

101187e vors and Samora Machel's death
 by Carlos Cardoso

Maputo, 22 Jan (AIM) Mozambique's transport Minister, Lt-gen Armando Guebuza, stressed on Wednesday a fact which shows one of the reasons why the FRELIMO party Political Bureau is demanding that investigations into the causes of the death of President Samora Machel should continue.

That fact was the appearance of signals from a vor (very high frequency omnidirectional radio) about ten minutes prior to the crash of the Presidential tupolev-134. It was that vor which caused the plane to turn to the southwest.

The factual report signed by the three members of the international Commission of Inquiry (Mozambique, the Soviet Union and South Africa) contains an annex which is the transcription of the conversation amongst the cabin crew. This comes from the cockpit voice recorder (cvr) which was listened to in Switzerland in November. This annex is also signed by all three delegations.

The annex has been translated from russian into english. Throughout the report and annex the time used is not southern african time but universal time (gmt).

According to the cvr transcription, at 21.11 and 28 seconds (1911.28) the captain said: +making some turns. couldn't it be straight ?+

The navigator replied +vor indicates that way+.

This was a turn of 37 degrees to the southwest, which began over the zone between Magude and the South African border, Magude is a town about 100 kilometers northwest of Maputo.

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Until Magude the plane was flying with a fluctuation of only four to six kilometers from the established route. In navigational terms it was, therefore, on the correct course. A turn to the southwest should have been made over the Maniça area.

The angle of this correct term would have been identical to that made by the plane over Magude.

In other words, due to the appearance of the vor referred to by the navigator, the aircraft made a premature turn to the right. It made the same turn that it would have made if the signal had not appeared, but did so a few fatal minutes earlier.

According to the cvr transcript, in the following ten minutes, Up until the impact on a hillside at Mbuzini (at 21.21 and 39 seconds), the crew complained that all navigational aids at Maputo except the vor were not functioning. The crew said they could get no guidance from the non-directional beacon(ndb), instrument landing system (its) or distance measuring equipment (dme). This leads one to suppose that in these minutes the crew did have a vor signal. *Disappearance of this vor right up to the moment of the crash.

Logically, the behaviour of the crew after the premature turn can only be examined after that turn is fully explained.

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* In the transcript there is nothing to indicate any

So what vor was this? could it have been the vor at matsapha airport in Swaziland, or was it some other vor?

A journalist from a news agency with an office in Johannesburg telephoned AIM on the morning of 21 October, asking about reactions in Maputo to the death of President Samora.

During the course of the conversation he told AIM of a strange telephone call that it is useful to recall today. He said that his agency had received a call from a man who did not identify himself but who claimed to be an officer in the South African air force. He said that the South African military had placed a +decoy beacon+ in the border area.

Now the factual report states that +during the on site investigation an abandoned campsite was found on the South African side of the border approximately 150 metres South east of the place where the aircraft initially contacted the ground. Witnesses on Mozambique's side of the border informed that a tent on the site had been removed on the day after the accident.+

The report says that the South African security police at Komatipoort were asked to investigate +who erected a large tent on the site and when+. The police reported to the commission that they had found an employee of the department of veterinary services who patrolled this section of the border in September and October 1986.

+He frequently saw members of the S. A. defence force camping at the place,+ states the report. +Their tents were however small. The soldiers sometimes played with a yellow ball. He once saw the ball laying on the site shown to him by the security branch commander+.

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The fact^ual report ends this part of the inquiry with the words +the company commander of the army unit in the Komatipoort area has no knowledge of any camps with large tents in the particular area+.

In his statement, gen Guebuza said that the investigation could by no means be considered concluded.

The appearance of the mystery vor means that there are now more questions than answers. Was the vor a legitimate beacon or a decoy one? Did the crew make mistakes due to lack of attention or were they induced to make errors? was the crash an accident or a crime, or the combination of criminal action and human failings?

These questions can only be answered if the matter of the vor can be clarified. Until that is done, this whole complex investigation runs the risk of creating more mysteries than it solves.

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