

WHITE RIVER, Mpumalanga June 17 1998 Sapa

NEW CLAIMS ABOUT THE WRECKAGE OF SAMORA MACHEL'S PLANE

Police claims that they have the wreckage of the aeroplane in which Mozambican president Samora Machel died are not true, a Mpumalanga scrapyard owner said on Wednesday.

Greg Duffey, of Duffey's metal scrap yard in White River, told African Eye Witness News that he bought the wreckage of Machel's plane from a mysterious church group in Komatipoort in 1987.

Duffey said he was told at the time that the mangled Russian Tupolev was Machel's. He recycled it at his scrapyard in White River.

"It was definitely Machel's plane. I still have a copy of the cheque I used to pay this strange Eljon church for the wreckage and am convinced that the wreckage and engine parts which the police say are Machel's are fake."

Duffey said the wreckage he bought included the plane's engines and fuselage. The tail section was missing.

"I chopped it all up and recycled it. I was therefore very surprised when I saw a Tonga police officer on TV recently claiming that they had the plane's wreckage at their police station. It has to be fake."

Ngwenya Lodge owner Dave Fourie said he had the plane's tail section, with a Mozambican state crest, displayed as a trophy in his bar, and was prepared to sell it for R250000.

"The tail is my property. It's been mine for a long time now and the only way anyone is going to get it is if they pay for it."

He said he found the tail section on the game farm when he bought it in 1989.

He said shotgun holes in the tail section were put there by an employee who used it for target practice.

Tonga police station commander Captain Andrew Mtiwane said he had no way of verifying whether or not the wreckage at his police station was from Machel's plane.

"The problem is that the plane wreckage was originally taken to Komatipoort after the accident and stored there until it was brought here on February 20, 1989. That's two years after

the accident and we have no idea what happened in the interim."

Mpumalanga special investigator Director Agrippa Mabuza said two wheels from the Tupolev were found on a farm in the Komatipoort area. The farmer told investigators that the parts were given to him by South African police officers who investigated the Machel crash in 1986.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has reopened the investigation following claims that agents of the previous government lured Machel's aeroplane off course with a decoy signal.

TRC investigator Christelle Terreblanche could not be reached for comment on Wednesday, but said on Tuesday that the wreckage was not central to her investigation.

"We're trying to establish whether South African forces used a decoy beacon to lure Machel's plane away from Maputo airport and into the hillside at Mbuzini, near Komatipoort," she said.

"While we'd obviously try to convince people with pieces of the plane to return them for a monument, this isn't the aim of what I'm doing."