

"If You Get Captured, We Don't Know You"

A South African prisoner who says he was sent to Mozambique to lay the groundwork for a plan to assassinate the late President Samora Machel will be freed as part of the new Mozambican amnesty and pardon measures.

Peter Schoeman, 42, told his story to AIM on 23 August at Machava prison on the outskirts of Maputo, where he has been held for the last six years.

The white-haired ex-captain of South African military intelligence was sent to Mozambique in March 1983. He says his aim was to obtain the installation plan for the reactors in the Cahora Bassa dam on the Zambezi, the electrical installation plans for the main power station in Maputo and for the Hotel Polana, to infiltrate the presidential palace and "do reconnaissance there" and finally, to study the presidential route from the palace to the Congress Hall "because they were planning the assassination of the president".

Schoeman claims he told his superiors, General Van Der Westhuisen, then head of military intelligence and Minister of Defence Magnus Malan the night before he left for Mozambique that he was not interested in doing the job, but that they gave him no choice. The next day, he was dropped off three kilometres from the Mozambican border and walked to the Ressano Garcia border post. He was picked up there by a Mozambican contact with whom he drove by car to Maputo. That night, at the Polano Hotel, he says he contacted the Mozambican authorities and gave himself up.

He had a list of between 20 and 25 Mozambican contacts—all civil servants—that he gave to the authorities. He does not know whether any of these people were later arrested.

Schoeman says that because he gave himself up, he did not expect to stay in prison so long, but he says he has been well treated. "Everything I said, I said out of my own will," he declared.

"I had been in the South African airforce since January 1962," Schoeman explained, from where he was transferred first to the infantry, then the artillery and finally became an



*Schoeman at Machava prison
(AIM/Antonio Muchave)*

agent for military intelligence in January 1979. For this job he had three years' training, most of it in Buffalo Camp in northern Namibia, where he took self defence, an 18-month survival course, and trained as a helicopter pilot. His 50 colleagues included South African, Namibian, Angolan, Tanzanian and a few Mozambican men. "Thousands of people have trained at Buffalo Camp," Schoeman said.

Schoeman says he also learned deep-sea diving in Durban, trained to be a paratrooper in Blomfontein and took an engineering course in water purification and bridge building in Pretoria.

Because of his extensive training, Schoeman sometimes gave lectures to MNR bandit recruits who were being trained at bases in Phalaborwa, Petersburg and Pretoria. He taught them about weapons, hand-to-hand combat, self-defence and survival.

Most of the MNR recruits were young Mozambicans who had gone to South Africa looking for work on farms or in the mines, he said. They are told by police they will get six months in prison and subsequent deportation for crossing the border illegally unless they agree to train for the MNR. Thus they "fall into the hands of recruiting officers".

Schoeman said he believed South Africa was responsible for the plane crash that killed the late president Samora Machel. "I am convinced that either the South African government or the military intelligence service must have had a hand in it".

For one thing, the area around Mbuzini, where the plane crashed, "is military property and I know it very well". And they have the equipment to do it, he said. "They can black out radio communication throughout southern Africa. They do that when they go on operations into Angola and Namibia."

Schoeman has never had any contacts with the local South African Trade Mission, which he said refused to take up his case because they are not a political mission. He added that, like military intelligence anywhere, the South Africans had told him before he left: "Look, if you get captured, we don't know you."

Schoeman has "no interest in going back to South Africa because there'll be problems for me there because of what I said" and expected he would get 20 to 25 years in prison if he returned.