

## Mozambican Minister on Machel Death Crash and Radio Beacon

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Text of "special report":

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 the 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 10 minutes prior to the crash of the presidential Tupolev-134. It was that VOR which caused the plane to turn to the south-west.

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 2111 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 south-west, which began over the zone between Magude and the South African border. Magude is a town about 100 km north-west of Maputo. Until Magude, the plane was flying with a fluctuation of only four to six km from the established route. In navigational terms it was, therefore, on the correct course. A turn to the south-west should have been made over the Manhica area. The angle of this correct turn would have been identical to that made by the plane over Magude. Due to the appearance of the VOR referred to by the navigator, the aircraft had turned 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 minutes, up until the impact on a hillside at Mbuzini (at 2121 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 (ILS) or distance measuring equipment (DME). This leads one to suppose that in these minutes the crew did have a VOR signal. In the transcript there is nothing to indicate any 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. So, what VOR was it? Could it have been the VOR at Matsapa 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 21st October, asking about reactions in Maputo on 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 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 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 camp site was found on the South African side of the border approximately 150 m [as received] 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 incident".

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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 SA 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 lying on the site shown to him by the security branch (?commander)." The factual report ends this part of the enquiry with the words "the company commander of the army unit in the Komatipoort area has no knowledge of any camps in this particular area".

In his statement, Gen Guebuza said that the investigation could by no means be considered as 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 a combination of action and human failings? These questions can only be answered if the matter of the VOR can be cleared. Until this is done, this whole complex investigation runs the risk of creating more mysteries than it solves.