

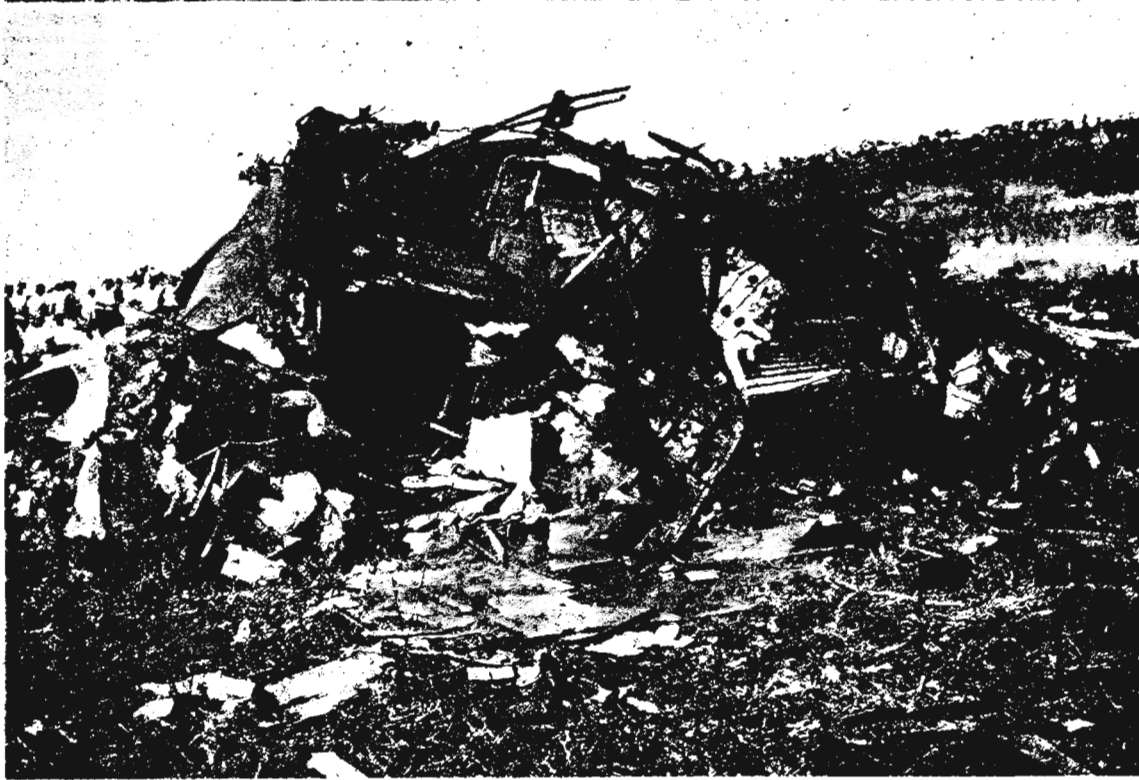
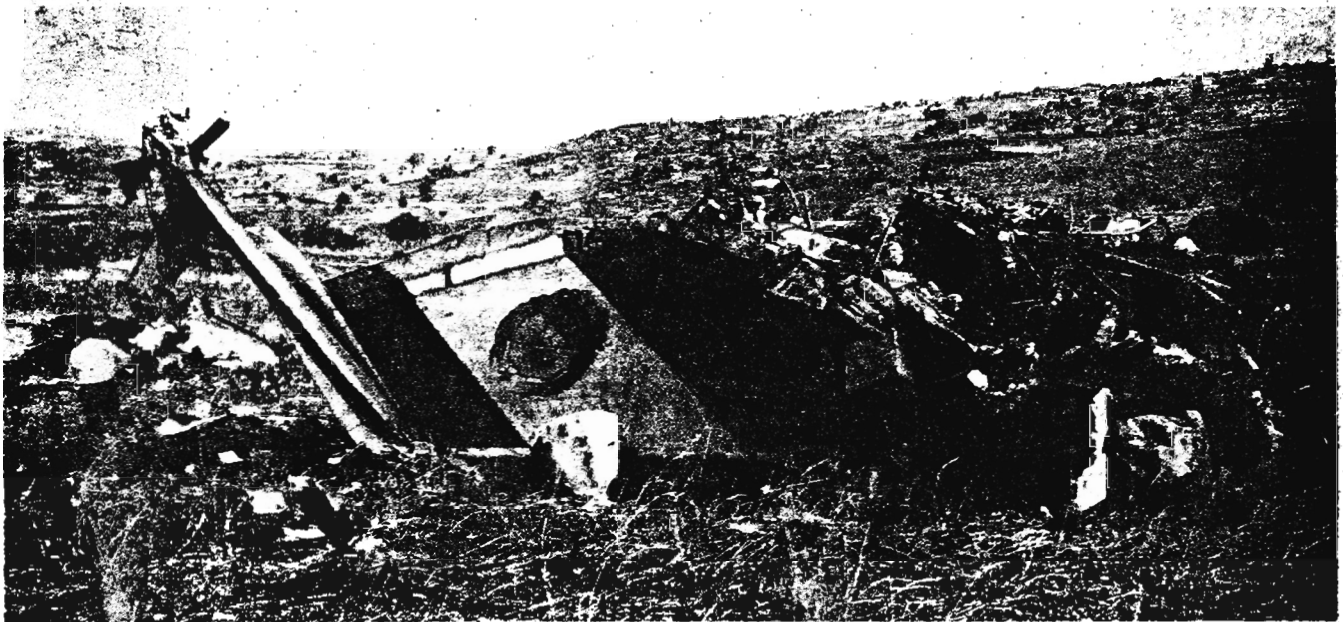
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MACHEL CRASH



Claims he was shot down, but pilot was off-course

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and
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THE Russian pilot of President Samora Machel's Tupolev jet claims he was "shot down", but survivor accounts show that he crashed into a mountain while beginning his descent to land in Maputo from a badly off-course position.

Official South African reconstruction of the crash which killed Pres Machel and 28 others, is that pilot error is the most likely explanation for the tragedy.

The Russian pilot has since been flown to Pretoria for "further treatment". He is one of ten who survived the crash.

It is understood that after making his initial allegation a Russian translator was flown to the area early yesterday but the pilot has remained silent and has not been cooperating with the authorities.

The mangled wreck of the tailpiece (top) and the rear piece of the cockpit area (above) are evidence of the force of the impact with which President Samora Machel's Soviet-built Tupolev TU134 jet crashed in the Eastern Transvaal. The aircraft disintegrated and debris was strewn over a wide area.

Pictures by DOUG LEE.

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Machel crash drama

FROM PAGE 1

The pilot told passengers to fasten their seatbelts for landing in Maputo — then the plane ploughed into a hillside in the Eastern Transvaal.

A Mozambican news agency, quoting government officials, said the crash was caused by human error.

Pres Machel and 28 members of his entourage including several high-ranking officials, were killed when the aircraft crashed at about 8.25 pm on Sunday night.

The injured, nine Blacks and a White, are in the Rob Ferreira Hospital in Nelspruit. One is in a serious condition.

Also killed when the Russian Tupolev TU134 hit the ground 75 km south of Komatipoort in the Lebombo mountain range were the Mozambique Minister of Transport, Mr Celontra Santos; the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Lobo; Zambian Ambassador in Mozambique, Mr Navesse; Zaire Ambassador in Mozambique (no name given); secretary to Pres Machel, and Lieut Col Fernando Hongwane.

Pres Machel and his party were on their way home to Maputo from a Frontline States conference in Lusaka when the accident happened.

One of the injured is believed to be a Russian pilot.

A survivor told police the pilot said the plane was approaching Maputo Airport and told them to fasten their seatbelts. He said it was a stormy night and conditions were terrible.

He heard what sounded like a shot from inside the aircraft.

Everything went dark and about three minutes later there was a terrible shudder and the plane hit the ground.

The aircraft clipped some trees about 200 m inside the South African side of the border — in the Mbuzini district of KaNgwane — then hit the crest of a hill before somersaulting several times and disintegrating.

Debris

It did not catch alight and debris was strewn over an area of about one kilometre. All that remained of the aircraft was part of the fuselage and a portion of the tail metal.

"If the plane had cleared the mountain top, it would probably have ploughed straight into the Mbuzine village, killing many more people," a South African official who visited the scene yesterday afternoon said.

Most of the bodies, including that of Pres Machel, were badly mutilated.

One of the survivors, who was not seriously injured, stumbled to a nearby village and alerted villagers.

Some of the villagers went to a nearby police station and police arrived at the crash scene at about 2am.

They removed the dead and injured, several of whom were still trapped inside the fuselage.

According to the Bureau for Information, a South African Police captain on the scene soon after the crash identified

Pres Machel's body from the Mozambican leader's beard.

Immediately

He immediately informed police headquarters in Pretoria who passed the news to Mozambican officials in Maputo.

South African Foreign Minister Pik Botha and Mozambican officials identified the body of the President on the hillside at about noon yesterday.

The body of Pres Machel was flown back to Maputo yesterday afternoon after it had been trucked 75 km from the scene of the air disaster.

The Mozambican Government announced the death of Pres Machel late yesterday.

A radio announcement was made after day-long high-level discussions and several hours after the rest of the world was informed by South Africa, where the crash occurred.

State radio had played solemn music all day after an early morning announcement that the President was missing.

The South African delegation on the scene included Mr Pik Botha, the Commissioner of Police General Johan Coetzee; Lieut-General Lotha Neethling, head of the CID; and Lieutenant General Dennis Earp, chief of the SA Air Force. Major General Bert Wandrag, Deputy Commissioner in charge of riot control was also present.

The Mozambican delegation, comprising of about 16 people, was headed by Mr Sergio Veira, Minister of the National People's Security Service. They arrived in two MAT helicopters from Maputo.

The delegation spent most of the day on the crash scene watching as policemen and workers removed the dead.

Conference

Mr Botha said at a Press conference in Komatipoort late yesterday afternoon that pieces of debris and bodies were strewn all over the veld.

The plane smash was being investigated by the Department of Transport, and this was normal practice.

The SA Government had made an approach to Mozambique to allow Mozambican officials to



Part of the instrument panel of the wrecked aircraft.

be included in the official investigation.

"The State President said he would welcome experts from international aviation in the official investigation."

Mr Botha said that according to the SA Air Force, Pres Machel's plane was in Mozambique air space for most of its trip. It only entered SA air space shortly before it crashed.

It hit the ground just inside the South African border.

The plane's black box had been recovered from the crash scene.

It had been sealed in the presence of the Mozambique delegation and would be handed over to those investigating "this tragic event".

Gen Coetzee would see to it that the SAP gave its full assistance with the investigation.

Off course

Tony Stirling writes pilots consulted last night said that from the diagrams of where the plane went down it was several miles off course from the Limpopo beacon at Komatipoort, which would be the normal point for the aircraft to turn for its run to Maputo.

"Only about five minutes flying time away from where it crashed,

the escarpment drops quickly about 2 000 ft over low country and the plane would have been quite safe if it had reached that point before beginning to make its descent," said a pilot.

The "explosion" reported to have been heard by a survivor, according to the pilots, could have been due to several causes, including the snapping down of the wheels, or thunder.

It was pointed out that the equipment aboard the Tupolev is inadequate and "ancient".

Conditions

Under the conditions static was almost bound to have affected the performance of the aircraft's automatic direction finder.

Pilot sources said that the same aircraft was involved in an earlier incident in South Africa when it "got lost".

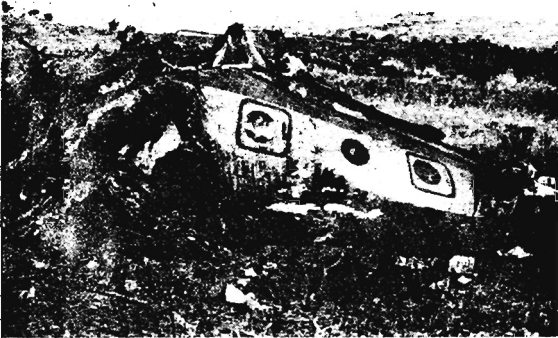
This occurred at Lanseria Airport about 18 months ago when a Mozambican delegation flew in for talks.

"The pilot radioed in to say he was lost on the approach. The control tower official went out and made a visual sighting of the aircraft and guided it in," a pilot said.

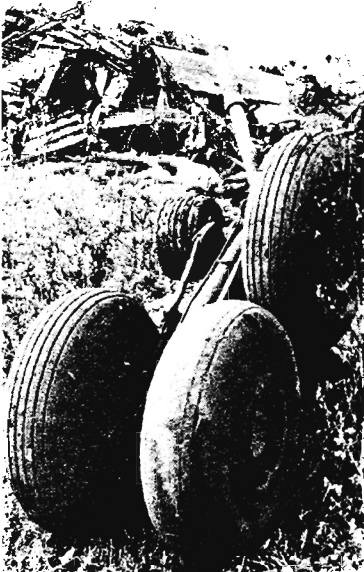
● See Pages 3, 4, and 6.



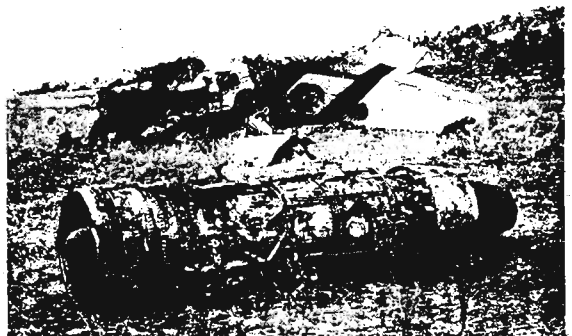
Debris of the wrecked aircraft lies strewn over a wide area.



Part of the wrecked remains of the Russian Tupolev aircraft which crashed close to the South African-Mozambican border.



The remains of the undercarriage of President Samora Machel's personal aircraft, with a pile of twisted metal in the background.



One of the aircraft's two jet engines lies in the veld with a piece of wing in the background.