

Defiant pub owner scorns truth body

Machel plane crash relic disappears after sneak sale

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INVESTIGATIONS into the crash that killed President Samora Machel of Mozambique and 34 others in 1986 took a bizarre turn this week when a lodge owner sold the plane wreckage for an undisclosed sum of money.

The 2m x 2m tail section was displayed in the pub at Ngwenya Lodge near Komatipoort in Mpumalanga. It was sold on Thursday, three days after the truth commission announced that anyone with pieces of the Russian Tupolev aircraft should hand them in.

Staff at the lodge said police had collected the tail section on Wednesday. When inquiries revealed that neither the police nor the truth body had anything to do with its removal, the owner, Dave Fourie, admitted he had sold it.

"This has got nothing to do with the media or anyone else," Fourie said.

He refused to say who the buyer was, or how much he had been paid.

Last week Fourie said he would part with the wreckage if he was paid at least R250 000 for it.

The head of the truth commission's investigating unit, Dumisa Ntsebeza, said yesterday that legal action against Fourie was being contemplated.

"If he has sold the wreckage in spite of everything that I have said in the media, then he will have only himself to blame. The truth commission will seek legal opinion and we might apply for a court order to seize the wreckage from whoever bought it," said Ntsebeza.

"I made it clear on Tuesday, shortly after Graça Machel testified before the truth commission, that all items that constitute evidence in this case should be preserved in a respectable manner," he said.

It is believed the tail section was taken from an airfield in Komatipoort where police dumped it along with other pieces of wreckage they collected after the crash.

Machel expressed her anguish on Tuesday that pieces of the plane in which 35 people had been killed should be exploited for entertainment. Patrons of Ngwenya Lodge had mixed feelings, however.

Fourie's nephew, David, said he didn't know what the fuss was about. "It was an ornament. Why do people have grave stones? It's the same thing".

"So what," said ex-Zimbabwean Ian Moore. "It means nothing. It's like displaying a piece of bottle you've picked up on the beach."

However, another patron, Rudi van der Walt, said: "It doesn't fit in with the atmosphere here. "People died in that plane."

Before being sold, the tail section was riddled with bullet holes. Fourie said one of his employees had used it for "target shooting" with a shotgun.