. It was only later that I learned that Crooke was, in fact, a former colonel in the British Special Air Service (SAS). They had a barrage of questions, and it was some time before I realised that part of their groundwork for setting up an undercover operation in South Africa was to confide all the details of it to a local journalist with a view to maximum exposure of any successes they eventually achieved. A few days later I arranged a meeting for them with Colonel Lategan – at the Burgerspark Hotel in Pretoria. This was the first time Pieter Lategan and I had seen each other since we left Ingwavuma. Ian Crooke and Ken Edwards assured him that their undercover operation would be cleared “at the highest level” of government. They said the then director of the SA Nature Foundation, Frans Stroebel, had a sister who was the private secretary of the Law and Order Minister Adriaan Vlok, and that she would serve as a perfect link for them at ministerial level.

Although Ian Crooke mentioned during our conversation that the World Wildlife Fund would be funding their operation, he afterwards changed his tune, and said although certain people in the WWF were involved, the organisation officially had nothing to do with it. He was at pains to stress that the WWF should never be linked with the operation in any way. I only found out later that Crooke was, in fact, the legendary hooded “man on the balcony” who commanded the SAS team which stormed the Iranian Embassy in London in May 1980 and that he had won the Distinguished Service Order for his exploits during the Falklands War. He explained that Sir David Stirling, founder of the SAS, who died a year after the South African operation was launched, was the driving force behind the project. “Sir David wants to spend his money on a worthy cause like saving the African elephants and rhinos from extinction,” Crooke told me. “He is also in an influential position where he can generate funds for such a good cause from his friends in high places in London.”

Sir David and Kas Enterprises

The late Sir David, who was much involved in conservation and charity work, set up the company Kas Enterprises in London as a cover, but I was not to know this until much later. I was keen on being a part of this major covert operation, and in the beginning, genuinely believed it would offer the opportunity of breaking the biggest story of my career – provided this crack team of British war veterans was, in fact, capable of pulling off their plan to stage a

silent coup in the underworld and control the movement of all contraband in Southern Africa. It was an imaginative plan – a dream come true for any investigative journalist. It had all the ingredients of a best-selling novel, except that the plot and the characters were real. But as the plans for secret infiltration of the underworld unfolded, certain restrictions on the operatives struck me as strange – almost senseless – if Crooke wanted to ensure success. His men were under instructions to back off immediately if they encountered any covert South African military intelligence activity while dealing with smugglers. They were ordered to abandon all actions that could compromise the SADF's Department of Military Intelligence (DMI). This made no sense at all, because the military underground was so intertwined with criminal elements operating in Africa that it would have been virtually impossible to launch such an operation without encountering underground intelligence networks.

Soon after the British operatives started coming into South Africa at the beginning of 1989, settling in safe houses in Pretoria and Johannesburg, another strange development fuelled my suspicions. Crooke told me he had approached former South African police spy, Craig Williamson, for help and advice as well as assistance in the operation. A year later, in a telephone conversation, I was told by Kas operatives that steps had been taken to ensure that I had no contact whatsoever with special surveillance teams provided by a South African security company "recommended" by Mr Williamson. Craig Williamson is regarded as one of South Africa's super-spies during the years of the struggle between the former apartheid government and the ANC. In a blaze of publicity, he returned to South Africa in January 1980, with his handler, then security police chief, Brigadier Johan Coetzee, after being employed in Geneva for just over three years by the International University Exchange Fund (IUEF), an important source of funds for the ANC and anti-apartheid groups inside South Africa.

On April 19, 1995, Williamson shocked his former spymasters by confessing in an interview with Britain's *Observer* that he and fellow police agents had bombed the ANC's London offices in Penton Street, King's Cross Station, in 1982 on the orders of the National Party government. Williamson also admitted the South African Police had been responsible for the parcel-bomb murders of Joe Slovo's first wife, Ruth First, in Mozambique and ANC activist Jeanette Schoon and her daughter, Katryn, in Angola. According to Williamson, both First and Schoon were killed by bombs intended for their husbands. Joe Slovo, appointed housing minister in President Nelson Mandela's first cabinet, died of cancer early in

1995, before Williamson made his sensational revelations. Marius Schoon, however, instituted legal proceedings against Williamson, claiming damages for the loss of his wife and daughter. At the time of going to press, the case was still pending, and the dust had not yet settled over Williamson's claim that the Penton Street bomb was assembled in South Africa's embassy in London's Trafalgar Square.

Englishmen on safari in Africa

The day after the Burgerspark Hotel meeting, Crooke and Edwards left for neighbouring countries to try and set up bases and contact people with a view to launching the operation early in 1989. I had a final meeting with them in Johannesburg on their return from Harare before they went home to the UK for Christmas. That was also the last time I saw Edwards. During the second week in January, Dr Jeremy Anderson, former director of the Kangwane Parks Board, telephoned me from Nelspruit and said the Kas team, as they called themselves, were on their way from London. Soon after their arrival, we had a meeting at Colonel Lategan's home in Verwoerdburg. For the next few months, Ian Crooke and some of his men visited me regularly at home to discuss the operation's progress or clarify certain information gathered by surveillance teams in the field. I also visited the safe houses in Pretoria and Johannesburg on a regular basis and sat in on joint strategy meetings between the Kas team and policemen assigned to work closely with them.

A few days before their arrival, Colonel Lategan made contact with a former Rhodesian soldier who had infiltrated a smuggling network. Chain-smoking, whisky-drinking Brian Davies was prepared to cooperate with the police in order to expose a new network being set up between South Africa and Hong Kong by a fugitive American conman. He was a typical secretive professional soldier, like numerous other Rhodesian bush war veterans, forever looking for the next battle to fight or some risky adventure to get involved in.

Undercover agent Brian Davies

My first impression of this man – always dressed in khaki, with short pants and hiking boots – was that his vocabulary was limited to military jargon. Sporting a beard, balding on the top of his head

and with a deep voice hoarsened by liberal amounts of tobacco and whisky, the erstwhile explosives expert had, in 1993, joined up with a South African "security" company, Executive Outcomes, to fight alongside Angolan government forces against Dr Jonas Savimbi's Unita rebel movement.

At our first meeting Brian Davies revealed plans to set up a new international smuggling ring to export rhino horn from South Africa to the Far East. The mastermind was a smooth-talking, womanising American, who later emerged as a notorious international conman wanted by both the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) – for smuggling hi-tech equipment to the Soviet Union – and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Dave Rogers, as he was known in South Africa, turned out to be a widely travelled man with several passports and numerous aliases. The FBI eventually identified him as David Riggs.

On Sunday, January 15, 1989, the sting operation started to take shape. Colonel Lategan and I travelled to Sandton, near Johannesburg, to meet with Brian at the City Lodge hotel. At this stage, Davies had no idea that I was a journalist and assumed that I was a policeman. As part of his cover in Hong Kong, Colonel Lategan handed him an impressive-looking horn, which in happier times must have graced a huge and very proud black rhino. The horn was to be part of the consignment Davies and Riggs (Rogers) would smuggle to the Far East. Brian paid Colonel Lategan R12 500 for the horn and insisted on paying for all the beers that night, remarking with a grin, "What the hell, it's Rogers' money anyway." The rhino horn came from the Natal Parks Board and Colonel Lategan later handed the money to NPB director Dr George Hughes, during a meeting at their Pietermaritzburg headquarters – but that was after Davies had returned from his undercover assignment in Hong Kong.

For Brian Davies, the trip to Hong Kong was to be a dry run to prove to David Riggs that he was in a position to acquire more than enough contraband to set up a new smuggling network, bent on eventual domination of the contraband trade from South Africa. That evening at the hotel the most incredible plot to raid and assassinate key people and secure millions of rands worth of ivory and rhino horn from South African state warehouses unfolded as Brian described in detail all Riggs's future plans. It was clear that Brian was a straightforward, no-nonsense guy who had nothing to hide. I tape-recorded the entire meeting and took photographs as he and Colonel Lategan sat there counting the money for the horn. Brian also had a smaller rhino horn, which he had bought in Swaziland.

One of the names mentioned by Davies later as a contact in Swaziland for rhino horn, was a Portuguese, Victor Lima. Lima's name cropped up several times during my investigations. He was known to sources in both South Africa and Swaziland.

Before we left the hotel, Davies agreed to keep a careful diary of all his movements during the trip to Hong Kong. Clearly concerned about the safety of his girlfriend in Durban, Brian asked Colonel Lategan to keep an eye on her and visit her when he travelled to the coast. On the Monday morning he returned to Durban with the rhino horns, which were to be stashed in a safe place until Davies and Riggs left for Hong Kong.

Brian, Riggs and his girlfriend, Brenda Gatfield, were due to leave from Jan Smuts Airport on the evening of Thursday, January 19. They flew from Johannesburg to Amsterdam before going to Hong Kong, in order to cover their tracks. While Riggs and his girlfriend stayed over in Amsterdam, Davies proceeded on a flight to Heathrow, where he collected certain items for Riggs from his safe-deposit box, and destroyed certain incriminating items at the orders of Riggs. This is dealt with in more detail where I quote from Davies' extensive diary of his excursions further on. They were in transit from Durban, and Colonel Lategan and a back-up team of narcotics detectives stationed at the airport kept a watchful eye on them from the moment they passed through customs into the transit lounge. Their luggage was also taken care of in a special way by customs in the loading bays so that nobody tampered with it in any way that could raise Riggs's suspicions.

Under surveillance

I met with Colonel Lategan and his team at Jan Smuts Airport on the day the trio left South Africa, and from the outset it appeared that everything was going smoothly and according to plan. A surveillance team in Durban reported that Davies, Riggs and Gatfield had boarded a flight to Johannesburg. Narcotics detectives on duty at Jan Smuts airport were very helpful in arranging permits for me to move around freely in the restricted area in order to get clear photographs of the smugglers leaving South Africa. Airport personnel even arranged for me to sit in a bus parked outside the transit lounge, taking pictures, through the one-way windows, of Riggs, Brenda and Davies as they made their way to the waiting aircraft. They passed so close to me that I could have reached out and touched them.

Dr Jeremy Anderson arrived at the airport with Ian Crooke and Ken Edwards, but he kept out of the way for fear that Davies would recognise him. The two Englishmen used the opportunity to arrange with airport personnel for customs clearance of their men from London, carrying "special" equipment. Dr Anderson, who had introduced the two Englishmen to me and other key figures in South Africa, preferred to keep a low profile due to the top secrecy surrounding Crooke and Andrews setting up their undercover operation. Brian Davies at that stage didn't know anything about the operation and the Kas team wanted as few people as possible to know about their activities. They took a particular interest in the Hong Kong operation and closely monitored progress that day. The police also kept them informed as things started to hot up in Hong Kong a few days later.

When Colonel Lategan checked the departure forms for the Amsterdam flight at customs after the aircraft had taken off, we discovered that Riggs had travelled on one of his false passports. At that stage, it was in fact not yet clear if the name Dave Rogers, by which everybody in South Africa knew him, was also an alias. Only later during interrogation in Hong Kong, and from information provided by the the FBI, was his true identity revealed. He used a false Australian passport to leave South Africa as Michael Joseph East, claiming he was an Australian tourist from Sydney and giving his address in South Africa as a well-known Cape Town tourist hotel, the Town House.

I didn't know much about Riggs's attractive 27-year-old brunette companion, except that she was a Durban sales representative, very much in love with the smooth-talking American conman. She was set up by the ruthless American to strengthen his cover, and when I talked to Brenda a few months later, it was clear that she had known nothing about his criminal activities. They had been talking about marriage, and her initial reaction to revelations about Riggs was: "How am I going to face my parents after this?" She was especially upset about the fact that Riggs had wrapped the rhino horns in her underwear before packing them in a suitcase. Although she had been looking forward to the overseas trip, Brenda returned halfway through it, after a violent argument with Riggs. But until that day in May 1989 when I telephoned her and told her the whole story, she never suspected Riggs was involved in anything illegal.

When Davies left for Amsterdam he was wearing a "feminine" pair of sunglasses on his head. I couldn't believe my eyes. Knowing him as a macho man, it was odd that he would assume a different image. It was only after he returned from Hong Kong that the tale of

the sunglasses was cleared up by Davies himself, with great amusement, during a late night gathering at a Durban restaurant. The sunglasses actually belonged to another girlfriend of Riggs's. Brenda didn't know about this woman, who had left her sunglasses in Riggs's vehicle. Travelling to Durban's Louis Botha Airport that afternoon, Brenda demanded to know who the sunglasses belonged to. To save Riggs's skin, Davies grabbed the glasses, pushed them up into his hair and said they were his.

His action saved the day for Riggs, "but I had no choice other than to walk around in public with those sunglasses all day - and I hate sunglasses," said Brian with a broad smile.

Brian kept a meticulously accurate diary of their daily movements from the time they left South Africa. This was a deadly indictment that would prohibit Riggs from ever setting foot in South Africa again. Brian mailed a copy of the diary to himself at the address of a friend based at the Hoedspruit air force base in the Eastern Transvaal.

Ten days later, Brian arrived back in South Africa after Riggs had been arrested by the Hong Kong police on a passport offence. Brian was debriefed by Colonel Lategan at the airport and handed over his original diary. The arrest of Riggs was not part of the plan. Colonel Lategan had a prior arrangement with the Hong Kong authorities that the trio would be allowed to pass unscathed through customs with the contraband, and later return to South Africa, so that Riggs could be caught red-handed later in the year, when he planned a massive ivory heist. But once the Hong Kong authorities realised what a big international fish they had in their pond, they changed their attitude and eventually arrested him. This sudden change in plans happened despite the fact that the Hong Kong police clandestinely made contact with Brian on his arrival and set up a surveillance team monitoring every step Riggs took.

An agent booked into the hotel room next to Brian's to stay in close contact with him. Brian told me later that he was in daily contact with Gary Y. C. Cheung, senior customs investigator in Hong Kong. "Cheung had a team of 20 keeping tabs on myself and Riggs. He was outstandingly cooperative and assisted in every possible way." Interdepartmental squabbles in the Hong Kong Immigration Department (it seems South Africa is not the only country suffering from this disease) were responsible for raising suspicions about the American's passport and he was arrested by the commercial branch of the Royal Hong Kong Police. Cheung battled in vain to get Riggs released and thereby salvage the sting operation.

For four months after his arrest, Colonel Lategan waited

patiently, hoping that Riggs might be released and return to South Africa. Riggs was totally unaware of the sting operation and as far as he was concerned, had been arrested on a fairly minor passport infringement. But he had begun to worry about the possibility of extradition to the United States, where he would have to stand trial on several serious outstanding charges. The FBI very much wanted him home and he was preparing for a bitter fight from his Hong Kong prison cell.

The diary that agent Brian wrote

Brian's diary explains his trip to Hong Kong in detail. Throughout, he refers to Riggs as Dave Rogers as, at that stage, he did not know the man's true identity. He wrote:

"Tuesday, January 17, I left Hermannsburg and proceeded to a flat rented by Dave Rogers at 4B Longbeach, Umhlanga Rocks. Rogers then ran through the travel arrangements and the plan of action upon arrival in Hong Kong. I was supplied with a navy blue blazer, white shirt, paisley tie, grey slacks, socks and shoes, the intention being that I should look like a 'pommy businessman'. The plan, in the event of my being stopped at Kai-Tak airport customs, was for me to deny that the two suitcases containing the rhino horns were mine. At this end a false name was placed on the cases and the rhino horns were wrapped in newspapers and packed with female clothing. The clothing belonged to Rogers's girlfriend, Brenda, and had been left at his flat for convenience sake – it was used without her permission.

"There were nine pieces of rhino horn, varying in weight from 620 g to 5 kg with a total weight of 19,68 kg. We then left Durban for Hluhluwe to pick up and weigh the rhino horn. The horn had, by prior arrangement with Robert Deane (owner of a game ranch in KwaZulu), been left in a blue nylon zip-up suitcase on top of the wardrobe in the main bedroom. Deane had kept the rhino horn for Rogers at his home in Hluhluwe in the gunroom. He was at the time of our visit in Botswana with his wife to recover a broken down vehicle. We placed the horns in two Samsonite suitcases (blue/grey in colour) which were bought previously for this purpose from Ambassador Luggage in Hillbrow, Johannesburg. The following day Rogers and I went to Miller-Weedon Travel in West Street, Durban to collect travel documents and I proceeded to Thomas Cook Rennies Travel in the same street to change R10 000 into US dollars – not traveller's cheques. I received \$4 090 in exchange. Of

the R10 000 changed into dollars, R3 000 was mine as part of the courier's fees and the rest was for Rogers. I handed Rogers \$2 500 and kept \$1 590. He then gave me another \$300 to cover my expenses in London.

"On Thursday, January 19, Rogers, Gatfield and I departed from Louis Botha Airport, Durban. The luggage was checked through to Amsterdam. At Johannesburg, Rogers was identified and photographed by the police. Arrive in Amsterdam on Friday, check luggage – all controls cleared. I then booked a British Airways flight to London. Rogers and Gatfield proceeded to Eden Hotel, Amsterdam, with all the luggage – including the rhino horn. I booked into the Ibis Hotel in Hayes, Middlesex after arriving at Heathrow and proceeded to Abbey Storage, 1 Nestles Avenue, approximately 7 km from the hotel, to locker K138 held in the name of Riceco Ltd. As the key I was given by Rogers didn't fit the padlock, the person in charge cut it off. Another padlock was purchased by me. The reason for my visit to London was to destroy certain documents and then ship the rest of the goods to South Africa. The locker contained various items of clothing belonging to a Shaun Bruce – indications were it was yet another alias used by Riggs and Rogers – as well as two video recorders, two computers, radio equipment, etc.

"The documents destroyed pertained to various business transactions of Rogers in Australia and New Zealand as well as pornographic magazines and sexual stimulant gadgetry. Rogers has an Asian business partner in London, who probably checked up on me afterwards, so most documents were destroyed. Photographs and business cards of interest were posted to myself to be collected later. The items belonging to Shaun Bruce were collected. The intention was to send all other kit via DHL (couriers) to Kessel Feinstein, to be held for collection in Johannesburg. I requested DHL to pick up the computers, but they refused due to incomplete documentation. Returned to Amsterdam on January 21, with 'copy watches', false drivers licences and international drivers licences for Shaun Bruce. All handed to Rogers who destroyed Bruce's false documents.

"Arrive at Kai Tak airport on Monday, January 23. Customs cleared – no problem for me but Rogers thinks he has a problem, so he and Gatfield go to a bus and I catch the courtesy car to the Imperial Hotel and book into room 1608. At this stage I am tired, broken seat on aircraft allowed me no sleep, jet lag and bronchial flu, so I went to bed. Two hours later at approximately three that afternoon Rogers arrives at my room without Gatfield. Explains that Nee offered him \$13 000 (Hong Kong) per kg rhino horn, but he turned down the offer. Rogers stated that Nee is closing down Pao

Fung Trading due to suffering heavy losses recently (Botswana and Namibia), but he will continue with his other companies trading in rhino horn. Rogers also said he saw letterheads on Nee's desk with Pong's name and address on them. Rogers booked into room 1511 in the Imperial and we then went to a bar 'somewhere else' where we ate and talked in general.

"Tuesday, January 24 - self and Rogers to meet Charles K. M. Cheng, managing director of Upbest Securities Company, 1405 Tuna Ning Building, 2 Hillier St. Discussion at Charles was of general nature and to make arrangements for his 'uncle' from Red China to come and view the horn and set a price. Rogers asked for \$25 000 (Hong Kong) per kg. Charles had a discussion with his uncle on the phone. The uncle, referred to by Rogers as 'The Fat Man', offered \$13 000 (Hong Kong) per kg and agreed to come to Hong Kong to view the horn at Charles' office the next morning. During the afternoon, Rogers took me to another contact, Kin Pang Li, manager of Lee Bing Kee Ginseng Company Ltd, 132 Wing Lok St. Again the horn was offered for \$25 000 (Hong Kong) per kg and an agreement made to view it the following afternoon.

"The next day Rogers hired a taxi from nine in the morning until 2.30 that afternoon. Horn taken to Charles' office for viewing by the Fat Man. Fat Man and son checked the horn and still stick to their initial offer of \$13 000 (Hong Kong) per kilo. Rogers declines the offer. Horn then taken to taxi where I waited until Rogers tied up the viewing arrangements with Kin Pang Li. At 2.30 Rogers and I went to the Ambassador Hotel, next door to our own hotel where he had previously booked a conference room for two hours. Kin Pang Li and son (the interpreter) attend and view the horn. Eventually agreed on \$23 000 (Hong Kong). Transaction/exchange to occur on Thursday noon. The next day (Thursday) the rhino horn are taken by Rogers and me to Kin Pang Li's shop where it was weighed and the agreed upon weight 19,48 kg (some skin on horns) and the price is dropped to \$22 000 (Hong Kong), apparently due to a shipment of 100 kg of rhino horn arriving that day. (No further details about this except that it was brought in by ship).

"Both of the sons of Kin Pang Li go to their bank and return with \$428 560 (Hong Kong). This money is then taken by me to the subway in the company of Rogers. At the subway he gives me \$100 000 (Hong Kong) to pay my bills with and takes the rest to his bank to be deposited into his Swiss bank account. At this time we are to go to Macau as Rogers is sure his Australian passport in name of J. East is compromised. After arriving in Macau we have a beer in the casino hotel and later return to our hotel in Hong Kong. On Friday

morning I depart for Johannesburg via Taiwan and after a 12 hour stopover arrive in South Africa in time to liaise with Major Lategan."

Brian also noted in his diary that if Rogers was held on the passport offence only, he was clean and wouldn't be under suspicion by the Americans or any of his accomplices in South Africa.

During his debriefing it appeared that he was considerably knowledgeable about some of the networks operating from Swaziland to South Africa, and that his contacts in this regard would be useful for an undercover operation to expose activities in the neighbouring state as well as in Natal, where small pockets of rhino were constantly threatened by marauding poachers. Brian indicated that he was keen to carry on with his undercover activities and it was decided that he should be deployed as soon as possible to ensure that his cover was not blown. His return was kept very quiet, and I agreed with Colonel Lategan not to write a word about the operation, in the hope that Riggs might be freed in Hong Kong and return to Durban. It was quite a difficult undertaking to give, because I already had more than enough to write a major story, but I kept my word and crossed my fingers that the big one would still become a reality.

Payback time for the rhino horn

Towards the end of January I travelled with Colonel Lategan to Pietermaritzburg for a series of meetings arranged by Nico Snyman of the Natal Parks Board. At this stage Brian, who was back in Natal, still didn't know I was a journalist. He learned my true identity that morning in Nico Snyman's office at NPB headquarters. At first, he was suspicious about my presence, but between Pieter Lategan and Nico, who had also known me for quite some time, they managed to put his mind at ease. Since then we have built up a good working relationship, and he has become a useful source of information. Before we left for Durban, Colonel Lategan held discussions with the director of the NPB, Dr George Hughes. He also handed over R12 500 to him paid by Brian with Riggs's money for the big rhino horn used in the sting operation. The impressive horn was, in fact, supplied by the NPB from its warehouse at Colonel Lategan's request.

In Durban, that afternoon, we met up with Simon Pillinger, wildlife investigator for NPB, based at the time in the troubled game reserves in Zululand, constantly under threat from poachers target-

ting the protected rhinos in the area. In a marathon meeting at the Durban City Lodge, the case of Riggs and his local accomplices, still operating from Natal, was discussed at length. Ways to act against them and other suspects in the province in future were also looked at.

Riggs' Durban flat, Robert Deane's movements in Zululand as well as a company involved in the export of dried shark skins, were placed under surveillance. At this stage, Brian's work as an undercover agent for the police was temporarily done and it was decided between Colonel Lategan and Colonel Crooke to employ Davies as part of the Kas team in the training of an anti-poaching unit in the Etosha Game Park in South West Africa (Namibia). It was also a way to keep the restless Davies occupied and prevent him from leaking any information regarding the Hong Kong operation to anyone. Before leaving for Pretoria the next morning, final arrangements were made for Brian to travel to the Transvaal for an introduction to the operatives in the Kas team. I undertook to set up a meeting for Nico Snyman with Ian Crooke two weeks later.

Back in Durban, after her disappointing brief trip abroad, Brenda Gatfield did not have much information on what had really happened to her former boyfriend. Brian was instructed to stay clear of her and although the police believed that she might be able to provide useful information about Riggs, Colonel Lategan ordered everybody else involved in the operation to avoid any contact with her in case she was still in contact with Robert Deane – Riggs' friend who kept the contraband rhino horn in his house at Hluhluwe prior to Riggs smuggling it to Hong Kong. Fears were that any awkward questions could alert the wrong people about what was going on.

Heartbroken, and her lover in jail

On February 16, Brenda received a telegram from a Hong Kong firm of solicitors, Haldane Midgley and Booth, who were acting on Riggs' behalf. "Dear Ms Gatfield, we as his solicitors confirm that we act for your friend Rogers who is currently detained in Lai Chi Kok reception centre in Hong Kong awaiting a formal request for extradition to the US from here on charges relating to allegations of wire fraud in the US. If you require further details about this we are authorized to give them to you. Please contact Geoff Booth as indicated at the following fax, telex and address. Our client requests that you post filing cabinet key to Rob Deane." The contents of that particular filing cabinet remain a mystery to this day, but it is clear

that some very incriminating items were kept in it. Certain people involved in the operation were even prepared to burgle the Durban premises housing the filing cabinet to retrieve the contents. But I was never told if this was in fact done or not. The possibility was not ruled out that some of Riggs' partners in crime in the coastal city may have done some damage control and removed from the cabinet in question whatever incriminating evidence it may have contained.

During March, Nico Snyman made contact with Brenda as the long and drawn out fight by the FBI for Riggs' extradition to the US began. Riggs wanted to prevent his extradition at all costs, because he knew back home there was no escape from justice. During this time Brenda received a letter from him, smuggled out of jail in Hong Kong, telling her how much he loved her and wanted her back (see appendix 6 on page 192). This was the same man who had left an attractive blonde distraught and on the verge of a nervous breakdown in Australia, when he fled the country a few months before he met Brenda in Durban.

An Australian journalist telephoned me towards the end of 1989, begging me not to reveal the identity of the girl, because she was still in a state of shock following her break-up with Riggs and wouldn't be able to cope with her name being dragged into the scandal. Brenda told me in May 1989 that Riggs – known to her as Rogers – told her about the sexy blonde he had left in Australia and described her as pop star Kylie Minogue's "double". A colour photograph of a somewhat overweight Riggs in the Sydney Tower Restaurant with the blonde girl confirmed that he wasn't exaggerating her beauty. But it was clear from Riggs's letter to Brenda that he was a lonely and very worried man, yearning for her to take him back:

"Darling Brenda, I don't know how much you have been told, if anything, so I will fill you in. On 28 January I was arrested at HK airport for travelling on a 'falsely obtained' passport. I was boarding a flight for Johannesburg at the time. The airport police turned me over to Interpol and I was held without charge for 48 hours, then formally charged with the above offence. I have been repeatedly questioned about various things including who B. Gatfield was (e.g. hotel bookings) and who the bearded man was I was seen with. I have refused despite all of their tactics to divulge any details.

"The US authorities have come up with about a dozen bullshit stories to use to extradite me and I have hired a law firm to assist me fighting extradition. I have been unable to communicate with you safely so I asked a friend to try call you after my arrest, but only Denzil (believed to be a family member of Brenda or a flatmate –

DWP) was home. I have every reason to believe the US will be successful in forcing me to return to the States and we both know what my fate will be there! I guess it doesn't really matter because that day I left you at HK airport I lost every reason I had for living anyway – I suppose I am ready to face whatever fate will demand of me. My lawyer has been in touch with Rob (Deane) and Rob asks if you will post him the filing cabinet key – PLEASE COMPLY. I don't know what happened between us, but I do know that for the first time in my life I felt true happiness and found someone who I would have given up anything for – even now I am putting up with endless interrogations and protecting you from any involvement as I promised I would. As I am 'putting my affairs in order' I must tell you that if you ever get contacted by an American lawyer named Mr Lee, he will be carrying out my wishes as I had amended my will about two months ago to include you and your family.

"I hope this doesn't happen, but the prospects don't look good. Most of all I must tell you that I forgive you for the things you did to hurt me and I hope you will find it in your heart to some day understand and forgive me as well. I will always treasure those beautiful feelings you wrote to me about and I will relive those weeks we had together in my mind forever. I want you to know I only wanted what was best for you and since you wanted me out of your life, I suppose what has happened to me is best. Rest assured I have in no way involved you in this and won't, you may be sure. I have been in the prison hospital, so I managed to swipe this aerogram. I love you. I know you'll never be sorry, but I'll always have feelings for you any way. All my love. Good luck!

Dave."

The FBI in South Africa

During May 1989 an FBI special agent from Washington visited South Africa for a week to gather background information on Riggs' activities with a view to his extradition hearing in Hong Kong. The special agent had several meetings with Colonel Lategan, who introduced him to me. He also had the opportunity to sit in on a joint meeting of detectives and operatives of the Kas team in the Johannesburg safe house where strategy against certain key smuggling syndicates was planned. Hot on his heels was Douglas Hykle, ivory unit coordinator of Cites from Lausanne, Switzerland, who was seeking first-hand information on the exciting developments taking place in a country regarded as one of the smuggling skunks

of the international community. Although Colonel Lategan also introduced him to Ian Crooke and his men, it was interesting to note that, unlike the cordial way the FBI agent was received and allowed to sit in on a meeting of the organisation, Mr Hykle's visit to the safe house, and a subsequent briefing on Cites' activities, was greeted with suspicion and hostility. Colonel Crooke was visibly upset by the fact that Mr Hykle had in fact visited the safe house in Duff Road, and knew where the headquarters of the undercover operation was. He questioned the Cites representative's honesty in view of certain suspicious people he met afterwards who threatened to expose the clandestine project to save their own skins.

A month later, one of the officers directly involved in Riggs' arrest in Hong Kong also took a lively interest in the case and held discussions with Colonel Lategan and myself while he was on holiday in South Africa. I met Detective Inspector Philip C. Wallace of the Royal Hong Kong Police commercial crime bureau over lunch at Jan Smuts Airport on his way back home. He had no more information about Riggs' situation than what was coming from other sources, and it appeared that it was curiosity about the case that led him to discuss it at all.

In May 1989 it began to look as if the US battle to extradite Riggs, to stand trial on more than 25 counts of fraud, would be successful, thus scuttling all hope in South Africa that the man now dubbed the "Rhino Cowboy", would be back to face the music. It was at the time of the FBI agent's visit that Colonel Lategan gave me the go-ahead to disclose details of the undercover operation, which I did in the *Sunday Times* on May 14, 1989. When I contacted Brenda Gatfield in Durban and told her that her life with Dave Rogers – as she knew him – was going to be exposed on the front page of the biggest circulation newspaper in South Africa, she was shocked. She feared that the exposure would cost her her job as a sales representative for the Karos Hotel group – one of the major South African hotel groups – and begged me to leave her out of the story. At one stage during our conversation she asked me to phone back a little later, saying: "I desperately need a cigarette right now, but there's nothing in the flat, I have to run to the shop to get some." There was no way I could convince her at that stage to talk to me or pose for a photograph, but eventually, we got lucky. The wife of Doug Gordon, erstwhile *Sunday Times* TV correspondent, also worked for Karos in Johannesburg, and she contacted Brenda and assured her that her job was secure.

Brenda tells her story

Brenda agreed to an interview after that, but was still nervous about being in the spotlight, and worried especially about what her parents would think. It appeared they were a close family. Brenda told me how shattered she was when she discovered her lover was the ruthless mastermind behind an amazing plot to hijack rhino horns worth R6-million. It particularly shocked her that the plot entailed the murder of three Natal Parks Board employees. Some of the grim details of her ex-lover's plans to acquire the rhino horn confiscated in raids by NPB inspectors, were told to her by senior NPB official Nico Snyman. He had briefed her about the truth behind Riggs' scam on the instructions of Colonel Lategan. Nico Snyman had to keep tabs on Brenda's movements and screen every bit of information contained in Riggs' letters and notes to Brenda from his Hong Kong prison cell.

Brenda had met Dave Rogers/Dave Riggs while working in Richards Bay on the north coast of KwaZulu/Natal in October 1988. Oblivious to the fact that he headed a multimillion-dollar ring smuggling rhino horns out of Africa to the Far East, she accompanied him to Hong Kong – her first trip abroad. After a heated argument over “personal differences”, she left him. Part of the argument was about the disappearance of clothing from Riggs' flat in Natal. “He told me my clothes must have been stolen and we had a terrible fight over it in Hong Kong. I found out after I got home that he even used my underwear for his immoral purposes,” she said angrily. “Before arriving in Hong Kong, all I saw were airports all over Europe and enjoyed nothing else of my first trip abroad. I feel angry. I feel I let my folks down,” she added tearfully. “I never want to see him again in my life. He didn't really impress me at the beginning. He was a typical, arrogant American.” But he was persistent and the friendship developed into a serious relationship, with the couple even talking about marriage and having children. Riggs told her he was an international import-export agent setting up an office in South Africa. “I knew he was dealing in things such as leather for shoes, but never realised he was involved in anything illegal,” she told me.

Brenda first became suspicious of Riggs' activities when she discovered that he travelled on false passports. “I asked him why he lived like James Bond – always ducking and diving. Dave told me it was part of his way of life and said he was a very cautious person.” She confirmed that she had replied to Riggs' impassioned letter smuggled out of the Hong Kong prison, telling him she didn't want anything to do with him ever again.

The amazing plan to “assassinate” members of the Natal Parks Board and hijack rhino horn from its storeroom, was revealed in the *Sunday Times* under the headline FALL OF THE RHINO COWBOY on May 14, 1989. Soon after word got out of the four-month undercover probe by the special task force, and in order to thwart a bloody raid on the vaults packed with confiscated rhino horn and ivory, a very nervous NPB director, Dr George Hughes, and another unnamed top conservation official rode shotgun on a truck laden with the precious rhino horn and ivory to a secret vault, knew where it was stashed. Only Dr Hughes and the other official know where this fortified storeroom was, and only one of them had a key to the vault.

The former Rhodesian soldier and explosives expert, Brian Davies, described how the raid was planned over the Easter weekend in 1989. It was for this purpose that he and Riggs did the dry run to Hong Kong to open the new smuggling route and find prospective buyers for the contraband. His instructions were to abduct the secretary and the woman in charge of the NPB storeroom keys the week before Easter. “I was supposed to get the keys from them, kill them and dump their bodies.” A senior official earlier unwittingly gave information about the location of the storeroom – and the identity of the person who carried the keys – to Riggs during a casual conversation at NPB headquarters. On the night of the raid gang members were to have created a diversion in the nearby black township of Montrose by throwing petrol bombs and handgrenades to distract the police from nearby Town Hill. As the man in charge of the raid, Davies was to handpick a five-man team for the operation. Colonel Lategan decided that members of the crack SAP task force would be part of the team to ensure that the gang was rounded up effectively once the stolen horns were handed over to the ringleaders.

One of Davies' assignments, on returning from Hong Kong, was to find a smallholding between Durban and Maritzburg where planning and preparation for the actual operation would be carried out. As a front, the gang would embark on drying shark fins for export. These would be supplied to a Durban company also allegedly involved in the smuggling network.

One of South Africa's most dedicated fighters for nature conservation, former Democratic Party spokesman Rupert Lorimer, played a major role in uncovering Riggs' activities. It was he who introduced Brian Davies to the police. “Brian told me he had been drawn into the ring through friends who were involved in smuggling. He wanted the whole thing exposed. I then introduced him to the police and the ball started rolling. I'm very impressed with the

efficient way the police handled this case," Lorimer commented afterwards.

For Brian Davies, the strain of his undercover commitments had taken its toll. He risked his life for several months infiltrating the shady world of the international smuggling syndicate. He planned ways of opening the new route to the Far East in the extremely competitive world of rhino horn and ivory smuggling while living on a knife edge. He had developed a stomach ulcer, both from the stress of his work and fear for the life of his girlfriend at the time, who acted as an intermediary between him and the police. The extreme tension the couple had to live with during these trying times resulted in a parting of the ways for them soon after he returned from Hong Kong. Brian's girlfriend knew a member of the smuggling ring and was told several times to tell Davies to "back off, or they would come and hurt me, or kill him". They knew about his activities and there were fears that Davies and Riggs might interfere or try to take over their networks. The police were in contact with her while Brian was in Hong Kong, and she was also responsible for supplying the names and details of the smugglers. These names and a copy of the document she wrote about the matter are in my possession.

A tough lady

A determined and stubborn lady, she refused to be intimidated by or scared off by the shady people involved in gunrunning and drug trafficking – real rough characters she had known since her student days. It's not clear how she became involved with a key link in the smuggling fraternity in Durban, but rivalry for her love between Davies and this shady character, appears to have scuttled their relationship. Although he never talked about his feelings for her, it was clear that Brian cared deeply for her and lived in constant fear that she might be hurt by his undercover activities. From the outset, he had gone out of his way to ensure that Colonel Lategan would keep her safe.

For her own protection, I will not identify her or the criminal elements who tried to pressure her into "sacrificing" Davies. I will refer to her as "Jenny" and to the shady character who appears to have been Brian's rival for her affections, as "Tony". A day before Davies and Riggs left for Hong Kong, Jenny met Tony at the Camden Hotel in Durban, and they went for a meal at Mike's Kitchen. He wanted to know why she was so uptight. "I'm worried

about not having a house to come back to when varsity starts and about the crowd Brian's hanging out with," she said. Tony knew about Brian's links with Riggs and pressed Jenny to tell him more about the smuggling operation. "He wanted to know why Brian still carried on working for Dave (Riggs), why he didn't leave. He claimed during the conversation that Dave's real name was Alan Falstaff and that he had been involved in dealing with firearms until 18 months before, but had been lying low since then."

Tony said he had discovered this while checking up on Riggs to see who he was after Riggs offered to bring a consignment of cameras into South Africa "if I could guarantee to sell them, both taking a cut", Tony told Jenny. Although the Durban manager of a major chain of photographic equipment dealers was keen to clinch the deal, Tony stopped all negotiations when he discovered that Riggs was in fact the Falstaff character. Tony told Jenny he had never realised how much she was involved with Brian and Riggs. "Which I was not, except being party to the knowledge", Jenny remarked in her notes. He promised to make a few phone calls to make sure that she would not get hurt. "I persuaded him not to make waves, contending that the less notice anyone took of me, the safer I was." Tony offered her the protection of two of the "big bosses" in the gunrunning syndicates, but implied that this would mean "sacrificing" Brian, or at least not helping him any more.

Despite pressure from Tony, Jenny refused to be intimidated and continued to contact Brian. Before Brian boarded the aircraft at Louis Botha Airport in Durban on January 19, en route to Hong Kong, Jenny, after speaking with Colonel Lategan in Pretoria, telephoned him and told him in a coded message that he was cleared through Hong Kong customs and no police would stop him from smuggling the rhino horn. The following day she again telephoned Colonel Lategan and said she had some notes and further information for him from Brian. Four days later she received a telephone call from the New Hanover police station informing her that Colonel Lategan was on his way to see her. She directed him and Nico Snyman, of NPB, to the flat she was staying in. Jenny told Colonel Lategan about Tony's threats against Brian and provided him with all the details of Tony's criminal activities. "I asked them not to tell Brian anything about it, for reasons of incompetence (on my part) and jealousy."

In her notes about the meeting with the two law enforcers, Jenny remarks wryly: "They grilled me about trusting them. They looked like cops! But instilled a suspicion in me that will guarantee that I will take no one at face value again, especially not on the phone.

Lategan asked me to keep an ear on the ground for arms deals, not endangering myself." The day after this meeting, Tony really turned on the pressure for her to convince Brian he should back off from his operation with Riggs. "He told me Brian had three weeks to back off or else they would come hurt me, or kill him. I asked what do they care about a few measly rhino horns, in comparison to arms?" It turned out that Brian had become a major threat in exposing one of the biggest gunrunning operations in the country. Tony told Jenny there were 12 top guys involved in this group of smuggling syndicates, and four of them had provided financial backing to the tune of R4-million in opening the new smuggling route. "With this connection, somehow, a network had been built up, with Hluhluwe as obvious centre, for getting rhino horn out of the country," Jenny remarked in her notes. This Hluhluwe connection in the smuggling networks is a particularly disturbing factor.

The Hluhluwe area teems with smugglers and small-time crooks of all kinds, and people like Simon Pillinger of NPB are deeply concerned about the poaching threat posed to the concentration of rhinos there. The world renowned Mkuze Game Reserve is particularly well known for its black rhino. The contraband is flown to a nearby landing strip at Hluhluwe from where it is shipped by boat to Kosi Bay and from there across the beach over the border into Mozambique. Once there, the contraband goes to Beira to be shipped overseas.

More crooked cops

In her notes, Jenny named a South African police sergeant in the area as being on the take. "He is a cop/border guard with a small pay cheque, but an enormous house." From her intimate chats with Tony, Jenny managed to find out why Brian was such a big threat to the border arms smugglers. "The crux of the matter is, however, that the organisation of the group has become too centralised, therefore Brian's little rhino investigation will start people digging and that will uncover a multitude of other operations."

Detailed information about the arms smuggling in Natal was given by Brian to the security police soon after his arrival back in the country. Although the security police appeared to take a sincere interest in these underground activities, it is to date not clear whether a proper investigation was ever carried out. In fact, a number of burning questions about smuggling activities in South Africa remain unanswered, and will probably never be cleared up,

due to persistent claims, over the years, of police and military involvement in certain smuggling operations. A cryptic remark by Jenny in her notes may help to explain this situation. "I doubt the police very much, although I think Lategan is OK, but powerless against the things that so much money can buy."

The flashpoint area of Hluhluwe – also known as the white gold triangle – is a smuggler's dream. While the bitter, bloody civil war between the Frelimo government and the Renamo bandits raged, there was a constant flow of refugees from war-ravaged Mozambique into the triangle – the perfect situation for the moving of contraband. Illegal immigrants and refugees from both Mozambique and Swaziland enter South Africa in buses, carrying with them small quantities of illegal consignments of ivory and rhino horn. The first contact point is a popular bottle-store at Mkuze, where three coloured men check the illegal merchandise and the validity of the runners carrying the contraband. One of the men then accompanies the runners to lower Mkuze where Kobus Oosthuizen – identified by Riggs during his interrogation by federal agents of the US Fish and Wildlife Service Division of Law Enforcement, after his extradition from Hong Kong – allegedly buys the contraband from them for cash or supplies of food and clothing. The runners are then transported back to Mbazwana, 80 km away, at the mouth of the Usutu River, where they walk through the desolate area back to Mozambique. If necessary, they would bribe their way past Frelimo and Renamo soldiers with some of the supplies they receive in Natal for the contraband.

In October 1989 an FBI special agent in Washington informed the police in Pretoria that Riggs' extradition to the US was imminent and requested that all relevant documents and other information regarding the fugitive American be made available to the US Fish and Wildlife Service Division for his indictment. On February 13, 1990, FBI Special Agent Robert Standish, attached to special operations, interrogated Riggs in Kansas City soon after his extradition from Hong Kong (see appendix 7 on page 193).

From Riggs' apparently cooperative attitude at that stage, it was clear that he was fighting for survival and wouldn't hesitate to "shop" anyone else in order to save his own skin. For this reason, NPB official Nico Snyman travelled to the US in June 1991 for an interview with Riggs, to find out how much detail he was prepared to divulge about his South African connections.

At the start of the FBI interrogation, Riggs told Special Agent Standish that he had a personal computer with him when he was arrested in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong police were unable to

people in the pictures were Rob Deane, his wife, Marlene, and John Rath, and that they had been taken while Rath was visiting the Deane family on their farm at Hluhluwe.

During January 1988, while living in New Zealand, Riggs' briefcase, with his false passport and ID, was stolen. The syndicate made arrangements for him to get new identity and travel documents. He was put in touch with a man known to him only as Richard, doing business as Travcour Visa Service in Auckland, New Zealand and in Sydney, Australia, and allegedly involved in laundering documents, passports etc. When Riggs entered South Africa in May/June 1988 on a passport in the name of Price, he was also carrying a back-up passport in the name of East – the one he used to fly to Hong Kong a few months later. According to the FBI interrogation report, Riggs had a contact in England, Charlie Chan of Manchester, who also forged passports and provided him with one in the name of John Alleston. "Chan has two eagles tattooed on his chest," the report stated.

While Riggs was in South Africa, he was contacted in Johannesburg by a British passport "courier", James Angus Bulloch, living in Bulawayo or Lake Kariba. Bulloch put Riggs in contact with Rob Deane, "a gunrunner and rhino horn and elephant tusk smuggler living in South Africa". Deane showed him their ivory and rhino horn smuggling scheme, and how he posed as a legitimate big game hunting guide. Deane told Riggs, "We can get you as much as you want" – meaning rhino horn. Riggs told the US law enforcement officer that little of Deane's income came from legitimate hunting. Deane operates Zululand Safaris in Hluhluwe and produces a big game hunting brochure. On the back of it is a picture of John Rath's friend and accomplice in Chicago, Mike (surname unknown). Deane allegedly deposits the proceeds of his smuggling operations in overseas bank accounts and smuggles most of the rhino horn to the US, Hong Kong or Singapore. He obtains the rhino horns from three different sources: farmers, game farms and poachers. The poaching is done in three different areas by means of bartered weapons, auto parts, food, etc. for poached rhino horn, and armed poachers would also bring in the rhino horns.

Riggs claimed that Deane had three main collectors of rhino horn from the hit squads:

- Kobus Oosthuizen, a tall, thin, bearded man operating a Zulu trading post and a pineapple farm near the Swaziland/Mozambique border approximately 40km from Hluhluwe. He is a South African citizen and an active SADF reservist.

- Colin Welensky, a professional big game hunter who lives in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. He collects the rhino horn from the poachers and transports it to Deane in exchange for cash and weapons.
- John-Black Benn, former assistant director of the Botswana Game Department. He owns a crocodile farm and also collects the rhino horn from the hit squads and transfers it to Deane in exchange for cash and weapons.

Deane trades a lot of weapons for the rhino horn and elephant tusks. Riggs once saw approximately 100 AK-47 rifles at Deane's residence. The next time he was there, all the guns were gone. Grenades are also traded, said Riggs. Sometimes a single grenade is traded for a rhino horn. Most weapons came into South Africa as semi-automatic and were then converted to fully automatic weapons. "Deane has access to sophisticated intelligence charts, maps, roadblock locations, etc. He always knew where and when the roadblocks were to be and knew the captain in charge of the roadblocks," Riggs told the US authorities in Kansas City. This disturbing revelation confirmed an acutely problematic situation experienced by Colonel Lategan and his men, as well as NPB officials – in the investigations into smuggling activities in the area certain elements inside military intelligence abused their positions and knowledge to frustrate all efforts to block the smuggling routes. As one senior policemen told me early in 1991, "I'm fed up. We can't get anywhere with our investigations in Natal without the boys in brown trying to obstruct us in gaining any successes."

American arms for rhino horn

Special Agent Standish noted in his report that Rath was probably transporting arms to South Africa in exchange for rhino horn which could be sold at a huge profit in the US. For example, Riggs placed a value of \$300-\$400 on an AK-47 which would be traded for a horn weighing approximately 8 kg. Riggs also told Agent Standish that one of the foremost taxidermists in South Africa, Nico van Rooyen of Pretoria, fitted fake horns on mounted rhino trophy heads and sold the real ones in the US for \$5 000 per kilo. Deane maintained contact with Rath through encoded fax messages, and they used scramblers during telephone conversations. Riggs claimed, during his interrogation in Kansas City, that big money was made with rhino horn traffic shipments to the US. Rhino horn sells for \$1 400-\$2 500 per kg. Deane ships rhino horn to Rath and his partner, who

supply markets both in the US and Hong Kong. Two recipients of rhino horn in the US were Alan Ting in Los Angeles, and a Mr Alvariqah, trade commissioner at the United Arab Republic's US mission. Alvariqah is an official emissary of the Yemen government and has diplomatic immunity. He has dealt with Rath and Deane for more than four years in purchasing rhino horn for export to Yemen in diplomatic pouches. Deane operates a Zulu arts and crafts shop as a front to ship rhino horn via Switzerland to the US. He also stuffs horns into game trophy heads shipped to the US. "He has even used a personal computer that was hollowed out to transport rhino horn into the US."

In the July 1989 edition of the authoritative US newsletter, *Hunting Report*, Deane came under fire from furious American hunters who had difficulty getting their trophies from him. "The *Hunting Report* has heard from several subscribers who have not received trophies after hunting with South African Rob Deane - who apparently has become involved in conflicts with hunters and at least one agent over other matters as well. Subscriber Huck Spaulding, for example, alleged he paid Safari Outfitters roughly \$20 000 to hunt a rhino and other animals with Deane, but the trophies did not materialise as promised. Spaulding now holds Safari Outfitters responsible. Safari Outfitters' Gretchen Starke said she and Lloyd Zeman were working to get Spaulding's money back and hadn't given up yet. "We know Huck as a good client. We are sorry about this problem and we are working on it," she said. "If the various people who are trying to collect from Deane would like to coordinate through the *Hunting Report*, and perhaps share legal fees, we will assist any way we can."

Riggs described in detail to Agent Standish how he and a New Zealand citizen, Shaun Adrian Bruce, stole a very large rhino horn from a British Museum patron in Scotland. At the time of the theft Bruce was using a false passport in the name of Reidy. The rhino horn was delivered to Hong Kong by "Reidy" and Riggs and sold for approximately \$75 000 cash to Charles Cheung. According to Riggs, Rath has met "Reidy" and is worried that he might finger Rath. After Reidy was released from prison in the US in December 1989, Riggs paid for an attorney to meet him, as well as for his flight back to New Zealand.

Burundi is still stockpiling large quantities of poached ivory. Many of the poachers travel with ivory through the country and the Burundi Defence Force makes it appear to be a legitimate anti-poaching operation, when in fact they are simply stealing the poached ivory, laundering it with Cites permits, and selling it, Riggs

told Agent Standish. In November 1988 Riggs made a trip to Burundi with Deane to inspect a warehouse full of ivory guarded by the Burundi Defence Force. Rath probably arranged the financing. The contact man was either the Minister or Assistant Minister of Trade and Industry. Riggs and Deane were taken to a military base where the ivory was stored. Approximately 15 000 tusks, or 80 000 kg of ivory, were observed in the warehouse by Riggs. "Burundi authorities would make arrangements to get Cites permits through the Burundi government for a fee. The permits and ivory would be laundered through Mozambique," Riggs told the FBI.

The Swaziland Massacre

LITTLE DID LIZ REILLY realise how prophetic her words would prove to be when, in March 1989, she said that Ted's precious herd of rhino would be sitting ducks for ruthless poachers. Barely three years into the future, her fears would turn to grim reality.

During March 1992, the ruthless onslaught by marauding gangs of poachers intensified, their efforts concentrating on Swaziland's vulnerable rhino herds. Where members of Ian Crooke's team had previously been available to safeguard the herds, the demise of Operation Lock left Ted and Liz on their own to wage a desperate battle against the poachers.

"Another rhino has been murdered. Vandals entered Mkhaya Nature Reserve with an AK-47 and sprayed a big white bull named Mtondo with gunfire. Human scum have killed him," were the angry and despairing words Ted greeted me with on the morning of Friday, December 11, 1992. Mtondo was tame and trusting, accustomed to the presence of humans no more than a few metres away. Safe and unthreatened at Mkhaya, he time and again had offered thousands of tourists from all over the world the opportunity of taking back to distant lands close-up photographs of an African rhino. Such experiences bring millions of dollars in foreign currency to African countries, remarked Ted bitterly. "And now human scum have killed him." Mtondo put up a gallant fight when he was blasted at point-blank range, but before he could reach his killers, he collapsed and died. Mkhaya rangers interrupted the slaughter, and in a joint operation, the Mkhaya anti-poaching unit and the Royal Swazi Police quickly apprehended the culprits and confiscated an AK-47 assault rifle.

One of the suspects was wanted by the police in connection with the murder of four people. Another was a former Mkhaya employee, who had been jailed for poaching royal game, but, for some unknown reason, paroled. On the day he walked out of prison, he returned to Mkhaya for the slaughter of Mtondo.

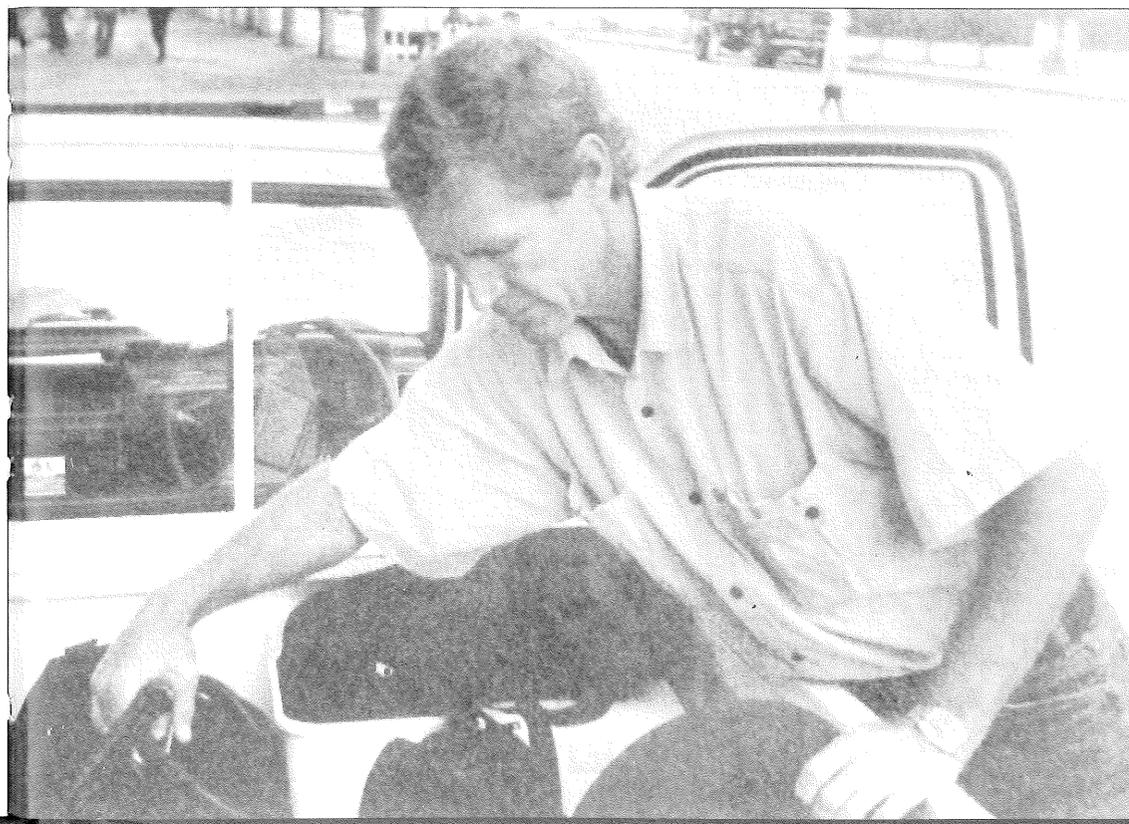
It was a trying year for the Reilly family. Ted was still recovering from the harrowing experience of being charged with contempt of



Above: Operation Lock's safe house in Hatfield, Pretoria, next to a nursery.

Below: Ant White, who may be able to unlock the great mystery of the Burundi ivory.

(Photograph: EIA)





Above: The remainder of the controversial batch of rhino horn which was secretly brought out by Colonel Ian Crooke and his men from Namibia just before the country became an independent state. This photograph was taken by me the evening I accompanied Colonel Lategan to a safe house of Craig Williamson's men in Johannesburg where he confiscated it and we took it through to police headquarters in Pretoria.

Below: Police arrest two international Chinese smugglers at Paulshof, near Johannesburg.



court and defeating the ends of justice, following a much publicised incident at Big Bend, when armed game rangers and Swazi farmers joined forces with a task group of Pieter Lategan's South African unit in a sting operation to net a poaching syndicate at the local hotel.

Shoot-out at Big Bend

On the evening of Wednesday April 15, 1992, guns were blazing at the Bend Inn, and the parking lot in front of the hotel resembled a scene from a Wild West movie. Two poachers were gunned down in the fierce battle and scores of parked cars damaged by flying bullets. It all started quietly, with undercover agents from the SAP's ESPU conducting a sting operation inside the hotel to buy rhino horn from the poachers. The horns were from two pregnant cows mowed down earlier at Mkhaya. As the poachers and undercover agents walked out of the hotel to clinch the deal at the smugglers' vehicle, all hell broke loose.

According to Colonel Lategan, everything had gone according to plan – until Ted's rangers and farmers from the Mkhaya area emerged without warning from the shadows, guns blazing. A desperate Ted Reilly, frustrated by the lawlessness in Swaziland and the way poachers were systematically annihilating his precious herds of rhino, had taken matters into his own hands. Some of the men with him were armed with ancient .303 rifles. Others grabbed whatever weapons they could commandeer at short notice, while a few were toting automatic weapons. A hotel resident had a narrow escape when he crashed through a glass door in the foyer as he fled the bullets flying indiscriminately in all directions.

The full story of what happened on the night that led to Ted appearing in the High Court of Mbabane, came to light when he told me his side of the story – which he would dearly love to put behind him forever. During 1992, all the remaining rhino at Hlane National Park were dehorned and confined to a high-security area surrounded by an electrified fence. More than 60% of Swaziland's rhino population had been decimated by poachers, 39 mutilated carcasses had been recovered and the Mlawula rhino herd had all but disappeared. On March 10, poachers struck at Mkhaya for the first time. An impressive bull, Msolo, was gunned down and his horn hacked. As a result, and at considerable expense, Ted's rangers herded as many rhino as they could find towards the Mkhaya homestead each night.

On Friday April, 14, automatic gunfire shattered the early

evening quiet, no more than 400 metres from Mkhaya headquarters. The agonised screams of rhino were clearly heard from the main ranger base. Within minutes, four rangers were closing in on the scene, armed with a R5-rifle and a shotgun. "This was the first contact since our rangers had been armed with the South African manufactured R5-rifle," Ted explained. It was dark, but the sound of rhino horns being chopped out of the skulls led the rangers to the scene. A furious exchange of gunfire followed, though no one was hit. Within minutes, Ted arrived and took charge of the scene. "All I could think about was Tim Purcell being held at gunpoint and robbed of his guns, ammunition, briefcase and cash," he admitted later. Purcell was a neighbour who had been attacked earlier in the year by two armed robbers wearing balaclavas, who burst in on him as he lay in bed. With an AK-47 pointed at him, they tied him up and forced him to produce the keys to his safe.

As the intruders rifled the safe, Ncawane – Tim's Swazi name – managed to escape, his hands tied behind his back and naked, into the bush, where he fell and injured his shoulder. He lay in the grass for some time without moving for fear of being discovered and shot. Later, he made his way through the bush to the staff quarters where his employees untied him and took him to the Big Bend clinic. Two sets of footprints had been tracked by Tim's ranger, Japan Magagula, to Phuzamoya – next door to Mkhaya – and Ted wondered whether they might match those of the rhino poachers. In both instances AK-47 rifles had been used. "I thought I must get Japan, who is an excellent tracker, to look at the tracks. Japan's bushcraft was good – I knew that because he had worked for me as a ranger for many years," Ted told me.

A posse to hunt down the robbers

"Together with our rangers, who are also impressive trackers, we might just get lucky. Tim doesn't have a telephone, so I called Barry Forbes, a nearby farmer and friend, and told him of the rhino loss. He immediately offered help and before long arrived with Japan and some of his men. We formed teams to follow the spoor from the killing grounds. After a quick call home to say he wouldn't be back until much later, Barry had set aside the day to join forces with us. I was pleased because Barry, also a native of Swaziland, is an excellent man with a lot of experience and guts.

"The manpower Barry provided, allowed us to fan out effectively to cut the tracks. We were now a truly formidable force!"

At first light the next day, the party picked up the tracks which led to the western perimeter of Mkhaya and the home of Duma-kudze Gamedze. Acting swiftly, the hunters arrested a man named Mhlanga, who provided the lead they were looking for. Gamedze was in the house at the time, but managed to escape. Acting on information provided by Mhlanga, another man, Shiba, was arrested and he confirmed what Mhlanga had said, namely that the men there had been sent by a certain Mdluli to poach rhino horn. "Then we got lucky," Ted recounted. "Mdluli walked into our trap that afternoon at Gamedze's house. He had come to collect the horns, and turned out to be the coordinator of a rhino horn poaching ring in Swaziland."

Information gleaned from the three poachers convinced Ted's group that they needed extended custody of the trio if they were to be successful in exposing the rhino racket in Swaziland. This was the chance to smash a much larger poaching ring which had been involved in rhino killings at Hlane, and on Monday, April 13, Ted decided to see the Swazi king to request extended custody of the prisoners. "I knew that handing them over to the police would see them out on bail, with every opportunity to ruin our case before we had investigated it properly or been able to round up everyone else who was involved," Ted said.

At Ludzidzini, King Mswati was not available to see Ted, but through Prince Manzelwandle, he authorised the extended custody and told Ted to return the next day to give a full account of the events. "The king was at Lozitha, and I told him about the arrests of Mhlanga, Shiba and Mdluli, the recovery of an AK-47 and the information we had received which showed links between the recent rhino killings and the Hlane killings. I told His Majesty that we were onto something big, but that I needed more time if we were to crack the rhino ring which, according to our information, was extensive. The king once again authorised extended custody and ruled that we should proceed with our investigation. He also directed that Dr Zonke Khumalo, the Minister of Justice, who attended our meeting, should clear the arrangements with the commissioner of police and the prime minister. Dr Khumalo neglected to do this, and when questioned later, claimed he had taken ill." The king told Ted to return two days later, on Thursday, April 16. On Wednesday, the shootout at Big Bend occurred, but before that debacle, Ted's men recovered another two AK-47 rifles and a Volkswagen minibus used by the poachers, and apprehended eight more people implicated by the three prisoners.

Almost as soon as Mtongo was gunned down, Ted Reilly notified

Colonel Lategan, who lost no time in setting up a sting operation aimed at netting the proud beast's killers.

But even as the ESPU prepared to meet the poachers at the Bend Inn, Reilly and his band of vigilantes were hot on their trail, and their operation led them straight to the Bend Inn on the very night that Colonel Lategan and his men planned to trap the culprits.

Exhausted after tracking Mtondo's killers for days, and at the end of their tether over the poaching, Ted Reilly's men did not ask anyone's permission to open fire on the poachers as they emerged from the hotel entrance.

No one was more surprised than Colonel Lategan, who found out only later that the bullets he had to duck that night had been fired by none other than his greatest allies in the fight against the smugglers.

"Thursday dawned and it was time for me to go back to the king. We were concerned that news of the Big Bend bust was out and that our quarry had gone into hiding. Time was passing, and we needed more time to follow up vital information. With my three senior rangers, I went to Luzdidzini to see the king. We were told to follow him to Nkoyoyo, near Mbabane. We sat on the lawn at Nkoyoyo and related the week's experiences to the king, giving him a full account of the Big Bend shootout the day before. I told His Majesty everything – the death of Dumakudze, the crippling of Ngcampalala, the recovery of an AK-47 and of Tim Purcell's stolen weapons and the enlisting of Colonel Pieter Lategan's unit to recover the horns."

Talking to the king

Dumakudze and Ngcampalala were two of the suspected syndicate members shot at Big Bend. Dumakudze died later in hospital, but not before providing details of where he had hidden the other AK-47 used in the Mkhaya killings and a .22 rifle that he had stolen from Tim Purcell during the robbery at his house. The revolver Dumakudze drew that night at Bend Inn also belonged to Tim. "I told King Mswati everything – fortunately, as it turned out, because this was to be of vital importance later," said Ted. "The king later summoned us to his residence, along with Zonke Khumalo. Also present was George Lys, His Majesty's tutor and a close adviser and confidant. The question of extended custody was discussed. The king invited advice from the floor – particularly from the Minister of Justice, Dr Khumalo. After much discussion, the king commanded

the minister to go to the chief justice for advice on whether or not there was a legal way to extend our custody over the prisoners."

The king was anxious that this concession should be in line with the judicial system if possible, but if it wasn't he would issue a royal decree to make it so. His purpose in going to the chief justice was an attempt to comply with legal procedures and enlist his advice, not to influence the judiciary. Ted was designated by the king to accompany the minister and Mr Lys to the chief justice.

"We set off for the Mountain Inn where the chief justice lived. He had not been in the country long, and had not yet moved into a house. I travelled with George Lys and my men followed in my car. As we approached the Mountain Inn, a car sped across the road in front of us and crashed into George's bakkie causing considerable damage. George stayed at the accident scene to wait for the police, while I went on with the minister to see the chief justice. The three of us sat down in the lounge and Chief Justice David Hull ordered drinks. The minister's opening words were: 'We are from the king.' After that he was at a loss for words and tried several times to explain our visit. Dr. Khumalo does not speak English very well and he was not being very articulate. Eventually he told me to explain to the chief justice the purpose of our visit. I told him that the king had sent us for advice on whether there was any legal way to extend custody of our prisoners. Judge Hull asked if this related to a specific case and I told him it did.

"He said that if that was so, he could not comment. That gave us the answer to our question, and as far as I was concerned, the matter ended there. But Judge Hull was interested in me and asked many questions. Was I a Swazi citizen and what was my position? I told him I was adviser to the king on nature conservation and the warden of Mkhaya, Hlane and Mlilwane. He questioned me on poaching and I grabbed the opportunity to tell him it was a massive problem in Swaziland – that though we now had excellent anti-poaching legislation, it was ineffective because, resentful that they had been stripped of their discretion, magistrates were circumventing it, and seemed to be deliberately flouting the law. I told him that Hlane in particular was hard-hit by poaching and that just a few days earlier there had been a shootout there in which, fortunately, no one had been injured, but that confronting poachers was dangerous work.

"The whole discussion revolved around the questions Judge Hull asked, and the meeting was cordial. At no time did I mention the Big Bend shootout, and there was no indication that the chief justice had on his mind any of the charges which he later levelled at me.

The entire encounter was amicable. After some time, the minister said he had another matter that he wanted to discuss with the chief justice in confidence, and that I was excused. I left with no inkling that anything was amiss," Ted said.

In the week that followed two more suspects were arrested at Manzini. They admitted conveying rhino horn across the border at Mahamba to a certain Kunene in Soweto, South Africa. They had been led through the fence on foot, while their car and driver passed through the border post legally. Several others who were implicated were searched, but they evaded arrest. Another target Ted's men did manage to catch up with was Mpompo Matse, an intrepid old poacher whose exploits at Hlane were legendary. "We were searching for him because he was known to have AK-47s and, according to our information, had been responsible for the killing of the first rhino at Mkhaya. He was also said to have shot several rhinos at Hlane. He was, in fact, a pivotal member of the poaching ring we were in the process of rounding up. We discovered that he was in jail at Simunye on a charge of assault. Had he not been, he would almost certainly have been part of the Dumakudze affair at Big Bend.

"We asked the police at Simunye if we could question Matse, but they refused to release him into our custody, so we waited for his trial. He was convicted of assault and paid a fine, and as he walked out of court, our rangers were waiting." They arrested him on the spot and whisked him away to Mkhaya, where Mpompo showed the rangers the rhino he had shot. Then he was taken to Hlane, where he showed them another rhino carcass. Four AK-47 shells found at the scene were later handed to investigating officer Frans Mxumalo of the Royal Swaziland Police at Lobamba.

Ted Reilly charged

On Sunday April 19, the *Times* of Swaziland splashed the Big Bend shootout all over its front page under the headline GUNS BLAZE AT BEND INN. Two days later Chief Justice David Hull charged Ted Reilly with contempt of court. At Mkhaya, he knew nothing of this until his daughter, Kate, telephoned to ask if Ted had seen the headline in the newspaper: REILLY CHARGED WITH CONTEMPT OF COURT. He had not, and Kate read the report to him. "I headed for home at Mlilwane where, that evening, I got to see the chief justice's subpoena for the first time. I was incredulous. The charges were all out of context. The next morning I appeared in court. My attorney

applied for a postponement on the grounds that I had not had time to employ an advocate to prepare my defence. Judge Hull granted us a day, but indicated that he wanted to get the case over as quickly as possible. I was later told in confidence that the British High Commissioner told Judge Hull that, in charging me, he had precipitated a confrontation between the king and the British government, and asked if there was not another way the matter could be settled. I understand that later the whole affair was taken further at the palace. It would have been interesting to be a fly on the wall!"

During the brief postponement, Ted had to travel to Johannesburg to consult an advocate. He was worried that in light of the damaging publicity in the Swaziland newspaper, he might not be allowed across the border. "It was reasonable to suppose that my arrival at a border post might be construed as an attempt to skip the country, and that I might be arrested. The headlines had been pretty sensational: NEW TWIST IN HOTEL SHOOTOUT: THREE HELD AS HOSTAGES, and POLICE TO CHARGE REILLY WITH MURDER. So I took the precaution of asking the police for permission to leave the country. It was readily given, and during consultation in Johannesburg, my advocate said the case was simple – all we had to do was say the king had commanded me to go to the chief justice. I told him that this was not possible, since the king's name may not be mentioned in court. The advocate insisted that this was essential for my defence, but I was adamant that I could not do it, and nor would any loyal Swazi."

When the trial began on Friday, May 3, the advocates deliberated with Judge Hull in chambers until late in the afternoon. When he finally emerged, Ted's advocate didn't say a word to him or Liz, walking straight past them into court, beckoning Ted and Liz to follow. Liz said she smelt a rat – why didn't he talk to them?

When proceedings finally got under way, Ted's advocate rose to deliver an abject apology, as instructed by his client, he said. "For 15 minutes, he apologised, using every conceivable way of issuing an apology, and ending with an apology. I was tempted to jump up and interject that I had nothing to apologise for, and tell the court I had instructed him to do no such thing, but I restrained myself," Ted said later. When the judge accepted the apology and acquitted him, "I felt relieved, but also very let down". Later, the advocate told Ted he knew things had not gone the way Ted had wanted them to, but all things considered – including the economic aspect of R15 000 a day for legal fees – it had been the best way to settle the matter. This was true, because Ted could not afford a lengthy trial, and as it was, he resented spending money on legal fees that could far rather have been spent on conservation.

Then the bills for the Big Bend shoot-out started rolling in: a windscreen, the perforated bodywork of a bakkie which had been in the firing line; a hotel door smashed by a guest fleeing flying bullets; a hospital bill for the same man whose arm had been lacerated by glass. All in all, it was a dramatic occurrence, but for Ted the most important thing was that the two crooks who had pulled guns were shot, and those who did not use their firearms were arrested.

A nightmare Ted never wants to repeat

The entire experience was traumatic, damaging and costly in time, travel and cash. To make matters worse, Ted's troubles struck at a time when preparing for a second year of drought should have been the priority. "All in all," he told me later, "1992 was not our year, and will actually be remembered as one of the most horrible of our lives. Cash flow foundered – whether as a result of the recession or the shoot-out I cannot say, but it is a fact that the drop in the number of visitors to Mkhaya coincided with the Big Bend shoot-out. I don't think this is because our actions in combating poachers were not supported, but rather because of timidity. News reports about poachers with AK-47s taking out rhino in the visitors' area at Mkhaya, and about confrontations between rangers and poachers armed with automatic weapons at popular hotels, are not conducive to tourism. Tourists are frightened off by that kind of thing. Just the mention of gunplay and killing is enough to put paid to any pending visit," Ted reflected sadly.

But one of the most damaging consequences was the effect the court apology had on Ted's ranger force. "It had a very real impact on them – they were disillusioned by the whole issue, and greatly discouraged at our portrayal in the newspapers as the villains, when, in fact, they had done sterling work in smashing the rhino poaching gang."

What the Minister told the World about South Africa

IT IS ALMOST FARFARICAL that in November 1994, South Africa's government of national unity sent a deputy cabinet minister, who also happens to be a member of the National Party, to Naples in Italy, to tell the UN of the grave danger organised crime poses to good government in South Africa. Some of the most notorious mobsters were in fact paid servants of the former National Party regime, who merely activated officially sanctioned networks for their own private smuggling operations.

Deputy Justice Minister Chris Fisser told the UN Conference on Organised Crime that the smuggling routes previously established for arms, ivory and stolen cars, were now also being used to move drugs such as heroin and cocaine. Delegates from 138 countries heard that the prevalence of criminal activity in South Africa threatened not only the public, but the government's ability to govern. Mr Fisser was quick to tell the world there were no signs that the Italian Mafia was operating in South Africa, but said the police were involved in more than 60 undercover investigations into specifically selected syndicates. The landmark UN meeting was deliberately held on Mafia turf to send a message that the international bid to stamp out corruption was serious. Almost 10 000 Italian police were on duty to guard delegates.

What Mr Fisser didn't tell the conference was that the South African Police's crack Organised Crime Unit (OCU) was, in fact, investigating a possible Mafia link with at least one crime syndicate and, at the same time, looking at organised crime links with certain military intelligence structures and police undercover units set up by the Nationalist government to fight the ANC. The expertise of well-trained South African intelligence operatives, who have turned to crime, has thwarted numerous attempts by police undercover agents to infiltrate these syndicates, and several special agents identified by the criminals have been badly beaten up, their wives and children threatened with death.

Victims of the "Total Onslaught", the Warlords and their Cohorts

THROUGHOUT THE DARK and bloody years of the so-called "total onslaught", a small and elitist group of National Party politicians, senior government officials, security force generals and senior officers, together with a hand-picked group of Afrikaner and Portuguese businessmen, hid behind the ubiquitous Official Secrets Act and created for themselves a playground in the militarised zones for their hunting expeditions and self-indulgent pleasures. In addition, the Official Secrets Act and the Protection of Information Act were liberally invoked to cover up corruption and bribery in the awarding of state contracts worth billions of rands of taxpayers' money over more than two decades. The National Party government might not have invented the art of effective cover-ups and smear campaigns to hide illegal deeds, but they damn near perfected the methods. Over the years, I had managed to expose a number of massive government corruption scandals, but what was ferreted out by investigative journalists was not a fraction of what we were told was going on, but could never prove irrefutably in print.

The Super Afrikaners

Membership of the Afrikaner establishment's secret organisation, the Broederbond, played a vital role in this elite "circle of friends". Once a member, the jobs-for-pals club opened doors for men in sober suits and nondescript footwear which made some rich overnight by exploiting a prolonged and bitter war. The Afrikaner Broederbond – an exclusive club for a clique of Super Afrikaners drawn from, among others, teachers, academics, farmers, clergymen of the Dutch Reformed Church and the two smaller traditional Afrikaner churches, generals, politicians, businessmen and industrialists, was formed in Johannesburg in 1918 by a group of young men embittered at being dispossessed people in their own country after the three-year Anglo-Boer War at the turn of the century. This cabal

of Afrikaner intelligentsia waged a remarkable campaign to harness political, social and economic forces in South Africa which paid off handsomely 30 years later, when the National Party came to power. While upliftment of the Afrikaner people was a noble objective in itself, the Broederbond finally became too powerful, and throughout the apartheid era, it was the secret power behind the government, the tail that wagged the dog.

The Portuguese "businessmen" were mainly wealthy, influential and embittered colonists expelled from Mozambique and Angola by the Frelimo and MPLA governments, who assumed power when the Portuguese pulled out of their former colonies. The reluctant exiles, bent on destabilising the pro-communist, post-colonial regimes, poured their energy and fortunes into strengthening the hands of rebel movements – Renamo in Mozambique and Unita in Angola. They found willing allies among the established smuggling rings and criminal elements in South Africa, and they, in turn, offered South Africa's spymasters the one thing needed most for spying operations in Africa: they all had foreign passports – Portuguese, Chinese, Italian, British, German, Dutch.

They were recruited by military intelligence, the Security Branch of the SA Police and by the National Intelligence Service – known as the Bureau of State Security until P. W. Botha became head of state – to spy for South Africa while carrying out their illegal activities in African states from the safe haven of a base in South Africa. The war years represent an era of unbridled lawlessness for criminals and con-artists, the hand-picked group with the right connections in high places enjoying unprecedented immunity as they practised their illegal craft.

Boobs, booze and barbecues

It was a time when influential businessmen staged steamy secret capers to woo the powerful men from Pretoria who held sway over the awarding of lucrative state contracts for the machines and materials of war. They found the mandarins receptive, and hunting trips with lavish helpings of booze, boobs and braaivleis (barbecue) became the order of the day. And then there were the sex romps at top hotels in Durban, Cape Town and Sun City.

In 1988, I stumbled on one of the fun spots in the far Northern Transvaal, a model game farm owned by Vink Kloppers, one of the most prominent front men used by military intelligence in their dirty tricks campaign against the ANC. Acting on a tip-off, I

travelled to the farm with my informant. I arrived barely an hour after a group of generals, including then chief of the Army, Lieutenant-General Kat Liebenberg, had left the game farm early one Monday morning to report for duty in Pretoria. Bloodstains showed clearly where the hunted buck had been butchered, and the ashes from the campfire were still smouldering. The hunting party had been housed in military tents, where empty brandy bottles and glasses still lay on the tables. Sleeping bags on the beds had obviously been hastily kicked aside and the smell of cheap perfume hung heavy in the air.

In this sub-culture of bribery and ruthless competition for pole position in the jobs-for-pals race, created under cover of a just war, the giants of the African bushveld became the innocent victims of the bounty hunters. Once the smuggling syndicates realised they could rely on military protection for movement of their contraband, the elephants and rhinos were systematically mowed down in hail after hail of automatic gunfire, the merciless hunters moving ever farther north.

The lost generation

In their lofty towers, the warlords and politicians continued to conduct their crusade against the deep, dark threat of communism, but on the ground a lost generation of young white South Africans was being born. Growing up in an environment permeated by a war psychosis, they went straight from school to battlefield, so successfully conditioned that, for the most part, they truly believed in what they were fighting for. When they returned, many were scarred for life, some no longer capable of caring for themselves, their youth and shattered limbs discarded somewhere "on the Border". Today, the human detritus of the wars in Namibia and Angola must make their way as best they can, with scant support from the politicians who called them to arms. By 1995, the lost generation of white South Africans ranged in age from about 25 to 45. Among them are individuals and entire units universally acknowledged as the best trained, battle hardened soldiers in the world. For them, fighting was a way of life, the only profession they have ever known.

In the new South Africa, they stand naked, rejected by a system they believed in, trying desperately to come to terms with the collapse of an ideology that convinced them they were the good, fighting the evil of communism and the anti-Christ. The church condoned their crusade, the government trained and indoctrinated

them, turned them into cold-blooded killing machines, then cast them aside, telling them apartheid was no longer worth defending. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of South Africa's young veterans are simply not equipped to make the ideological quantum leap from rigid, authoritarian rule to a democracy, and even less can they comprehend that they are now considered the villains, while the politicians they served have survived the transition virtually unscathed, continuing to walk the corridors of power.

Thanks to the autocratic influences of the traditional Afrikaner protestant churches and the Broederbond, white Afrikaners allowed themselves to be subdued into a docile and obedient nation, accepting unquestioningly for more than 40 years what the "wise men" in the National Party fed them, abiding by government's rules. The result was a gullible electorate, too trusting – or too timid – to challenge the deeds and policies of the men they voted into power polling day after polling day. History may show that the Afrikaner's greatest sin was not apartheid in itself, but giving the architects of the system a blank cheque to construct and maintain for so long an hegemony that tolerated no opposition.

As a young and enthusiastic cadet reporter on the now defunct Afrikaans morning newspaper, *Oggendblad*, in Pretoria in 1975, the first seed of doubt about the system was planted in my mind when the South African forces invaded Angola and took on the MPLA's Cuban surrogates. The advance of our troops on Luanda was headline news throughout the world, but in South Africa, families and friends of the men in the front line were kept in the dark, prevented by officialdom and "national security" from knowing that young men, average age 19 and fresh from school, were fighting and dying in a foreign country thousands of kilometres from home in a war that had nothing to do with them. In the end, it proved to be as senseless a waste of human life as America's futile attempt to stem the tide of inevitability in Vietnam.

In the news room at *Oggendblad*, journalists had access daily to the blow-by-blow accounts of the war put out by international news agencies. In South Africa, concerned loved ones could read only of a sudden surge in casualties in the so-called "operational area" as the defence force referred to the theatre of war in euphemistic terms in order to conceal the exact location of a "contact". The South African public knew all along that something major and serious was happening, but they were deliberately denied the truth of where and why our sons were dying. The government threw a veil of secrecy over the slightest intimation that South Africa had invaded a foreign country, and in so doing, plunged the nation into a dirty secret war

that would last for 15 years. But then, the words "transparency" and "accountability" were two words that were never in the National Party's vocabulary.

For the guilty, nothing has changed

The people who should be called to account for ruining young lives on both sides of the political spectrum through the many years of the struggle, are those who ran the country. Ironically, for many of them, democracy has changed nothing. They cling to cushy government positions and political office, while their cohorts in the private sector continue to live lavishly off the spoils of war, sipping champagne and rubbing shoulders with members of the new government, expeditiously tailoring their political cloth to fit the "new" South Africa.

In July 1995, an act of parliament paved the way for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, designed to investigate human rights violations in apartheid South Africa. The commission, whose marathon task had not begun at the time of printing, is empowered to grant indemnity from prosecution to those who make full disclosure about their role in the dirty tricks campaigns, deaths in detention, unexplained disappearances of hundreds of political activists, acts of terror, assassinations and intimidation. It will also have authority to grant amnesty to those already found guilty of politically motivated crimes, and to award financial compensation to victims and families of apartheid's victims.

When first mooted by the ANC, the idea of a Truth Commission was vehemently opposed by former members of the security forces and National Party politicians, who predicted it would be nothing more than a witch-hunt. But when the draft bill was finally tabled in Parliament, it was supported by the National Party on the grounds that the same criteria would be applied to human rights violations on both sides of the struggle.

Whether atrocities committed in the ANC's infamous detention camps in Angola and Uganda, or terror campaigns waged against civilian targets by members of both the ANC and its ally in the liberation struggle, the Pan African Congress, are indeed dealt with by the Truth Commission, remains to be seen, but there is no doubt that the main focus of the exercise will fall on the security forces that served the National Party regime.

Equally certain is that, as South Africa wrestles with its bloody past in what appears to be a genuine quest for peace and reconcilia-

tion, those most likely to suffer are not the parasites of the past, but those who carried out their orders – the soldiers at grassroots level. They will bear the brunt of accusations levelled by the Truth Commission, while the warmongers, the leaders who masterminded the total strategy to combat the "total onslaught", may never be impeached.

If South Africa's diverse peoples are to truly go forward in tolerance, if reconciliation and forgiveness are to be genuine goals for the future, the books of the past must be opened to public scrutiny, for only then will we know the truth about the deep, dark struggle for freedom.

The CCB: a factory for dirty tricks

In 1990, shocking details of covert operations and the assassination plots hatched by a top secret Third Force, clandestinely created by a small group of generals in the security forces, came to light during a judicial commission of enquiry chaired by Mr Justice Louis Harms. At times the hearings bordered on farce as heavily disguised agents – wearing wigs, false beards and rubber noses – "testified" under oath about their roles in the SADF's Civil Cooperation Bureau.

But despite the sensational revelations about the workings of this harmlessly named collection of misguided patriots, criminals and deep cover agents, the Harms Commission exposed only a single cell, Region 6, which operated inside South Africa. To date, there is no way of knowing how many cells continue to exist, in African states, Europe, the US and the Middle East. Nor is there any record of the numerous front organisations and commercial enterprises set up as part of a network that pervaded every facet of society. Officially the CCB was disbanded in 1991, but since virtually all official records of the organisation were destroyed when the Harms Commission was appointed, there is no way of proving that the CCB did, in fact, cease its operations, and even less chance of ever identifying the legitimate businesses set up with money from the SADF's multi-million-rand secret fund.

For all anyone knows, front companies funded by South African taxpayers may even now be moving contraband across international borders, wherever there is a demand for ivory, rhino horn, firearms, drugs and other commodities best traded on the black market.

After all, the nameless, faceless agents of apartheid have con-

trolled the smuggling channels in and out of South Africa for years, and still hold sway over the routes today.

The driving force behind the Truth Commission is Minister of Justice Dullah Omar, once a prime target for assassination by the CCB. At the time, Mr Omar was the legal representative of incarcerated ANC leader Nelson Mandela, regarded by the CCB as a "radical activist" and marked for elimination because of:

- His involvement in Lawyers for Human Rights and the United Democratic Front.
- The fact that he defended ANC members in court.
- His membership of other banned organisations.

A member of the CCB, Slang (Snake) van Zyl, testified before Judge Harms in March 1990 that Mr Omar was active in what he termed "the violent onslaught against the government", and thus "an enemy of the state". Initially, the plan was to shoot Mr Omar with a Makarov pistol and an amount of R15 000 was made available to hire an assassin. But, when the CCB learned that Mr Omar has a heart condition for which he takes regular medication, a more bizarre plot presented itself. A small-time gangster, Peaches Gordon, was recruited by the CCB to switch Mr Omar's heart pills with specially prepared pills that would cause him to suffer a fatal heart attack. However, an expert in chemistry told the CCB operatives it was not possible to produce fake pills that resembled Mr Omar's medication closely enough, so a vial of white powder was eventually handed over to Slang van Zyl. He flew to Cape Town with his lethal concoction and instructed Peaches to put it into Mr Omar's food. Once Peaches had confirmed that Mr Omar had died from the poison, he would send a message over Van Zyl's pager saying "The sun is shining". The message never arrived, and Peaches himself met an untimely death in a mysterious car accident a few months later.

Doctor David Webster

Thanks to the bungling of the CCB plot, Mr Omar is alive today. Others were not as so lucky.

Dr David Webster, a well-known anthropologist at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, and a staunch political activist, stumbled on damning evidence towards the end of the 1980s of South Africa's secret military support for the Renamo rebel

movement in Mozambique. In the process, he also found proof of military involvement in the smuggling of ivory from the neighbouring state. This could've been a major breakthrough in exposing the smuggling routes between South Africa and the war-torn former Portuguese colony, and it was believed at the time that Dr Webster had passed on the results of his investigation to a friend, Dr Sergio Vieira, a member of Mozambique's ruling Frelimo party.

It this had been so South Africa might have been spared the senseless violence and bloodshed caused by tons of illegal AK-47 rifles smuggled into the country from Mozambique in recent years. But in October 1992, Colonel Lategan of the Endangered Species Protection Unit met with Dr Vieira in Maputo to discuss allegations that David Webster had been gunned down in front of his house on May 1, 1989, because he had uncovered the SA Defence Force's involvement in the smuggling of ivory. According to Colonel Lategan, Dr Vieira told him he could not confirm this as a possible reason for Dr Webster's death, but did reveal that the anthropologist had made an appointment to see him. Unfortunately Dr Webster died before the meeting took place, and whatever information he had found, went with him to his grave.

David Webster's humble life came to an abrupt end while he was offloading plants he had bought from a nearby nursery on a Saturday morning. He never saw the BMW driving slowly down the quiet suburban street in Troyeville, Johannesburg, and probably never heard the deafening blast of the shotgun that ripped his chest apart. According to forensic tests and an autopsy report, the assassin was less than a metre from him when the shots were fired from the car. The weapon was so close to his body that fragments of the cardboard cartridge were embedded in his chest along with the pellets. No one has ever been charged with his murder.

Dr Webster, who had frequently been involved in confrontations with security policemen because of his work for various human rights groups, was engaged in research on the culture of the Thembe-Tonga people who live in the Kosi Bay region of KwaZulu/Natal. Whenever he visited the area he lived in a grass and tin hut a stone's throw from the Mozambican border – an ideal position from which to observe cross-border movement and pick up information from residents in the area. Whatever Dr Webster discovered must have been extremely sensitive, because according to an article in the Johannesburg-based *Weekly Mail and Guardian* newspaper on November 8, 1991, game rangers employed by an intelligence unit which was doing work for the then KwaZulu government, spied on Dr Webster. This highly trained team was employed by KwaZulu's

Department of Nature Conservation and monitored every move he made while carrying out his research work in the Kosi Bay area. The surveillance team included an officer trained by the SADF's elite Reconnaissance Unit, and men who received military and intelligence training in the Rhodesian special forces.

Less than a year later, shortly before an inconclusive inquest into Dr Webster's death began in the Johannesburg Supreme Court, the *Sunday Times* carried a front page story, written by me, stating that new evidence had come to light about a military intelligence link with the assassination. Two white academics with MI links visited the Kosi Bay area shortly after Dr Webster was gunned down. The academics - both from Potchefstroom University in the North West province - claimed they were members of a research team and questioned field workers extensively about the slain anthropologist's activities. Both men were later questioned by the investigating officer retracing their footsteps. A day after the *Sunday Times* published the report, which suggested a possible link with the CCB, the managing director of the CCB, Joe Verster, walked into my home accompanied by one of his henchmen and told me in no uncertain terms, in front of my wife and terrified three-year-old son, to retract claims of the CCB's involvement in Webster's murder in the next edition, or face the consequences. I retracted nothing, and happily, survived to tell the tale.

During the Harms Commission hearings in 1990, CCB agent and former Murder and Robbery policeman Slang van Zyl conceded that the murder of Dr Webster had "all the signs" of a CCB operation. He told Judge Harms this could explain why Mr Joe Verster had at one time voiced his concern that members of the CCB's internal region might have been involved.

Whoever killed him, David Webster died because he knew too much. Scores of other South Africans still alive today know a great deal more. For the sake of peace and prosperity, it is to be hoped that they will come to the fore, and tell the truth about their part in a shameful past that can never be laid to rest while it remains hidden in the shadows.

Waybill for copper scraps imported from Zambia by Mr Pong. In a dummy compartment of that particular truck customs officials discovered a huge pile of various contraband.

(See chapter 2)

RE. JALIC

OF ZAMBIA

TRUCK No. 17487

THIS WAS THE TRUCK THAT WAS CAUGHT

BILL OF ENTRY FOR THE REMOVAL OF GOODS IN TRANSIT THROUGH ZAMBIA

TRUCK No. 17487

IN BOND FOR CONSUMPTION

Page No. 1 of 1

| Form | Country of Supplier | African Coastal Port | Port of Origin | Country of Origin | Country of Production or Manufacture | Number and Type of Packages | Description of Goods in accordance with nomenclature of Customs Tariff | Weight, Number or Measure | Value for Duty Purpose | Customs Tariff Item | Value for Duty Purpose |
|---------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|---------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| ADD ONE ZATRE | ZATRE | NSA | NSA | ZATRE | ZATRE | ADD ONE ZATRE | COPPER SCRAP IN DO | 74.0/20 | 8000 | | |
| | | | | | | | EX K/EA R/ONS | 2648/88 | 01/0788 | | |

ACCEPTED FOR EXPORT

DECLARATION OF RECEIPT

Signature of Consignee: A.H. PONG AND SONS

Signature of Customs Officer: [Signature]

Date: 09/11/1988

Bill of Entry Number and Date: 220

RECEIVED BY ZATRE CUSTOMS AND EXCISE

04.10.88 00000

CHINGOLA

Accepted

1988