

CHAIRPERSON: Good morning and welcome Mr Basson. This is an investigative inquiry in terms of section 29 of the promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act. It is by the very nature of that section an inquiry that should be held in camera, and it is held in camera. So it's only you and members of the Commission staff who are permitted, and I. And all evidence and information is going to remain confidential until the Commission decides - if it does so - to release it to the public. But then it will also be subject to the requirements of the Act.

So you can relax, to the extent that this is possible in the circumstances, and know that you are not going to be met by a report in the Cape Times or Die Burger or anything as soon as you have left here.

MR BASSON: Thank you Sir.

CHAIRPERSON: It will certainly not have come from us.

~~JAN HENDRIK BASSON: (sworn states)~~

CHAIRPERSON: You can sit down Mr Basson.

MR BASSON: Thank you. May I just switch off my cell phone please?

CHAIRPERSON: Oh yes.

~~MR BASSON: So it doesn't interfere.~~

CHAIRPERSON: So also may we all. May I indicate that we have got a facility for simultaneous translation. And it is my wish - in fact it is the Commission's policy - that people should testify

in the language that they are best comfortable with. So if you would rather speak Xhosa, then there will be facility. If you would rather speak Afrikaans, then there is a facility. If you at any moment choose to speak in a language you are best comfortable with of the 11 official languages, then you can put on these devices and then I think the translators will indicate. I think Afrikaans for instance is on channel 1. Yes, channel 1. And there you are. Ms Terreblanche - just to tell you about the panel: we were expecting Ms Glenda Wildschut who is a Commissioner and a member of the Reparations and Rehabilitations Committee. She apparently has taken ill and is not going to be joining us. But I am here. My name is Dumisa Ntsebeza. I am in the investigative unit but I am also a Commissioner in the Human Rights Violations Committee. To my right is Mr Magadhla who is head of special investigations in the investigative unit. To the furthest right - and I wouldn't like you to associate her name and her being towards the furthest right with any of her politics - is Ms Terreblanche, Christelle. She is the person who has been doing the investigations into this matter and the other matter about the Helderberg. We have also Ms ~~Deborah Patta who has been assisting us and who has been~~ contracted on a consultant's basis to the Commission and will also put some questions to you for clarification. Ms Terreblanche?

MS TERREBLANCHE: Thank you very much for making yourself available and coming this far. Mr Basson, can you perhaps just start with telling us your career in the SADF, and where you were and how it worked?

MR BASSON: Good. Contrary to the invitation I was never in charge of electronic warfare in the defence force, but I was in charge of electronic warfare operations in the air force. Also as you have just heard, the M Basson refers to a nickname. My actual initials are JH Basson.

Good. I joined the air force in 1964 and attended the pilot's course, 1/64. And thereafter I was selected for university training and I obtained a B.Mil. degree through Stellenbosch with aeronautics, physics and military geography as main subjects.

Thereafter I did a flying instructor's course and I gave flying instruction until I was selected as a fighter pilot and I spent most of my career flying fighter aircraft. Towards the end of my flying career - anybody must end up in an admin post at some stage of his flying career - I was selected because of my operational and theoretical background to study into electronic warfare and was then posted into the post of electronic warfare operations at air force headquarters. And there I stayed for perhaps I think five or six years and then I went and I carried on in a specific section of related work, namely technical evaluation which is basically gathering specific technical data that could be

used in electronic warfare. And I stayed in that post until my contract expired in 1991.

Then I went on pension and established a company, and I'm actually very much still involved in electronic warfare in the air force as I'm sitting here.

MS TERREBLANCHE: Thank you. You must excuse that we know very little about things like electronic warfare. It seems very sophisticated. Can you basically just give us a short idea of what it is you do?

MR BASSON: Okay. Now in the air force electronic warfare is mainly concerned with the protection of fighter aircraft against air defence threats. So it would be the development of tactics, that means flying manoeuvres; and techniques, that means electronic ways of protecting an aircraft against radar and infrared threats. So I would say more than 90% of the time spent on electronic warfare are in those two directions.

MS TERREBLANCHE: Would you say that South Africa was fairly sophisticated in these matters during...?

MR BASSON: Yes. We actually had to be to survive in the operational scenario that the air force operated in towards the ~~end of the 80's, here 86 onwards.~~

MS TERREBLANCHE: You know that we have basically brought you here to tell us what you know about the events at Mbuzini on the night of the Machel crash.

MR BASSON: Yes, I do.

MS TERREBLANCHE: Would you like to just give us an indication?

MR BASSON: Good. Now unfortunately - and I hope I don't disappoint you now - that I know very little about the actual events that this inquiry is about, and on technical matters I can answer questions and I can speculate, but that would be speculation on a technical basis and not on a historical, factual basis.

On that particular night I was as I said at that stage in the operational staff at air force headquarters and we do on a rotational basis standby at air force headquarters when there are other operations on the go, being they air force, navy or army or whatever, if there is a chance of air force involvement or if there is actual air force involvement in such an operation.

During that particular night there was a special forces operation of which I was not briefed on the detail - it was on a need to know basis - but as I deducted, it was somewhere in Botswana. Because our aircraft - and the air force's role was standby with Puma helicopters for casualty evacuation in the case of somebody getting hurt.

So myself and Brig General De Wet, PD de Wet who was my immediate boss at that stage, we did the standby at air force headquarters and we manned the command post there.

Fairly earlyish - and I'm not sure of the time, but it could be around eleven o'clock or so - we got a phone call from special forces headquarters telling us that the operation was cancelled; something went wrong. And I was actually busy just entering that into the daily log, that I'm now basically closing the ops room and that we're going home, when the telephone rang and it was somebody from Nelspruit. He was an air force officer whose name I can't remember. And he was from the forward air force command post at Nelspruit.

He then informed us that there was an aircraft accident, which I initially thought was one of our own aircraft, and they couldn't give us more detail. They say that they are investigating, but there was an aircraft accident. He then came back a bit later and he said it looks like a passenger liner, a fairly biggish aircraft, and there are many people dead.

And I think - and as I say it was a long time ago and I was not later on involved in anything further - but later on, and that could have been around twelvish or past twelve, they phoned back and they said that they think that President Samora Machel was on the plane.

~~In the meantime my immediate boss that was with me~~
started reporting this matter up in air force channels and from that moment I basically became a clerk and I took some notes and I made some telephone calls to Civil Aviation and I can't

remember the guy who I spoke to, but we woke him up in his house and we said that you know, it would be a Civil Aviation matter because it's a civilian aircraft and that basically they must appoint somebody from their side at least to represent the Civil Aviation.

And that phoning around and running around and admin things kept me busy until about four o'clock in the morning and then I went home.

MS PATTA: Col Basson, you were in the one ops room and next door there was another ops room. Am I correct geographically? Or there was another ops room where the senior generals would be.

MR BASSON: No.

MS PATTA: There was not another ops room?

MR BASSON: No. There was only one...

MS PATTA: So where would General Joubert have been that night?

MR BASSON: He would have been at special forces, their ops room which was about 10, 12 km away on the little koppie outside Valhalla.

MS PATTA: Okay. Sorry, that's what I was meaning. And he was there that night, General Joubert?

MR BASSON: I haven't been to the ops room, but I phoned them on a couple of occasions, asking them is everything still

going okay and so on, and I think - and this is a deduction; I never spoke to him personally - that I heard his voice in the background.

MS PATTA: General Joubert?

MR BASSON: General Joubert's voice.

MS PATTA: And do you have any idea what they were doing in the ops room and was it procedure for him to be there?

MR BASSON: As I said, I was not fully briefed on their operation. We were in fact on standby for a special forces operation. So I knew that their ops room was manned, and I knew that there was an operation on the go, and I also knew that the operation was on the Botswana side. It could also have been - what's this - on the Zimbabwe side.

MS PATTA: But you weren't specifically told.

MR BASSON: I was not specifically told, but our aircraft was doing standby as I can recall from Pietersburg, so my assumption was that it was in fact in Botswana.

MS PATTA: Okay. And then I once showed you a drawing of a beacon - no, no, it's not a beacon; and I'm going to get the technical terms wrong here, you must correct me - of a Kawasaki powered box with a clerk mast attached to it.

MR BASSON: Yes.

MS PATTA: Could you explain what that was used for in the military?

MR BASSON: Okay. Now electronic warfare in the air force has basically four sub-divisions. The first one would be signal intelligence, the next one would be electronic countermeasures, the other one would be electronic support measures and the last one would be electronic counter countermeasures.

Now the last three that I've mentioned, those are electronic countermeasures, electronic support measures and electronic counter countermeasures; they are operational activities. In other words they fall under operations and as such fell directly under me.

Signal intelligence on the other hand is an intelligence function and resorted under the director of air force intelligence.

Now signal intelligence as the name indicates is a unit who is in fact still operational and still operating - my son is an operator there - and they deploy with specific equipment and with specific tasks.

Their task would normally be to listen out to electronic transmissions from areas of interest. So if the area of interest is on the other side of the border, they would deploy this side, on our side of the border and would set up the equipment to listen what is going on on the other side of the border. Mostly in the radar frequency ranges, in other words we're talking about .5 Gigahertz up to 18 Gigahertz. And then in the aviation bands between 100 and 150 mH amplitude modulated.

So they go and they deploy normally two weeks at a time, sometimes for a week, sometimes for a day if they just have to go and check out something. But normally between one and two weeks, where they sit and they put up these huge clerk masts and they sit there and they listen.

They are completely passive; in other words they are not allowed to transmit anything. The moment they transmit a single signal it becomes operations, so then it resorts under me.

MS PATTA: Now signal intelligence - and this equipment is contained in a landrover?

MR BASSON: The equipment is in fact fully mobile, but normally if they deploy internally, in other words in our country, they would go with landrovers, yes. With 10-seater type landrovers and put the equipment in the back. But the equipment is also helicopter transportable.

~~MS PATTA: Oh, it can also be transported by helicopter.~~

MR BASSON: Yes.

MS PATTA: Now I understand that Signal Intelligence Division, that's what it's called, right? Siged? Signal Intelligence...?

MR BASSON: Yes, that's right.

~~MS PATTA: Siged was in Mbuzini on the night Samora Machel's plane crashed.~~

MR BASSON: Okay. As I've indicated that Signal Intelligence did not resort under me because it was not operations, it was

intelligence. But I know that over that period there was a signal intelligence deployment there. I cannot swear that they were there on that particular night but they were there over that period, so I assume by deduction that they were there that night.

MS PATTA: Colonel, could you give us I mean just - and this is, I'm asking for an opinion - why would the army - the military, sorry - say to us now that there is no such division as signal intelligence?

MR BASSON: I can't comment on that obviously because that comment didn't come from me. I can make a general statement and that is that electronic warfare today in the national defence force is as it always was, very much a holy cow. People are not allowed to talk about it; people are not allowed to give any indications and when they heard that I was coming down here I got a very stern warning and they say you may say how - no. You may say what, but not how. In other words you can say what we are doing, but not how we are doing it. So...

CHAIRPERSON: Who said that to you?

MR BASSON: It was on the staff of the chief of the national defence force, a - I'll tell you now, never met the guy before. I think he's an attorney or something. Walters? Does that ring a bell?

CHAIRPERSON: No, it doesn't. Was it somebody...

[intervention]

MR BASSON: It's a colonel...

MS PATTA: Van der Walt?

MR BASSON: Van der Walt, Van der Walt.

CHAIRPERSON: Van der Walt.

MR BASSON: Col Van der Walt.

CHAIRPERSON: Ja. Col Van der Walt.

MR BASSON: Yes, basically.

CHAIRPERSON: Was he aware that you are coming to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission?

MR BASSON: He was.

CHAIRPERSON: And he said to you that there are things that you shouldn't say when you testify?

MR BASSON: No. He said to me that he must just remind me that electronic warfare is very much a very highly classified subject, and that I should watch what I say technically-wise. And I said to him yes, I'll do that. At least I know enough about electronic warfare to know when it's technically State secrets and when it is you know, the what and not the how.

CHAIRPERSON: I find that statement amazing and I think you should call - I would like you to tell Col Van der Walt that I regard his remarks to you in a very, very serious light. It's interference with the testimony of a witness in circumstances where, for all the time that we have been operational, he himself has been part of those who have been assuring this Commission

that they will give us their co-operation. And I can tell you now, we have never had as much co-operation as there has been in fact from this... [intervention]

MR BASSON: Yes Sir, but this... [intervention]

CHAIRPERSON: I take strong offence to an admonishment of that nature to you, when in fact we have gone out of our way to hold this sort of inquiry in terms of section 29 which provides for confidential testimonies.

MR BASSON: I take note of that Sir. And on your question in that remark, as I said the only reason that I can think of why the military would say that such a unit does not exist is this holy cow environment around electronic warfare.

CHAIRPERSON: H'm.

MS PATTA: The military also says that there was no signal intelligence in that area anywhere at any time of the crash or anywhere around that period; that they simply were not there.

Now could you give us any reason why they would say that?

MR BASSON: No. It was an intelligence - but as I say, now I am speculating, okay? So if I might or may speculate on that, then I would assume that the army - or whoever you spoke to - was not briefed on that deployment. That's the only reason I can think of.

MS PATTA: So this was a very sort of secret operation, whenever signal intelligence touches... [intervention]

MR BASSON: No, I think it's not so much secret as almost routine. Today they might be out in the field today, and they go out on very regular basis and they cover huge areas and they do that on a continuous basis. So I think the fact that it was a - perhaps, I don't know - regarded as a routine deployment, that the army perhaps was not briefed.

MS PATTA: Okay. I'd just like to understand. I see that you say they were not operational, but were signal intelligence division never deployed in support of an operational endeavour?

MR BASSON: Yes. Yes. If they are deployed in support of an operation, they would then fall under the operational commander and that would go through my office.

MS PATTA: But you have no knowledge of the Samora Machel plane crash on that night. You say there was no operation of that nature under your command that night.

MR BASSON: Most definitely not, and if the air force was in any way involved, there was no ways that it could not have gone through my office.

MS PATTA: Was there ever times though colonel, if there was an operation - even if it did involve technical aspects - that it would be so secret and so classified that it would only go through military intelligence? I mean for example the CCB operations which may have employed technical capabilities, not of electronic

warfare, were not known to everyone. We're talking about covert operations.

MR BASSON: Yes. The operations of a highly sensitive nature was conducted totally on a need to know basis, but if air force electronic warfare was involved, I would have been pulled in and I would have been part of the operation.

MS PATTA: Just let me understand: you didn't know what exactly the operation was that night. The cross-border operation.

MR BASSON: No, I didn't know. I was not briefed on that. I was made to understand that it was something in Botswana.

MS PATTA: Colonel, if you could also just talk to us about beacons, VOR beacons. Hypothetically, okay, if one wanted to bring a plane down using a beacon, or at least divert a plane off course using a beacon, what would have to happen?

MR BASSON: VOR-wise it would be technically extremely difficult to put up a second beacon with the first one still going. So you would have to switch off the one to switch on the other one.

MS PATTA: So if the Maputo beacon was switched off...

MR BASSON: Yes?

MS PATTA: And a false Maputo beacon signal was transmitted, that could divert the plane off course.

MR BASSON: Technically, yes.

MS PATTA: To your knowledge, was something like that ever experimented on in South Africa?

MR BASSON: Never.

MS PATTA: Are you aware of the 1962 endeavour to trap two so-called communists who escaped from prison in the Northern Transvaal?

MR BASSON: No, what was the date again?

MS PATTA: '62. I can't remember, but I understand it to be 1962.

MR BASSON: No, that was before my time, but I was never briefed on that.

MS PATTA: Two people trying to escape from Botswana to Zambia in a plane after they escaped from prison in South Africa was diverted to Hoedspruit in the Northern Transvaal and nearly landed. They couldn't make them land.

MR BASSON: No, I have no knowledge of such an operation.

As I said, I was only posted to air force headquarters in the early 80's.

MS PATTA: Colonel, could you explain our - did we have a good relationship with Israel? Because Israel is quite technically superior when it comes to electronic warfare.

MR BASSON: Yes. All contacts in the aviation line with - ja, okay. To answer your question: yes. We had a fairly good relationship with Israel.

MS PATTA: Were you aware of any equipment having been bought from America, equipment that could - say for example a plane wanted to land in a jungle in Columbia or in a desert in Iraq, there is equipment - mobile beacons - that can be used to help a plane land, to guide them to a landing. Were you aware of that equipment in the army?

MR BASSON: Was the question am I aware that it was bought from America, or am I aware that it was available in the army?

MS PATTA: Both.

MR BASSON: Okay. I'm not aware of any equipment having been bought, but surely the air force for its forward air force command post had mobile air field equipment, in other words approach lights, runway lights, tack hand beacons and so on. So that's standard equipment of the air force when they deploy to an away air field where these things are not available, these mobile equipment would be deployed, yes.

MS PATTA: And am I correct in saying it's almost like you can set up a mini landing strip through it. I mean it becomes like a sort of makeshift air landing space.

MR BASSON: Yes, definitely. You can go to any gravel strip, say in the middle of nowhere and put up a complete, like a manned air field there, with control tower, the works.

MS PATTA: Would it include the kind of standard lights or...?

MR BASSON: It would be a row - in other words normal runway lights and approach lights giving you the grade path.

MS PATTA: Col Basson, can you also just - we had evidence being led about a frequency scrambling device. It was a small thing, about this big. What do frequency - do you know much about frequency scrambling devices?

MR BASSON: Yes. That's basically a communication device thereby secure communications can be set up or made between two communication posts or two call signs. And what it actually does, there are two ways of doing it: the one is to put a code on the speech so that when you hear the speech it's just a lot of garble, and the other one is - and that's the one most frequently used, is - and that is probably what you're referring to, the frequency scrambling device - is a frequency hopper. And that is a device that very quickly, 10 - 20 times a second, hops from one frequency to another. And the two radio's are then hopping in synchronisation, so that if you don't have the hopping code, from which frequency to which frequency they are hopping, you would not be able to listen what they say.

MS PATTA: Could you listen in to a flight?

MR BASSON: No. No, that equipment is purely to establish secure communications from point A to point B. You might be referring to a frequency scanner which is something different.

MS PATTA: What does a frequency scanner do?

MR BASSON: A frequency scanner you can set up a lower and a maximum frequency. It will then electronically scan through that frequency band, stop on any frequency where there is activity, and you can listen in to that.

MS PATTA: Why would one have such a thing on a plane?

MR BASSON: No, no, not on a plane. You would have it - the signal intelligence unit would have something like that.

MS PATTA: Can you - sorry.

CHAIRPERSON: Are you aware of the fact that one such device was found at the scene of the crash?

MR BASSON: No Sir. Of the crash and the subsequent investigation I know very little about. What I read in the papers basically.

CHAIRPERSON: Did you take part in the Margo Commission into the crash?

MR BASSON: No Sir.

CHAIRPERSON: Were you called in there as an expert witness?
As you said you're an electronic warfare expert?

MR BASSON: Never Sir.

CHAIRPERSON: Would there have been a reason for not calling you, in view of the fact that there were allegations and things that the beacons were used and that in fact the South Africans were involved in the crash by diverting that plane through the use of

those beacons? Wouldn't that have been your field, to clarify that?

MR BASSON: It would have been Sir, but I was never called in.

I don't know how deeply that particular aspect was investigated during the investigation. I also never saw the report of the Margo Commission.

CHAIRPERSON: In view of the outcry and the allegations and the rumours, would you say that was - would you not regard that as an omission in terms of the investigation itself, into that situation?

MR BASSON: Sir, as I am not on exactly - I'm not knowledgeable as to what the whole of the inquest or the whole investigation actually involved. I cannot comment on that. But if they did do a good investigation into the false beacon side, I would say that it would have been normal to involve me, yes. To call in and say what if, what if, what if.

CHAIRPERSON: But you would have heard of course through the press or through your own colleagues that there had also been a suggestion, a theory kind of thing by the Russians that the beacon that would have misguided the plane, was a Botswana one. Was one in Botswana somewhere. What's the place? Swaziland, Matsapa.

MR BASSON: Matsapa, yes Sir.

CHAIRPERSON: H'm.

MR BASSON: Yes. I actually - the air force representative on the Board of Inquiry was Brig General Lynch. And he's a personal friend of mine. And I saw him one day and you know, just off the record I asked him you know, how's it going with the investigation? He said no, they found the problem. It was the Matsapa beacon. And...

CHAIRPERSON: He said they had actually found the problem?

MR BASSON: Yes. They found the cause of the accident. That was after the investigation. I spoke to him one day, when it was just a sort of a casual chat. And he said they're definitely - you know, they are 100% sure that the problem was the Matsapa beacon.

CHAIRPERSON: To your understanding that would have been far from just a theory by the Russians or by somebody else.

MR BASSON: To my understanding Sir, that - the idea that I got was that after a very thorough investigation they proved to themselves beyond any doubt that the aircraft was actually homing in on the Matsapa beacon.

MR MAGADHLA: (Indistinct) after the people had set off to that special operation which you understood to have been in Botswana, there had been a call to say that that whole thing was cancelled because there was an accident.

MR BASSON: No Sir, not because of an accident. I was not given a reason. They just said that the operation - something

went wrong and they are not proceeding with the operation; we can actually switch off and go home.

MR MAGADHLA: Would - just on the basis of it having been on a need to know basis, that you wouldn't actually enquire from any one of your colleagues that - but what could have happened; why call this operation off?

MR BASSON: Yes, I did actually ask them over the telephone. I said why? And they said things went wrong; something with their operation didn't work out properly and they had to call the people back. And they are all safe on our side of the border and they can go home.

MR MAGADHLA: Likewise, did you enquire from your friends who were involved in the operation as to what in fact this operation was about?

MR BASSON: No Sir. It was not my friends; they were special forces people from the army, and they are living in a world of their own; and they don't like people from the outside inquiring what they're doing.

MR MAGADHLA: Ja, but then you - I mean they wouldn't get rid of you because of the electronic warfare thing that you were an expert in. I mean you had to be involved, because even where they were going, there had to be beacons and things that would be involved.

MR BASSON: Sir no, I was never briefed where they were going and what was involved or in - apart from the fact that we had to keep aircraft on a standby for an area in Botswana I think. And they would then, if somebody gets hurt, they would give us a grid reference on a map, and we would send out a helicopter to take the persons to hospital.

MR MAGADHLA: There was a likelihood that people would get hurt in that operation, the one they were undertaking?

MR BASSON: It appeared to me like that, because they specifically asked for casualty evacuation standby should somebody get hurt; yes Sir.

MR MAGADHLA: Would it be then far-fetched in your mind that here are people, special forces people setting out on a special operation which would only be discussed on a need to know basis, and then there is this crash which amongst - whose passengers was the president of a neighbouring country, and now that because there is that - you say it wasn't said it was because of that, but doesn't your mind therefore as people would say count 2 and 2 and get an answer which would be saying that yes, indeed now it seems this was in fact the operation that these people set out to?

MR BASSON: Sir, if that operation was conducted in Mozambique I would have had my doubts. But I was under the

very firm impression that it was in Botswana on the other side of the country. And I couldn't tie these two up.

MR MAGADHLA: Now on that need to know basis they would have said Botswana and yet they meant Mozambique.

MR BASSON: Yes....

MR MAGADHLA: Wouldn't your mind lead you to saying, oh so this is the thing; they said they're going to Botswana and now it happens in Mozambique because the president of a country gets killed in an air crash?

MR BASSON: Sir, if on top of that we had to do helicopter standby from Nelspruit, then again I would have thought that why are they saying to me they are going to Botswana if we are doing helicopter standby from Nelspruit? But the helicopter standby was also in that part of the country. And a false beacon never entered my mind, purely because I was not involved. And it was to me automatically that if anything like that was planned and executed it would have had to go through my office. So I immediately wiped that from the table, and - but perhaps I was naive; I don't know.

MR MAGADHLA: Well, a lot of people were made to be naive in these things, because they mostly happened on a need to know basis by a core of people who had their own intentions about how to look after the interests of the country then. Now to your knowledge, how would you describe the relations between

President Machel and the South African government at that time, and especially those days?

MR BASSON: Sir, it's difficult. I was very much on the operational level and not on the strategic and political level. But - so I don't think I can comment on that apart from what you read from the newspapers. And as you know, we were fed what people wanted us to know. And... [intervention]

MR MAGADHLA: Well, perhaps something that would give you comfort as a member of that army, were you aware of the capacity of your intelligence unit, that that capacity would have easily enabled them to monitor the movements of that plane as it took off from wherever to Malawi as - it having been said that was the destination, the intended destination?

MR BASSON: Yes, they definitely had the technical capability to listen to all aircrafts communication, yes. That would be between Maputo tower and the aircraft itself.

MR MAGADHLA: And even besides the technical part of it, they would also have people on the ground in Maputo or in Zambia - by the way, were you aware of the fact that he had been in a meeting with people in Zambia?

MR BASSON: No Sir. I knew that he was either in Zambia or Tanzania or somewhere, and they were on their way back when they crashed.

MR MAGADHLA: But then I'm saying you would be aware too that in fact it would be common knowledge that intelligence, your intelligence would have actually been there on the ground at the place where the meeting was.

MR BASSON: No Sir, that would not be air force intelligence. That would be military intelligence.

MR MAGADHLA: Ja, I mean even military intelligence.

MR BASSON: Yes. No, they are a completely different division and they are also a very closed community. I just know their building, and you can't even stop in front of the building because they've got cameras and they check you and so on. So...
[intervention]

MR MAGADHLA: Ja, but then if they are going to use aeroplanes for whatever - aircraft, whatever they are going to do, taking from whatever information they would have collected from their own secret ways or secret core of their departments or so...

MR BASSON: Yes, through agents and so on.

MR MAGADHLA: But then, because they would have had to use aircraft, then you would know that this is because of information collected by military intelligence. That now you are going to be involved with your electronic warfare things.

MR BASSON: Yes. They would have definitely have to actually pull me in and they would have had to say to me we have this information and this information and this information; we're

planning this, we need the help of the air force. They would have had to do that, yes Sir.

MR MAGADHLA: Do you know that the investigation into -the Margo investigation, that a lot of people after that investigation and even before the investigation - sort of doubted as to the results having to be such that they would satisfy people, the victims?

MR BASSON: No Sir. I understood from the - what I read in the papers and what this friend of mine told me afterwards in a casual, just conversation, that it was a completely above board investigation and that they are very happy with their findings. And this is the only thing that I know about the inquiry.

MR MAGADHLA: Now you as a person with your own independent mind, is it your intention to comply with the advice of the person that saw you before you came here?

MR BASSON: No Sir, no. I... [intervention]

MR MAGADHLA: You have your own open mind about that.

MR BASSON: I have my own open mind. 100%.

MR MAGADHLA: Thank you. For now anyway.

MR BASSON: Yes Sir.

MS PATTA: I just want to ask you if you have any knowledge of a military/security force base called Squamans near Mbuzini.

MR BASSON: Never heard of it.

MS PATTA: And just one more thing: do you have any pictures of this landrover that could be converted into a signal...?

MR BASSON: Yes. I showed one to her which I borrowed from the air force for the day, and if you want to, I can get permission - I'm sure I will get permission and I can e-mail it through to you, yes. But I don't have one here with me.

MS PATTA: Okay, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON: I want to for the record state that we will require you to get the permission and to do the necessary so that we can have the photograph.

MR BASSON: Okay Sir.

MS PATTA: Col Basson, just two other questions. The frequency scanner that you said this thing may have been, how big would it be? How big is this frequency scanner?

MR BASSON: There are various types on the market and you can buy them in the shops. I personally have one that I used for field trials which is as big as this microphone stand. You can hold it (indistinct).

MS PATTA: The size of a cell phone.

MR BASSON: It's like a cell phone, yes. Very much the size of a cell phone.

MS PATTA: Right. And secondly, the military radar, that is the air force military radar, there was one at Mariepskop and one at Hoedspruit.

MR BASSON: Yes.

MS PATTA: Now these radar, would they not have monitored Samora Machel's plane coming back from Zambia? They would know its flight path.

MR BASSON: Not necessarily, because they are very much understaffed. And I said to you my one son is in signal intelligence, my daughter is a radar operator. And they only man the radar stations when there are military operations on the go like for our side, night flying or training or something like that. But the radars are definitely not manned 24 hours.

MS PATTA: But that night there was a military operation in Botswana, so they probably would have been monitoring the radar.

MR BASSON: No. Because there were no aircraft involved in the operation as far as I know.

MS PATTA: But you don't know if it was being monitored or not.

MR BASSON: No, I don't know.

MS PATTA: Okay. But it is possible to monitor...
[intervention]

MR BASSON: It is possible to monitor and the equipment are there. And technically to switch them on and to man them, then they can monitor the air space for hundreds of thousands of square kilometres they can actually monitor, yes.

MS PATTA: I just want to clarify something on the beacon while we have you here as well. Am I correct in saying that a VOR beacon is a precise instrument...

MR BASSON: Yes.

MS PATTA: That you hook in and you follow. You follow that line exactly.

MR BASSON: Yes.

MS PATTA: The signal that it gives out. I'm sorry, my technical terms are a bit wanting here. So for example the flight path that was drawn of the plane crash, it was coming down like that and then it made that turn to the right.

MR BASSON: Yes.

MS PATTA: The Matsapa beacon was actually parallel to it, the line of the Matsapa beacon. Then you had the turn to the right and then you had the real Maputo beacon which was about eight minutes away. So if it had been travelling to Matsapa, would it not have been directly on the Matsapa line 100%?

MR BASSON: No. It depends on air corridors. Which I haven't swotted up, but one can have a look at that. Or in fact perhaps flying to a point over the ground where the pilot can pinpoint himself. So what you would do, is you would draw on a map before take-off a what we call a back bearing. Which would be a reverse radial from that beacon, and then you could fly, if the beacon is say over there somewhere, I would fly towards this jug

and when I get to the jug I would intercept that back bearing and then turn onto that bearing if I want to approach that beacon from a specific direction. And that is normal, standard procedure that you approach a beacon from a specific direction. Sometimes to clear high ground; sometimes to fly around civilian traffic or for various reasons. You have what we call a feed-in point, like a funnel and aircraft has to actually come in through that funnel. So you would actually fly to a specific point and then turn in. It's very normal.

MS PATTA: Okay.

MR MAGADHLA: But we've been told too that at some point that plane was spotted by your own radar systems to have entered South African air space. Now what would have been the normal reaction of your air force people, should that happen? Should it have happened that way?

MR BASSON: That was not under my control, so I'm speculating. If it was actually flying across the border directly into the country, they would probably notify air force headquarters operations. But if it was just clipping away or just entering say five or 10 miles into the country, it would just be a reportable incident that they would write in their log. Or if the corporal was asleep, he would probably not see it.

CHAIRPERSON: Can I just ask - and if my ignorance shows, please forgive it - is it possible for air force headquarters to

monitor movements of aircraft, even outside the borders of South Africa? In other words let's take this aircraft. It is now known that it was travelling from Zambia in Lusaka. Now would your equipment be able to monitor its route and course anywhere outside South Africa? Or is it only when it enters into South African air space?

MR BASSON: No Sir, it would see it very far outside our borders. Depending on the altitude of the aircraft, it could be hundreds of kilometres.

CHAIRPERSON: So on that theory it would have been possible, for instance had it been the aim of the SAAF for whatever reasons - and I'm just putting a hypothesis here - to monitor that aircraft. It would have been possible given the - and I accept what you say about altitude and everything, distance. But it would have been possible for it to be monitored. Its route to be monitored, as it left and as it travelled.

MR BASSON: Yes Sir. But that reporting of that could only have come to one position, and that is air force headquarters.

CHAIRPERSON: Yes.

MR BASSON: The commander control channels, the radar station cannot report that to anybody else apart from air force headquarters and I was sitting in air force headquarters in operations.

CHAIRPERSON: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON: Yes. No, what I'm trying to explore is let's assume that Joep Joubert where he was head conferred with the chief of the air force and there had been an agreement that there is a special mission, and that mission is to monitor this aircraft from Lusaka and to give reports. And Joubert would say I would like those reports to come to where I will be in the operations room, 10 km from the air force base. Is that a possibility? In other words what I'm trying to say, is it possible that that arrangement could have been made, given the need to know basis, and that you were not in the loop, and that in fact it did happen?

MR BASSON: It's possible, but highly unlikely. It would be something completely out of the ordinary. But it's possible.

CHAIRPERSON: Well, it was - I mean to bring down an aircraft... [intervention]

MR BASSON: Yes, for sure. It's... [intervention]

CHAIRPERSON: It was something out of the ordinary.

MR BASSON: You're right. But yes, it is technically possible.

CHAIRPERSON: Ja.

MS PATTA: Col Basson, I know - I mean I know you say you know nothing about the actual crash. But I mean did you not think the next day afterwards, when you heard that Mr Samora Machel's plane had crashed: I wonder if we were involved?

MR BASSON: Not in the slightest. Because I knew that any involvement air force-wise would have had to come via me. I was

not in the least bit - I never even considered - my wife even asked me was the defence force not involved? And I said to her no, on the spot. So as I said, I could have been naive.

CHAIRPERSON: Ja. Again, I ask the question. You see, if it was a question of for instance a cross border raid, I don't think the SADF was ever - what's the word? They never hid, even if it was after the event, their involvement in some of these raids. Kasinga, Botswana, everywhere else.

MR BASSON: H'm.

CHAIRPERSON: But assuming they were involved, this was not the sort of thing that they would have openly admitted.

MR BASSON: No, I would not imagine so.

CHAIRPERSON: And it was not the sort of thing that would have been operationalised in the normal way in which cross border raids were put into operation. It would be confined possibly to only the top, top leadership.

MR BASSON: That is possible, yes Sir.

CHAIRPERSON: Yes. So I mean you may have been naive, but I accept that it could not have been the sort of thing that you would have been made privy to, given your rank and your status.

MR BASSON: Yes, and if there was air force involvement as such, then I assume never mind how sensitive it was, it would have gone through my office. Obviously it... [intervention]

CHAIRPERSON: But would it not have gone through your chief?

MR BASSON: Well, my chief was not a technical man. So you know, this beacon would have to be tested in the environment, to look for you know reflections and technical terms like multi-path and does it really work, and, and, and. So there would have had to be some operational testing with the thing beforehand and so on. So as I said this is possible technically, but air force involvement I'm very sure was not there.

MS PATTA: Col Basson, I mean the air force was always regarded as the - of all the units, the sort of most clean if I can say that.

MR BASSON: Thank you.

MS PATTA: And certainly not entrusted with some of the sort of biggest operations. I mean is that a correct perception?

MR BASSON: That is.

MS PATTA: Secondly the special forces had specialised people in a whole range of areas... [intervention]

MR BASSON: Exactly.

MS PATTA: Including the sort of air force and air expertise and electronic stuff and so on. Could they not have been involved without your knowledge?

MR BASSON: Possibly, but highly unlikely. But possibly, yes.

CHAIRPERSON: What's unlikely about that colonel? Let's test that. What makes a person a special forces person? Were these not the sort of people who were supposed to have been trained virtually in all the areas of war and war-making? They were special people. They had received special training in virtually everything. These were the people who were put and left behind enemy lines. Not so?

MR BASSON: That is... [intervention]

CHAIRPERSON: I mean Rick Verster for instance when I interviewed him, he told me that they would be dropped off in Angola and they would actually be put there in order for them to direct the air force, to pinpoint to the air force where they must strike on the basis of the intelligence that they had collected.

MR BASSON: Yes Sir, that I say... [intervention]

CHAIRPERSON: And I would assume that to direct an aeroplane to zoom exactly where it should strike when you are on the ground would have entailed your knowledge of how to actually cause the aircraft to know where the position is if you are behind enemy lines. That would entail some measure of expertise, wouldn't it?

MR BASSON: Yes Sir, but that is navigation expertise, basically knowing where you are on the ground. Reading a map, and then talking on a radio to the pilot.

CHAIRPERSON: Yes. What I'm saying there could never have been in special forces people who had been trained, rudimentary or otherwise, such that with you at Hoedspruit or wherever it was where you were, somewhere else a person with your expertise could have been there without you knowing it?

MR BASSON: I doubt it Sir, but it's possible.

MR MAGADHLA: Maybe let me put it this way: if there was a proper briefing before people set out to do whatever, special forces, and you were involved in that briefing; and you were told, all of you who gathered there that today's mission is to kill Samora Machel. He's in Zambia and he'll be flying there and he's threatening Malawi, our friend. Today we're going to get rid of him. What would be your personal feeling? If somebody said those who feel we shouldn't do it lift up your hands, what would you do? What would be your position?

MR BASSON: Can I start by saying what would be the position of the chief of the air force? He would... [intervention]

MR MAGADHLA: No, I mean yourself.

MR BASSON: Myself?

MR MAGADHLA: H'm.

MR BASSON: I would be against it.

MR MAGADHLA: You would be against it.

MR BASSON: I would be against it and I have done it on occasions in Angola where I thought air strikes were directed at

targets where there could have been civilians and then I would stand up in a meeting and say no... [intervention]

MR MAGADHLA: This is exactly where we are leading to. Now if you were that kind of person, why would you think they would tell you about this kind of thing?

MR BASSON: Sir, technically-wise I cannot think of other expertise that was available, unless they contacted somebody from overseas; another country to come and sort this out.

MR MAGADHLA: But that was not - was it so difficult to divert a plane by using a decoy - I mean what do you call this? A beacon, placing a false beacon, and lure him into the mountain?

MR BASSON: Yes Sir, I think it's technically involved. You'll have to actually do a lot of homework on power output, on cliffs in the vicinity, mountains in the vicinity, power stability and you would have to actually go and do some test flights against it. And you would have to make sure that other aircraft are not affected. Light aircraft flying around and you know, own aircraft for instance flying in the Nelspruit environment, from Nelspruit to Maputo for some or other reason. I don't know. And I'm speculating now.

MR MAGADHLA: Could they use an expert from Israel?

MR BASSON: Ja, that would be possible.

MR MAGADHLA: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON: Do you have any other...?

MS PATTA: No further questions Mr Chair.

CHAIRPERSON: Well, thank you very much Col Basson. And especially your preparedness and readiness to come at what obviously was short notice.

We are trying to unravel mysteries and trying to get to the bottom of some of the things that our passed history has been tainted with. And for us we don't have pre-determined answers to these issues. It's not our function. We are trying to get to an indication of whether or not amongst other things, our armed forces were involved in an act of this nature.

And given that there was an accord, the so-called Nkomathi accord which four months earlier had been demonstrated to have been violated by a minister, deputy minister having gone to Mozambique and documents captured at Gorongosa, we have every reason to want to make sure that if we were not involved in this thing, then we are able to arrive at that conclusion.

So you have been of assistance and we thank you for it.

MR BASSON: Sir, it was only a pleasure, and I hope I could help. And if any more technical information is needed in future, the lady knows where to get hold of me.

CHAIRPERSON: Yes. You are excused.

MR BASSON: Thank you Sir.

WITNESS IS EXCUSED