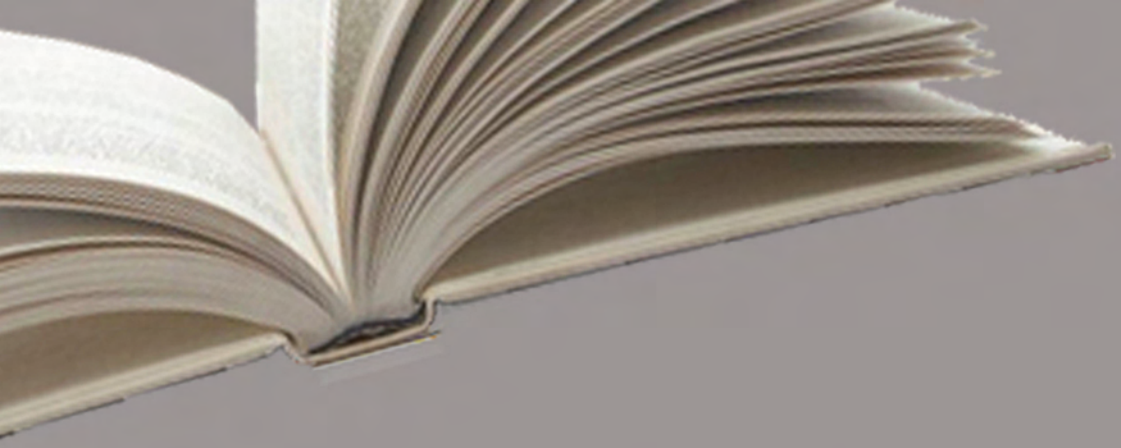

MARLÉNE BURGER
&
CHANDRÉ GOULD

SECRETS AND LIES

ZEBRA PRESS

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Wouter Basson and South Africa's Chemical and Biological Warfare Programme

Marléne Burger & Chandré Gould

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This book records, as fairly and accurately as possible, details of South Africa's chemical and biological warfare programme, and, specifically, the public face of investigations into alleged abuse of Project Coast. Because of their involvement in such proceedings, the authors are in a position to both comment on them and share with readers their personal insights, based on a wealth of information at their disposal. This book is not intended to be, and should not be read as, the definitive account of any of the events concerned. Views expressed by the authors are not necessarily those of the publisher.

This book is dedicated to those who strive continually
and courageously to rid the world of chemical and biological warfare,
no matter where it is hidden, or by whom – and to all the
victims of military secrets and political lies.

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About the Authors

CHANDRÉ GOULD is a senior researcher in the Crime and Justice Programme of the Institute for Security Studies. From 1996 to 1999 she worked as an investigator and evidence analyst for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and was one of the investigators responsible for the TRC's investigation into Project Coast. Throughout the Basson trial, she was responsible for compiling weekly reports on proceedings as part of the Centre for Conflict Resolution's chemical and biological warfare research project.

MARLÉNE BURGER was a journalist for more than 30 years and was a news editor at *The Friend*, *Eastern Province Herald* and the *Sunday Times* before becoming a freelance writer and editor. From October 1999 to April 2002, she attended the trial of Dr Wouter Basson on behalf of the Centre for Conflict Resolution.

Foreword

TEN YEARS HAVE passed since Wouter Basson was acquitted of the criminal charges brought against him and *Secrets and Lies* was originally published. In that time, Basson continued to practise medicine at a private hospital in Cape Town, regale his friends and associates in the Boland winelands and cock a snoot at those who sought his demise. He remains unapologetic about his role as head of the chemical and biological weapons programme, as clearly demonstrated in his interview for filmmaker Bob Coen's 2009 documentary *Anthrax War*. Coen puts it to Basson that 'There was some talk about an ethnic weapon, Project Coast working on what was called the "black bomb".' Basson responds, 'That was great, ja; that was the most fun I've had in my life,' before going on to talk about the intention to develop an anti-fertility vaccine for black women.

Basson's arrogance is born of impunity. He is yet to be, and may never be, held accountable for the activities of the apartheid chemical and biological warfare programme. The Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) has been unsuccessfully pursuing disciplinary action against Basson for more than two years. The case has been bedevilled by delays, weak witnesses and legal challenges brought by Basson, the details of which are mind-numbing. At the time of writing, we still await an outcome. Basson and his lawyers have tried their damnedest to have the charges by the HPCSA dropped, describing his more than decade-long struggle against being held to account as like 'eating an elephant'. In early 2012, he told the media, 'This was a hell of a long time ago. Nobody remembers, and I'm not sure that anybody cares.'

Like me, Marléne Burger would have cared. She also would have liked to have seen the end of the process, if indeed there ever will be one, but it dragged on

too long. Marléne died an early death in 2009. She was an exceptional investigative journalist whose tenacity, curiosity and unbelievable memory for detail meant that she was able to continue to follow stories long after they had faded from public attention. Marléne spent most of the three years that it took for Basson to be tried sitting on hard court benches in the Pretoria High Court. She took copious notes, and closely watched the expressions and body language of the defence team, prosecutors, accused and witnesses. Every evening after a day in court we would speak on the phone for hours while she passionately described the day's events.

Through this book she forged a close relationship with our publisher, Zebra Press, and went on to edit nineteen more non-fiction South African titles: *32 Battalion* by Piet Nortje; *The Battle for Zimbabwe* by Geoff Hill; *Winnie Mandela: A Life* by Annè-Marié du Preez Bezdrob; *The Road to Democracy* by the South African Democracy Education Trust; *Memoirs* by Ahmed Kathrada; *Thabo Mbeki and the Battle for the Soul of the ANC* by William Gumede; *What Happens After Mugabe?* by Geoff Hill; *At Thy Call We Did Not Falter* by Clive Holt; *Brett Kebble: The Inside Story* by Barry Sergeant; *Against the Grain* by Geoff Nyarota; *Mom, Interrupted* by Debbie Adlington and Gerda Kruger; *Dances with Devils* by Jacques Pauw; *Through the Darkness* by Judith Todd; *Total Onslaught/Totale Aanslag* by De Wet Potgieter; *The Making of a Nation* by Peter Joyce; *White Power* by Christi van der Westhuizen; *A Life in Transition* by Alex Boraine; *The Mbeki Legacy* by Brian Pottinger; and *Of Tricksters, Tyrants and Turncoats* by Max du Preez.

Project Coast was not the largest or most sophisticated of the state-run chemical and biological weapons programmes. Nor, thankfully, did it result in large numbers of casualties. It is, however, an important example of what happens when a state is existentially threatened. The way in which Basson and his associates managed to manipulate the system also shows what happens when secrecy and subterfuge trump oversight. I am grateful to our publisher, Zebra Press, for making this electronic version of *Secrets and Lies* available so that we don't forget.

CHANDRÉ GOULD
2012

Preface

UNTIL THE END of January 1997, neither of us had heard the name of Dr Wouter Basson, or paid particular attention to sporadic mention by the media of something called Project Coast. Since then, both have influenced our lives in ways we could never have imagined, and we have learned more about chemical and biological warfare and covert military projects than the average person ever really needs to know.

This book is the culmination of an intensive five-year learning curve, but it by no means purports to be the definitive story of either South Africa's top-secret CBW project, the Truth Commission hearings or the criminal trial that emanated from alleged abuse of that programme. Project Coast had an official lifespan of 12 years, Basson's trial stretched over 30 months and is recorded in some 30 000 pages. It would be impossible to offer an exhaustive study of these events in a single published volume.

By necessity, therefore, certain information has been omitted. These omissions should in no way be seen as diminishing the value of such data in relation to the bigger picture, merely as an indication that the authors had access to an overabundance of source material, and were obliged to make sacrifices in the interest of a coherent and hopefully absorbing read.

By drawing on our personal experience of both the TRC investigation and the trial, we have tried to take readers behind the scenes of at least some of the most sensational headlines they have encountered during the past few years. Writing a book is never easy, and in this case the process was made harder still by the agonising and ruthless decisions we constantly faced regarding condensation of the large volume of material at our disposal. Those who wish to learn more

than they can from this book would do well to explore the Centre for Conflict Resolution's informative website, www.ccrweb.ccr.uct.ac.za/cbw or the TRC's final report, which includes a section on Project Coast.

This book is based largely on contemporaneous reports compiled throughout the Basson trial for the Centre for Conflict Resolution. We extend sincere thanks to the CCR and especially to the director, Laurie Nathan, Guy Lamb and Fiona Grant for their unfailing support from October 1999. A presence in the courtroom was possible only because of generous financial contributions by the Ford Foundation, Royal Norwegian Embassy, Fredrich Ebert Stiftung, Ploughshares Fund, Swiss Campaign on Debt Cancellation and Reparations for Southern Africa, the Harvard-Sussex Project and the Department of Microbiology at Leeds University, to all of whom we are deeply grateful.

Many thanks, also, to Marlene Fryer and Robert Plummer of Zebra Press for their encouragement and confidence in our ability to deliver a publishable manuscript, and especially to Frances Perryer, who edited it with both a keen and kind eye.

Dr Jan Lourens and Charles van Remoortere supplied many of the photographs, while Professor Milton Leitenberg of the University of Maryland, USA, was the North Star that guided us through a complex scientific field. Without his insight, we might never have negotiated some of the hazards.

There are others whose support, sense of humour and perspective contributed in ways too many to mention, but who would shy away from public acknowledgement of their roles as mentor, muse or material helper. They know who they are, and that they have our undying appreciation.

Last, but in no way least, our deepest love and thanks to our families for their unflagging patience and understanding during the demanding process that has brought us – finally – to this point. Heartfelt appreciation from Chandré to Helèt for her love and support.

MARLÉNE BURGER — CHANDRÉ GOULD

PRETORIA — JUNE 2002 — GEORGE

Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
Apla	Azanian People's Liberation Army
BRCI	Blowing Rock Consolidated Investments
CAMs	Chemical Agent Monitors
CBW	chemical and biological warfare
CCB	Civil Cooperation Bureau
CMC	Coordinating Management Committee
CSI	Chief of Staff Intelligence
CSIR	Council for Scientific and Industrial Research
DCC	Directorate Covert Collection
DST	Directorate Special Tasks
EMLC	*Acronym of the Afrikaans terms for Electronic, Mechanical, Agricultural and Chemical*
Fapla	People's Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola
Frelimo	Mozambican Liberation Front
MCI	Medchem Consolidated Investments
MI	Military Intelligence
MK	Umkhonto we Sizwe (armed wing of the ANC)
MPLA	Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola
NBC	nuclear-biological-chemical (suit)
NIA	National Intelligence Agency (post-1994)
NIS	National Intelligence Service (pre-1994)
OPALS	Pan-African Organisation to Combat Aids
OPCW	Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Warfare
OSEO	Office for Serious Economic Offences
PLAN	People's Liberation Army of Namibia (armed wing of Swapo)
Renamo	Mozambican National Resistance

RHOSA	Regional Health Organisation of Southern Africa
RITS	Regent International Trading Services
RRL	Roodeplaat Research Laboratories
SAA	South African Airways
SAAF	South African Air Force
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SACC	South African Council of Churches
SADF	South African Defence Force (pre-1994)
SANDF	South African National Defence Force (post-1994)
SAMS	South African Medical Services
SANAB	South African Narcotics Bureau
Scopa	Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Public Accounts
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SIU	Special Investigation Unit
SRD	Systems Research & Development
Swapo	South West African People's Organisation
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
TREWITS	Teen-rewolusionêre Inligting Taakspan; Counter-Revolutionary Intelligence Task Team
Unita	National Union for the Total Independence of Angola
USMMIIA	US Military Medical Intelligence and Information Agency

Foul deeds will rise,
Though all the earth o'erwhelm them, to man's eyes.

– SHAKESPEARE, *Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene 2

1

A Tangled Web

WHEN A DECEMBER 1992 purge of the South African Defence Force (SADF) thrust a top-secret Military Intelligence unit into the spotlight and implicated a phalanx of high-ranking officers in alleged Third Force activities, one man hugged the shadows. Five years later, the names of six officers placed on early pension and 16 others suspended pending further investigation had all but faded into obscurity. Ironically, the twenty-third man, whose identity had been kept a closely guarded secret, was about to become a household name.

That man was Dr Wouter Basson, a double medical specialist, former brigadier and head of the apartheid government's ultra-secret chemical and biological warfare programme, Project Coast. From 4 October 1999 until 11 April 2002, however, this slight-built, balding man was, first and foremost, the Accused, his chequered past the leitmotif of one of the longest and costliest criminal trials in South Africa's judicial annals.

By the time Basson walked out of the Pretoria High Court a free man, he had been the subject of diverse investigations for 10 years, and on trial for 30 months. The route followed by Judge Willie Hartzenberg in concluding that the evidence of 153 witnesses and thousands of pages of supporting documents was not enough to find Basson guilty on a single one of the 61 charges he faced, may be the subject of debate for years to come, but there is no doubt that the tale that unfolded in his courtroom is one seldom told outside the pages of fictional best-sellers: a tale of subterfuge and sophistry, politics and power, murder and mad science.

Born on 6 July 1950, Basson was the eldest son of a rugby-loving policeman and an aspiring opera singer. Shortly before matriculating from Milnerton High School

in Cape Town at the end of 1967, his plans to study medicine at the University of Cape Town were dashed by his father's transfer to Pretoria, and the news that his parents could not afford the cost of long-distance tuition. He enrolled at the University of Pretoria instead, qualifying as a medical doctor before serving a one-year internship at one of South Africa's premier teaching hospitals, HF Verwoerd (now renamed Pretoria Academic) in 1974.

Basson's intention was to specialise in gynaecology at Middlesex Hospital in England, but like all white South African men of his generation, he was subject to compulsory military service. He joined the SADF on 2 January 1975, switched his area of specialisation to internal medicine and, by the end of 1980, was a qualified physician also holding a master's degree in physiology and physiological chemistry and the rank of lieutenant-colonel.

When the SADF High Command cast around for a suitable candidate to head up a proposed chemical and biological warfare (CBW) project, Basson was the man they chose. For the next 12 years, he would enjoy a freedom of movement and absence of control unprecedented in a military milieu, where chain of command is paramount and paperwork the fuel that moves the war machine along.

Basson's immediate superior, Surgeon General Niel Knobel, would later admit that he and other members of the Coordinating Management Committee (CMC) to which Basson reported periodically, did not *want* to know who he was dealing with or how he was acquiring the equipment and information needed by Project Coast. As long as Basson did not exceed the annually approved budgets, and produced the required results, he was authorised to do 'whatever he had to, even if this involved theft or bribery', according to Knobel. Just about the only restriction placed on Basson was a standard caveat against self-enrichment at the project's expense.

By the middle of 1992, this lack of checks and balances saw Military Intelligence steeped in what would be the first of a series of investigations into irregularities and criminal activity allegedly perpetrated under the mantle of Project Coast. But not until Basson's arrest on 29 January 1997 for drug-dealing would these disparate probes converge, adding vivid detail to a picture of securocratic South Africa that was coming to resemble nothing so closely as a Hieronymus Bosch landscape.

Shortly after PW Botha was deposed as head of state in 1989, Almond Nofomela, a former policeman, sentenced to death for the murder of a farmer, made a shocking confession on the eve of his execution: he had been a member of a Security Police hit squad operating from a farm called Vlakplaas, south-west of Pretoria. When his erstwhile commanding officer, Dirk Coetzee, confirmed the claim, the lid was lifted on a can of worms so foetid that no one in apartheid's corridors of power could escape the stench.

Botha's successor, FW de Klerk, appointed no fewer than three commissions of inquiry in a bid to redeem and reform the security forces at the heart of one

shocking revelation after another. In 1990, the Harms Commission probed both the Security Police covert unit operating from Vlakplaas and the SADF's equivalent, the Civil Cooperation Bureau (CCB). In August 1992, recommendations by the Kahn Commission resulted in the cutting off of the liberal flow of secret funds for clandestine security force operations. Significantly, Project Coast was never among the projects laid before Kahn, and it emerged from the probe unscathed. Towards the end of 1991, allegations of security force complicity in the violence wracking vast tracts of South Africa led to the appointment of Judge Richard Goldstone as head of an ongoing commission of inquiry with an open-ended brief that encompassed township massacres in the dead of night, a bloody campaign of attacks on train commuters and minibus taxis, and the supply of arms to members of the Inkatha Freedom Party.

By November 1992, when the Goldstone Commission raided the front company in Lynnwood, Pretoria, that hid Military Intelligence's Directorate Covert Collection (DCC), the civilian National Intelligence Service (NIS – now Agency (NIA)) had already spent two years on a top-secret investigation launched on De Klerk's instructions into burgeoning allegations that a Third Force made up of elements of the security forces was not only stoking but in fact igniting the fires that threatened to engulf South Africa before a negotiated settlement could be reached between the two major political players, the ruling National Party and the African National Congress (ANC).

The DCC raid would have far-reaching implications. Five top-secret dossiers filed under the code-name Baboon contributed to the successful prosecution of former CCB killer Ferdi Barnard in June 1998, when he was sentenced to life behind bars for the May 1989 murder of anti-apartheid activist and anthropologist Dr David Webster in Johannesburg. Crucially, in the wake of the widespread media coverage following the Goldstone raid, the NIS decided to pool its resources with the commission, and by the end of November, Lieutenant-General Pierre Steyn, the SADF's Chief of Staff, had been designated the unfortunate bearer of bad tidings to the head of state.

In his autobiography *The Last Trek*, published in 1999, De Klerk wrote that he was 'deeply shocked' by what Steyn reported to him. At a hurriedly convened Cabinet meeting, wrote De Klerk, 'we listened dumbfounded, while General Steyn unravelled a complex web of unauthorised, illegal and criminal activities within some units of the Defence Force'. The report was a combination of the findings to date of the NIS, the SADF's own counter-intelligence section and the Goldstone Commission. Amid allegations of widespread subversive activity, arms and drug smuggling, cross-border vehicle theft syndicates and murders committed with poison, there were also the first references to abuse of a chemical and biological warfare programme. Although Steyn made no specific recommendations, the

information was so dangerous that he urged De Klerk to act sooner rather than later.

De Klerk lost no time, consulting with three top military officers – SADF chief General AJ 'Kat' Liebenberg, Army chief Lieutenant-General Georg Meiring and Chief of Staff Intelligence Lieutenant-General Joffel van der Westhuizen – before announcing, two days before Christmas, that 23 senior SADF officers up to the rank of major-general were being axed with immediate effect. Within a fortnight, a team of detectives began gathering the hard evidence needed if any of the allegations were ever going to lead to criminal charges being laid. Simultaneously, but as part of an entirely independent investigation, the Office for Serious Economic Offences (OSEO) began unravelling the labyrinthine financial affairs of Project Coast, armed with the names of companies in South Africa and abroad that appeared nowhere in the SADF's records as approved front companies. OSEO's probe was an extension of Military Intelligence's earlier attempt – which included the tapping of 47 telephone lines – to establish the links between Basson and the multi-million-rand refurbishment of a luxurious three-storey house in Pretoria's diplomatic belt, as well as a number of companies in which he appeared to have a personal stake.

With sleuths combing every possible avenue for witnesses willing to state under oath what had previously been confined to 'raw' intelligence, the Goldstone Commission made a major breakthrough. Former Vlakplaas operator Chappies Klopper indicated that he was ready to talk – in exchange for protection, and only in a foreign country. For the first time in the history of South African law and order, a witness protection programme was hastily conceived. Though not in the league of the well-established American system, where witnesses in major cases are even supplied with new identities and lives, the South African programme does make use of various 'safe houses', while witnesses relinquish their existing jobs and are paid an allowance until their presence is required in court, after which they are helped to find new employment.

Klopper was the key that unlocked the door to the secrets of Vlakplaas, home of the Security Police's Unit C10, under command of Colonel Eugene de Kock – known to both his colleagues and his men as 'Prime Evil'. After Klopper talked, the Vlakplaas squad fell like dominoes, and several of them spent months living in Denmark before De Kock's trial began in February 1995. The prosecutors were Anton Ackermann, SC, and Dr Torie Pretorius, who had moved over from the Goldstone Commission to the Special Investigation Unit (SIU) set up by Transvaal Attorney-General Dr Jan D'Oliveira in 1993 to focus on Third Force cases. De Kock was sentenced to more than 200 years in prison after being convicted by Judge Willem van der Merwe in the Pretoria High Court in October 1996. Ackermann's next success was the conviction of Barnard, by Judge Johan Els, in June 1998.

The SIU also investigated half a dozen more serious cases linked to Third Force activities, including the death of three Eastern Cape security policemen in what became known as the Motherwell bomb incident, the reign of terror waged by the Black Cats gang in the Ermelo area and the so-called 'Red Mercury' murders of several individuals with close links to the arms and chemical industries. They had also revisited the crash of the *Helderberg*, a South African Airways Boeing 747 that went down in the sea off Mauritius in November 1987, and the air crash that killed Mozambican president Samora Machel in 1986.

By the end of 1996, three major investigations centred on Basson were in progress – those of National Intelligence, OSEO and the SIU. But on the morning of Wednesday, 29 January 1997, it was detectives from the Narcotics Bureau who laid a trap in Magnolia Dell, the pretty park opposite Basson's home where mothers and child-minders take toddlers to feed the ducks and see the statue of Peter Pan. They saw Basson hand a black plastic bag (later found to contain 1 040 capsules of the popular rave drug Ecstasy) to a business acquaintance, who in turn placed R60 000 in cash on Basson's car seat. As the policemen emerged from the bushes, firearms drawn, the soldier-doctor fled, stumbling into the shallow stream that meanders through the park and emerging dripping wet. Basson would later deny all knowledge of the drugs in the bag, saying he ran because he believed agents of the Israeli secret service, Mossad, were about to kill him.

If the most senior detective on the scene, Giel Ehlers, was bemused by Basson's apparent relief when he identified himself as a member of the SA Police, he was totally flabbergasted by a slew of calls 'from all sorts of generals' to his cellular phone shortly after formally arresting Basson and walking across the road to search his house. Telephone lines throughout Pretoria were ringing frantically that day. National Intelligence wanted to know from the SIU whether they had nabbed Basson. SIU thought OSEO might have struck. SADF generals and some of Pretoria's top lawyers wanted to know from everyone involved what was going on. It would be another 36 hours before the picture came into focus.

That night, with Basson behind bars pending a bail appeal on the drug charges, two agents from National Intelligence trailed a car driven by a woman from his home to an apartment block several suburbs away. They watched as she removed a black refuse bag from her boot and placed it on the ground next to another parked vehicle before driving off. Shortly afterwards, a man emerged from the building, placed the bag in his car and was followed by one of the agents to a house in the suburb of Wonderboom, north of Pretoria. The next day, detectives returned to the house, and when they left, they carried with them a veritable treasure trove of documents, stored in two securely locked blue steel trunks, which would not only form the basis of several criminal charges subsequently brought against

Basson, but would also provide invaluable information on chemical and biological research conducted under the aegis of Project Coast.

Among the thousands of pages retrieved from these and two additional trunks, handed over to investigators in May 1997, were extremely sensitive and classified documents which had supposedly been destroyed after details of the CBW programme had been captured on 16 compact discs, stored under stringent security measures in a vault at the Surgeon General's office and accessible only by presidential order. As a signatory to international treaties governing weapons of mass destruction, South Africa is bound not to disclose any information that could lead to the proliferation of CBW. Consequently, the contents of numerous documents found in the trunks will never be made public. However, a considerable number of documents have entered the public domain after being used by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) during its mid-1998 hearings on CBW, and by prosecutors in the Basson trial. As for the mysterious black bag that led investigators to the trunks, Sam Bosch would testify that it contained nothing more sinister than a selection of succulent plants.

On 22 October Basson was arrested again – this time by investigators from OSEO, who had formulated the first of the fraud charges he would face. As with his initial bail hearing, the second was closed to the media, on the grounds that information that had a direct bearing on national security was likely to be disclosed. By the time a 300-page indictment had been drawn up by Ackermann and Pretorius in March 1999, hardened journalists and an unsuspecting public alike had become almost inured to the shocking revelations made about bizarre experiments conducted by Project Coast scientists who testified before the TRC. But nothing could have prepared ordinary South Africans for the harrowing testimony presented during the criminal trial by self-confessed military hit men, or the convoluted nature of financial transactions that formed the basis of the fraud charges.

The TRC hearings, more than a year before the start of the criminal trial, had not been able to canvass the allegations of murder and financial malfeasance that eventually formed the basis of the 60 most serious charges against Basson – and indeed, had it not been for a single amnesty application, the subject of the CBW programme might never have come before the TRC at all. The TRC was set up by the Government of National Unity after the 1994 election and mandated to investigate conflict and abuse during the apartheid years. It was hoped that by exploring South Africa's bloody past, the foundation would be laid for peace and tolerance in the future. Particular emphasis was placed on gross human rights abuses, with both victims and perpetrators being afforded the opportunity to tell their personal stories and come to terms with the suffering they had either endured or inflicted. Those guilty of abuse, including murder, were granted amnesty from prosecution,

provided the commissioners believed they had disclosed the full truth about crimes motivated by political conviction. The TRC was chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, former head of the Anglican Church in South Africa and an ardent opponent of apartheid, and the first public hearings took place in April 1996.

Scorned and largely spurned by serving and former members of the SADF, not least thanks to a highly effective campaign spearheaded by a group of former generals, the TRC was impotent to pierce the shield protecting military operations during the apartheid era.

The amnesty application by one Jan Lourens was an exception, the act of a man who had chosen to turn his back on his former colleagues and bosses in the organisation that had been his bread and butter for more than a decade. The application was short and vague. Lourens identified himself as having worked within a chemical and biological warfare programme that few in the TRC even knew had existed. He described James Bond-type assassination weapons that he had designed, and listed the names of his former colleagues.

By the time TRC investigators debriefed Lourens in January 1998, investigative journalists had begun to scratch the surface of something that the average person had never before encountered. The concept of germ warfare is difficult enough to grasp – but what unsuspecting South Africans were suddenly confronted with was a tale so bizarre that it defied even the most fertile imagination. Amid allegations of gross misuse of public funds poured into a project so secret that at any given time, only a handful of the most senior SADF officers even knew of its existence, stories began to emerge of cruel animal experiments, plans to breed a super wolf-dog, the search for the ultimate murder weapon – a substance impossible to detect during autopsy – and sinister research on a contraceptive aimed specifically at South Africa's black population.

Inevitably, comparisons were drawn between Project Coast and the heinous human experiments conducted in Nazi Germany under the leadership of Dr Josef Mengele, and in the absence of hard facts, speculation made for sensational headlines. As a former confidant of Basson, Lourens was able to provide an insider's view of the programme. He had visited the chemical and biological front companies, even overseen construction of one of them, and had managed several support companies associated with the programme. What he told the TRC made it clear that both South African taxpayers and the international community were owed an explanation for the SADF's foray into CBW. But the TRC was running out of time: the final deadline for completion of its task was rapidly approaching, leaving only three months in which to uncover a programme that had remained hidden for almost two decades.

The TRC had been given access to the documents found in the four trunks retrieved after Basson's arrest, but, while party to the cataloguing of the documents

by the National Intelligence Agency, TRC officials had not studied the contents before the documents were secured in an NIA strongroom. However, they did elicit the assurance that access could be obtained, should the need arise. When the time came for TRC investigators to start studying the documents, investigators were told they would have to hold off until a meeting could be held with Deputy President Thabo Mbeki. Weeks passed without any progress being made. Letters to Mbeki's office remained unanswered; investigators were told he was too busy to meet with them. The meeting never did take place.

Meanwhile, NIA representatives informed the deputy head of the TRC, Dr Alex Boraine, and the head of the Investigative Unit, Dumisa Ntsebeza, that the proposed investigation could jeopardise major probes already being conducted by OSEO and the Transvaal Attorney-General into the alleged criminal activities of Basson and his associates. The TRC was warned that exposing the scientists who had been the backbone of the programme could threaten their lives, or worse, expose them to possible recruitment by countries wanting to develop CBW programmes of their own. The TRC made it clear that it was under an obligation to proceed with the investigation in order to provide answers to those who might have been victims of the programme, as well as to the public. The NIA introduced stalling tactics, refusing to allow access to the documents on the grounds that the TRC investigators did not have security clearance. It was OSEO that finally broke the deadlock. Having had its own investigation frustrated for so long, it was sympathetic towards the plight of the TRC, and made its own set of documents available at its Pretoria offices. In the light of this, the NIA eventually relented, agreeing that the TRC could have access to all the documents, subject to stringent security measures.

Tracking down and interviewing the scientists of Project Coast was no easy matter either. Some proved willing participants in the process, relieved at being given the chance to share the secrets they had kept for so long, even from their closest family members. Others remained tight-lipped and wholly uncooperative, or went to ground. Basson himself, Dr Wynand Swanepoel (former managing director of the biological facility, Roodeplaat Research Laboratories) and Dr Philip Mijburgh (former managing director of the chemical facility, Delta G Scientific) were unhelpful and refused all requests for interviews.

Some of those who came forward voluntarily did so out of feelings of betrayal. Dr Schalk van Rensburg, who had previously approached the TRC with his story, returned from his Free State farm to Cape Town to tell it again. A former director at Roodeplaat Research Laboratories (RRL), Van Rensburg felt betrayed by both the system and the people with whom he had worked. He had left the front company without being able to capitalise on any of the shares he believed he was entitled to, while his former colleagues, Swanepoel and Dr André Immelman,

had walked away millionaires. Dr Daan Goosen, too, felt aggrieved. After having headed RRL for three years, he was dismissed from his position on charges of breaching security.

When the front companies were privatised in the early 1990s, both Goosen and Van Rensburg had launched personal campaigns to expose the secrets of their work and the corruption they believed was involved. They were the first to break the silence, albeit anonymously, telling their stories to selected journalists, OSEO and, in at least one instance, the Minister of Justice. Meetings with the scientists confirmed the information provided by Lourens and filled in some of the gaps, but the TRC was constrained by its mandate to investigate only human rights violations, and thus was able to do little more than scratch the surface of the programme in its entirety.

Two weeks before the public hearings into chemical and biological warfare were scheduled to begin, TRC commissioners and investigators were summoned to an urgent, high-level meeting with the Deputy Minister of Defence, representatives of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Surgeon General, the National Intelligence Agency and others who had an interest in preventing public exposure of the programme. The TRC was given a new warning. The proposed hearing posed a threat to the government's international relations. Details of visits by British and American diplomats to South Africa in 1993, 1994 and 1995 were among the documents found in the trunks, and the government feared that exposure of these secret meetings would compromise their relationship of trust with the two countries. The government representatives tried repeatedly to convince the TRC to proceed with caution, to hold the hearings in camera.

In retrospect, the greatest concern of government representatives may have been that revelations about the CBW programme could reveal that South Africa had not honoured its commitment to the Biological Weapons Convention, which had been signed in 1972 and which banned production of biological weapons and biological agents for anything other than peaceful means. Furthermore, it is now clear that the politicians did not know what would emerge when the scientists testified. Although Knobel, as Surgeon General, had briefed President Nelson Mandela when he took office, notes from that meeting show that Mandela was not told the full extent of the programme. Nor had the NIA briefed Mandela or Mbeki about the contents of the documents that had been found. During the TRC investigation, Knobel insisted that Project Coast was nothing more than a defensive programme aimed at providing protection against what the military perceived as a real threat of chemical attack against its troops in Angola. He prided himself on having represented his country at the 1993 signing of the Chemical Weapons Convention and disclaimed all knowledge of the assassination weapons that Lourens and others had developed.

Initially, Knobel was more than willing to appear at the TRC hearings, from which he believed he would emerge as the capable leader of an important military project. But, as he began to realise that the investigators had uncovered serious aberrations within the project, his attitude shifted. On Friday, 5 June, three days before the hearing, Knobel called the investigators to an urgent private meeting where he proclaimed his innocence, saying that he had not known about any of the offensive research done by Project Coast, and handed over a new set of documents that revealed the workings of the SADF's Coordinating Management Committee. When the hearings began on Monday, 8 June 1998, the government, represented by its legal advisor Fink Haysom, made a last-ditch attempt at keeping the CBW programme secret. Arguing that the hearings should be held in camera, a position supported by legal representatives from the Department of Foreign Affairs and the head of the Council for the Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, Abdul Minty, the government again drew attention to the dangers that revelations of the programme could pose. But the TRC refused to be swayed, making it quite clear, yet again, that the hearings would be open to the public.

The next hurdle lay just ahead. Lawyers for Basson, Swanepoel and Mijburgh argued that they could not be expected to testify, since there were indications that all three were facing indictment by the Attorney-General, and that forcing them to appear would be a violation of their constitutional right to remain silent. The TRC rejected their arguments, but it was not until Basson had taken his objections to the Cape High Court, significantly delaying the hearings, that he finally faced the commissioners on 31 July, the very last day the TRC's Human Rights Violations Committee could legally convene. Having previously attended the hearings wearing an African print shirt and clutching a little black handbag, Basson reverted to a conventional business suit on the day he testified, and appeared supremely confident. Before taking his seat at the table he smilingly shook the hand of each commissioner. Not even the barrage of media photographers distracted him, and he continued to smile and wink at the cameras.

Whatever faint hope the commissioners might have fostered that Basson would be amenable to their questions was destroyed in the very first minutes, when he declined to place even his military rank on record. The rest of the session was marked by constant objections from his advocate, Jaap Cilliers, protracted legal bickering between Cilliers and the TRC's legal adviser, Hanif Vally, and vague and argumentative responses from Basson. Asked by Vally at one point whether he had ever been in the least bit tempted to profit from the large quantities of Ecstasy and Mandrax manufactured at Delta G Scientific, Basson responded: 'Mr Vally, for the last three days I was tempted by the girl behind me. We're all subject to temptations. The fact that the temptation was there does not mean that

I succumbed to it.' When Ntsebeza admonished him, pointing out that 'You are making that lady blush, Doctor, she's blushing, she's crimson red with blushing, please,' Basson retorted: 'I was hoping to achieve more than that, Mr Chairman,' at which commissioner Dr Wendy Orr became so disgusted that she walked out of the proceedings. During a brief recess, Basson went down to the coffee shop in the TRC building. Encountering Vally and some of his colleagues having a cup of coffee, he walked over and kissed the legal adviser on the forehead. It was a deliberate gesture, calculated to upset Vally, and it worked. Shortly afterwards, Basson scrawled graffiti on the wall of the same coffee shop, signing himself 'Dr Death' with a flourish.

Swanepoel and Mijburgh were of little help either, claiming loss of memory not only on salient points about the project, but even on such personal details as their salaries while attached to Project Coast. Using monosyllables as far as possible, Swanepoel's answers were simply laughable at times. The one thing he could remember clearly was that for an initial investment of R50 000, he received R4,5 million in return when RRL was privatised.

Knobel's testimony left no doubt that the management of Project Coast was so lax that one of the TRC's findings was that 'the military command, and pre-eminently the Surgeon General, Dr DP Knobel, were grossly negligent in approving programmes and allocating large sums of money for activities of which they had no understanding, and which they made no effort to understand'. In an even more damning finding, the TRC said the testimony of the scientists had shown that Knobel 'did know of the production of murder weapons but refused to address the concerns that were raised with him, on the grounds that they did not fall under his authority; that he did not understand, by his own admission, the medical, chemical and technical aspects and implications of a programme that cost tens, if not hundreds of millions of rands and made no effort to come to grips with these issues, notwithstanding the fact that he was the highest-ranking medical professional in the military and that others in the military were wholly dependent on his judgment and discretion.' At the time of the hearing Knobel had the support of the head of the Non-Proliferation Council, who regarded him as a vital consultant. The TRC findings resulted in him losing this position, although he continued to advise and report to the Health Professionals Council of South Africa and serve on their executive body.

The TRC hearings, closely followed by the international media, marked the first time that a CBW programme had been publicly exposed to this extent, or that the managers, scientists and architects of any CBW programme had been called to account, in an open forum, for their actions. The process offered the scientists an opportunity to talk about and question their involvement in the programme, and many of them found this cathartic, expressing a tremendous sense of relief

afterwards. Some of them subsequently pledged to support processes designed to prevent other scientists from finding themselves trapped in similar circumstances. The scientists have, however, found themselves thrust into the glare of media attention, an experience some have weathered better than others. After all, by the nature of their task, scientists are accustomed to working well out of the public eye, and media demands have added to the professional and personal stress caused by the work they did not only becoming public knowledge, but being revealed for the first time to their loved ones.

2

From Genesis to Exodus

GIVEN THE MEASURE of secrecy and obfuscation surrounding Project Coast, even years after it was officially shut down, it should surprise no one that the genesis of South Africa's chemical and biological warfare programme is fraught with specious claims. The chronology spans the years from 1979 – when a White Paper on Defence ushered in the infamous securocratic era epitomised by the twin catchphrases 'total strategy' and 'total onslaught' – to 1995, when it fell to the ANC government to mop up the lees of one of apartheid's most distasteful potions.

Precisely who knew or did what – and when – during those 16 years will almost certainly never be acknowledged. That has been ensured by the march of time and the wholesale destruction of records pertaining to one of South Africa's most clandestine undertakings. Officially, it was SADF policy to shred all documents relevant to Project Coast every two years. That an astonishing number of them survived that edict is due to a variety of factors, among them the military's universal penchant for paperwork, cross-filing by other branches of the bureaucracy, and unauthorised retention of files by individuals who somehow divined that they might need 'insurance policies' at some juncture. Despite the thousands of documents retrieved by investigators via such channels, there is no complete record of Project Coast, and reconstruction of the chemical and biological warfare programme's annals relies heavily on the testimony of former Surgeon General Niel Knobel and Basson himself. Even Basson's personal SADF file, which could have been of inestimable value in fixing the dates of cardinal events, had been gutted before it was finally turned over to investigators. The file contained a mere 15 flimsy sheets of paper – some of them duplicates of one another – recording his leave applications

and details of selected inter-unit transfers. It was a decidedly incomplete reflection of a military career spanning close on two decades.

It is now generally accepted that Project Coast was approved by Defence Minister General Magnus Malan in 1981, but some of the key figures involved remain at odds over the exact date and even disagree on why research into chemical and biological warfare was necessary at all. Against the background of the Cold War, virtually the entire southern African sub-region was immersed in armed conflict from the early 1970s. In 1972, as support intensified for the South West African People's Organisation (Swapo), the SADF launched a major deployment of ground and air troops in the northern areas of Namibia (then South West Africa). Three years later, the independence of Angola, following a coup in Portugal by the Armed Forces Movement, changed the face of the conflict in Namibia. As a war of words raged within the United Nations regarding South Africa's continued mandate over the former German colony, members of Swapo's armed wing, the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), stepped up incursions into the disputed territory, using Angola as a springboard. Simultaneously, members of the South African security forces became increasingly drawn into the Rhodesian bush war, working closely, albeit covertly, with crack units such as the Rhodesian Light Infantry, Selous Scouts and Special Air Services. When Zimbabwe became independent in 1980, this cooperation led directly to the absorption of a significant number of ex-Rhodesians by the SADF's fledgling Special Forces.

Following the SADF's invasion of Angola in 1975, South Africa threw its full support behind Dr Jonas Savimbi's National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (Unita) in the fight against the government of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). The Rhodesian government, in turn, espoused the cause of the Mozambican National Resistance (Renamo) against the Mozambican Liberation Front (Frelimo), which had come to power following independence from Portugal in 1975. By 1976, South Africa's neighbouring states to the north, east and west were seen as the first line of defence against Soviet expansionism, but from 16 June, student uprisings in black townships across the country brought the war suddenly and uncomfortably much closer to home.

Both former SADF chief General Constand Viljoen and erstwhile SA Police forensics chief Lieutenant-General Lothar Neethling pinpoint 1976 as the seminal date in South Africa's quest for chemical agents that could be used to quell violent protests. In July 1998, Neethling told the Truth Commission: 'When the riots started, the South African Police were caught unawares. They had nothing apart from guns, shotguns, and sharp point ammunition. Nobody wanted to use that and that's why there was a search for various techniques to be applied … I went overseas three times to Germany, England, Israel, America to find the best techniques available.' Viljoen, on whose watch the CBW project was launched, is

of the opinion that if the international community had provided South Africa with the information and equipment needed to protect its troops against the putative use of chemical weapons by Cuban forces in Angola, there would have been no need for Project Coast. However, there is evidence to suggest that the first use in modern-day Africa of toxic substances as weapons of war was during the Rhodesian conflict in the late 1970s.

Official documents record the use of toxins by the Rhodesian Police's Special Branch and the Selous Scouts from 1977, although some former Special Branch operatives have said they were aware of poisons being used as early as 1973. A document dated 24 June 1977 records 809 deaths resulting from poisoned items distributed by the Selous Scouts. Another lists the distribution of 12 sets of contaminated clothing at Gwelo, 15 at Enkeldoorn and 34 at Mount Darwin, as well as the use of spiked maize meal, tins of corned beef and sweets. Between 8 and 17 August 1977, the distribution of 59 sets of poisoned clothing, two packs of poisoned cigarettes, medical supplies and 'assorted food and drink' resulted in three direct deaths and led to the retaliatory killing of 19 civilians who guerrillas believed were responsible for the poisonings. A report dated November 1977 from the Officer in Charge of Operations to the Officer Commanding Special Branch Headquarters and the Director-General Central Intelligence Organisation records that 79 'terrorists' were killed after more contaminated food and clothing were distributed. The report also notes that 'there is a considerable decrease in the quantity of materials directed into the field during the fortnight under review, this being due to (a) staff shortages in the field and subsequent inability to recruit contact men and (b) the shortage of necessary ingredients which are to be obtained from South Africa within the next two weeks' (see pages 221-2). In 2000, journalist Peta Thornycroft interviewed MJ 'Mac' McGuinness, the man who facilitated the chemical programme at the Bindura Fort, as it was called. Thornycroft was told that about a dozen times during 1977, 25-gallon drums of foul-smelling liquid were delivered to the officer in charge at the Fort. The contents were poured onto large sheets of metal and dried in the sun. The dehydrated flakes were then pounded into a powder, using a mortar and pestle, which was brushed onto items of clothing or mixed into processed meat such as bully beef, before it was re-packed in new tins. The poison was also injected by means of a micro-needle into bottles of liquid, including alcohol.

Unlike the relatively formal structuring of South Africa's chemical and biological warfare programme, the use of toxins by the Rhodesian security forces does not appear to have been linked to an official research and development project. The only Rhodesian scientist known to have collaborated with the security forces in a campaign that claimed at least 900 victims is Professor Bob Symington, head of the Anatomy Department at the University of Rhodesia's medical school, who

subsequently settled in South Africa and became a lecturer at the University of Cape Town before his death.

The sense of *déjà vu* evoked by the descriptions of poisoned food and clothing that emerged during the Basson trial makes it impossible to ignore the possibility that SADF Special Forces operators deployed in Rhodesia became aware of such practices, or that their Rhodesian counterparts who swelled the ranks of covert SADF units from 1980 brought with them accounts of poisons being used against 'the enemy'. While the Rhodesian experience may have influenced the thinking behind clandestine SADF organisations such as the Civil Cooperation Bureau and its forerunner, Barnacle, the authors have been unable to find any direct link with the *official* doctrine of Project Coast. None of the documents verified by McGuinness specify what ingredients were to be obtained from South Africa, whether they were to be supplied by a branch or member of the security forces or to be purchased commercially. However, substances used in Rhodesia – thallium, organophosphates, rat poison, anthrax, cholera – were all among those later supplied to agents of the CCB and South African Security Police from inside Project Coast's biological front company, Roodeplaat Research Laboratories.

Several years before Project Coast was approved, Prime Minister PW Botha and Minister of Defence Magnus Malan authorised the establishment of a covert company specifically tasked to develop counter-intelligence equipment for the SADF's Special Forces. Dr Jan Coetzee was drafted from the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) to head the innocuously named EMLC – an acronym of the Afrikaans terms for the four components: Electronic, Mechanical, Agricultural and Chemical. According to Coetzee, no chemical synthesis or research was conducted by EMLC up to the time of his resignation at the end of August 1980 – the same date on which EMLC moved into a corner of the newly constructed headquarters of Special Forces, Speskop, outside Pretoria. Coetzee was, however, aware that experiments had been conducted in Rhodesia with clothing impregnated with organophosphates, because a courier for Rhodesian Special Forces had given him a typed report containing details of the effects on humans of various toxic substances, including the deadly pesticides. Coetzee said he 'got a big fright' when he read the report, but had no idea what he was supposed to do with it. Eventually, he took it to Lieutenant-General Fritz Loots, head of the SADF's Special Forces, only to be 'chased away' and told that Loots 'wanted to know nothing about such matters'. Coetzee then locked the report in his office safe, and when he left EMLC, turned it over to the incumbent Surgeon General, Lieutenant-General Nicol Nieuwoudt. Coetzee's successor was Sybie van der Spuy, a Citizen Force colonel with an engineering background. During his first tour of EMLC's facilities, Van der Spuy came across 'a large quantity' of chemicals in bulk containers and a carton of what appeared to be clothing in one of the rooms.

As he moved towards the box, one of his 140 employees stopped him with a warning not to touch the contents 'because those clothes are poisoned, and if you put those underpants on, you'll be dead by tonight'. Van der Spuy immediately ordered the contents of the room destroyed, and testified during the Basson trial that from that moment until 'the dark day' in March 1992 when EMLC was shut down as the result of political pressure, not a single chemical product or substance was made there.

The precise dates on which Basson became involved with Special Forces and Project Coast are blurred. He joined the Permanent Force in January 1975 as a newly qualified medical doctor, and in 1977 was encouraged by Nieuwoudt to specialise in internal medicine. Nieuwoudt appears to have taken a special interest in Basson's career from the outset, and arranged for him to attend a junior staff officer's course at the beginning of 1981. Basson had just qualified as a specialist physician and been promoted to the rank of lieutenant-colonel. No sooner had he completed the course, in March, than Nieuwoudt offered him the job of establishing a CBW research programme for the SADF. According to Basson, Nieuwoudt impressed on him 'the very real threat' of chemical weapons being used by Angolan forces and their surrogates – Cubans, East Germans and Russians – against South Africa's troops, and gave him examples of weapons that had already been used against Unita forces. Basson, just 30 years old and with little more than six years of military service under his belt, accepted with alacrity, telling his mentor it sounded like 'a most interesting mental exercise' and that he would be honoured to serve his country in this fashion. A meeting with SADF chief General Constand Viljoen, Lieutenant-General Pieter van der Westhuizen (Chief of Staff Intelligence) and Loots (Commanding Officer Special Forces) followed, at which it was agreed that Basson's first task would be to gather as much information as possible about CBW in the international arena, so that a decision could be made about what direction the SADF project should take. It was made clear that the SADF was utterly vulnerable to chemical attack.

Basson realised that no one in the SADF knew anything about chemical or biological warfare, and that, even though he had not been trained in espionage, it would fall to him alone to obtain the information that was needed. The realisation rendered him 'somewhat apprehensive' since his orders implicitly included the need for plausible deniability – under no circumstances was the SADF to be linked to his activities. He would be provided with whatever funds he required, and no restrictions would be placed on him as to where he went or how he acquired the information, but in the event of misfortune, he would have to rely on his own resources. South African diplomats abroad could be called on for assistance only if he found himself in the most dire straits imaginable. Within weeks, the newly appointed spy set off for America where, by presenting himself as a draft dodger,

he was able to infiltrate various strategic organisations – including the Library of Congress – and gain access to both classified and public data over a two-month period. The only official record of this trip shows that Basson attended a meeting of the Aerospace Medical Association in San Antonio, Texas, during the first week of May 1981. Documents found in the trunks retrieved after his 1997 arrest show that shortly after his trip to the United States, Basson also travelled to Taipei, where he was given a tour of Taiwan's chemical warfare facilities. After returning briefly to South Africa, he set off for Europe on a similar fact-finding mission, concentrating on the East Bloc countries in particular.

Mid-year proved an extremely busy time for Basson. No sooner had he reported back to Viljoen and selected members of the SADF's General Staff on his foreign trips in July, and been officially appointed to Project Coast, than Nieuwoudt placed him in command of all medical services for Operation Protea, a major strike into southern Angola by ground forces. Basson testified that it was not until he arrived back in Pretoria during the first week of September that he was informed he was to be transferred from the Surgeon General's staff to Special Forces, where his task would be to establish a medical support unit for all special operations.

When Nieuwoudt's successor, Knobel, first learned of Project Coast's existence in 1983, he was told that it was launched because 'a number of investigations' had verified oral evidence to the SADF during the late 1970s and early 1980s of chemical attacks in Angola. During Operation Protea, the confiscation of what was believed to be decontamination equipment, as well as Soviet-made combat vehicles fitted with air filters and equipped to withstand chemical attack, convinced certain elements of the SADF that Cuban surrogate forces were prepared to use chemical weapons. Furthermore, Knobel personally inspected medical bags containing antidotes for some of the best-known chemical substances at Oshakati following Operation Protea, and was made aware that Cuban troops had been issued with gasmasks.

According to Knobel, Basson's initial proposal, approved by the Minister of Defence, was aimed at providing South Africa with a 'comprehensive' defensive ability, using front companies that employed the best scientists available in the private sector, but under the watchful eye of the Surgeon General to ensure that the project complied with the 1925 Geneva Protocol and the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention, to both of which South Africa was a signatory. However, Basson reported that his investigations had shown that conventions governing CBW had not kept pace with scientific and technological advances, and were 'practically useless' as control measures. He advised the Defence Command Council that the major world powers had already abandoned the development of lethal weapons in favour of incapacitants, which could be used both on the battlefield and for crowd control. Basson's assertion that world powers had abandoned lethal agents

in favour of incapacitants was accepted by the SADF as fact, and used to determine the direction taken by Project Coast, but it is now known that at the exact same time, the United States was contemplating the development of binary chemical weapons containing the intermediaries for lethal nerve agents that would combine on impact.

On the basis of Basson's claim that the major world powers were focusing on developing incapacitants, the SADF decided that acquiring these substances and protecting its troops should be priorities. When Basson reported that both the United States and the Soviet Union had developed a highly effective New Generation Teargas but had not yet found an antidote, the search for one was designated as Project Coast's primary objective. In fact, there is no evidence to suggest that either the US or the former USSR produced significant quantities of CR, the so-called New Generation Teargas, and it is highly unlikely that researchers in those countries would not have known what it took South African scientists only a short while to find out, namely that one of the most effective antidotes for CR is ordinary household bleach.

None of the SADF documents available to the authors offers a clear and explicit threat analysis warranting the establishment of Project Coast. Some documents contain retrospective reviews of the military situation at the time, but most of these were authored by Basson himself and tend to focus on international trends in chemical warfare and broad assessments of the Angolan situation. What is clear, however, is that the SADF's philosophy included the right to 'reactively use non-lethal chemical warfare', 'integration of chemical warfare into all conventional actions' and 'acceptance of the use of chemical warfare on a proactive basis to ensure the survival of the state, for example, in controlling the massive violence in the current revolutionary situation'.

The programme's stated objectives leave no doubt that the use of chemical agents *inside* South Africa was envisaged. Indeed, it could be argued that the primary motivation for Project Coast was to deal with internal political opposition rather than development of conventional chemical or biological weapons *or* protection of SADF troops. Adding credence to this argument is the fact that, for all the urgency of the perceived threat against South African troops, Project Coast was strangely slow off the mark, and it was not until 1988, just one year before the SADF finally withdrew from both Angola and the Namibian Operational Area, that defensive training against chemical weapons was introduced. If, as has consistently been claimed, Project Coast was primarily a *defensive* programme, it is inexplicable that at the height of the alleged threat, thousands of young South African conscripts were not adequately trained to deal with chemical attack. By contrast, the offensive component of the programme moved ahead fairly rapidly. Construction of the two production facilities – Delta G Scientific and RRL

– was approved in 1982, but it was not until 1985 that Delta G began turning out chemicals at its state-of-the-art plant in Midrand, halfway between Pretoria and Johannesburg. It would be another two years before the biological facility, RRL, came on line.

Basson was required to report to the Coordinating Management Committee, headed by the SADF chief and including the generals in charge of finance, medical services, operations, logistics, intelligence and the army, but the frequency of the CMC's meetings, and who attended them, were ad hoc at best. In the beginning, the CMC met monthly but, Basson explained, the members were all high-ranking SADF officers who were, after all, fighting a war when 'the political situation' did not demand their attention, and it was not long before a decision was taken that a minimum of three regular members would constitute a quorum. Towards the end of the 1980s, the CMC met only once every three months. Day-to-day management of the project was the Surgeon General's task, and once a year the CMC was required to report on progress to the Minister of Defence. Basson was the only SADF officer who had direct contact with the front companies. Indeed, so conscious were the CMC members of the project's high security that, according to Knobel, none of them ever set foot on the premises of either Delta G or RRL. Knobel, who became Surgeon General in 1988, made only one visit to Delta G, and that on a Sunday, and went to RRL twice, outside normal working hours.

The most serious indictment of the CMC is the startling admission by Knobel that, in effect, Basson was told: Here's the funding, now get us the results we want. The end totally justified the means, and if that meant Basson had to lie, steal or bribe people, no one in the SADF would blink an eye. Who he dealt with and how he achieved the desired results were 'details' that members of the CMC specifically did *not* want to know. Provided Basson operated within the approved annual budgets, did not transport hazardous material on commercial airlines and did not enrich himself at the project's expense, he was completely unfettered.

Having handpicked the first group of scientists for the project, Basson dictated the direction of their research at both Delta G and RRL. Basson told the CMC what the project needed. Basson identified possible suppliers and negotiated the price paid for materials and equipment. Basson decided on the fairness of black market prices for items covered by international sanctions. Basson informed the CMC what purchases and progress had been made. Basson was the sole source of the CMC's information, and the only person with the knowledge and expertise to both advise the committee and facilitate procurement. In an extraordinary departure from the normal strictures of military regulations, Basson was given unprecedented authority to wheel and deal in the international arms bazaar, move millions from the Secret Defence Account at the stroke of his pen and traverse the world without restriction. The only checks and balances instituted by the CMC

were internal audits by the head of the project's administrative front company and an annual external audit. In the absence of invoices, receipts or physical verification of acquisitions, Basson's word was accepted as proof of expenditure.

With every aspect of Project Coast governed by the need-to-know mantra, even the highest echelon of the SADF was entirely dependent on Basson for every detail of the CBW programme it had created. As D John Truter, responsible for the eponymous administrative front company that channelled all funds for Project Coast from May 1989 until March 1994, observed: 'Wouter Basson *was* Project Coast – end of story.' Truter described Basson as a brilliant man, one of the most intelligent he had ever known, whom he trusted 'more than my own wife'. More than once, according to Truter, Basson denigrated his superior officers, stating baldly that Knobel 'didn't have a clue what was going on in Coast' and making scathing references to 'those chickens at headquarters'.

To anyone familiar with the military chain of command, the absence of formal controls over a multi-million-rand operation is simply unthinkable, and in order to grasp the apparently laissez-faire approach to Project Coast, it is necessary to understand not only the context in which the programme was launched, but also the interpersonal dynamics at play. Handpicked by Nieuwoudt to head the project, Basson also enjoyed special relationships with Knobel and General Kat Liebenberg. Before joining the SADF, Knobel had been a professor of anatomy at Pretoria University's medical school, Basson one of his students. As fellow military officers their relationship deepened, and Knobel described Basson as having been 'like a child in my home'. If Truter is to be believed, Basson had a somewhat more jaundiced view of Knobel. Liebenberg, an authoritarian soldier's soldier who was inclined to treat the SADF as his personal fiefdom, was Basson's operational chief throughout his tenure as head of Project Coast, first as Officer Commanding Special Forces, then as chief of the Army and, ultimately, Chief: SADF. Although Knobel was nominally Basson's immediate superior, the fruits of Project Coast could be applied operationally on the basis of direct orders to Basson from the Minister of Defence, the SADF chief, the head of Special Forces, Chief of Staff Intelligence, the Police Commissioner, head of the Security Police or Director-General National Intelligence. The CMC merely 'noted' such operational use after the fact.

Attending a 1987 National Security Management System meeting in Nieuwoudt's stead, Knobel was 'extremely surprised' to hear Magnus Malan tell Law and Order Minister Adriaan Vlok, Police Commissioner Johann Coetzee, Security Police chief Johan van der Merwe and National Intelligence director-general Niel Barnard that Basson was to brief them on potential riot control methods. At the time, Project Coast was such a closely guarded secret that Knobel believed it was known to only a handful of top-ranking military officers. He certainly had no idea that any other

branch of the security forces was aware of the project's existence, and found it 'quite strange' that Basson was to address the meeting on the New Generation Teargas. Even more disturbing, Knobel said, was Malan's instruction that if any branch of the security forces family needed CR, Basson was to be contacted directly for advice on both the most effective use of the teargas and what protective measures were necessary. Knobel's concerns about this broad exposure of both Basson and the top-secret project were brushed aside by Nieuwoudt, who indicated that he ought not to question a decision taken by the Minister of Defence.

In the era of the securocrat, Basson's frame of reference extended far beyond military ranks. He served as personal physician to State President PW Botha, and was on excellent terms with Malan, whose nephew, Dr Philip Mijburgh, was one of Basson's closest associates and managing director of Delta G Scientific from 1985. The project's external auditor, Pierre Theron, was a close friend of PW Botha's, and was personally appointed by him as Coast's financial watchdog. On three occasions during Basson's trial, Malan graced the public gallery with his presence, and the interaction between the two men indicated mutual support and admiration. Perhaps the best explanation for the unique position Basson enjoyed was that of Knobel, who told the Truth Commission: '… this is a man who became a brigadier at a very young age. He obviously had the trust of the entire Defence Force and of the Cabinet, because that type of appointment is approved at that level. He had the total support of my predecessor. The system created to run this project and the way he operated had been in place for eight years when I took over. It would have been quite impossible to question the way he carried out his task. His word was accepted without question.'

While Delta G Scientific and RRL were under construction, limited research was conducted in the laboratories under Basson's control at Speskop, and at temporary facilities in suburban Pretoria. Project Coast's first – detractors might argue only – achievement was the production of the New Generation Teargas, CR. Under the leadership of Dr Willie Basson, a chemistry lecturer at Pretoria University (and no relation to Wouter), 25 scientists began working on Project FP003 – allegedly a less toxic but significantly more potent teargas than the traditional CS used by the police. Gerald Cadwell, who spent his entire career working as a chemist although he had no formal qualifications in this field, was responsible for upgrading the CR project from laboratory to production scale. The exercise was so fraught with misfortune that Delta G scientist Dr Hennie Jordaan described it as a 'horror show in incompetence'. By the time the operation was moved to Midrand, some 50 kg of CR had been pro-duced, and from September 1985 to the end of 1986, Delta G turned out 24 tons of CR and between five and 10 tons of CS.

Much has been made, by Knobel among others, of the level of sophistication attained by Project Coast. Both he and Basson are on record as claiming that South Africa's CBW programme was second only to that of the Russians in terms of scientific achievement, and that American and British authorities were 'shocked' to learn during briefings in 1995 what advances had been made on what they considered a low budget. At the end of the Basson trial, the judge found that the project had indeed been a success, and that there was 'undeniable evidence' that the Americans and British were not only 'thoroughly impressed' with what had been achieved, but 'dumbstruck' by how little it had cost. He specifically referred to Knobel's assessment that Project Coast's achievements were a 'national asset' that should be preserved for future generations.

In the absence of an independent review of the programme in its entirety, the possibility cannot be ruled out that foreign powers were more concerned about the dangers of post-apartheid scientists sharing their knowledge with pariah states than impressed with Project Coast's achievements, or that favourable comparisons with the Russian programme may have been examples of the chicanery used to cloak South Africa's CBW programme long after it had been officially scrapped.

Veterinarian and clinical pathologist Dr Daan Goosen, one of the project's pioneers, was puzzled by the myth, perpetuated by Basson and Knobel, that this was cutting-edge science: 'Certainly there was the potential of reaching high levels of sophistication. We established the ability to do genetic engineering that would have produced effective biological products, but nothing was ever really made. The facilities lacked nothing … but when the scientists got to the point where we should have been producing bio-weapons, there was no support … and the assassination weapons were crude, off the shelf products.' Microbiologist Mike Odendaal, who spent more than eight years at Roodeplaat developing some of the most potent pathogens known to man, could not understand why he was required to research 45 strains of anthrax, only to produce quantities 'so low, it is incomprehensible they could ever have been used in biological warfare, which requires tons'.

Basson vehemently denies claims by Schalk van Rensburg, director of laboratory services and head of the experimental animal unit at Roodeplaat from 1984 to 1991, that at his insistence the Holy Grail of all research was the perfect murder weapon: a tasteless, colourless, odourless toxin that could not be traced *post mortem*. Almost as urgent, according to Van Rensburg, was the fruitless quest for a form of birth control which he believed would have been covertly administered to the burgeoning black population of apartheid South Africa.

Even the most superficial review of the Soviet Union's massive Biopreparat illustrates that Project Coast came nowhere close by comparison. Admittedly, Moscow's programme had a 10-year head start on Pretoria's endeavour, but there

can be no doubt that one of the Cold War's most closely guarded secrets prior to the 1992 defection of Basson's Russian counterpart, Ken Alibek, was a full-scale CBW programme unparalleled in recent history. At its height, Biopreparat had 60 000 employees working at more than 100 facilities so cunningly disguised that they escaped even satellite surveillance. Employees at Project Coast's two research laboratories and all related support facilities never exceeded 400. By early 1989, while Roodeplaat was producing enough anthrax spores to contaminate letters or single cigarettes, the Soviet Union had deployed an unknown number of SS-18 intercontinental missiles, each armed with ten 500-kiloton warheads loaded with anthrax and aimed at every major American and European city. In his book, *Biohazard*, Alibek states that it took Russian scientists just 14 days to produce the 400 kg of anthrax needed to arm the first missiles – enough to kill an estimated 12 million people.

When the fall of the Berlin Wall heralded the collapse of communism in 1989, Russia's Biopreparat had advanced the science of bio-warfare further in four years than anyone else had done in the four decades since World War II, by Alibek's account. And while Moscow was filling its arsenals with enough germs and delivery systems to eradicate half the population of the globe, Pretoria was producing teargas, tinkering with derivatives of hallucinogens such as BZ – tested and discarded as an effective CBW agent by the Americans during the Vietnam War – synthesising the popular rave drug, Ecstasy, and making variants of methaqualone, or Mandrax, the drug of choice in both the townships of South Africa and the back streets of India.

According to Neethling, he was instructed in 1983 by the Police Commissioner, the Surgeon General and the Minister of Law and Order, Louis le Grange, to assist Basson in the pursuit of the most effective incapacitants. To this end, he provided more than 200 000 Mandrax tablets (though Basson himself put the figure at half a million), LSD and several tons of cannabis confiscated by the police. The intention was to convert cannabis into a gas formulation, according to Neethling, and there is documentary evidence that Project Coast scientists did undertake research into the development and synthesis of cannabinoid analogues, as well as the effect of combining cannabis with methaqualone. Knobel testified that methaqualone was considered such an effective incapacitant that a number of mortar bombs were armed with it. However, there was a drawback. Tests on human guinea-pigs – volunteers from the SA Police Task Force and 7 Medical Battalion, according to Basson – resulted in severe oedema and elevated stress and tension levels. Since the whole idea was to calm and effectively neutralise the targets, methaqualone production was halted in 1988, though research continued on an analogue that would eradicate the unwanted side effects.

Few of the scientists employed by Project Coast knew from the outset that they were working for military front companies, let alone engaged in a chemical and

biological warfare programme. Even those who were aware of the SADF links only learned the name of the project many years later. Secrecy was paramount, and employees at Delta G Scientific and RRL were required to sign documents swearing them to silence about their work after being subjected to extensive security clearance investigations. Files were kept under lock and key, offices had to be locked when occupants vacated them even for a brief visit to the toilet, and projects were deliberately compartmentalised so that two scientists working side by side would each not necessarily know what the other was doing. Such is the nature of the beast, however, that in time the men in white coats did discuss their work with colleagues over tea or lunch, and at least the senior scientists began to form a reasonably accurate picture of what was going on. Raw materials delivered to the plant were immediately stripped of all identifying marks and given codenames. Final products were also referred to by number rather than name. Delta G's production manager, Corrie Botha, was never told what substances were being made, and ran his plant on the basis of following instructions for the processing of raw materials, then depositing the final product in a designated warehouse. At the end of the day, the record shows that Delta G Scientific produced nothing for the military – besides methaqualone and CR – on a scale that warranted expenditure of R127 467 406 of South African taxpayers' money by the time the company was privatised in 1990. Forensic auditor Hennie Bruwer found that R40 million was spent on setting up the company and another R50,5 million on running it. It cost the SADF an additional R37 million to divest itself of the front company it had utilised for less than five years.

For all the ambiguity over the roles of Delta G and RRL in Project Coast, there ought to have been no doubt about the need to protect South African troops on the Angolan front against possible chemical attack. Knobel, after all, stated unequivocally that a primary motivation for launching the multi-million-rand CBW programme was the SADF's implicit concern for the thousands of conscripts who waged its protracted war in Namibia and Angola. 'If just a single one of our troops was killed in a chemical attack, how could we face his parents and tell them we could not protect him?' a plaintive Knobel asked. Nonetheless, five years into its existence, Project Coast's defensive cupboard was bare, and some of South Africa's most respected fighting men testified that, as late as 1988, troops deployed in Angola had nothing more than standard-issue plastic ponchos and a few World War II vintage gasmasks to protect them in the event of chemical attack.

By August 1987, the first 1 500 protective nuclear-biological-chemical (NBC) suits ordered by Coast had been delivered, but there is no definitive evidence that they were issued to troops in Angola. These suits featured prominently in one of the major fraud charges against Basson, as can be seen in Chapter 7. Between 1986 and 1988, 'containers full' of gasmasks were acquired from Israel,

but for reasons that have never been explained these do not appear to have found their way to front-line troops either. Even if the equipment had been made available, there is no guarantee that the SADF's troops – or their commanders – were adequately trained to use it during the closing campaigns of the Angolan War. Dr Brian Davey, now head of health and safety at the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Warfare (OPCW) in The Hague, testified that it took him between 12 and 18 months to design the SADF's chemical defence training course and drills, which were 'non-existent' when he was assigned to the task in 1986. His work covered every aspect of chemical attack, from basic survival in the field to command of troops in a contaminated area. Should the need for protection against chemical weapons arise in future, the new defence force will be in a considerably more favourable position. By August 1994, when Mandela was briefed on Project Coast, Basson's successor, Colonel Ben Steyn, was able to report that there was enough protective gear in stock to equip a division, approximately 25 000 people.

When the last apartheid Minister of Defence, Gene Louw, was briefed about Project Coast in January 1993, he was told that all data relating to the CBW programme was being captured on CD-ROM for future use, and that original research documents were to be destroyed. At one of the last meetings of the CMC, Knobel reported that these orders had been carried out by Basson. However, the four steel trunks found by investigators the night after Basson's arrest in January 1997 told a different story. Steyn – on whose shoulders the mantle of CBW project officer fell when Basson was sacked from the SADF in December 1992 – was one of those called in by the National Intelligence Agency to evaluate the documents crammed into the trunks. He was shocked to find that many of them had a direct bearing on national security, the defence of South Africa and RRL's research – which, in the wrong hands, could be used for proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Steyn has also had occasion to review the contents of the CD-ROMs stored as a 'national asset' under the most stringent security, and has concluded that, far from being the repository of Coast's deepest, darkest secrets, the discs contain little more than published literature on CBW in general.

Briefing former president FW de Klerk on Project Coast in 1990, Basson claimed it had focused on the development and manufacture of chemical agents not prohibited by the Geneva Protocol, such as CR, and that the biological research was directed at 'staying current with the changing threat' in order to develop antidotes and treatment for a wide range of pathogens. In fact, offensive projects accounted for most of the work done by RRL scientists, and munitions loaded with CR had to be destroyed after South Africa signed the Chemical Weapons Convention in January 1993. It was at this juncture that almost four tons of potential street drugs

were dumped in the sea, and the pathogens manufactured and freeze-dried by RRL allegedly burnt in a furnace.

The project was officially shut down in 1995. However, unlike South Africa's nuclear weapons programme, the dismantling of the CBW project was not subject to international supervision or verification, and there is no independent confirmation that the substances were destroyed. In October 1990, Basson reiterated at a briefing of SADF generals that chemical weapons had been used against Unita in Angola, describing in detail the composition and delivery of phosphine bombs with a definitive 'peri peri smell', which had accounted for paralysis seen in 'hundreds' of Unita soldiers. The only substantiation for such attacks is found in a series of reports compiled by discredited Belgian toxicologist Aubin Heyndrickx. Davey, Project Coast's own expert, conducted three verification exercises in Angola from 1986, but failed to find any conclusive evidence that chemical weapons had been used against Unita.

As for the original justification for launching Project Coast – the discovery during Operation Protea of CBW filters in Soviet-made vehicles – it is likely that Basson, at least, realised at an early stage of his CBW education that such equipment was standard in all military vehicles of Russian origin at the time.

After all, it took just two gruelling weeks in the witness box for Knobel to finally admit that at no time, anywhere, were SADF troops ever on the receiving end of a chemical or biological attack.

3

Toxins in Little Bottles

DURING THE COURSE of Basson's marathon trial, 153 witnesses trooped through the Pretoria High Court to testify against the military doctor who was the linchpin of a programme that not only perverted science, but also cost taxpayers millions of rands in the name of national security. So fearful was apartheid South Africa of the enemy perceived as a threat to an entrenched way of life, that a scientist at an institute of one of the leading academic hospitals agreed to hand a military officer a live black mamba (one of the deadliest snakes in Africa), and a vial of the serpent's toxin, even though he surmised that they could be used for nefarious purposes.

In 1983 veterinarian Dr Daan Goosen, the father of six children, headed the HA Grové Institute at the Hendrik Verwoerd Hospital (now Pretoria Academic). His relationship with Basson went well beyond the bounds of professionalism. Basson was a regular visitor to his home, where the two men would sit and chat about methods of warfare over a beer and Basson's favourite savoury biscuits. On one such evening, Goosen told the TRC, he asked Basson what motivated him to be involved with the military's CBW programme. 'Well,' Basson reportedly replied, 'one day when my daughter grows up and looks around to see a black government in power, she will ask me: "Daddy, what did you do to prevent this?" and I will be able to give her a clear answer.'

From early 1983 onwards, the two men spoke frequently about the use of chemical substances in a war situation. They wrote reports about the threat of chemical attack on the SADF, reports on biological agents, and on the use of rats as landmine detectors. Around the middle of 1983, Basson invited Goosen to become involved in establishing a facility where chemical and biological substances

could be tested on animals. It was not long before the initial plan was expanded to include research into and production of biological warfare agents. Goosen testified at both the TRC and Basson's trial that the primary task of Roodeplaat Research Laboratories, founded towards the end of 1983, was to find novel poisons that could be used to murder individuals regarded as enemies of the state. However, he said, it was agreed from the outset that none of the scientists ever wanted to know the identity of any 'targets', and he was assured by Basson that all of them would be 'legitimate' and 'responsibly' selected. Though other scientists, notably Immelman, corroborated the evidence that toxins made at RRL were destined for use against enemies of the state, the judge made no findings in this regard, and granted all the scientists indemnity from prosecution.

Although funded entirely by the military and set up for the sole purpose of serving Project Coast, both RRL and its sister company, Delta G Scientific, were structured as private concerns so as to ensure that the work done there could not be traced back to the SADF. RRL's cover story, told to anyone who asked questions, was that it was a contract research facility in the pharmacological, agricultural, biological, veterinary and medical fields. To maintain this cover, and as a means of acquiring additional funding, a limited amount of conventional research was undertaken by the scientists, resulting in the development of such products as burn dressings for use in hospitals.

RRL started out in a few offices in a shopping centre in the Pretoria suburb of Sinoville while Goosen scouted around to find a permanent home for the front company. He finally settled on 350 hectares of farmland north-east of Pretoria, near the Roodeplaat Dam. While relatively isolated, the location was close enough to the city to allow a convenient commute for employees. For the first two years the existing farmhouse served as an office and laboratory. The hi-tech laboratories and containment facility envisaged for the future were built in phases to avoid attracting undue attention. The animal centre came first, then the basic research facilities: five laboratories shared by microbiology and reproductive physiology. At first, liaison between RRL and the SADF was confined to contact between Goosen and Basson. Later, the situation was formalised with the introduction of monthly meetings between RRL's 'directors' and the main 'shareholder', the Surgeon General, at which all research and development projects were discussed. According to Goosen, there was no doubt among the RRL staff that the Surgeon General knew exactly what they were doing.

While construction was in progress, Goosen began the important task of recruiting scientists to work with him. He sought out former colleagues from the University of Pretoria's veterinary faculty at Onderstepoort, people he knew and could trust – people who had no problem marrying their patriotism with a desire to practise interesting science and be paid well for it, and who would not

question the work being done. Those who fitted the bill had to fill in reams of forms, providing details about every aspect of their lives. Security checks and psychological tests were mandatory – the security checks to determine that neither they nor their close friends or family members were secret supporters of any anti-apartheid organisations, the tests to ensure that they were 'emotionally stable'. Among the first scientists to be recruited and appointed 'directors' were veterinarians Dr André Immelman and Dr Schalk van Rensburg, who was lured away from the Medical Research Council by Basson himself. Once on the payroll, scientists were subject to stringent security in the workplace, barred from discussing their work with colleagues who were not part of their specific research teams. Some scientists believe that their homes might even have been secretly bugged. Returning home one evening after a frustrating day in the labs, one of the Delta G scientists complained to his wife of tensions at work, only to find himself answering to his boss for his indiscretion the following day. Warnings like this kept the scientists in line, made them afraid to challenge the system and powerless to change the course of the programme they found themselves involved with.

Goosen testified that he, Basson and Immelman talked about developing covert chemical and biological weapons such as a substance that could be smeared on a car door handle, which would cause whoever opened the door to be poisoned. They came to the conclusion that the ideal poison for such application would be an organophosphate, which research had shown was most effectively absorbed through the skin. It was with this kind of application in mind, said Goosen, that paraoxon became the most researched organophosphate at RRL. Paraoxon attacks the involuntary muscle functions, paralysing vital organs and resulting in suffocation within minutes of ingestion. In time, most – perhaps all – of the senior scientists at RRL came to suspect that the substances they were doing research on would be used to eliminate or harm enemies of the state. Goosen said that during one of the informal discussions about how organophosphates could be used, ANC leaders and communists were mentioned as suitable targets for elimination. There was talk, for example, about how hard it would be to murder former South African Communist Party leader Joe Slovo, and what could be used if an assassin had only one minute in which to strike. Nelson Mandela, too, was discussed, and the view was expressed that if he could somehow get cancer while in prison, his release would present no real political problem.

Basson denied that discussions such as those described by Goosen had sinister undertones. Hypothetical scenarios might have been outlined during informal meetings, he said, but only with a view to exploring potential threats to VIPs.

While Van Rensburg was nominally in charge of the animal research laboratory and oversaw the project to develop an infertility vaccine, Immelman headed the

chemical and pharmacological departments. Microbiologist Dr Mike Odendaal focused his attention on collecting as many cultures as he could find, including some 45 different strains of anthrax, *E. coli* (which causes severe vomiting and diarrhoea), and *Yersina enterocolitica* (closely related to the bacteria that causes plague), to name but a few. Every organism Odendaal collected was nurtured and grown in sufficient quantities to freeze-dry. The vials of freeze-dried anthrax, cholera, *Clostridium botulinum* and many more were given to Immelman to keep in the walk-in safe he had installed in his office. For security reasons Immelman never told Odendaal what he intended using the pathogens for, but there were times when this information slipped out during casual conversation. So it was that having supplied Immelman with a bowl of sugar contaminated with salmonella, the non-lethal bacteria that induces food poisoning, Odendaal was told that it was destined for Soweto to be used at an ANC meeting. In this instance, unusually, Odendaal received feedback about the results: the salmonella had worked very well, he was told, all the delegates had fallen ill. Testifying in the Basson trial, Immelman said that he had 'merely been joking' when he told Odendaal this.

The so-called fertility project of RRL and Delta G received widespread media attention during the TRC hearings. Van Rensburg and Goosen testified that discussions about the population explosion in South Africa gave rise to the idea of developing a vaccine that would prevent reproduction. Van Rensburg thought that the project, which he believed was in line with the World Health Organisation's attempts to curb rising global birth rates, would bring RRL international acclaim and funding. He was encouraged, he said, by Basson, who told him that the military needed an anti-fertility vaccine that could be administered through food so that female Unita soldiers would not fall pregnant. While sceptical about the reasons given, Van Rensburg committed himself and his colleagues to the development of an anti-fertility vaccine that could be administered orally without the knowledge of recipients. Both Goosen and Van Rensburg believed that the intention was to secretly give the contraceptive to black South African women. Other scientists involved in the project have denied knowing that this was the purpose of their work. Geoff Candy, a scientist at Delta G Scientific, confirmed Goosen and Van Rensburg's claims, saying that when he was asked to get involved in the project and realised that the intention was to affect the fertility of black women, he knew that he had to 'get out', because he could not morally justify this kind of work. A vaccine of the kind envisaged was never produced.

While all the scientists agree that at first their work centred on understanding how defences against chemical and biological weapons could be developed, the emphasis gradually shifted to the offensive use of biological agents, until Odendaal and some of his colleagues at RRL found themselves making bizarre products such

as anthrax-contaminated cigarettes. Immelman was in charge of all the military or 'hard' projects, as they were known, and for which orders were almost never put in writing. Even soft-centred chocolates were injected with anthrax or botulinum toxin and given to Immelman. Fairly soon after Odendaal joined RRL, he was given a vial of blood by Immelman who told him it came from Basson, had been drawn from a 1 Military Hospital patient dying of AIDS and was to be freeze-dried with a view to being used against 'opponents'. This is the only record of a virus being kept at RRL and it is not known whether the plan was ever put into practice.

It was James Davies, Special Forces trained veterinarian, who did much of the practical work at RRL. By his own admission a handy man with a toolbox, Davies used a dentist's drill to make tiny holes in cans and bottles through which Immelman could then inject paraoxon, anthrax, Brodifacoum or any other toxin of choice before Davies soldered the holes shut. Davies admitted – and research files confirmed – that he had added Aldicarb to orange juice, botulinum toxin and thallium to beer, Paraquat to whisky, all deadly mixes. Davies also injected custom-made toxins into chocolates and alcohol, which he than handed back to his boss.

Immelman, now the owner of a game farm in Limpopo province, said he knew from the start that RRL was an SADF front, and explained that paraoxon was synthesised as an active ingredient because it was 'reasonably easy' to make and required a lethal dose of only 1 mg per kilogram of body weight, which was quickly absorbed. An added advantage was that if detected *post mortem*, its presence could always be attributed to parathion, a common agricultural pesticide. In addition, research into paraoxon offered an ideal cover for the establishment of a high-safety laboratory in which research would be done on the nerve agents sarin, tabun and VX.

Harrowing as the personal testimony of the scientists was, the true horror of the twilight zone explored by some of the country's finest scientific minds lies in the thousands of documents filed with the Pretoria High Court during Basson's trial. The Rosetta Stone of the RRL records was a list compiled by Immelman during 1989, titled simply 'Verkope' [Sales]. It is a record of the toxins and contaminated items that Immelman handed to people introduced to him by Basson, and provides some insight into the ghastly products dreamed up at RRL. (The Sales List is reproduced on pages 34–5.)

Clinical toxicologist Professor Gerbus Muller of Stellenbosch University told Judge Willie Hartzenberg that of the 24 items on the 'Sales List' covering the period August to October 1989, at least eight are extremely poisonous. One, botulinum, is the most dangerous toxin known to man. It kills by respiratory arrest and is one million times more poisonous than arsenic. Another, Paraquat, is so potent that even with treatment for a low dosage, a 100 per cent mortality rate can be expected.

At Roodeplaat, these and other lethal substances were added to cigarettes, chocolates, alcoholic beverages and toiletries before being supplied to members of the sinister Special Forces hit squad, the Civil Cooperation Bureau and the Security Police. In some instances, specially adapted screwdrivers, walking sticks and umbrellas were loaded with doses of deadly toxins to be administered to officially approved 'targets' in scenarios worthy of a James Bond novel. Basson denied being involved in plans to murder anyone, and said the only reason such research was done was in order to illustrate how easily South African agents or VIPs travelling abroad could be assassinated.

In order to determine how well and how quickly the poisons would work, scientists at RRL tested their potions on primates, pigs and beagle hounds. How many animals met horrible deaths in the process will never be known, but 203 Roodeplaat research files recovered by Basson investigators show a dedicated commitment to the quest. The majority of substances involved cause death by suffocation – an excruciatingly painful process involving paralysis of the central nervous system and collapse of the lungs. An anti-coagulant called Brodifacoum gives rise to massive internal bleeding and fatal brain haemorrhage, while Cantharidine (commonly known as the aphrodisiac, Spanish Fly) causes severe burns in the mouth, throat and vital organs before victims become comatose and die of multiple organ failure.

In RRL's laboratories, death sometimes came swiftly, within minutes, but it could take hours, even days. Records of clinical tests with cholecalciferol – or vitamin D3 – show that dogs given three consecutive overdoses of the substance took four to seven days to die. Vervet monkeys fed a low dosage over a 30-day period died of heart failure 65 days after first ingesting the substance, suffering nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, headache, itching, disorientation and peripheral nerve damage in the interim. Sodium azide, used industrially in the manufacture of explosives and preservatives, produced symptoms in baboons within three to eight minutes of oral ingestion. Soon after being fed the poison the baboons would have extreme difficulty breathing, their blood pressure would drop and they would lapse into a coma before dying within 30 to 120 minutes. This substance was also tested on pigs and dogs – which, according to the research report, 'continued to wag their tails, even while in a coma, until they died'. Tests with Brodifacoum, used commercially in rat poison, caused a monkey to bleed to death from the femoral artery, while organophosphates attacked the central nervous systems of baboons within eight hours of being applied to a small patch of naked skin. The baboons were subjected to protracted torture, being injected with an antidote, atropine, at the first sign of poisoning, only to have the toxin reapplied at 24-hour intervals over a period of up to seven days before succumbing to the inevitable.

CBW 88 B 0000

V E R K O P E

DATUM GELEWER	STOF	VOLUME	PRYS
19.03.89 SK	Phensiklidien Thallium asetaat	1 x 500mg 50g	Teruggebr
23.03.89 SK	Phensiklidien	5 x 100mg	
04.04.89 C	Aldicarb - Lemoensap	6 x 200mg	
04.04.89 C	Asied - Whisky	3 x 1,5ℓ	
04.04.89 C	Paraoxon	10x 2ml	
07.04.89 C	Vit D	2gr	
15.05.89 C	Vit D	2gr	R300,00
15.05.89 C	Katharidien	70mg	R150,00
15.05.89 C	10ml Spuite	50	
16.05.89 C	Naalde 15Gx10mm	24	R18,00
16.05.89 C	Naalde 17Gx7,5mm	7	R7,00
19.05.89 C	Thallium asetaat	1g	
30.05.89	Fosfied tablette	30	
09.06.89	Spore en Brief	1	
20.06.89 K	Kapsules NaCN	50	
21.06.89	Bierblik Bot	3	
21.06.89	Bierblik Thallium	3	
21.06.89	Bottel bier Bot	1	
21.06.89	Bottel bier Thallium	2	
22.06.89 K	Suiker en Salmonella	200gr	
27.06.89 C	Wiskey en Paraquat	1x75ml	
20.07.89 K	Hg-sianied	4gr	
27.07.89 K	Bobbejaan foetus	1	

Translation

DATE DELIVERED
SUBSTANCE
VOLUME
PRICE
Phencycladine (Returned)
Thallium acetate
Phencycladine
Aldicarb – Orange juice
Azide – Whiskey
Paraoxon
Vitamin D
Vitamin D
Cantharadine
10ml Injections
Needles
Needles
Thallium acetate
Aluminium phosphide or Phosphine tablets
Spores and letter
Capsules of Sodium cyanide
Beer can botulinum
Beer can thallium
Beer bottle botulinum
Beer bottle thallium
Sugar and Salmonella
Whiskey and Paraquat
Mercuric oxycyanide
Baboon foetus
Vibrio cholera
Azide
Capsules cyanide
Cigarette B anthracis (anthrax)
Coffee chocolates B anthracis
Coffee chocolates Botulinum
Peppermint chocolates Aldicarb
Peppermint chocolates Brodifacoum
Peppermint chocolates Cantharadine
Peppermint chocolates Cyanide
Vibrio cholera
Capsules Propan Sodium Cyanide
Formalin and Piridine
Needles
Cantharadine – powder in packet
Methanol
Vibrio cholera – 10 bottles
Snakes
Mamba toxin (Brought back)
Digoxin
Whiskey + colchicine
B. melitensis
Salmonella typhimurium in deodorant
Culture from letters
B. melitensis
Salmonella typhimurium in deodorant.

6 00

V E R K O P E

DATUM GELEWER		STOF	VOLUME	PRYS
04.08.89	K	Vibrio cholera	16 bottels	
10.08.89	K	Asied 4xgr	Kapsule sianied 7	
11.08.89	C	Sigarette B anthracis	5	
	C	Koffie sjokolade B anthracis (1)	5	
	C	Koffie sjokolade Botulinum (2)	5	
	C	Pepperment sjokolade Aldikarb (3)	3	
	C	Pepperment sjokolade Brodifakum (4)	2	
	C	Pepperment sjokolade Kathacidien (5)	3	
	C	Pepperment sjokolade Sianied (6)	3	
16.08.89	K	Vibrio cholera	6 bottels	
16.08.89	K	Kapsules Propan NaCN	7	
18.08.89	K	Formalien en Piridien ~~naalde~~	50ml x 30	
		Rooiste 19cm x no 16	12	
05.09.89	K	Kantharidien - poeier in sakkie	100mg	→ ?
08.09.89	K	Metanol	3-30ml	?
	C	Vibrio cholera	10 bottels	
08.09.89	K	Slange	2	
	K	Mamba toksien	1	dry sol.
13.09.89	K	Digoksien	5 mg	?
18.09.89	C	Whiskey 50ml + colchicine	75mg	
6.10.89	K	B.melitensis c	1 x 50	
		S.typhimurium in deodorant	1	
11.10.89	K	Kulture vanaf briewe	2	

6.0001

V E R K O P E

DATUM GELEWER		STOF	VOLUME	PRYS
21.10.89	K	B.melitensis c		
		S.typhimurium in deodorant	1	

Immelman began keeping a record of substances he handed out towards the end of 1988, when Basson introduced him to three men he knew only as Chris, Gert and Manie. Instructed by Basson to use the codename 'Willem' when meeting with the men, Immelman presented himself as a farmer, knowing he had to protect his identity and his link to RRL at all costs. It was these three men who were the recipients of many of the poisons itemised on the Sales List. Immelman claims to have believed they were members of 7 Medical Battalion and felt no compunction when Basson told him to 'give them anything they want'. Later, Basson also introduced him to a man he knew only as Koos, with the same instruction. Nothing, says Immelman, left RRL without Basson's approval.

All Immelman's meetings – about nine, to his recollection – with Chris, Gert and Manie were set up by Sarie Jordaan, Basson's secretary at the South African Medical Services (SAMS). The men met in Basson's office at SAMS headquarters in his absence, or in restaurants, and it didn't take long for Immelman to realise that the three were not schooled in pharmacology. He spent a great deal of time talking to them, over coffee at a fast food outlet, about the best ways of administering the poisons, what effects could be expected and how they could be applied to clothing. Before giving Chris a quantity of paraoxon on 4 April 1989, Immelman explained that the most sensitive areas for absorption would be the scrotum and eyelids, and that a shirt collar or waistband of pants would be ideal areas on which to spread the poison. It was not long after this meeting that Immelman read in a newspaper about the poisoning of the Reverend Frank Chikane, secretary-general of the South African Council of Churches and an outspoken opponent of apartheid. Having made a connection in his own mind, Immelman asked Basson directly if paraoxon had been used. Basson replied that no one knew, 'not even the Americans'.

Late in 1989, Immelman delivered vials of vibrio cholera to Koos in Basson's office. The bacteria were in Schott laboratory flasks, made of thick glass with screw tops. Former CCB operator Pieter Botes testified during Basson's trial that he was given two vials of cholera with instructions to use them to contaminate the water supply of a Swapo refugee camp outside Windhoek shortly before Namibia's pre-independence election in 1989. Because the water supply was chlorinated, the germs had no effect. Six containers of orange juice, each containing 200 mg of Aldicarb, were delivered to Chris, along with 2 g of vitamin D3, on 7 April 1989 (a fatal dose would be three to four grams). On 15 May 1989, Chris received 70 mg of Cantharidine, of which as little as 10 mg – a taste – has been known to be fatal. Koos was given 100 mg of Cantharidine in September 1989. Chris also received a number of hypodermic syringes and needles, while 50 sodium cyanide capsules (fatal dose 4 g) were given to Koos and a letter laced with anthrax spores

to Basson. All the chocolates and cigarettes laced with anthrax appearing on the Sales List were supplied to Chris.

From photographs shown to Immelman in court, Chris, Gert and Manie were identified as Security Police officers (whose surnames are protected in terms of a court order). While admitting that he had introduced Immelman to the three men, Basson said this was for the sole purpose of supplying them with sedatives and tranquillisers that could be used during cross-border abductions by the Security Police, and that he had never instructed or authorised Immelman to give them any lethal toxins. Items on the Sales List marked down against his own name, said Basson, had been 'passed on to scientists' for further research. Odendaal, the man who laced chocolates and single cigarettes with anthrax, strongly disputed this claim when it was put to him under cross-examination, describing it as 'ludicrous'. At the time, he said, he was probably the closest thing to an anthrax expert that South Africa had, so who else could have done what further tests? All 'they' wanted, said Odendaal, was 'toxins in little bottles'.

In the broad scheme of things, however, the ubiquitous 'they' actually wanted a great deal more – but it was not for the scientists at RRL to know that while they were making toxins, someone in a workshop on the opposite side of Pretoria was designing bizarre instruments that could be used to administer them. Jan Lourens graduated from the Rand Afrikaans University with a degree in metallurgical and mechanical engineering before joining the Air Force, where he worked in the laboratory at Air Logistics Command. It was there that he met up with an old school friend, Philip Mijburgh. It was an encounter that would change the course of Lourens's life. Mijburgh, a medical doctor and member of Basson's Special Operations Unit (later 7 Medical Battalion), lost no time recruiting Lourens into the unit or putting his skills to use. Lourens worked closely with scientists at RRL from the start. In 1985, he was introduced by Mijburgh to Goosen, Immelman and Davies, who needed his help for the development of custom-made apparatus to conduct animal experiments with chemical and biological warfare agents. Lourens made a chair that could restrain a primate, with a mechanical arm that could be used to extract blood at a distance. He also constructed a gas chamber large enough for the restraining chair. A baboon strapped into the chair could be placed inside the chamber while gases were piped in, to see what effect they would have on the animal. The gas chamber was used on at least one occasion to subject a restrained baboon to the potent CR teargas.

Among the first tasks assigned to Lourens was to set up an independent radio network to link the vehicles of all Special Operations members. He also modified their Nissan Skylines, souping up the engines and enlarging the fuel tanks to allow a rapid response, in the event of a chemical mishap, by members of the so-called Skyline Squad. Working from Speskop, Lourens came to know some of

the staff at EMLC, striking up a friendship with former Selous Scout Philip Morgan, a self-taught armourer with a vivid imagination and the mechanical skills to match. When Lourens became involved in designing a series of 'special applicators', it was Morgan who turned his sketches into weapons cunningly disguised as screwdrivers, walking sticks, even a poison-tipped umbrella. Lourens's friendship with Mijburgh translated into a good relationship with Basson, and by 1987, three years after joining Special Operations, he was firmly ensconced in Basson's inner circle. His wife, Antoinette, also worked for Project Coast – at the financial and administrative front company, Infladel – and often served as personal assistant to Basson.

Through his position in the Special Operations Unit, Lourens became acquainted with Delta G Scientific, even while the fledgling chemical plant was still housed in a few offices in the Pretoria suburb of Val de Grace. When construction began on the sophisticated research and production plant in Midrand, Mijburgh invited him to serve as project manager, a task he willingly accepted. In the heyday of Project Coast, Delta G's main purpose was production of CR, the so-called New Generation Teargas. Unlike conventional teargas, or CS, CR is extremely irritating. It burns the skin, eyes and nasal passages and causes severe flu-like symptoms in anyone who comes in contact with it. Scientists who worked with CR all felt the effects of the agent. The poor safety conditions under which they conducted their experiments left at least two of them chronically ill and unable to continue working in the industry. Delta G staff were also asked to develop defensive measures against chemical warfare agents, such as test kits that could be used by troops in the field.

On completion of the Midrand factory, Lourens was invited to stay on as resident site engineer, but the prospect held little attraction, and instead he discussed with Mijburgh the possibility of removing the defensive arm of the project from Delta G and running it himself. Mijburgh agreed, and at the end of 1986, with funding supplied by Basson, Lourens set up Systems Research & Development in Strydom Park, Randburg. In due course, SRD acquired a number of branches. One of these was Phoenix Service Station, where the super-Skylines were modified and serviced. Another branch concentrated on developing filters and chemical detection apparatus, while SRD Electronics supplied the military with surveillance equipment and debugging devices. A mechanical workshop operating as QB Laboratories became home to Morgan, who left EMLC at Basson's request, and Bart Hettema, a Hollander appointed at the behest of Basson and General Lothar Neethling. Hettema's main task was to pack CR into hand-held aerosol cans for the SA Police, while Morgan concentrated on the custom-made items he and Lourens called 'applicators' in English and the generic 'screwdrivers' in Afrikaans. These were devices containing secret compartments that could be filled with lethal toxins.

Lourens said he received instructions from Basson to make the applicators. Basson, in turn, claims that the orders came from General Kat Liebenberg, who had 'heard' that such instruments could be used by covert agents.

Most of the finished products were delivered to Basson by Lourens, though a few were also handed to Immelman or Davies at RRL, where they were tested to check their efficacy. RRL test reports show that the screwdrivers were tested on pigs, to see if they could operate silently and penetrate the skin in order to deliver their lethal payloads. The first generation screwdrivers were either spring-loaded or contained a low explosive charge that released the chemical substance on impact, while umbrellas were adapted to shoot a poisoned polycarbonate ball into a victim's body. Polycarbonate was virtually impossible to detect during an autopsy, and Lourens was told that the micro-balls could not be picked up by security X-ray machines. He and Morgan also produced walking sticks that were really injectors and a folding knife-spoon that fitted into a cigarette box. This device was ideally suited for use in prison where spoon stabbings were commonplace. The victim could be stabbed with the spoon, inside which was hidden a container of poison. The intention was for the victim to die, the only visible cause of death being the stab wound. QB also made signet rings with a secret compartment for poison. The unique locking mechanism designed by Morgan allowed Lourens, during the Basson trial, to identify a signet ring used by police agent Leslie Lesia against ANC members in exile in African states.

In March 1988, Lourens quit SRD to focus his attention on the development of personal apparel offering protection against chemical attack. By that time, the defensive side of Project Coast was in a growth phase, with textiles, clothing and filtration systems all being tested against genuine chemicals rather than simulated substances. Leaving SRD in the hands of psychologist Johnny Koortzen, Lourens became managing director of a new company, Protechnik, holding this position until March 1993.

In January 1986, shortly after RRL launched into full swing, Goosen was removed from his position as managing director amid allegations that he was a poor administrator and had taken kickbacks from the building contractors. Goosen was moved to Roodeplaat Breeding Enterprises, a sub-section of RRL that was involved in the supply of guard dogs, and replaced by Special Forces dentist Wynand Swanepoel. The shift in leadership at RRL was mirrored by the situation at Delta G Scientific, where Dr Willie Basson was removed from his post as chief executive on the basis of equally vague accusations of bad management, to be succeeded by Philip Mijburgh. Two years later, Swanepoel asked Goosen to return to RRL to 'sort out' problems in the animal research centre, but in February 1989 Goosen found himself out on the street as the result of accusations that he was guilty of a major security breach.

The alleged offence had taken place during a conference in the Kruger National Park. Goosen, whose wife had recently died of cancer, was emotionally fragile at the time, and shortly after the conference he suffered a nervous breakdown. To this day, Goosen believes his condition was deliberately induced by the administration of a psychotic drug, and denies that he was guilty of any security breach. Nevertheless, he was told by Knobel that the offence was seen in so serious a light that, by rights, he ought to be going to prison. Instead, he was told to quit Project Coast and sign a restraint of trade agreement that prevented him from pursuing a research career for 10 years. He also had to sign secrecy agreements, promising not to reveal the nature of the work he did at RRL. In return, he was paid R60 000 – the equivalent of three months' salary and his contributions to the pension fund. By this time, Basson and Goosen were no longer on speaking terms.

Ironically, scientists who remained at RRL agree that from the moment Swanepoel became managing director, they ceased to be given any clear guidelines from management on what they were expected to do. In the absence of a scientific compass, they simply began working on projects that interested them personally, but did not necessarily have any military value. The microbiologists motivated their research to management by appending the phrase 'has military application' to their proposals to ensure they would be approved. This was how one of the junior scientists under Odendaal's supervision perfected the genetic modification of the *E. coli* bacterium. Adriaan Botha's objective was to develop a vaccine that would protect sheep against one of the lethal toxins expressed by *Clostridium perfringens* bacteria. *E. coli* can produce far larger quantities of toxin, so the idea was to modify *E. coli*. While Botha was clear about his intention to develop a harmless vaccine, he was fully conscious that his work could also lead to the development of a dangerous and frightening biological warfare agent. Management of RRL was so lax at that stage that Botha and Odendaal believed they were in full control of the research they were doing. Whether or not this was naive was never put to the test, and Botha was never asked to apply his process to the development of a bio-weapon.

Control over the science and scientists involved in Project Coast was not the only thing falling apart by the late 1980s. Basson's personal relationships with several individuals also fell casualty to the increasingly urgent need by the SADF to sever all links with front companies. In September 1989, arch-securocrat PW Botha's replacement as head of state by the more moderate FW de Klerk heralded the dawn of a new political era in South Africa, and the military mandarins were neither deaf nor blind to the full implications of his historic speech on 2 February 1990, which transformed the former enemies of the state into partners in search of a political rather than a military solution to the country's ills.

Privatisation of Project Coast's front companies had been envisaged from the start, and the process was approved on 18 April 1990 by Defence Minister Magnus Malan, Finance Minister Barend du Plessis, Auditor-General Peter Wronsley, SADF Chief of Staff Finance Admiral Bert Bekker and SADF chief General Jannie Geldenhuys. The proposal was vetted by Project Coast's external auditor, Pierre Theron, by Wally van Heerden of the Auditor-General's office and by the State Attorney's office. Because of the limited number of major players in the chemical sector and the possibility that the SADF would have need of the privatised facilities at some point in the future, Basson and Mijburgh made a case for a management buyout of Delta G Scientific, with 49 per cent of the shares being sold to directors and employees and the rest going to Mijburgh through his flagship private company, Medchem Consolidated Investments. Chemical giant Sentrachem, one of the only private concerns considered a potential buyer, set the book value of Delta G at R12 million – less than 10 per cent of the amount poured into the company by the SADF. Just two years later, when Sentrachem did, in fact, buy Delta G, it paid a paltry R3 million. The management buyout was financed by a R12 million interest-free loan from the SADF. In practice, this was immediately offset by payment of cancellation fees for five-year SADF contracts in place at the time.

Mijburgh became an overnight millionaire – a situation that would be mirrored a year later when RRL was privatised, propelling Swanepoel into the ranks of the super-rich as well. The privatisation boosted the personal financial coffers of a handful of 'directors' and shareholders at RRL, including Immelman, Davies and the administrative chief, David Spamer. Among those who received no benefit from the process were Goosen and Van Rensburg, both of whom had already left RRL, but felt they were entitled to some share in the spoils, in light of their earlier contributions. Both men were seriously aggrieved at the way they had been used and discarded, and having exhausted all other avenues of redress, they launched personal campaigns designed to expose both the secrets of the biological warfare programme and what they perceived as corruption involved in the privatisation process. They were the first to break the silence about what had been going on behind the sturdy fences and high walls of RRL, telling their stories to journalists, the Office for Serious Economic Offences and finally the TRC and Basson's prosecutors. Goosen made no secret of his role in the supply of toxins, convinced that he had an obligation to warn fellow scientists of the dangers inherent in allowing their political beliefs to undermine their professional ethics and personal morality. He has made no attempt to disguise the fact that in 1983 he was a loyal supporter of a system that sought to retain power in the hands of the white minority at all costs. Like so many white South Africans of his generation, Goosen believed implicitly that his country was at war with

communism and that the use of chemical and biological weapons was a justifiable component of that conflict.

Despite his Afrikaans name, Van Rensburg is atypical of his breed. An English-speaking Anglican, he was motivated by paternal rather than political concerns to join RRL. While working at the Medical Research Council as a senior research scientist, he was approached directly by Basson at a time when his own son was performing National Service in the Operational Area. When Basson assured him that by working at RRL he would be making a valuable contribution to protecting troops like his son from imminent chemical attack, Van Rensburg believed him. But, despite being one of RRL's founding directors, Van Rensburg never really felt comfortable about the work he was doing or the secrecy that shrouded the activities of some of the scientists. Corridor gossip confirmed his growing fears that he was involved in something far more sinister than he had been led to believe, but he felt trapped, dependent not only on the income and generous perks his job entailed, but mindful of repeated warnings that stepping out of line could be dangerous. His dilemma was resolved, albeit unsatisfactorily, when the last of a series of clashes with Swanepoel led to his suspension and a disciplinary hearing in August 1991. Van Rensburg later took his case to the courts, eventually being paid R200 000 as compensation for the loss of his RRL shares, which he estimated would have been worth at least R3 million when the company was sold.

Both Goosen and Van Rensburg paid dearly for betraying the system that spawned them. Forced to sign restraint of trade agreements when their employment was terminated, they were precluded from working as research scientists for a period of 10 years. Goosen's short-lived bid to earn a living from farming failed dismally and he has been beset by financial problems since leaving RRL. Van Rensburg and his wife, who have received numerous anonymous death threats over the years, live in virtual seclusion on a farm in the north-eastern Free State, wary of strangers and constantly on the alert.

Lourens's relationship with Basson soured when he arrived home unexpectedly from a trip to the Operational Area in the late 1980s, to find Basson's car parked in the driveway. He suspected that his wife was having an affair with Basson, and they divorced soon afterwards. Basson admitted during his testimony that he was 'crazy' about Antoinette, and that she had frequently accompanied him on trips abroad, acting as his 'very personal assistant'. Around the same time that his marriage began to fail, Lourens became increasingly plagued by his conscience about the special applicators he had designed. On a trip to England, he raised his moral qualms with Basson while they were travelling together in a train. Basson advised Lourens to 'sort it out with your God' as he himself had already done. In January 1993, Lourens went to see Knobel to tell him about the work he had been doing. Knobel was dismissive, saying he knew nothing about any special applicators

being made under the aegis of Project Coast, and did not want to know about such things. Lourens left Knobel with a computer disc and a document containing full details of the applicators he had made, but there is no indication that Knobel ever acted on this information.

By the time Lourens quit Protechnik in 1993, he was disenchanted with both Basson and the CBW programme, despite having profited financially through the companies he set up. He, too, was on the receiving end of several threats, and testified that Basson told him more than once that trying to quit the programme or stepping out of line were sure ways to wind up dead. Shortly after leaving Protechnik, Lourens tried, through an attorney friend, to see then Defence Minister Roelf Meyer in Cape Town, to brief him about the unorthodox projects. Meyer declined to meet with Lourens, referring him back to Knobel, who in turn refused to see Lourens again and told him he should talk to General Kat Liebenberg, then chief of the SADF. When the two men met, Liebenberg made it clear to Lourens that there was nothing to discuss and that as far as he was concerned, the matter was closed. But, Liebenberg told Lourens, he should remember that 'those are my toys … and I want them back'.

When Immelman began to question the legitimacy of the work being done by RRL, he voiced his concerns to Basson and was assured that all RRL's projects had the approval of the State Security Council. Although Immelman became more and more convinced that the toxins he was supplying were probably being used against people, he resigned himself to the fact. The ambivalence experienced by some of the scientists involved in Project Coast was not helped by the approach of RRL's management to those who dared voice moral reservations over the work they were doing. According to Van Rensburg, the only counselling offered came from a Dutch Reformed Church minister, whose contribution was limited to assuring the troubled scientists that they were acting in the best interests of their country, their families and the nation.

By 1998, the war psychosis that had been bred and fed by a succession of National Party politicians had been buried along with apartheid. Nevertheless, it was hard for a man like Odendaal to admit publicly to having done what he believed was necessary to protect '*volk en vaderland*' [people and country], and harder still to reconstruct the context in which he became involved in the biological warfare programme. Despite the personal turmoil they experienced by becoming the focus of negative media coverage and public attention, a handful of the scientists did not shirk their responsibility, however, and it is largely thanks to their courage that some of Project Coast's deepest, darkest secrets have been exposed at all.

It would be strangely comforting if the scientists had turned out to be despicable monsters, but this is simply not the case. They are perfectly normal people, leading

quite ordinary lives – except that they can never escape the knowledge that the work they did on behalf of Project Coast defied the most basic tenet of science, which is to further understanding to the benefit of humanity.

4

First, Do No Harm

AN EXTRAORDINARY TASK was given to a young military doctor named Kobus Bothma, one ordinary day at the Special Operations Unit of Special Forces. It would lead him to violate the most basic principles of his profession – and, within 72 hours, change the course of his life.

While it was not unusual for doctors of the Special Operations Unit to accompany operators on covert missions, this was no ordinary assignment. Three unnamed men were to be killed at the SADF training base in the Dukuduku forest, near St Lucia on the scenic KwaZulu-Natal north coast. The doctor's task was to accompany Barnacle agent Johan Theron on a macabre journey and carry out a bizarre human experiment after ensuring that the three men marked for murder were sedated during their last ride from Pretoria to Dukuduku. Bothma was given a little bottle containing a jelly-like ointment and told to smear it on the men to see what effect it would have.

After receiving his orders, Bothma had the rest of the day and that night to consider his gruesome task, but whatever thoughts went through his mind, they were not powerful enough to influence his decision that the need to be a good soldier took precedence over every promise he had ever made to save rather than take life. The next morning he and Theron met their three victims in Pretoria. The men, in their late twenties, were bound hand and foot in the back of a minivan, awaiting their fate. It would have been difficult to travel the long distance, a trip which would take more than five hours, with three terrified, struggling victims in the back of the vehicle, so Bothma injected doses of the sedative Dormicum into three cans of soft drink. The unsuspecting victims downed the liquid and fell asleep. So deeply did they

sleep that when Bothma had to slam on brakes to avoid an accident, one of them fell to the floor without awakening. By the time they arrived at Dukuduku, the men would have been starting to stir. It was almost evening and they were disorientated, with no idea where they were. But even in their confusion, they must have known they were facing death.

It was too late to begin the experiment, so Theron chained the men to trees and left them alone in the forest overnight. As Bothma and Theron slept, one of the men struggled to free himself, using the chain that shackled him to saw halfway through the tree to which he was bound. Early the next morning, the doctor and the operator returned and stripped the men naked. Bothma pulled on a surgical glove to protect himself from any effect the jelly might have, and he and Theron rubbed the ointment onto the most sensitive parts of the men's skin, including their genitals. Then they left, allowing time for the ointment to do its work while they drove to the nearest town to perform their civic duty – to cast their ballots in a referendum that would allow Indians and Coloureds to vote for apartheid-sponsored representatives in a proposed tricameral Parliament.

When Bothma and Theron returned to the forest they found their victims still alive, the ointment apparently having had no effect. 'It's time for these three to say goodbye,' Theron told the doctor. They had served their purpose, and there was no doubt in Bothma's mind that the men were to be killed. Telling his story in court, Bothma broke down in tears before he could recount how Theron took out a syringe and ampoules of the muscle relaxants Tubarine and Scoline. Having murdered in this way countless times before, Theron knew, as did Bothma, that in combination and overdose the drugs would paralyse the men, preventing them from breathing and causing a terrifying and painful death during which they would be fully conscious as their bodies failed to respond to the urge to breathe. Bothma's conscience forced him to hand Theron an additional ampoule, containing the anaesthetic Ketelaar, which, while easing the pain and sedating the men, may also have caused them to hallucinate during their final moments.

Theron testified that he and Bothma took turns administering the fatal injections, but Bothma said he was so disturbed by the events that he walked away, unwilling or unable to witness the deaths. When he returned after 10 minutes, he said, Theron was already placing the three corpses in body bags. Soon afterwards, pilot Matie van der Linde arrived in a light aircraft, into which the dead men were loaded. Bothma told the court he was in the aircraft when the bodies were thrown into the Indian Ocean from a high altitude, but that he only went along for the ride 'because I felt intimidated … I did not want them to realise how upset I was.' He testified that he had been through '20 years of hell' since the incident, but whatever pangs of conscience he might have suffered, he seems to have successfully suppressed them, returning to his job as a medical doctor in the

Special Operations Unit before launching a career in private practice, and never speaking of that dark day in November 1983 to anyone – until he had to.

Ten years after the murders, and shortly after South Africa's first democratic election, Bothma and his family emigrated to the tiny town of North Battleford in Saskatchewan, Canada, where he opened a practice. Oblivious to his past, his patients – and the Canadian authorities – were happy to have him, and when prosecutors Anton Ackermann and Torie Pretorius visited Bothma in Canada during the investigations leading up to Basson's trial, Bothma tried to avoid their pointed questions, believing they knew little of his involvement and were, as he described it, 'on a fishing expedition'. Soon after meeting with the prosecutors, however, Bothma called Van der Linde and realised that enough evidence had been collected to implicate him in the murders. He would have to testify to avoid prosecution. Nevertheless, it was not until a month later, when contacted again by Pretorius to ask him whether he had made a decision, that Bothma agreed to testify against Basson – because he 'had no other option'.

In June 2000, Bothma reluctantly flew to South Africa to testify in the trial, ready to return to his family in Canada at the earliest opportunity. But he had failed the examination required for permanent medical registration in Canada, and had to bring his family home to South Africa instead, setting up an orthopaedic practice in the northern KwaZulu-Natal harbour town of Richards Bay – less than 100 km from the scene of his crime.

The Special Operations Unit, of which Bothma was a member, was commanded by Basson from at least the early 1980s (no definitive dates are available for his appointment). The unit was established to provide medical support to Special Forces during operations outside the borders of South Africa. Although the unit was officially part of Special Forces and Basson reported to the commanding officer, according to Jan Lourens (who joined the unit in 1984) the doctors seldom wore military uniforms, except when accompanying soldiers on operations, and rank played little or no role in the day-to-day running of the unit. Apart from Lourens (the only one who was not a medical professional), members included dentist Wynand Swanepoel and doctors Philip Mijburgh, Chris Blunden, Deon Erasmus, Ben Steyn, Hennie Bester and Bothma.

When Niel Knobel became Surgeon General in 1988, the name of the unit was changed to 7 Medical Battalion and it was slotted in under command of the Surgeon General rather than Special Forces, although the doctors continued to provide medical services to Special Forces. Basson remained head of the unit, and the lines between 7 Medical Battalion and covert operations continued to be blurred. Provision of support to the security forces took many forms. The testimony of operators and doctors alike indicated that certain SADF units made use of drugs, so-called truth serums, during interrogation to force their captives

to talk. While most witnesses in the Basson trial were reluctant to implicate themselves in 'chemical interrogation', one man, Dr Phil Meyer, gave eyewitness testimony of just such an incident.

Meyer is a descendant of a long line of proud military doctors. He served the SADF from 1981, a year after graduating, until going into private practice in 1989. In 1985 Meyer was ordered to accompany Basson and Dr Deon Erasmus (now practising medicine in Provost, Alberta, Canada) to the secretive Ward 15 at 1 Military Hospital. The events that were to follow led him to assume that his earlier training in interrogation techniques were what qualified his involvement.

At the hospital, the three doctors went to a small private room on the left-hand side of Ward 15. There, lying in a bed and attached to an intravenous drip, they found a man whom Meyer was unable to name in court, having forgotten those details. The man had ANC connections, Meyer was told, but his precise role in the organisation was unclear. He was to be interrogated to establish who and what he was. According to Meyer, who was careful not to implicate himself directly in the administration of the drugs, Basson or Erasmus injected a substance into the drip and one of them asked the patient questions, working from a standard military interrogation list. All the while the doctors remained in clear view of the victim. Meyer was vague about who did what, and could not remember what drug was injected into the drip. He did remember that at first the victim was fully conscious, but as the hour-long session progressed he became increasingly drowsy. Despite the effects of the drug, the interrogators were forced to leave without having gained any information of value. The following day they returned. Again the man was drugged and the procedure was repeated for about an hour, again without producing satisfactory results. During this session the interrogators discussed the fate of the victim, concluding that he would 'have to be sorted out' afterwards to prevent him from identifying those involved or telling anyone about the interrogation procedure. In the euphemistic terms of the security forces, he would have had to be 'taken out' (murdered), said Meyer, who claimed he never saw or heard anything about the patient again.

Meyer claimed to have been troubled by the incident, though it was his religious convictions rather than his medical ethics that made it impossible for him to reconcile himself to this type of work. He 'knew in his heart' that he had problems, he said, but it took him a few months after the interrogation to fully appreciate their extent and the likely consequences for him as a medical doctor. He took his concerns to Knobel, who was Acting Surgeon General. Meyer fully expected Knobel, a trained medical professional and highly placed member of the Health Professionals Council of South Africa, to share his reservations, and made it quite clear that he was not prepared to take part in interrogations again. But, instead of evoking

the understanding and outrage he expected, shortly after making his confession, Meyer found himself transferred to the Angolan combat zone – a direct result, he believed, of having refused to participate in any future chemical interrogation.

Basson denied that Meyer was ever present during any chemically assisted interrogation session at 1 Military Hospital, but said that if his memory had failed him, the procedure could only have been designed to make an accurate diagnosis of a medical condition – an 'accepted' technique used in combat conditions when patients may be too severely shocked to assist doctors treating them. Basson's defence counsel, Jaap Cilliers, told the court that medical science accepted the use of Sodium Pentothal as a diagnostic aid in identifying and eliminating malingering (if soldiers pretended to be ill in order to escape duty), particularly in conflict situations. And substance-assisted interrogation was in use generally, said Cilliers, by doctors who needed to find out quickly exactly what was wrong with a patient.

Cilliers claimed that chemical substances were used, for example, if a patient appeared to be in respiratory distress. Before a doctor performed a tracheotomy or intubation, he would first administer Sodium Pentothal to establish whether the patient was not, perhaps, a malingerer. Or, if a patient thought he had been poisoned, perhaps was even showing some symptoms of poisoning, a doctor would first administer Sodium Pentothal to establish if the symptoms were not, perhaps, purely psychosomatic, and so that he could question the patient about the circumstances in which the apparent poisoning might have taken place. Sodium Pentothal was used by doctors as a diagnostic tool, said Cilliers, and the practice was not at all unfamiliar to military doctors working in combat conditions. Civilian medical professionals consulted by the authors were horrified by these claims, and said that the use of Sodium Pentothal for diagnostic purposes is by no means an accepted medical practice. Sodium Pentothal is not a diagnostic tool and cannot be used to differentiate between malingering and a genuine medical condition, nor is there any scientific basis for such claims.

According to the indictment against Basson, chemical interrogation was used in entirely different circumstances, namely to question a group of suspects in 1983, when Orlando Cristina, Secretary-General of the Mozambican rebel movement, Renamo, was murdered on an SADF-owned farm north of Pretoria. At the time, Renamo was receiving massive secret support from the SADF in its war against the Frelimo government, and to this end Renamo soldiers were housed and trained by the SADF on South African soil. When dissent broke out in the ranks of Renamo in April 1983, a group of members headed by Boaventura Bomba – whose brother, Adriano, had defected to South Africa a few years earlier by flying a Russian-made MiG across the border – decided to kill Cristina. Shot with an AK-47 through his bedroom window while having sex with his

South African common-law wife, Fran, Cristina's body was removed from the scene and later buried with the utmost secrecy. The next day, the farm, Fontana, was swarming with investigators from the military and the East Rand Murder and Robbery Unit, as well as doctors from 7 Medical Battalion, led by Basson. It took two days of intense interrogation and searching before one member of the assassination squad named his five accomplices.

While one of the policemen testified that Basson was clearly a member of the investigation team, Basson said his only role was to treat some of the Renamo operators who had become catatonic through shock and 'faction fights' that broke out after Cristina died. The prosecutors argued that Basson played a far more sinister role in events, administering chemicals during interrogation of the five suspects. Before the week was out, the investigators and suspects were moved to another military facility at Entabeni. Basson arrived in a closed minibus in which Bomba was shackled and bound hand and foot. He was taken from the van and moved to a room in the domestic quarters, where he was spread-eagled on an iron bed and tied down. After several days of interrogation, Bomba finally confessed to being the ringleader and the police investigation was immediately halted.

Official records showed that the murder was 'unsolved', and every policeman involved in the investigation was required to sign a written undertaking never to disclose details about it to anyone. What aroused the attention of Basson investigators was the fact that both the official police docket and the photo album compiled at the murder scene, along with a classified report with Basson's name typed at the end, in which the 'elimination' of the assassins was recommended, were found in the trunks of documents retrieved from his associate Sam Bosch's house after his arrest in January 1997. Basson denied that he was the author of the report, and witnesses whose names appeared on it as co-compilers disclaimed all knowledge of the document. The court found that Basson had not been involved in chemical interrogation and acquitted him on all related charges.

Shortly after the Entabeni visit, Cor van Niekerk, deputy head of Military Intelligence's Directorate of Special Tasks (DST), was ordered to make arrangements for a court martial to be held at an isolated base in the Angolan bush. He was to 'plan for any eventuality' and make sure that 'certain equipment' was taken along in the event that the suspects were sentenced to death: tarpaulins in which the bodies would be wrapped, and chains that would be bound around them to add weight when the bodies were dumped into the sea from an aircraft. Gloves were also taken along for those who would have to handle the bodies. Van Niekerk handled all the transport arrangements for the court martial. Renamo members had to be brought in from Mozambique and Europe, and were housed at the St Miele base until being taken to Wonderboom Airport, north of Pretoria, to

board a DC3 aircraft with blacked-out windows for a flight to Bloemfontein, where the suspects were being held by the Military Police. Those on board included Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama, who had been picked up in Mozambique.

At Tempe, home of 1 Parachute Battalion, five handcuffed black men were handed over to the pilots, who flew to an airfield near Bwobwata in the Caprivi Strip, close to the Angolan border. It was late afternoon, but Mo Oelschig, Cor van Niekerk and the head of DST, Brigadier Hannes Botha, escorted Dhlakama and his men into Angola. As darkness fell, the manacled suspects were taken into Angola as well. The pilots flew to a nearby base to refuel, with instructions to return as soon as possible and sleep in the aircraft. Around 1 am, they were awakened by the sound of the party returning through the bush, carrying the bodies of the five suspects, which were thrown in a heap in the rear of the aircraft. They were 'riddled' with bullet holes, according to one of the pilots, Mr S. At first light, they took off and flew out over the Atlantic Ocean. Thick chains were wound around the corpses to ensure they would sink, and as soon as a heavy mist lifted, they were hefted out of the aircraft's open door, and the operators flew home to Pretoria.

In the absence of eyewitness testimony to the alleged chemical interrogation, prosecutor Torie Pretorius attempted to prove that the use of drugs during the interrogation of SADF captives was common practice and that the procedure required the presence and active participation of a military doctor to administer the drugs. The indictment named Basson as a member of an exclusive team of medical experts who carried out the secretive chemical interrogations. Although witnesses were able to give independent confirmation of the use of chemical interrogation by the military, none were able to give eyewitness accounts of Basson's involvement in the interrogation of Bomba. The closest the state could get was the testimony of Johan Theron – found by the judge to be an unreliable witness – who told the court that he knew that the police had caught Cristina's assassins and that one of them had ended up in the Intensive Care Unit at 1 Military Hospital.

Theron said that when the man (who the state believed was Boaventura Bomba) recovered, Basson instructed him to fetch the victim from the hospital. Theron, allegedly accompanied by Basson and national serviceman Paul Heyns, went to the Intensive Care Unit at 1 Military Hospital where they handcuffed Heyns to the alleged assassin. The four then drove in Theron's car to Zwartkop Air Force Base, where a light SAAF aircraft was waiting for them on the runway. The man was handcuffed to a seat and Theron was told they were headed for Bloemfontein. According to Theron's testimony, during the flight the prisoner struggled, desperately trying to free himself from his captors. He added that Basson had told him that the victim's condition and his aggressive behaviour were the result of an overdose during chemical interrogation in which he, Kobus Bothma

and Philip Mijburgh had taken part. Basson's defence team claimed that the victim had in fact been catatonic, and said that Theron was 'clearly not aware that catatonia is particularly prevalent among black people, far more so than whites'. 'Under severe stress,' advocate Jaap Cilliers said, 'black people enter a trance-like state and that is what had happened to this person.' Independent experts told the authors that catatonia is a recognised medical condition, generally induced by extreme stress as the result, for example, of torture or severe abuse, and there is no scientific evidence to suggest that it is more prevalent in any one ethnic group than another.

Military Intelligence interrogation expert Jan Anton Nieuwoudt told the court that he was not only aware that drug-assisted interrogations were conducted by members of the security forces, but that he had been present during at least one such session. Nieuwoudt joined the SADF in 1973, and made a major contribution to the military handbook on interrogation techniques and procedures. He boasted in court of having had 'excellent equipment' at his disposal to assist in forcing his victims to reveal their secrets, including sophisticated electronic surveillance equipment in a caravan. He claimed to have been present on one occasion, at the farm where the Renamo soldiers were accommodated, when drugs were used during an interrogation. The victim was a policeman from Nelspruit by the name of Msibi, who was suspected of being an ANC supporter or agent. While the Security Police conducted the interrogation, a Special Forces operator, who Nieuwoudt assumed was a medical doctor, administered the drug by injection. Indeed, Nieuwoudt testified, operators were not allowed to administer drugs themselves during interrogation; it was always done under strict medical supervision. During cross-examination, Nieuwoudt admitted that he could not judge the efficacy of the drugs used, as 'other methods [of interrogation] were also applied', but said, 'I can assure you, the man did talk.'

Phil Meyer's former instructor in interrogation techniques, Magdele Jaeckyl, was appointed Senior Staff Officer Interrogation at Military Intelligence headquarters in mid-1985. Her task was to interrogate detainees and prisoners of war and to train SADF members in the art of interrogation. Most of her experience was gained through the interrogation of Swapo prisoners of war in Owamboland. Testifying against Basson, she told the court that she had trained a group of doctors and operational medics from the Reconnaissance units and others from Special Forces in interrogation techniques. By 1987 she knew that drugs could be – and were – administered to detainees during an interrogation. When, during that year, she was involved in the interrogation of an ANC member and was unable to convince some of her colleagues that the man had undergone a change of heart and was willing to work for his former enemies, she turned to Basson – whom she knew as one of the officers who gave lectures to Military Intelligence recruits – for advice. Jaeckyl

testified that she asked Basson if he could help her determine once and for all whether the man was a genuine defector or not, by administering an anaesthetic during interrogation. Basson allegedly told her it was possible, but warned her that once the procedure had been applied, the man 'would have to say goodbye' (*groet*). There was no question in Jaeckyl's mind that this meant the man would have to be killed. The court did not hear whether this caused her to abandon the plan, but in cross-examination Jaeckyl told Cilliers that she personally was never involved in the chemical interrogation of anyone. Basson denied that the conversation with Jaeckyl had taken place.

The role of 7 Medical Battalion doctors involved with the CCB ranged from providing operators with medical supplies to opening private practices used as fronts for CCB activities. Medics were also drawn into the web. One such person was Mr T, who revealed that he was the coordinator of the CCB's Region 9, specifically tasked to wage psychological warfare against 'enemies of the apartheid state'. Murder and physical violence played no part in the functions of Region 9, which made use of the services of psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists and even traditional witchdoctors to devise ways of intimidating selected targets, he said.

Mr T joined the SADF in 1978 in the SAMS training department. He served as a medic at Fort Doppies in the Operational Area until the end of 1979, then returned to SAMS headquarters to undergo training as a commissioned officer. At the end of 1988, he 'resigned' from the SADF with the rank of major to join the CCB. At some point during his CCB career, he was asked to act as medical coordinator for Region 9, and later as intelligence coordinator for this region. As medical coordinator, he acted as liaison between the CCB regions and the 'system'. When a medical doctor or medication was needed, Mr T would be informed by the region concerned and he would feed the requirement up the chain of command. His chief link upwards was a medical doctor known to him as Frans. Meetings between Mr T and Frans customarily took place in hotel rooms, where Mr T would tell Frans what was needed. Later, Frans would contact Mr T and they would meet for the requested substances to be handed over. Mr T would then act as courier and deliver the substances to the regional coordinator concerned. He received these substances (believed by the prosecutors to have been poisons from RRL) in envelopes, plastic bags or wrapped as parcels. He did not always know what was in the parcels, but assumed the substances would be used to further the aim of maximum disruption of the enemy.

Mr R, a medical pathologist, was an extremely reluctant witness, who added little to the state's case as a result. He is a big man, balding, bearded and fair-haired, who has as a close relative a former member of PW Botha's and FW de Klerk's Cabinets. A court ruling bars the authors from revealing further details about this connection. Mr R's mostly monosyllabic testimony began with an admission that

he had been a member of a covert sub-division of Special Forces, which he later learned was the CCB. For the protection of members, no one was allowed to talk about the organisation's activities, and Mr R feared that his testimony would endanger his life.

Mr R qualified as a medical doctor in 1985 and joined the SADF as a national serviceman, completing a one-year Special Forces training course before being assigned to 7 Medical Battalion. On completion of his national service in 1987, he joined the Permanent Force and was recruited into the CCB where he remained until the end of 1989. In response to questions from the prosecutor, he admitted that he had run a private medical practice as a cover for his CCB activities. He was motivated to join the CCB, he said, because 'the bush war had moved into the cities' and he realised that covert measures would be needed to combat the threat. He regarded all orders he received or carried out as a CCB agent as lawful, and was deeply conscious that 'we were not playing games … we were engaged in deadly conflict'.

Mr R's tasks included provision of the medical needs of covert units, medical advice and meeting their operational requirements. He admitted acting as courier for certain 'products' needed by CCB operators. No real names were used, though Mr R – whose administrative name was Frans Brink – knew the true identity of some CCB operators. All CCB medical requirements for operations were given to him by an agent he knew as Theo (Mr T), and he in turn 'took them to the formal SADF structure'. His contacts in this regard were Basson and someone he knew only as Willem (Dr André Immelman, head of research at Roodeplaat Research Laboratories), whom he met with in Basson's office. Mr R would convey Theo's requests to either Basson or Willem, the products would be given to him and he would pass them on to the CCB. Mr R was shown the Sales List drawn up by Immelman, but could not remember that either Basson or Willem gave him the items on it despite having met with Willem five or six times.

During cross-examination Cilliers put it to the witness that attempts were being made to attach sinister connotations to the work done by Mr R as a doctor, whereas, in fact, the CCB had needed doctors to see to the medical needs of operators. Mr R agreed. He did, however, admit to having handled a request for heart medication, which the prosecutors believed was intended to cause the death of ANC leader Dullah Omar. This request caused him to have 'some doubt' about what he was doing, even though he was wholly cognisant of the CCB's stated objective, to 'eliminate enemies of the state'.

While not all the doctors who served in 7 Medical Battalion were involved in murder, human experimentation or chemical interrogation, for those who were it is the contradiction between their responsibility as medical professionals and

the role they played within the military that poses ethical problems. Basson himself personifies this ambiguity. A specialist in both cardiology and internal medicine, he was trained to heal, to prevent the harm caused by disease. As a soldier and head of Project Coast, he was responsible for creating weapons designed to inflict harm, even kill. Indeed, the SADF's curious decision to appoint the Surgeon General as manager of the chemical and biological warfare programme, and a medical doctor its project officer, is indicative of a total lack of appreciation of this ambivalence. In 1990, the World Medical Association adopted a resolution stating that 'it would be unethical for the physician, whose mission is to provide health care, to participate in the research and development of chemical and biological weapons, and to use his or her personal scientific knowledge in the conception and manufacture of such weapons'.

Never were the inherent contradictions in the doctors' dual roles more obviously highlighted than during the testimony of Kobus Bothma. As Bothma was chronicling his role in the murder of the three men at Dukuduku, proceedings were dramatically halted when a clerk from another court came running into the courtroom. After a hasty whispered consultation with Basson's attorney, Adolf Malan, Cilliers asked for an immediate adjournment, as Basson's medical expertise was urgently required by a prosecutor who had collapsed. As Basson strode purposefully towards the exit of the court, Bothma instinctively moved out of the witness box to offer his assistance as well. He was stopped by prosecutor Torie Pretorius, who did not think this was the appropriate moment for the accused and the man testifying against him to forge anew the bond common to all members of the medical profession. As it happened, the advocate had suffered a stroke rather than cardiac arrest, and Basson was unable to do anything more than hold his hand until the swift arrival of a paramedic team. Inevitably, the next day's newspapers ran the story under the headline: Dr Death Saves Life.

At the time of writing, Basson continued to enjoy the support and admiration of many of his colleagues in the Pretoria medical fraternity. He was still a registered member of the Health Professionals Council of South Africa and practising as a cardiologist in Pretoria. Other doctors mentioned in this chapter also continued to practise medicine, though in the light of having being refused indemnity from prosecution in return for his testimony, a question mark hung over Bothma's future in his chosen profession.

5

The Grim Reapers

THE FIRST VICTIM was an unnamed Swapo freedom fighter who had murdered a farmer near Tsumeb, in northern Namibia. The last was Corporal Mack Anderson, a member of 5 Reconnaissance Regiment at Phalaborwa, in what is now Mpumalanga province. Between the deaths of these two men lie eight years and an untold number of bodies tossed into the sea in a calculated extermination programme allegedly sanctioned by top-ranking SADF officers.

Until early May 2000, the innocuously named Operation Dual was one of the apartheid era's most closely guarded secrets. Exposure of its grisly details ensured that it would go down in infamy, along with the name of the SADF's chief executioner, Johan Jurgens Theron. As the mild-mannered 50-something former intelligence officer reeled off one murder after another, a stunned silence fell over the Pretoria courtroom where Basson had been on trial since October 1999. Theron – whose closest estimate of how many people he had killed in cold blood was 'hundreds' – eschewed the amnesty process offered by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission because he would not subject himself to the 'humiliation and abuse' he believed was meted out to other former security force members who confessed their sins in public. But, after experiencing a spiritual rebirth, he agreed to testify against Basson in the belief that 'the truth will set me free'.

In order to place Basson at the scene of a single – albeit quadruple – murder in Namibia, for which he could not be tried in South Africa, Theron not only had to incriminate himself in myriad 'eliminations', but was also forced to admit that he masterminded a top-secret plan to empty 'overcrowded' detention barracks of Swapo prisoners of war during the torrid 1980s. However, Theron claimed it was General Fritz Loots, inaugural commander of the SADF's Special Forces, who

suggested lethal injections as the 'most humane' mass murder weapon, and Basson, in his capacity as a military doctor, who supplied him with vast quantities of Scoline and Tubarine, legitimate muscle relaxants used during major surgery, but fatal in overdose. At a later stage, Theron also used Ketelaar (an anaesthetic particularly suited to battlefield medicine because of the relative ease with which it can be administered by a trained medic) or Vesperax sleeping pills to sedate his victims before killing them.

Basson denied that he ever gave Theron any such drugs, or authorised anyone under his command to do so, and after acquitting Basson on all the charges he faced, Judge Willie Hartzenberg refused to grant Theron and his fellow hit men indemnity from prosecution, finding that they had falsely implicated Basson in their murderous deeds in a calculated bid to save their own skins. Whatever the origin of the drugs used, there is no doubt that Theron administered them as described. In fact, he told the court that while he had been 'traumatised' by the brutal nature of his earliest eliminations in July 1979, 'things went more smoothly' once he began using the medication to first sedate, then kill his victims, who 'passed away more peacefully'. Asked by Basson's defence counsel why he had not simply shot them, Theron said he was not prepared to take the chance, however remote, that the murders could ever be linked to the SADF by a skull containing a bullet hole washing up along the coast.

The shocking revelations about Operation Dual came 10 years after the first disclosures about state-sponsored hit squads were made by former police captain Dirk Coetzee and convicted murderer Almond Nofomela. In the interim, the subject had been canvassed by a judicial inquiry headed by Judge Louis Harms, the 1994 criminal trial of erstwhile Vlakplaas commander Colonel Eugene de Kock and a series of amnesty hearings by the Truth Commission. But, with the exception of the September 1989 assassination of Windhoek advocate Anton Lubowski, none of these investigations had probed CCB operations beyond South Africa's borders. Nor, despite the fact that the shadowy organisation fell under direct control of the Commanding Officer, Special Forces, had military involvement in CCB assassinations been explored in depth. And had Johan Theron not become a born-again Christian, the sickeningly graphic truth about Operation Dual and other 'eliminations' might never have been exposed.

Colonel Dawie Venter, a 33-year police veteran, joined the Special Investigation Unit in March 1997, when the case against Basson was in its infancy and only three sworn affidavits had been secured. By the time the trial began in October 1999, statements had been taken from hundreds of potential witnesses on three continents. It was while Venter was interviewing Theron for the second time that 'the dam burst … details about things I simply could not believe were true, just came pouring out of his mouth, like a torrent'. Unlike many seasoned detectives, Venter

is not a hard-drinking man – but what he heard from Theron so shocked him that he downed an entire bottle of vodka, neat, in his hotel room that night.

When investigators in the Basson case first approached Theron, they were armed with nothing more incriminating than vague details of a plan to distribute poisoned beer at taxi ranks used by black commuters in the Eastern Cape. Theron's confessions about his bloody past were a major breakthrough for the SIU, and in the months that followed, investigators peeled away one layer after another of a cover-up that had remained intact for almost 20 years. Thanks to their efforts, the wall of silence that had shielded the CCB's paid killers during earlier probes was breached, and although much about their nefarious activities has still not been uncovered – and probably never will be – key pieces have been added to the jigsaw of apartheid's hit squads.

Unfortunately, the identity of most CCB agents remains a closely guarded secret. Several of those called as witnesses against Basson testified under an alphabet soup of code-names provided by the prosecution, which was also granted an order by the judge prohibiting them from being photographed by the media. Dr Torie Pretorius sought these protective measures for fear of reprisals against the witnesses, claiming that the elimination of anyone who exposed CCB operations was still a very real possibility, despite the fact that the organisation had officially been disbanded in 1991. On 2 May 2000, the first member of the 'Barnacle Brigade' took the stand. Although his real name appeared in the indictment against Basson, the rugged ex-Rhodesian – one of three pilots involved in Operation Dual – testified as Mr K.

Born in the Western Cape town of Worcester in 1947, Mr K moved with his family to Rhodesia in 1959 and joined the army in 1968, serving in the Rhodesian Light Infantry, 2 Brigade and, from 1974, as one of the pioneers in the crack Selous Scouts. After a brief spell in the Special Branch, he was in the first wave of Rhodesian bush war veterans who flooded the ranks of the SADF's Special Forces in the run-up to Zimbabwean independence, and from February 1979 Mr K was appointed group commander 1 Reconnaissance Regiment, based at the Bluff in Durban. Shortly afterwards, he was summoned to Pretoria by Loots, who had been coaxed out of retirement in October 1974 by SADF chief General Magnus Malan to establish the Special Forces unit, which he commanded until April 1982.

At a meeting with Loots and Malan, who was Minister of Defence by 1979, Mr K was told that a front company was to be set up to carry out covert operations, and that he would be required to teach SADF members 'what we had done in Rhodesia'. This would include training in deep penetration reconnaissance – inserting a two-man team hundreds of kilometres behind enemy lines and leaving them there for six or seven weeks with no logistical support or contact with their own forces, in order to identify terrorist infiltration routes and training camps that could later be targeted for air attack. From the outset, the unit's primary objective

was to identify enemies of the state and conduct 'super-sensitive' covert operations against them, including 'eliminations'. To hide their activities, Mr K and a colleague, Johan Moller, set up a real estate agency named NKJM, but neither man was able to sustain the cover by actually conducting any property deals, and it wasn't long before the name changed to NKTF Security Consultants, run by Mr K and one of the SADF's first Recces, Trevor Floyd. Malan authorised the purchase of a small-holding at Broederstroom, west of Pretoria, as the headquarters of the fledgling unit, and Mr K began recruiting 'experienced' members of both the SADF and the former Rhodesian security forces, among them Gray Branfield, ex-Special Branch, and Danie Steyn, erstwhile Selous Scouts quartermaster. Theron, who joined the SADF in 1962 and was already a member of Special Forces, became Barnacle's security officer at an early stage. An operations room, radio room and specially constructed armoury were concealed behind a four-metre-high wall, and guard dogs patrolled the property night and day.

Within the first few months of 1980, Mr K and Floyd made several road trips to Rhodesia, returning with truckloads of arms, ammunition and 'special' equipment previously supplied by the SADF. As a Selous Scout, Mr K had been closely involved in pseudo-operations – the 'turning' of captured guerrillas in order to 'make them work for you' once they returned to enemy ranks. Such operations were vital in a bush war situation, Mr K explained, since it was 'almost impossible to identify terrorists living among the general population, and if you want to kill them, you have to first identify them'. In the African context, some 90 per cent of pseudo-operators were black, and this was the case with the first 30 to 40 agents recruited for Barnacle (briefly also known as D40) as well. Initially, the focus was on deep penetration operations, but identification of targets for elimination was soon added to the agenda. Mr K was involved in several cross-border operations that resulted in the murder of both Swapo and ANC members, as well as the elimination of SADF members who threatened to expose clandestine activities. He testified that all the operations in which he took part were conducted beyond South Africa's borders. 'I'm a soldier, not a policeman, and I refused to work inside the country,' he told the court.

While orders for eliminations were only ever issued verbally, a classified document, dated 18 February 1981, that spells out the role of Barnacle states that the director – Mr K – had no authority to make decisions regarding elimination of targets, as this was the sole province of the Commanding Officer, Special Forces. In Mr K's time, no elimination order was ever challenged, though among themselves, the operators did shake their heads and wonder aloud if their senior officers were 'insane' when certain names came up.

Mr K already had a private pilot's licence, and in the middle of 1979 he used SADF funds to buy a six-seater Piper Seneca – registration ZSKFG – which was

housed in a hangar at Lanseria, an extremely busy airport between Johannesburg and Pretoria. When Theron moved from SADF headquarters to Barnacle as security officer, one of the apartheid era's most diabolical plots began to unfold. According to Mr K, when security force members involved in pseudo-operations in the Namibian Operational Area began to experience 'problems' with turned terrorists, 'the powers that be decided that rather than make them martyrs, they should be quietly disposed of'. Theron, however, said he was the one who came up with the idea of Operation Dual, after 'long deliberation' with Loots, as a way of clearing overcrowded barracks at Fort Rev, the Special Forces' forward operational base near Ondangwa.

Whoever devised and authorised the plan, it was launched on 7 July 1979, according to an entry in Mr K's flight logbook. The accounts given by witnesses of specific flights over the next eight years differed in certain respects, owing as much to the fact that pilots fudged or falsified their logbook entries in order to hide the purpose of the trips as to the fading memories of those involved (or their conscious efforts to erase the horror of what they did in the name of war). Consequently, it is impossible to give a full or accurate reckoning of how many 'problems' were solved by means of lethal injections before their naked bodies were flung into the sea from aircraft at an altitude of 4 400 metres.

Mr K remembered taking part in seven or eight such flights, with two or three victims on each. He would land at remote and deserted airfields in the Namibian bush or desert, where corpses in body bags or semi-comatose prisoners would be handed over to Theron by members of the SADF's Special Forces or the SA Police counter-insurgency unit, Koevoet. They would then fly to an equally desolate landing strip and remove the rear door of the aircraft before heading 60 to 90 nautical miles out to sea. At some point during the flight, Theron would use a hypodermic syringe to inject the victims. Mr K claimed that he never knew what was in the syringe, and could not say with certainty that all the victims were dead before their bodies were thrown out of the aircraft, but he believes this would have been the case as 'it would have been inhumane to toss them out while still alive'.

On one of the earliest missions, he recalled, a life-threatening situation arose when one of the 'passengers' regained consciousness and began moving around. Theron moved from the co-pilot's seat to the rear of the aircraft and a scuffle ensued, with Mr K fighting to maintain control of the aircraft while shouting at Theron, 'For God's sake just don't shoot him!' Afterwards, he said, he asked Theron where he was 'getting the stuff' used to sedate the victims, and Theron promised he would 'speak to Dr Basson about using something better' in future. Mr K knew Basson as the medical officer for Special Forces, and testified that when he met him by chance in a corridor at Special Forces headquarters some weeks

later, because he was still 'extremely pissed off' about the incident, he told Basson: 'Make sure the stuff that's being used works next time – we can't afford problems when we are in the air.' According to Mr K, Basson assured him that he would 'take care of it'. The court found that this encounter had not taken place, and that Basson was never instrumental in the supply of sedatives or any other substances used as part of Operation Dual.

Mr K resigned from Barnacle in August 1982, when Kat Liebenberg – later to become SADF chief – took over command of Special Forces from Loots. He neither liked nor trusted Liebenberg, 'could not work with him' and was especially opposed to the new commander's plan for Barnacle to operate inside South Africa. His parting shot on quitting the unit was: 'If anyone ever wants to talk to me about Barnacle, they had better come with a wheelbarrow full of gold.' It was not until the middle of 1997 that someone did want to speak to him – investigators who came armed not with a barrow full of gold, but with 'chapter and verse about what I had done in the past'.

After leaving the unit, Mr K had cut all ties with his former colleagues, beyond sharing 'a cup of coffee' once with Theron around 1993. 'They didn't have enough money to get me back to that set-up. No ways would anyone in that organisation ever have come to talk to me again,' said Mr K. When detectives knocked on his front door, however, it didn't take him long to grasp that they had 'more information than I did – there was no point in denying anything'. It was obvious, said Mr K, that 'someone had talked', and he thought the most likely candidate was Theron. Faced with the inevitable, he took a number of documents from his safe and handed them to the police, telling them: 'Here – this is what I did, under orders.' The documents were classified top secret and provided information about Barnacle that had never before been available to anyone probing the covert hit squads. The investigators 'almost fell off their chairs', said Mr K, who was fully aware that by supplying the information, he would 'open an even deeper can of worms'. Despite this, when the investigators suggested he should apply for amnesty from the TRC he declined, offering instead to make a sworn statement, even though he was told this could be used as evidence against him. Six months later, Mr K agreed to testify against Basson, and when he did, he told the court: 'If I have to go to jail for the rest of my life, a lot of other people will have to go with me. Whatever happens, happens – and if I have to go to prison for what I did for South Africa, so be it. I was just doing my job.'

When police first questioned Theron in the middle of 1997, he likewise realised that they had enough information to prosecute him for some of his actions, but was confident that they would never uncover the full extent of his participation, since until he spilled the beans himself, 'they had no inkling about Operation Dual'. Only after praying for guidance did he tell investigators the full story, which

emerged in a series of interviews over a period of almost two years. Having related his gruesome tale in court, Theron has consistently refused to do so again, declining numerous requests for interviews by telling the media he had entered into a covenant with God, and would never speak of these matters publicly again. Basson's defence counsel spared no effort to portray Theron as a hideous monster, lacking in intellect and with a desperate need to please his superiors. During closing argument, Cilliers went so far as to call him a 'psychopath … a vile and repugnant creature', which prompted Judge Hartzenberg to attack the prosecution for conducting a 'relentless witch hunt' against Basson, while allowing Theron to 'walk around a free man'. The defence made a concerted effort to put as much distance between Basson and Theron as possible, maintaining that contact between them had been a necessary evil, limited in scope and not at all to Basson's liking.

Far from being an indiscriminate killing spree, Operation Dual was planned with customary military precision. Theron visited the SADF's highly sophisticated electronic intelligence command centre at Silvermine in the Western Cape in order to obtain accurate data about tidal movements in the oceans around southern Africa so that he could calculate the chances of 'a package' weighing as much as an average man being washed up after it was dumped in the ocean. He also consulted the manufacturers of the Piper Seneca regarding the hazards of flying without the rear door, telling them the aircraft was to be used by skydivers. Having done his homework, he was able to instruct the pilots who would take part in the operation that they should fly up to 100 nautical miles out to sea before any bodies were thrown out. Theron also identified a number of abandoned landing strips along the desolate Skeleton Coast that could be used, and informed key members of Koevoet and 5 Reconnaissance Regiment of the plan. Victims were to be identified by the commanding officer at Fort Rev and the head of Koevoet, Major-General Hans van Rensburg. During telephone or radio calls to initiate flights, they were always referred to as 'packages that need to be fed into the system'.

Theron never knew the names of any of the victims, as their identity was 'of no importance to me'. His account of the flight during which one victim had to be physically subdued was one of the most nauseating disclosures of the entire Basson trial. The supposedly powerful sedative that was administered by plunging a dart – normally used to capture game – into the man's buttocks had no effect, Theron said, and a 'mighty struggle' broke out, causing the tiny aircraft to buck and rear in mid-air. Theron first tried to strangle the terrified man with his bare hands, before slipping a length of the strong plastic cable tie used to bind the wrists of victims, around his neck. But even though he used a pair of pliers to tighten the noose and exert maximum pressure, 'he simply would not

die', and it took some 15 minutes before the victim stopped kicking and flailing about, urinating in the process, and Theron could find no pulse. The rest of the flight was uneventful, but when they landed to strip the bodies of their clothing, the plastic cable tie was so deeply embedded in the dead man's neck that Theron had 'quite a problem' removing it. The next operation involved six 'packages', and they too were manually strangled by Theron with plastic cable ties before being loaded into the aircraft. After this, Theron sought a meeting with Loots in Pretoria, telling him a 'more humane' way of killing the detainees had to be found, and the use of scheduled drugs was adopted. Years later, in an unguarded moment, Theron told his assistant, Rita Engelbrecht, that she should not imagine a murder victim died quickly, and boasted that he was 'extremely good' at giving injections to 'terrorists'.

Theron placed Basson at the scene of an operation only once. The murder charge emanating from this incident was of crucial importance to the prosecution, and although it was one of the six original charges dropped at the start of the trial, the state was nevertheless allowed to place Theron's testimony on record. In May 1982, he claimed, he and Basson travelled together to Fort Rev to 'take care of' four Swapo detainees and to allow Basson the opportunity to monitor at first hand how Theron was coping with both the physical and psychological demands of his grisly job. The night before the detainees were to die, they were placed in an interrogation room, and Theron watched from behind a two-way mirror while Basson gave each of the men a sedative pill. Theron said he saw the condemned men hide the pills in the legs of their chairs as Basson left the room, and that he had to return and watch while they swallowed the drugs. Later, Theron claimed, Basson himself injected the men with Scoline and Tubarine, demonstrating the correct procedure to be followed. Afterwards, according to Theron, 'they were dead'. Basson denied that this trip had taken place, and the value of Theron's account was severely diminished by his inability to explain how he and Basson had travelled to Fort Rev. Basson's name appeared in pilot Matie van der Linde's logbook as one of the passengers on the flight in question, but Van der Linde said Basson and Theron both left the flight at Windhoek. Basson testified that he had simply 'cadged a ride' to Namibia, where he had meetings with military and civilian health authorities in connection with 'certain epidemic outbreaks', and the judge accepted that he had never visited Fort Rev with Theron.

Throughout Basson's trial, one of the difficulties facing the court was the absence of corroborating evidence. On a number of matters, the only testimony was that of a single witness, very often the perpetrator of the crime. One such incident concerned the cremation of an unidentified black man's naked body in the furnace at Special Forces headquarters outside Pretoria. Theron said Basson

had solicited his help to dispose of the body of a patient from 1 Military Hospital. Early one evening, after all the regular staff had left the premises, Basson arrived at Speskop in an ambulance, from which he and Theron removed a body already in an advanced state of rigor mortis. It was 'something of a battle' to force the cadaver into a furnace 60 cm square and 1,8 m deep, and it took about 30 minutes for the bulk of the remains to be cremated, at which point Basson and Theron scraped together the bone fragments and burned them again. Once everything had been reduced to ashes, Theron removed them and placed them in a container. Then, he said, he and Basson went to have a drink at the Special Forces pub, where colleagues were struck by their ruddy complexions to the extent that one asked jokingly: 'What have you been up to – burning a body that you're so red in the face?' Theron responded that they had been destroying chemicals, and told the court that while driving home later that night, he threw the ashes out of his car window.

Basson's defence counsel put it to Theron that it was SADF policy not to report the deaths of any Unita or Swapo member who died at 1 Military Hospital. Their bodies would either be cremated or returned to Namibia, and for all Theron knew, according to Cilliers, this could have been a Swapo or Unita patient – who might not even have died at the military hospital, but in an aircraft 'over a foreign country' while being transported to the hospital, possibly 'while someone was trying to save his life'. Basson later testified that he had 'no idea' what Theron was talking about regarding this incident. The SADF, said Basson, had contracts with various funeral undertakers, and if a body had to be cremated, there were channels to follow, even if a patient from Angola died at 1 Military Hospital. Procedures were in place for the return of the remains or ashes of all foreigners to their country of origin, and in any event, security at Special Forces headquarters was so stringent – probably better than at any other SADF facility – that it would have been impossible for an ambulance to enter the grounds unnoticed.

Theron's last Operation Dual elimination, in December 1987, was that of Mack Anderson, who had served the Portuguese military in Mozambique as an intelligence officer before being absorbed into SADF ranks. At some point Anderson – also known as Fernando – turned vigilante, launching a series of one-man attacks on ANC supporters. When he tossed a hand grenade into a shebeen and killed five people, he was detained by the Security Police, and Theron was ordered to investigate Anderson's behaviour. After assuring his colleagues that Anderson would be 'handled' and never seen in public again, Theron arranged for his transfer to the detention barracks at 5 Recce headquarters and enlisted the help of Special Forces air support officer, HAP Potgieter.

Potgieter, who retired from the SA Air Force as a major-general a year after testifying in the Basson trial, was the last of three pilots involved in Operation

Dual. He joined the SAAF in 1961 and was posted to Speskop in 1987 as Van der Linde's successor. Special Forces had two aircraft available for covert operations – the Piper Seneca housed at Lanseria airport and a helicopter, which operated from another private airport, Grand Central. Potgieter's duties included the planning of air support for Special Forces, including covert and cross-border operations, and assisting the CCB. Permission to use the Seneca had to be obtained from Basson. When he first arrived at Speskop, Potgieter was briefed by Van der Linde that he might be required to take part in certain 'unorthodox' operations. If asked to fly an aircraft from which 'terrorists' would be thrown, Potgieter should make sure the orders had been approved at top level, Van der Linde advised.

Potgieter said he 'refused point blank' to be involved in any such flights, and informed the Special Forces commander accordingly. Nevertheless, when Major-General Joep Joubert ordered Potgieter to fly the helicopter to Phalaborwa and link up with Theron on the morning of Saturday, 12 December, he did so. Over breakfast with the 5 Recce intelligence officer, Dave Drew, Potgieter was told that an operator had to be transported to Mozambique and dropped five to seven kilometres across the border. On arriving at the base, an 'ashen-faced' man clad in a white overall was helped into the helicopter by Drew and Theron, flown across the Kruger National Park and 'laid on the ground' in the Mozambican bush by Theron. Potgieter said he confirmed with Theron before taking off from Phalaborwa that the passenger was alive, but Theron said he injected Anderson with the lethal triple cocktail of Ketelaar, Scoline and Tubarine before his body was stripped naked and loaded into the helicopter. The one thing the two men agreed on was that they spent the night at the picturesque Coach House hotel at Tzaneen before returning to Pretoria.

Van der Linde, former commanding officer of the SAAF's 41 and 17 squadrons as well as the Dunottar Flying School, was aware of covert operations carried out by D40/Barnacle long before he was inducted into the body-dumping fraternity by Kat Liebenberg. Shortly after assuming command of Special Forces, Liebenberg told Van der Linde there were 'certain tasks' that Theron had to carry out from time to time, and that Van der Linde was to act as his pilot. As a professional military man, Van der Linde told the court, he could not refuse the order, and he may have made as many as 10 'death flights', though he found the task 'extremely unpleasant'. With one exception, he 'never looked at the cargo' or had any idea how many bodies were loaded into the aircraft, 'because my job was to fly the plane'. On a flight from Zeerust in 1984, however, Van der Linde left his cockpit to check that the four bodies in the rear of the aircraft were securely hidden under a tarpaulin, because he knew he would have to land at Eros, Windhoek, to refuel and wanted to make sure that his human cargo was well concealed.

After killing Anderson, Theron quit Special Forces, attending a year-long staff officer's course before returning to Military Intelligence, where he was placed in charge of security for all the SADF's top-secret projects. A day after taking early retirement in 1990, he went to work for Project Coast as the resident counter-intelligence officer, by prearrangement with Basson, operating from a front company named Centurion Security Consultants. Theron remained associated with the project until it was shut down. In 1992, he claimed, Basson discussed with him a plan to distribute toxic beer at taxi ranks in the Eastern Cape, which was seething with pre-election violence at the time. The contaminated beer was collected from Basson's office by Theron and Engelbrecht prior to being transported to Jeffreys Bay by Theron, who planned to draw a former colleague, Danie Phaal, into the plot. However, Phaal spurned his overtures, and Theron eventually threw the bottles into the veld, making sure they all broke. The judge exonerated Basson of involvement in what he described as 'a truly bizarre idea, which makes no sense at all'.

Phaal joined the SADF straight from school in 1977, qualifying as an instructor before joining the Special Air Task Force and becoming involved in reconnaissance of foreign airfields and aircraft crash sites. He also underwent advanced medic training and was trained in the use of explosives and bush survival by the time he was selected to undergo a test to determine if he was capable of 'eliminating enemies of the state'. He passed the test – which involved the use of a silenced weapon – with flying colours, and joined Special Forces at the end of 1980. Theron was his immediate superior. Phaal's duties included issuing false identity documents to operators for use on covert missions, supplying vehicles that could not be traced back to the SADF, electronic and photographic surveillance and investigating SADF members who had 'loose lips' or were considered a threat to clandestine operations. His introduction to Barnacle was gradual, and initially confined to training members in parachuting. He also trained a number of Special Forces doctors in parachuting and spent three weeks in Namibia's Caprivi Strip giving Basson a one-on-one course in survival.

Phaal's first task as a fully fledged Barnacle operator involved the elimination of a fellow agent, Christopher – one of his parachuting students. It was suspected that Christopher intended to expose Barnacle's activities when he next went home to Zimbabwe on leave, and Phaal and another Barnacle operator, Trevor Floyd, were instructed to offer Christopher a lift, on the pretext that they were travelling to Messina. On the afternoon of Sunday, 14 February 1983, the three men set off on their journey, Christopher dressed in his best suit of clothes and toting a suitcase. Some distance north of Pretoria, Floyd offered Phaal and Christopher each a beer. Phaal had been told in advance that Christopher's would be laced with a sedative, and as soon as the unsuspecting man fell asleep, he administered

an intravenous injection of Ketelaar. The plan was to keep Christopher alive until first light the next day, when they were to deliver him to the airfield at Zeerust, but somewhere along the way Christopher stopped breathing. Theron had warned Phaal that this might happen, and that if it did, he should fold Christopher's body into a foetal position before rigor mortis set in. Christopher was a tall man, but Phaal carried out his orders to the letter. On arrival at the airfield, he was tense and agitated, doing 'just about anything I could' to take his mind off events. His wife had packed a plastic container of grapes for him before leaving home, and although he felt extremely nauseous, he ate the fruit while waiting for the aircraft. Before the Piper Seneca with Van der Linde and Theron aboard landed, Sergeant-Major Chris Pretorius, who was in charge of the detention barracks at Phalaborwa, arrived in a pick-up truck with another three detainees. Phaal helped Theron inject the three newcomers in the neck and heart before all four bodies were stripped naked and loaded into the aircraft. Once it was airborne, Phaal and Floyd drove back to Pretoria, stopping twice along the way: for breakfast at a fast-food restaurant and to burn Christopher's clothes and suitcase at a municipal refuse dump.

Some time afterwards, Phaal was told by Theron to be at the Waterkloof Air Base early one morning, where 'someone' would hand him a substance for use in an operation at Ondangwa, in the Operational Area. According to Phaal, Basson himself handed over a small vial, about the size of a bottle of eyedrops, containing a liquid which he was instructed to mix with orange juice (popularly known among SADF troops as Jungle Juice) and give to a victim who would be identified when Phaal arrived. As soon as the man showed signs of illness, Phaal was to transport him back to 1 Military Hospital on the first available flight. Masquerading as a doctor, Phaal was taken to the detention barracks at Ondangwa by an intelligence officer, and the laced juice was given to a Swapo prisoner to drink. The next day, in response to an urgent summons by the intelligence officer, Phaal found the detainee 'in bad shape', his lower body and cell both covered in blood. He immediately arranged for the man to be flown to Pretoria, where he was loaded into an ambulance on arrival at Waterkloof. He never saw the man again, but was told some time later by Basson that he had died. Basson denied all involvement in this incident, and the judge found Phaal's account totally implausible, leaving a question mark over how he acquired what was probably a vial of Brodifacoum. Classified as a superwarfarin, this poison, generally used to kill rats, prevents the blood from clotting, causing massive haemorrhaging within a few hours of ingestion. Researchers at Roodeplaat tested the substance on eight vervet monkeys, which all bled to death within 24 hours.

The most traumatic elimination in which Phaal was involved was that of Victor de Fonseca, a trained Special Forces soldier with whom he had worked

closely, and whose office was just a few doors away from Phaal's own. De Fonseca, an ex-Mozambican, was diagnosed with brain cancer, and despite receiving every available treatment, he became a security risk when he began talking to fellow SADF members and outsiders about covert operations. Eventually, Theron told Phaal to fetch De Fonseca from the detention barracks at Phalaborwa, as he had to be 'brought under control'. Back at Speskop, Phaal gave his colleague a cup of tea to which he had surreptitiously added a powdery substance given to him by either Theron or Bothma. For Phaal, killing De Fonseca was 'not an easy thing to do', and in frustration he crushed the metal teaspoon he had used to stir the poisoned tea, bending it almost double and keeping it as a macabre reminder of the event for more than 15 years before handing it to the court as an exhibit. Whatever the powder was, however, it did not work, and Phaal was ordered by Theron to make a second attempt on De Fonseca's life. This time, he took his colleague into Pretoria's central business district on the pretext of renewing a vehicle licence. While De Fonseca was out of sight, Phaal bought two containers of orange juice, injected a vial of liquid Theron had given him into one and gave it to De Fonseca to drink. On 13 August 1986, Phaal was told by either Basson or Theron that De Fonseca was dead. It was never proved that De Fonseca was poisoned.

Along with other CCB agents, Phaal testified that poison was an acceptable means of eliminating targets. While Barnacle was still in existence, he said, he would obtain whatever toxins were needed from Special Forces doctors. Later, more 'cut-outs' were built into the system, and requests for poisonous substances had to be channelled through the CCB's designated medical coordinator – initially Dr Gerrie Odendaal, later Dr Frik Botha. Like Theron, Phaal never considered applying for amnesty from the Truth Commission, because he had 'no desire' for his past to become public knowledge. Confronted with the fact that Theron had spilled the beans, however, he felt he had no choice but to become a state witness, though he made it clear from the witness stand that it was 'thanks only to Johan Theron's new religion' that he was there at all.

Trevor Floyd was one of five soldiers handpicked by the legendary Colonel Jan Breytenbach to train Nigerian troops during the Biafran War in the 1960s. The highly decorated and consummate sergeant-major was also one of the 12 founder members of 1 Reconnaissance Commando, the embryo of the SADF's Special Forces. In 1974, he was appointed regimental sergeant-major of 1 Recce and was in the group that launched a daring seaborne raid on ANC targets in the Tanzanian capital of Dar es Salaam in 1972. In April 1979, Floyd was called to a meeting with Loots at Ondangwa and invited to join a new unit that would conduct operations more clandestine than anything he had previously been involved in. Even though this would mean a major upheaval for his family – relocating from Durban to Pretoria, no more living on a military base, cutting all

ties with friends and colleagues, absences from home for months on end – Floyd accepted, and for the first six months lived in a caravan at the Broederstroom smallholding where Barnacle was being shaped. When his wife and children moved to Pretoria in January 1978, it was to a house bought with SADF funds. Floyd accepted that killing people was part of his job – after all, he pointed out, when he joined the SADF as a young man, he was told he would be trained to kill the enemy, and from that time forward, no one ever told him he could *not* kill his country's foes – such as Swapo and ANC members – wherever he found them. While lethal injections were the norm during Barnacle eliminations, on one occasion Floyd and Mr K had to bludgeon three victims to death with four-pound hammers because Mr K had forgotten to take along the drugs.

In 1985, Floyd was told by Liebenberg that Peter Kalangula, a senior official with the Owambo administration in Namibia, had become a 'thorn in the flesh' of the security forces. Kalangula was the liaison man between the security forces and the Owambo population, but he had become alarmed at the high number of Owambos who were being detained, and suggested to the Administrator-General in Windhoek that a committee be appointed to investigate the situation. 'I had thought,' Kalangula said in an affidavit filed with the court, 'that the SADF and the SA Police were in Owamboland to protect my people.' But the growing realisation that they were being subjected to sustained harassment placed a severe strain on his relationship with the security forces. When a landmine planted on the road leading to Kalangula's house failed to bring him to heel, Liebenberg told Floyd to come up with a more effective plan. On a Sunday afternoon, Floyd said, he drove to a townhouse in what he remembered as being the Pretoria suburb of Sunnyside, where Basson gave him a pair of white surgical gloves, a pair of black gloves and a small plastic container in which there was a dark brown ointment. Basson also gave him an antidote, for use in the event that Floyd accidentally got any of the ointment on his skin. Armed with the ointment and details from Liebenberg about what car Kalangula drove and where he parked it at work, Floyd went to Namibia, parking his own vehicle next to Kalangula's, with the intention of smearing the toxic ointment on the door handle of the car. However, a security guard patrolling the parking lot prevented Floyd from carrying out his task, and after waiting as long as he dared without arousing suspicion, he aborted the plan, acutely aware that he had to 'get out of Ondangwa quickly' as there were too many SADF members who knew and might recognise him. Basson denied involvement in this elimination plan, and Floyd was unable to find or identify the house where he claimed to have met Basson.

When Barnacle was reorganised and expanded into the CCB in 1986, Joe Verster was appointed 'managing director' and Floyd, code-named Richard Chalmers, was placed in charge of European operations – Region 5 of six in the new structure.

Using SADF funds, he set up a front company on the Isle of Man. Precisely what – and how many – operations Floyd was involved in abroad remain his secret. To date, he has disclosed details of only one – the attempted assassination of two top-ranking ANC officials, Ronnie Kasrils and Pallo Jordan, while they were in exile in London. The order came from Verster, but it was the ever-resourceful Floyd who suggested the murder weapon should be a poison-tipped umbrella, such as that used by the Russians in 1976 to kill one of their own agents, Georgi Markov.

An authentic British brolly was adapted for the purpose, and in 1987 Floyd travelled to London where, in classic cloak-and-dagger fashion, he met a courier on a train. At the time, Floyd knew his contact's face, but not his name, though he subsequently learned it was bio-engineer Jan Lourens. They drove from Ascot station to a nearby pub in a white car that Lourens had parked earlier, changing to a Bentley for the rest of their short journey to a cottage which, Lourens told Floyd, both he and Basson used frequently for business and pleasure. Once behind closed doors, Lourens produced the assassination kit – the umbrella had been fitted with a trigger device and the tip modified to hide a plastic syringe that released several micro-needles simultaneously.

While showing Floyd how to screw the syringe into the umbrella, Lourens accidentally got a small quantity of the toxin on his hand, and unthinkingly licked it. Realising that he had just ingested a lethal poison, Floyd said, Lourens 'got the fright of his life'. Floyd, alone in an unfamiliar environment, had no idea what to do, realising that even if he knew where the nearest hospital was, he could hardly take Lourens there for treatment in the circumstances. All he could do was suggest Lourens drink the universal antidote, milk. Lourens himself said he also drank an entire bottle of the disinfectant Dettol before going to lie down. Whether it helped or whether the amount he swallowed was simply too small to do any harm, he suffered no ill effects and was able to drive Floyd back to the railway station later that afternoon. The intelligence Floyd had been given proved to be of little use – Jordan had long since relocated and Kasrils 'never seemed to be at home' – and in due course, he cancelled the Portuguese hit squad that had been contracted to commit the murders and threw both the umbrella and the vial of poison into the River Thames.

Floyd stayed with the CCB until it was disbanded, then secured a civilian post with 4 Recce Regiment at Langebaan in the Western Cape. When investigators in the Basson case knocked on his door in 1998, he was not overly surprised. He had seen his former colleague Danie Phaal shortly before, and was aware that a probe was being conducted into covert operations. He had long thought it possible that 'these stories' would eventually surface, and had been prudent enough to submit an amnesty application to the TRC, although he omitted details of all

the eliminations he was involved in, except for a car bomb that killed KwaNdebele Cabinet minister Piet Ntuli. His reasoning was that the TRC was not empowered to grant amnesty for operations beyond South Africa's borders, and that 'internal' eliminations had been the result of what he considered lawful orders. The Ntuli bomb was different, however, because Floyd and other CCB members had been told to withdraw from the operation when it was established that he was not an 'approved' target, and that the Security Police were engaged in a frolic of their own. He thus considered Ntuli's elimination an unlawful order, hence one he needed to disclose. He could see no reason to reveal any of the other operations he had been involved in, since the only killings he was responsible for had taken place 'in a war situation'. When first asked by investigators to make a statement about his activities, Floyd was so incensed at the suggestion that he had done anything except the job for which he was trained that he threatened to take the detectives to court. On reflection, however, he sat down with the investigators and they talked, and for the first time Floyd realised that he could face criminal charges for doing what he had always considered his duty. After discussing the situation with his wife, he decided to 'come clean'.

While the Basson trial fell short of expectations that the full extent of the CCB's bloody reign would finally be exposed, the evidence presented has added significantly to its dossier of death. At the very least, documents produced during the trial show conclusively that arch-securocrat Magnus Malan both knew about and authorised the establishment of D40/Barnacle a full decade before the date on which he claims he became aware of the CCB's existence. Ever since the 1990 Harms Commission's inquiry into hit squads, Malan has publicly denied that 'eliminations' by the CCB were officially sanctioned, and he and a host of generals refused to apply for amnesty from the TRC on the grounds that the SADF was never guilty of committing gross human rights violations. Malan's 1997 submission to the TRC on behalf of the SADF stated categorically that the killing of the former government's political opponents 'never formed part of the SADF's brief' and reiterated that he, personally, 'never issued or authorised an order to assassinate anybody'. While that may be true, the Basson trial proved that Malan himself authorised the structure of the covert unit that embarked on a campaign of mass murder of Swapo prisoners of war within two months of being set up in May 1979. Malan has consistently refused to comment on the evidence about Operation Dual, or the top-secret documents furnished by Mr K, which state unequivocally that within 18 months of Barnacle being set up, the unit's chief function was 'eliminations'. Nor has Malan reacted to the 9 January 1981 letter to Mr K, signed by Loots – and copied to the SADF's senior staff officers operations, finance, personnel, intelligence, security and logistics – which spells out Barnacle's purpose as 'ultra-sensitive operations' and its functions as:

- eliminations
- ambushes against persons of strategic importance
- carrying out other super-sensitive operations as ordered
- gathering combat intelligence in respect of above-mentioned operations
- gathering intelligence as ordered in cases where other sources could not be utilised
- carrying out certain specialist security tasks for Special Forces, e.g. surveillance of sources/agents and conducting random security checks.

Chillingly, in light of the alleged abuse of Project Coast, a December 1980 document titled 'Organisational Investigation into Project Barnacle', drawn up by management consultant S Serfontein, includes 'execution of chemical operations' as one of the unit's tasks. This was omitted in the letter from Loots to Mr K, which states that the Special Forces commander was to be kept informed 'continuously' of progress on operations and specifies that the unit's director was not allowed to make operational decisions, since 'this authority rests with Chief: SADF through Commanding General Special Forces'. In the SADF chain of command, the head of Special Forces reported directly to the Chief: SADF – and he, in turn, reported directly to the Minister of Defence.

Despite documentary proof that Malan personally approved the purchase of the smallholding where Barnacle was based in June 1979, he has never publicly admitted that he knew anything about a unit by that name. In 1990, Malan told Parliament that the CCB had originated in the mid-1980s. Technically, this is correct, since it was at that time that the organisation was restructured and renamed, but there can no longer be any doubt that the CCB was a direct descendant of Barnacle and D40. In March 1991, Malan said in a statement that he had only 'become aware' of the CCB in November 1989. One week later, he was forced to amend his claim, admitting that the 'concept' had been known to him earlier, but that he had only learned in 1989 about Region 6, which operated within South Africa. In 1997 he went a little further, telling the TRC he had approved the CCB 'in principle' as a vital component of Special Forces in the fields of infiltration and intelligence gathering.

Malan was never called to testify at the Harms Commission, which is now known to have been deliberately misled, lied to and given only the information a cabal of top-ranking security force officers approved for public release. As recently as April 2000, former CCB managing director Joe Verster told the TRC he had been ordered to 'sacrifice Region 6' in order to avoid disclosure of the full extent of CCB activities. It was this region, headed by former Brixton Murder and Robbery Squad chief Staal Burger, that was behind an attempt to intimidate Archbishop Desmond Tutu, by suspending a baboon foetus from a tree in the

garden of his official residence, and a plan to murder the ANC government's first Minister of Justice, Dullah Omar. Testimony during the Basson trial showed that the foetus probably emanated from RRL, which was also the source of a white powder (which the CCB agents believed to be digoxin) that was to be added to Omar's food in the hope of inducing a fatal heart attack – another plot involving the most notorious Region 6 agents: Slang van Zyl, Calla Botha and Ferdi Barnard.

Deadly organophosphates used in the attempted murder of leading anti-apartheid cleric, the Reverend Frank Chikane, most likely also came from RRL and were in all probability smeared on some of his underwear by members of the Security Police. Chikane was secretary-general of the SA Council of Churches and one of PW Botha's harshest critics at the time of the attempt on his life. In recent years, former members of the Security Police have admitted they were responsible for bombing Khotso House, the SACC's Johannesburg headquarters, shortly before Chikane was due to travel to America for a meeting with President George Bush (senior) in a bid to persuade him not to roll over South Africa's international debt. On the eve of his departure, Chikane flew to Namibia, where he fell ill almost immediately. He was treated at a German mission hospital for what was diagnosed as acute gastritis before returning to Johannesburg in an aircraft sent by the SACC to fetch him. By the time he was admitted to the Florence Nightingale Clinic he was desperately ill, suffering severe body pain and respiratory distress.

Doctors struggled to keep Chikane alive through the night and spent the next five days conducting extensive tests in an attempt to diagnose his condition. They were unable to do so, however, and when he was discharged on 27 April Chikane immediately travelled to Cape Town, where he spent 10 days recuperating at Archbishop Tutu's home. By then, the suitcase of clothes he had taken with him to Namibia had been recovered, and Chikane simply added a few more items to the contents before resuming his trip to America, where he planned to spend some time with his wife, a student at the University of Wisconsin, before going on to Washington. Less than 12 hours after arriving in America, while attending a reception in clothes taken from his suitcase, Chikane again fell violently ill, showing identical symptoms to those he had in Namibia. He was rushed to hospital and only regained consciousness 12 hours later. Later that day, the gravely ill Chikane was transferred to the University of Wisconsin teaching hospital and placed under the care of Professor Daniel Smith. Once again, he recovered and was discharged – only to be rushed back to hospital 24 hours later. This time, he was treated for pancreatitis and discharged as soon as he showed signs of recovery. Chikane's third emergency admission came two days later, and this time, Professor Smith called in the FBI. All Chikane's clothing and personal effects

were taken for tests in the FBI laboratory, and all three places he had stayed at since arriving in Wisconsin were also combed for clues. His wife and their hostess, Donna Shalala – later Health Secretary in President Bill Clinton's first Cabinet – bought him an entire new wardrobe of clothes and this time, after being treated, Chikane stayed healthy.

Testifying in the Basson trial, Smith said Chikane's symptoms had been typical of exposure to toxins, but based on his movements since arriving in America, Smith had not been able to pinpoint any possible source of organophosphate poisoning, since such substances are normally used in the agricultural sector. Blood tests indicated that Chikane had indeed been exposed to these deadly toxins, and his American doctors issued a statement suggesting that someone had deliberately tried to kill the cleric. The only common denominator in all four attacks was the suitcase of clothing with which Chikane had originally left Johannesburg. Unfortunately, by the time the FBI got around to testing the contents of his suitcase, most of his clothes had been laundered, and conclusive evidence of poisoning could not be found.

One of many remaining mysteries about covert units operating within the security forces, and especially the SADF, concerns the relationship of the CCB, which resorted under Special Forces, to the two most secret Military Intelligence units, the directorates of Special Tasks (DST) and Covert Collection (DCC). There are strong indications of cooperation between the three units, even a measure of cross-pollination of employees, but it is not yet clear which, if any, was the senior organisation or whether they simply worked together on an ad hoc basis whenever this was expedient.

Jan Anton Nieuwoudt joined the SADF in 1973, and 10 years later moved to Military Intelligence, where he was assigned to the Homefront Desk, dealing with identification of ANC and PAC targets, in the form of both individuals and facilities. The dossiers he compiled contained information gleaned from the National Intelligence Service's 'Valkoog' (falcon eye) electronic surveillance system, among others. His immediate superior was Brigadier Harold Doncaster, and his reports were submitted to the Chief: SADF and sometimes to the Minister of Defence. From the end of 1983, Nieuwoudt was seconded to Special Forces for two years and met weekly with the head of the SA Police hit squad, C10, based at Vlakplaas. He liaised directly with Security Police branches throughout South Africa, with the head of Barnacle and with operators on the ground, supplying them with information about potential targets. Suggested targets for elimination were submitted to the SADF chief and on at least one occasion to the Minister of Defence who, in turn, took the proposal to the State Security Council. This situation led to the establishment of TREWITS (Teen-rewolusionêre Inligting Taakspan; the English term CRITT – Counter-Revolutionary Intelligence Task

Team – is almost never used), the existence of which was first disclosed by former Police Commissioner Johan van der Merwe during the amnesty hearings of security policemen Jack Cronje, Jacques Hechter, Paul van Vuuren and Wouter Mentz in 1997. The team included representatives of Military Intelligence, the Security Police and National Intelligence, and was primarily designed to coordinate the identification of targets for elimination, so as to ensure that the various covert units did not eliminate one another's undercover agents by mistake.

Nieuwoudt testified that he instructed a DCC agent, Henri van der Westhuizen, to buy six or eight cans of beer in Swaziland in July 1989, which were handed to colleagues at Speskop to be laced with poison. A petrol-bomb attack on the LM Restaurant in Swaziland had killed a number of military agents, and a revenge attack was planned against ANC activist Enoch 'Knox' Dhlamini. When the cans of beer were returned to Nieuwoudt, he gave one to an agent in Swaziland, who reported some time afterwards that Dhlamini had drunk the beer. When Dhlamini died in Manzini's Nazarene Hospital on 28 July 1989, the official cause of death was given as acute haemorrhagic pancreatitis. Shortly before he died, and unable to speak, he wrote a note to his daughter telling her that a few days before falling ill he had attended a barbecue at which he had drunk a few beers.

Van der Westhuizen was one of the covert agents exposed to various facets of the security machinery. He joined Military Intelligence in 1981 and was assigned to TREWITS in 1985, tasked with including all available information on the ANC in the 1986 target lists. At the beginning of 1987 he was transferred to Speskop, where his job was to prepare target dossiers – the final step before an elimination was authorised. Later still, he joined the terrorism section of DCC, but was not in the building on the day it was raided by the Goldstone Commission in November 1992. Nor was he able to shed any light on what had happened to a filing cabinet containing about a dozen bottles of poisoned beer and two bottles of poisoned wine, which disappeared from his office on that day.

Colonel Cor van Niekerk – one of more than 20 senior SADF and Security Police officers acquitted in 1996, along with Magnus Malan, on charges of being responsible for the KwaMakutha massacre in which a number of women and children died – was in charge of Renamo support from 1979 to 1992 in the Directorate of Special Tasks. The SADF had assumed responsibility for Renamo in 1980, when this role was relinquished by the Central Intelligence Organisation in Zimbabwe, and SADF policy was that while every possible means of support would be given to Renamo, it was to remain an independent movement rather than a surrogate force. Similar support for the Angolan rebel movement, Unita, was run by a Brigadier Thackeray and Colonel Mo Oelschig. In the mid-1980s, DST's annual budget was some R300 million, of which Renamo's share, at its peak, was between R12 million and R14 million. According to Van Niekerk,

cooperation between Special Forces and DST was clearly defined – Special Forces provided the fighting men, DST the logistical support.

One of Van Niekerk's most trusted assistants was a young national serviceman, Roland Hunter. Several months after being drawn into the operation, Hunter began to question what he was involved in, and decided to contact the ANC to furnish them with vital information about the extent of the SADF's support for Renamo, as well as to warn them in advance of the time and date of the monthly resupply air drops. His contacts were Derek Hanekom, who later became Minister of Agriculture in the ANC government, and his wife Trish. During 1983, however, DST became aware that sensitive information was being leaked by someone close to the operation, and after an intensive investigation, Hunter was identified as the spy. According to Van Niekerk, the SADF then faced a dilemma. The evidence against Hunter warranted charges of high treason and espionage, but if he was placed on trial, details of the highly sensitive Renamo support would become public knowledge. Van Niekerk was ordered to explore all possible options to find a solution. Transvaal Attorney-General Don Brunette advised against holding a trial in camera, suggesting that the military should try instead to make a deal with Hunter – have him plead guilty to lesser charges in return for a lighter prison sentence, thus avoiding the leading of any evidence in open court. Van Niekerk also looked into ways that Hunter might disappear without trace, and turned to Basson for advice in this regard. They met at Basson's home, where Van Niekerk sketched a hypothetical situation, asking how someone could be 'got rid of' without arousing suspicion. Basson was alleged to have suggested that mamba venom was the answer, and prosecutors tried to show that this was the reason he requested both a live snake and a vial of its venom from Dr Daan Goosen, but the plan was never carried out. Van Niekerk was ordered to hand Hunter over to the Security Police and, after being arrested on 8 December 1983, he struck a deal, pleading guilty to the charge of possession of classified documents in return for a five-year sentence.

The list of covert operations carried out by the CCB, DST and DCC during the heyday of apartheid's securocrats and canvassed during the Basson trial is by no means complete, but it would be remiss of the authors not to mention some of those in which Pieter Botes – alias Bobby Greeff – was involved. He was one of the first dissident agents to blow the whistle on CCB operations, and thus also to feel the full impact of his betrayal. Botes was personally recruited by Joep Joubert while he was a member of 2 Parachute Battalion, training Unita troops at Rundu and Fort Doppies in the Caprivi. His fellow officers were David Fourie, Danie Phaal, Corrie Meerholz and Bill Pelser. In due course, Botes was assigned to the Zimbabwe region, but after a difference of opinion with Joe Verster he was moved to Region 2, Swaziland and Mozambique, working under Meerholz and

eventually taking over the region himself. Botes was given poison on three occasions for use against targets, and though he was never told officially what the origin of the toxins was, he claimed it was 'common knowledge' among CCB members that 'Doc Wouter's team' would supply them with anything they needed.

In 1987 Henri van der Westhuizen, then a major with Military Intelligence, identified ANC supporter Gibson Mondlane as a target. When Van der Westhuizen learned that Mondlane planned to spend a specific day in Maputo during April, he passed the information on to Botes, who already had authorisation from Verster to eliminate Mondlane and had secured ampoules of a slow-acting poison from the CCB medical coordinator. He gave the poison to an operator named Baloyi, who managed to administer it to Mondlane, who died in the Maputo hospital. After a serious confrontation with Verster, Botes quit the CCB at the end of August 1989. During their last stormy meeting, he said, Verster threatened to kill him, and a week later his front company office was petrol-bombed. Botes went to see Law and Order Minister Adriaan Vlok, who promised to have the CCB investigated, but nothing happened, except that threats were made against the school attended by one of Botes's children, which prompted him to spill the beans to the media.

In response to the testimony of several witnesses implicating Basson in the supply of toxins to CCB agents, Basson said the only drugs he dispensed to members of Special Forces or the Security Police were sedatives used to incapacitate targets during cross-border abductions, tranquillisers to still the nerves of edgy operators or sleeping tablets to help them get a good night's rest. He also denied having issued orders to any of the doctors working under him to supply Theron, Phaal or any of the other CCB operators with such substances as Scoline, Tubarine and Ketelaar, but could not explain why a succession of witnesses – including several who made no secret of their continued respect for him – would incriminate themselves in heinous crimes for the sole purpose of falsely implicating him. Prosecutor Dr Torie Pretorius said it was nothing less than astonishing that the CCB, which fell under the direct control of Special Forces and was known to have used poison to eliminate targets, had never once asked Basson – the unquestioned expert in the field – to supply them with any toxins. Indeed, interjected the judge, why had they not approached the doyen of poison? There could be only one of two reasons, said Basson: either they did not use poison, or they had another source.

6

The Drug War

WHEN DETECTIVES SET about catching a drug dealer in January 1997, they believed they would bag a Gauteng-based syndicate both making and supplying massive quantities of Ecstasy, the designer drug synonymous with the rave culture sweeping across South Africa at the time. What they netted in a series of three sting operations over a 10-day period was Dr Wouter Basson – and the world's first Ecstasy capsules (as opposed to the more common tablets).

For members of the drug squad, the outcome was a far cry from the anticipated result. Detectives had sought the largest amount of 'stake money' in the SA Narcotics Bureau's history – R700 000 – after being alerted by informer Steve Martin to 'huge' trade in Ecstasy. At R50 a tablet, even the lesser amount of R200 000 approved for the operation should have netted 4 000 units of 'E', which police hoped would lead them to the source. Ultimately, 3 214 capsules of the street drug formed the basis of charges brought against Basson. Fifty-six of those capsules were found abandoned in a Delta G Scientific laboratory and led to the arrest of Dr Johan Koekemoer, who would later testify, after all charges against him had been dropped, that he had made the MDMA in the capsules, but had not known that it had been encapsulated.

How the leading organic chemist at Project Coast's chemical warfare facility came to spend the greater part of 1990 making synthetic drugs is a story that began almost 20 years earlier. On 16 June 1976, members of the SA Police opened fire in the township of Soweto on black schoolchildren protesting against the compulsory teaching of Afrikaans in schools. The police used live ammunition to quell the riots, killing a number of protestors. The international community responded with outrage, and the incident provoked a tightening of sanctions against the apartheid

government. It was the resulting diplomatic crisis, according to General Constand Viljoen, head of the SADF at the time, that focused the attention of the security forces on the need to develop new crowd control agents – measures which Viljoen hoped would 'neutralise the offensive spirit' of the protestors. With this in mind, Basson was authorised in 1983 by the Minister of Law and Order, the Commissioner of Police and the Surgeon General to collect confiscated street drugs from General Lothar Neethling, head of the Police Forensic Laboratory. According to Neethling's testimony at the TRC, 'the philosophy … was that under certain circumstances one could provide or use sedatives which could possibly decrease the anger of the crowds'.

In the quest for calming agents, Neethling claimed, the first priority was to produce two types of teargas: standard CS (which had been used by the police in the past) and the more potent product, CR. Once these agents were available to the security forces, the scientists of Project Coast would turn their attention to the development of other agents that could 'influence the state of mind of the crowds'. Three common street drugs were initially chosen as candidates for this programme: Mandrax, LSD and cannabis (known commonly as dagga in South Africa). Research reports from Delta G Scientific show that by the late 1980s researchers were investigating the synthesis of cannabinoid analogues under the code-name FP/00/T52 (Final Product T52), but the research came to naught when the idea of using cannabis for crowd control was found to be impractical. The Mandrax research went on for much longer. By 1985 Neethling had given Basson between 100 000 and 200 000 tablets confiscated by the police during drug raids, with the intention of developing a methaqualone compound that could be loaded into hand grenades and used against protestors. Five thousand LSD tablets were given to Basson with the same process in mind.

While Neethling, Basson and Niel Knobel were considering the development of crowd control agents from these commonly abused narcotics, Dr JP de Villiers, head of the Applied Chemistry Unit at the CSIR was assessing a more sinister application. In 1982, De Villiers addressed a meeting of scientists on the history of chemical warfare and the work done in the United States and Britain on psychomimetic substances such as LSD. It was this work, said De Villiers, combined with the moral leniency of the time, that 'led some years later to chemical warfare's one outstanding success. A success that was caused more by the social tolerance of the period than by the clandestine contribution of the enemy. This success consisted of the inflicting of over ten percent casualties on the Americans in Vietnam by the distribution of drugs to their forces. If this is considered a chemical warfare action [which it is not], and it was undoubtedly covertly supported and managed by the Vietcong and their patrons, it is the most successful example of chemical warfare in history and one that should be

taken most seriously, far more seriously than the threat of conventional warfare attack.'

De Villiers's comments might have been unremarkable had it not been for the testimony of timid pharmacist Steven Beukes, who revealed that in 1985 he was asked by Basson to manufacture exact replicas of commercial Mandrax tablets. Beukes, who at the time was a qualified pharmacist doing his national service at 7 Medical Battalion, testified that Basson had given him an official SADF cheque with which to buy a tablet press, a rough formula for Mandrax and the active ingredients for approximately 100 000 tablets, stamped MX on one side and RL (for Roussel Laboratories, legal manufacturers of Mandrax) on the other.

Beukes made the tablets, but one of the major points of dispute during Basson's trial was whether they actually contained Mandrax or not. Basson said the tablets were placebos, made for Special Forces operators to use while infiltrating arms-for-drugs smuggling routes used by the ANC's armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK). However, former Civil Cooperation Bureau agent Danie Phaal testified that Basson had offered him 100 000 Mandrax tablets to sell to surfers at Jeffreys Bay in the Eastern Cape in 1992. The self-confessed state assassin found the suggestion that he become a drug dealer so abhorrent that he reported the offer to former CCB chief Joe Verster – who in turn passed the information on to the National Intelligence Agency, according to Phaal.

One of the biggest hurdles faced by the prosecution was trying to bridge the seven-year gap between the tablets made by Beukes and those allegedly offered to Phaal. In the end, the court found it highly unlikely that Basson would have retained Mandrax tablets for such a long period before trying to peddle them, and Phaal's evidence was rejected.

According to Knobel and Basson, research done by Delta G scientists on Mandrax confiscated by the police resulted in the development, to prototype stage, of mortar bombs filled with methaqualone, which were tested on humans and animals in 1986 and 1987. Animals, said Basson, were given the drug orally and exposed to methaqualone smoke, while human guinea-pigs, volunteers from the SA Police, were exposed to the smoke while engaged in a simulated battle organised by Neethling. The results were disappointing. Far from having a calming effect on the test subjects, they showed elevated levels of tension, and, according to Knobel, this led to the halting of methaqualone production in 1988. However, a production report from Delta G Scientific shows that the company produced a ton of methaqualone during that year. While it is possible that this was a variant of the original product, both batches apparently produced the same results.

Despite the fact that tests showed methaqualone to be unsuitable for crowd control purposes, the Coordinating Management Committee authorised Basson to continue the search for a suitable variant, resulting in an extremely complicated

deal involving Croatian government officials, the head of the Swiss intelligence service, a Danish spy and forged Vatican bearer bonds, less than two years before South Africa signed the international Chemical Weapons Convention, which sought to ban production of chemical weapons and restrict trade in both agents that could be weaponised and their precursors. Indeed, it was the looming restrictions that prompted Project Coast's military managers to accelerate the drug programme in 1992, so that substances to be used for crowd control could be weaponised before procurement of chemical agents became more difficult.

In line with the CMC's instructions, Basson began negotiations at the end of 1991 to acquire a large quantity of methaqualone through the Croatian Minister of Energy Affairs, M Kajifeg. The deal was brokered by Swiss arms dealer Jurg Jacomet and, according to Basson, formed part of a much bigger transaction, involving the purchase of enriched uranium by former Swiss intelligence chief General Peter Regli. By 1992, when it was finally agreed that the Croats would supply Basson with 500 kg of methaqualone, four Croatian officials (Kajifeg, a border guard, a member of the Croatian Special Forces and a representative of the Croatian Army) had been drawn into the deal. None of them trusted the other, however, and all of them were wary of Basson, demanding certain guarantees of payment before delivery. Basson constructed a deal, approved at least in part by the CMC, which amounted to a double transfer of funds. One amount would be used to make cash payments from Jacomet's bank account in Zagreb to the suppliers of the methaqualone, while the second would be placed in a Swiss bank as a performance guarantee. As soon as all four suppliers had been paid, Jacomet would accompany Basson to the bank, the guarantee would be cancelled and the money repatriated to Project Coast. But the deal went awry, and after only two of the suppliers had been paid, the Croatian authorities allegedly froze all the funds remaining in Jacomet's account as part of an investigation into an unrelated arms deal. Despite this hitch, Basson testified, he brought the 500 kg of methaqualone back to South Africa on 23 December 1992.

An exhausted Basson went home to sleep, but his rest was disturbed by a telephone call the next morning from Knobel, who informed him that he had been fired in a military purge by President FW de Klerk. Basson was placed on official early retirement on 31 March 1993, but immediately employed on a 12-month contract to 'tie up loose ends' and shut down Project Coast. Among the threads to be gathered was the recovery of more than $1 million from Jacomet, an exercise that proved both futile and frustrating to Project Coast's auditors and managers. Basson had lost contact with the two suppliers who had not yet been paid, and could no longer reach Jacomet. On returning to Croatia in January 1993, he learned that the military officers involved in the deal were 'somewhere on the front line' and that Jacomet had gone to ground.

It was not until March, Basson said, that he tracked Jacomet down in the Black Forest and 'forced him' to set out in writing how the SADF's funds had been lost. Basson had known Jacomet since the mid-1980s, had dealt with him frequently and trusted him 'implicitly'. Not only had Jacomet facilitated a deal with Swiss company Huber & Suhner to supply the SADF with gasmasks, he had been of 'enormous help' in arranging, through Regli, for an official helicopter to ferry Basson and Neethling around on one of their visits to Switzerland, and for Basson to enter Switzerland without clearing customs at the airport. Jacomet was also the man who introduced Basson to Regli, and all his contact with Regli was arranged through Jacomet.

By May, Project Coast's books could still not be balanced, and Basson went back to Croatia again, where he met up with one Hendrik Thomsen, a Danish spy based in the Ukraine, who told Basson he had intercepted Vatican bearer bonds worth $100 million, which were intended to fund the Croatian war effort. Basson immediately saw an opportunity to use the bonds to his advantage. He would inform the Croats that he would return them as soon as Jacomet's bank account was unfrozen. Thomsen, however, suggested a much simpler way of recouping the loss, and generously offered Basson bonds drawn on the Banco Di Napoli with a face value of $5 million that he could cash in order to make up the SADF's loss. When Basson presented the bonds, however, the bank asked for proof of ownership, which he was unable to provide.

At some point during the next few months, Basson learned that the bonds were, in fact, forgeries. Jacomet had disappeared again, and despite assurances from Regli that the 'problem' was being attended to, the Swiss authorities had issued a warrant for Basson's arrest. After a 'harrowing' two months on the run in Europe, Basson was arrested on arrival at Basel airport in December 1993 and detained for questioning for three weeks, until the SADF sent a white knight to his rescue in the person of advocate Chris Marlow, who was closely linked to Project Coast, and who paid Basson's bail of 100 000 Swiss francs. A year later, Basson was recalled to Switzerland for further questioning, his bail was refunded and he returned to South Africa.

The prosecution contended that Basson's version of events leading to his arrest in Switzerland had been invented to hide the fact that the missing funds had allegedly been siphoned off for personal gain. By the time Basson himself testified, the tale had become even more complex. Not only had he acquired half a ton of methaqualone through his Swiss contacts, he said, but they had also been instrumental in helping him procure four tons of the chemical warfare agent, BZ. Basson said the BZ was bought in 1992 from a front company in Hong Kong, and that his Libyan financial principal, Abdur Razzaq, was also involved in the deal. He claimed that 1,5 tons of the BZ was used in the search for the correct

formula for weaponisation and that the balance was sent to Delta G for development of a variant.

Delta G scientists unanimously denied that any work was done on such large quantities of BZ. Neither Project Coast auditor Pierre Theron nor Knobel knew anything about the alleged BZ deal, and no documentation was provided to support Basson's claims. This, he said, was because all the relevant documents had been seized by Swiss authorities investigating Regli's role in the Croatian deal.

Basson testified that in his secret laboratory at Speskop, the BZ was mixed with cocaine in a ratio of 10:1, some 80 kg of cocaine having been bought in Peru through a 'high-placed government official' at the 'bargain price' of between $250 000 and $300 000. The cocaine was shipped through El Paso and Austin in Texas to South Africa hidden in a consignment of bananas, allegedly sold to defray some of the costs incurred. The cocaine deal, dubbed Operation Banana, was an 'official' sub-project of Coast, Basson said, and had been fully audited as such. Ultimately, he said, the BZ was weaponised in hand grenades, 81 mm mortars and 155 mm projectiles, and he had demonstrated mortars loaded with BZ, methaqualone, Ecstasy and cocaine in the veld in front of the Special Forces Headquarters at Speskop.

By the time Basson became embroiled in the Croatian deal, the list of street drugs under consideration by the South African security forces as potential crowd control agents had grown from cannabis, LSD and Mandrax to include Ecstasy. Neethling was certainly of the opinion that Ecstasy was suitable for use in this role, telling the TRC: 'If I could give Ecstasy to every person, he will not make war, but love, then I can in a matter of 10 minutes, change his whole spiritual condition … I live behind a rave club and this is definitely not a casino, these people just carry on from Friday till Sunday on two tablets.' Many questions remain regarding the use of the Ecstasy made at Delta G Scientific as a crowd control agent. Forensic experts testified that since it is a stimulant, Ecstasy could not have been used to calm protestors.

Dr Johan Koekemoer, who joined Delta G Scientific in 1986, was the first Project Coast scientist to testify at both the Basson trial and the earlier TRC hearings. Among his 120 colleagues were Gert Lourens – 'an excellent scientist who was head of organic research' – and Hennie Jordaan, the 'father' of the unique synthesis used to produce 912 kg of MDMA under the code-name Operation Baxil from June 1992 to 4 January 1993, when production was stopped on the orders of the Defence Minister. At Delta G, security was tight, laboratory access limited to senior staff and security breaches harshly dealt with by security chief Karel Koen. The need-to-know principle was so strictly enforced that none but a handful of those directly involved knew Baxil entailed the manufacture of MDMA. The majority of employees were told they were making rocket fuel for France.

Koekemoer said he never believed that Ecstasy could be used as an incapacitant, and was deeply concerned about the potential abuse of a substance being produced in such large quantities. Asked during the TRC hearings what he was told the Ecstasy was to be used for, Koekemoer said: 'They just decided that it will be a good incapacitant, so I actually said to Doctor Mijburgh [Philip Mijburgh, managing director of Delta G]: You know Doc, I don't want to love my enemy if I want to use an incapacitant on him. And as far as I know where the pharmacology of MDMA is concerned, it enhances interpersonal communication and empathy and I would not like to kiss my enemy, I would rather work on his central nervous system and disorientate him to such an extent that he can't operate properly.'

Mijburgh's response, said Koekemoer, was that Ecstasy was considered a potentially good incapacitant, 'and that was that'. Koekemoer was not satisfied, however, and took his concerns to Neethling. But their meeting did little to allay the scientist's fears about production of the drug. Neethling appeared to be well informed about the project, and far from addressing Koekemoer's moral and ethical concerns, engaged him in a technical discussion on the best way to go about manufacturing Ecstasy. Still not convinced that he should proceed, Koekemoer insisted on a formal order, signed by Knobel, for the MDMA production. He never saw one, but was assured by Mijburgh that it had been issued and was locked in a safe in his office. Copies of the order filed with the court showed that Knobel approved production of 1 000 kg of methamphetamine (which Knobel understood to be Ecstasy) under the code-name Baxil.

When Project Baxil was launched, Delta G Scientific was in the red financially, and the MDMA production was seen as a way to save the company from financial ruin. The Ecstasy would be manufactured at a cost of R326,34 per kilogram. After production in Delta G's No. 3 Plant, the MDMA was packed in plastic bags and then in double-sealed white metal drums, each containing 30–40 kg of 98 per cent pure MDMA. On Basson's orders, Koekemoer delivered the drums to a basement room in the Centurion building where Mijburgh had an office. In a departure from Delta G's normal practice, Koekemoer was also required to fill out invoices and analytical certificates for the MDMA. He found the arrangements unorthodox, but complied 'because the project was so secret'.

Pharmacist Steven Beukes, by that time managing director of one of Mijburgh's companies, Medchem Pharmaceuticals, had rented space in one of Delta G's warehouses, and between 1991 and 1992, he encapsulated a substance there that is believed to have been MDMA. Beukes told the court that 'having made some funny things previously, I didn't want to know [what he was dealing with] but it wasn't Disprin'. It was 56 of these capsules that led to Koekemoer's arrest when police found them in a cardboard box in his office. Koekemoer had discovered the capsules in the area recently vacated by Beukes.

When the evidentiary stage of Basson's trial got under way on Monday, 25 October 1999, the first witness was the former police officer who had arrested him nearly three years earlier. Working out of the Johannesburg branch of the South African Narcotics Bureau (SANAB), Superintendent Giel Ehlers had set up a sting operation involving a mysterious police informer, Steve Martin. Precisely who Martin is was never revealed. There has been some speculation that he was a foreign agent, or acting on behalf of an international intelligence agency, but no evidence has been presented to suggest that the events of January 1997 were deliberately orchestrated to place Basson under official scrutiny for his role in Project Coast. The judge found that the man at the heart of the drug deals, Grant Wentzel, had falsely implicated Basson in order to protect the identity of his *real* supplier.

As far as Ehlers was concerned, Basson's arrest was the result of two earlier drug deals set up by SANAB between Martin and Wentzel, a Johannesburg-based commodities broker who had long-standing business ties with Basson. The first deal involved 100 capsules of Ecstasy and took place at the up-market Bryanston shopping mall, north of Johannesburg, on 20 January. The second, on 24 January, was set up at the Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet in Rustenburg, a picturesque town halfway between Johannesburg and the popular Sun City resort. This deal, involving 2 000 Ecstasy capsules, culminated in Wentzel's arrest.

While detained, Wentzel was persuaded to cooperate with police, identifying his supplier as 'a dangerous, high-profile Pretoria heart doctor', in exchange for police not opposing bail when he appeared in court on Monday, 27 January, charged with drug dealing. The most significant evidence by Ehlers was that until the first sting operation between Martin and Wentzel on 20 January, Ecstasy had never been encountered in capsule form. Subsequently, police forensic scientist André Koch testified that international enquiries turned up only one other instance, worldwide, of Ecstasy ever being found in capsules – in San Diego, California, in January 1999.

In setting up the operation to apprehend Wentzel's supplier, Ehlers learned that previous meetings had taken place at a restaurant in Pretoria or at Magnolia Dell, a public park opposite Basson's home. Ehlers chose the park as the venue for the January 29 delivery and by 9 am on that day, five members of his squad were in position to observe the meeting in the parking lot between the two men. One policeman, Constable Jotti Wiese, was concealed in the boot of Wentzel's car. Earlier that morning, Wentzel had been fitted with two separate electronic surveillance devices to record his conversation with Basson. The quality of the tapes was, however, extremely poor, and transcripts used in evidence offered no conclusive proof of a drug deal.

The meeting was brief, but police saw Basson remove a black refuse bag from the boot of his white Sentra and hand it to Wentzel, who in turn gave Basson an envelope containing R60 000, prepared by the police, representing what Wentzel

said was Basson's share of the Rustenburg deal five days earlier. Wentzel placed the refuse bag in his car and, as he drove away, Basson was arrested. The refuse bag contained a number of small, see-through plastic bank bags, in which were scarlet and black capsules. After meeting Wentzel in the public toilets some distance from the parking lot and retrieving the listening devices, Ehlers and his team went to search Basson's house. No evidence of drugs was found, but Ehlers did discover a number of documents marked 'top secret', which he confiscated. In quick succession, he was then confronted by a National Intelligence agent (who told him Basson had been under surveillance for some time but left on learning that the doctor had been arrested in connection with drug dealing), had several telephone calls from 'SADF generals' whom he could not identify in court and finally, on arrival with Basson at the nearest police station, was served with a warrant ordering him to turn over all documents found at Basson's house to the Office for Serious Economic Offences.

Wentzel testified that over a 20-year period, he had dealt in such diverse products as canned fruit, ostrich meat and leather, hi-tech machinery and unwrought gold. He had also 'tried' arms deals, but found this a difficult area and soon abandoned it. In 1990 Wentzel had been arrested, along with Jerry Brandt, by American authorities in a sanctions-busting sting operation. They cut a deal and pleaded guilty to trying to export an ion implanter – used to make microchips – to an East Bloc country. Wentzel also admitted attempting to bribe an FBI agent working undercover as a customs officer, and Brandt pleaded guilty to trying to smuggle defence manuals for guided missile systems out of America. Immediately after their court appearance, the two men were placed on an aircraft back to South Africa, but ordered to return to the US at a later date for sentencing. Brandt did return, accompanied by Basson, and was sentenced to 'time served'. Wentzel, however, had never gone back 'because I didn't have the money for the airfare', and a warrant for his arrest remained outstanding.

In 1992/93, back in South Africa, Wentzel was involved in a company called Global Management, financed, he claimed, by Basson, and designed to create foreign markets for South African products. His colleagues included Brandt (who later served as chief executive of Organochem, one of the companies that supplied chemicals to Project Coast), Marlene Brand, Solly Pienaar and Steve Martin. Wentzel, whose testimony was rejected by Judge Hartzenberg, said he had regular contact with Basson over a number of years, consulting him about the price and availability of crude oil and the cost of AK-47 assault rifles, which Wentzel wanted to sell in an offshore deal.

Wentzel said he became involved in Ecstasy deals in January 1997, when he was in dire financial straits. He had previously been told by Brandt that Delta G Scientific had been producing the drug, so, when Martin told Wentzel that he

had a market for Ecstasy, Wentzel presumed he could get the drug from Basson or Brandt. He first approached Brandt, who referred him to former Delta G scientist Gert Lourens. Lourens warned Wentzel against the scheme, saying that dealing in Ecstasy would be 'too risky'. Wentzel claimed that not long after this meeting, he was contacted by Basson who, over a cup of coffee, confirmed that Ecstasy was available. After this, events as described by Wentzel unfolded as follows: on 18 January, at a meeting in a Pretoria restaurant, Basson handed him a sample of 100 scarlet and black capsules in a small plastic bank bag. The next day, Wentzel gave the capsules to Martin in exchange for R5 000 and agreed to meet Martin's 'friend' Fred at a shopping mall. Fred, a police reservist posing as an Ecstasy buyer, ordered 2 000 units of the drug. When Wentzel contacted Basson, he was allegedly told this was 'quite a big order' and that Basson would get back to him. When he did, they arranged to meet at Magnolia Dell on 21 or 22 January, and Wentzel took delivery of a black plastic refuse bag containing 2 000 scarlet and black capsules in plastic bank bags. Wentzel claimed that Basson wanted R30 per capsule and that he planned to sell them at R50 each. The Rustenburg deal followed on 24 January, when Wentzel was arrested and, acting on the advice of his attorney, agreed to take part in a sting operation to catch his supplier. He was under the impression that in return, the police would 'make things easy' for him by either dropping the charges or ensuring that he was given a suspended sentence.

After placing an order for another 1 000 capsules, the 29 January sting was set up. The transcript of the taped conversation between Wentzel and Basson at Magnolia Dell contains no reference to drugs, Ecstasy, pills or capsules. At one point, Wentzel tells Basson '30 per …' and a little later, 'R30 per …'. The only other reference to what Wentzel claims is money is a question from Basson: 'How much is there?' to which Wentzel responds '60 000' – the number of rands in the envelope he gave Basson. The defence spared no effort to discredit Wentzel, stating that all his known business deals had been illegal, and that he would have no problem shedding morals and ethics in the face of financial difficulty. Wentzel, in response, assured the court that he 'tried to conduct business deals as legally as possible'.

Basson denied any involvement in Ecstasy deals, claiming that the conversation he had with Wentzel on that fateful January morning was related to an arms transaction in which Wentzel was involved. Two days before, Basson said, Wentzel had brought him three boxes of export quality wine, but when Basson removed them from his car, he noticed that three bottles were missing from one box, and that a black plastic refuse bag was stuffed into the cavity. He never looked into the bag, said Basson, but when he next spoke to Wentzel, they arranged to meet at Magnolia Dell so that it could be returned.

If Ecstasy made at Delta G was encapsulated by anyone directly or indirectly connected with Project Coast for sale on the black market, the question must be asked: Why, when forensic scientists calculate that more than six million capsules could have been made from the MDMA manufactured by Delta G during the lifetime of Project Coast, have so few of them turned up? Barnacle operator Trevor Floyd testified that in 1992, Basson asked him if he had 'contacts in Europe and England' who could distribute a large amount of Ecstasy to which Basson had access. Like Phaal, Floyd had no reservations about killing those identified as enemies of the state, but drew the line at peddling drugs, and said he dismissed Basson's inquiry immediately, telling him that he had no such foreign contacts.

Basson testified that he was merely 'testing' Floyd as part of an investigation into possible involvement of covert South African agents in the international drug trade, after Irish authorities seized 55 kg of the precursor for Ecstasy at Dublin Airport. The package was hidden in a drum marked as 'fragrance' for the perfume industry, and had arrived in Dublin from South Africa via Rome and London. The seizure followed a massive surveillance operation, and analysis of the substance showed that it was 'almost 100 per cent pure', according to Irish police.

The contents of capsules confiscated during the operation to arrest Basson also had an exceptionally high level of purity. American Drug Enforcement Agency research chemist Tim McKibben, who carried out independent tests on the capsules, testified that the MDMA had been produced by means of a 'unique' synthesis, and was more than 95 per cent pure.

Officially, all the Ecstasy made by Delta G Scientific for Project Coast was destroyed, which leaves a question mark over the source of the drugs seized in January 1997. Four years earlier, when Knobel briefed the new Minister of Defence, Gene Louw, about the status of Project Coast, Louw ordered that all the incapacitants stockpiled by the SADF were to be destroyed, and it was decided that they should be dumped in the sea. The destruction process was supposed to be monitored by high-ranking police officers, but Basson testified that they were 'not interested' and 'did not want to get involved'. He then suggested that someone from Military Intelligence verify the operation, and Colonel Jan de Bruyn was assigned to the task.

On the morning of 27 January 1993, Basson and members of 7 Medical Battalion loaded the drugs onto a truck at the Defence Supply Depot and drove to Air Force Base Zwartkop. Basson then asked De Bruyn to take samples from the containers at random, but De Bruyn said his superior had indicated that there was no need to do so, and indeed, it could be 'compromising'. Basson insisted, telling De Bruyn that Product M was the safest to handle, then BZ and Baxil. Basson and Mijburgh opened the containers, but because De Bruyn had no protective clothing,

Basson himself scooped out the samples. Later, after 'cleaning up' the sample bottles, he turned them over to De Bruyn. Basson and his team loaded the containers into the aircraft and before taking off, he briefed the air crew about procedures in the event of an accident or any of the containers breaking open in flight. An hour or two into the flight, the pilot announced that they were approaching the drop zone. Curtains separating the cockpit from the rest of the aircraft were closed and Basson's team hefted the cargo out of the aircraft's rear door within the space of about 10 minutes.

Basson testified that he was 'extremely emotional' afterwards. Not only had he just dumped the results of 10 years of dedicated work in the ocean, but he had recently been sacked under difficult circumstances, those who were supposed to have protected him had failed to do so, and he was a depressed and angry man. According to the drug destruction certificate issued by De Bruyn, the Atlantic Ocean became the final repository of a ton each of methaqualone and MDMA, 25 kg of cocaine, 6 kg of 'Angel Dust', almost two tons of BZ and a number of mortar bombs loaded with these incapacitants. The 500 kg of methaqualone bought in Croatia just one month earlier was included in the jettisoned cargo.

A year later, R21,7 million was written off against the SADF's budget as the estimated value of the drugs. On the street, they would have fetched more than 10 times that amount. The data on the certificate is confusing and does not correlate with the known facts, but in the absence of evidence to the contrary, that flimsy sheet of paper is the only documentary proof that the SADF's foray into the narcotics industry ended in the stormy seas off Cape Agulhas.

7

Follow the Money

PUNCTUATING THE MIND-NUMBING details of financial transactions at the heart of 27 fraud charges against Basson were some of the most entertaining vignettes in a trial sprinkled with colourful anecdotes: a secret code so simple a nine-year-old schoolboy could have cracked it in minutes; an elite military unit cast in the role of bootlegger to the masses; equipment worth millions of rands lost in a fire sparked by spontaneous combustion; small-denomination banknotes so filthy that tellers refused to handle them; parcels of cash ferried by courier across international frontiers.

By the time the first of more than 60 witnesses – ranging from a former Cabinet minister and high-ranking military officers to an outspoken anti-apartheid activist and international business brokers – was called to testify about the alleged fraud, investigations into the use of certain Project Coast funds had been under way for more than seven years. The Office for Serious Economic Offences had taken evidence from all the main players involved in the convoluted fiscal affairs of the top-secret project – Basson himself was questioned for 39 days – and a forensic audit had been conducted on three continents over a six-year period. Senior prosecutor Anton Ackermann and his junior, Werner Bouwer, were armed with thousands of documents retrieved from the files of Basson's foreign associates, records of dozens of accounts at banks in the financial capitals of the world, and reams of correspondence, much of it in Basson's own handwriting, related to the movement of a small fortune in international currency. For months on end, black lever-arch files crammed with documents were lined up across a four-metre table behind the prosecutors, like so many soldiers on parade.

Independent financial experts who followed the proceedings are of the opinion that this was one of the most complicated alleged white-collar crimes ever tried in a South African court. For the layman, it was an exercise in the esoterica of wheeling and dealing on a global scale. At the core of the case was a single premise: the spider's web of companies set up under the aegis of the WPW Group had been constructed by Basson for personal gain, using funds diverted from Project Coast to acquire two private aircraft, valuable real estate in America, Europe and South Africa, and to finance a lavish lifestyle shared by a small and select group of associates.

The prosecution was confident that seasoned forensic auditor Hennie Bruwer's 379-page report would be the court's guide to the paper trail snaking through Switzerland, Luxembourg, Lichtenstein, Belgium and Croatia to England, via the Channel Islands, New York, Orlando (Florida), Canada and the Cayman Islands, where money-laundering is not only one of the biggest industries, but one of the most secure. It was in this exotic Caribbean haven of those with money to hide that the WPW Group was born, in October 1986. With the help of American attorney and Vietnam War veteran David Webster, Basson set up three holding companies: WPW Investments Inc., PCM International Inc. and Medchem Inc. Webster was listed as the 100 per cent shareholder in each, but both documents and his testimony confirmed that he was merely acting as Basson's nominee.

Over the next four years, WPW in particular lent its name to between 50 and 100 companies and close corporations with such diverse interests – on paper, at least – as aviation, property, travel, investment, leisure resorts, security equipment, pharmaceuticals, information technology, telecommunications, farming and shower enclosures. The multinational one-stop money-laundering service included a liquor store and a vehicle maintenance centre, along with a Belgian golf course and a zoo in South Africa's Western Cape province. The list of company names is as interminable as an Old Testament chronicle of who begat whom, but it is worth taking a closer look at some of them, if only to illustrate the mindset of those responsible for choosing the nomenclature.

Even those steeped in the affairs of the WPW Group believed it was named for the three main players – **W**outer (Basson), **P**hilip (Mijburgh) and **W**ynand (Swanepoel). Among those who had initially made this assumption was Jane Webster, wife of the attorney who represented the public face of the group, but when she testified in Jacksonville, Florida, in October 2000, she said Basson had told her, while they were watching television together one night at the group's cottage in England, that the name was actually an abbreviation of Wolf-Parkinson-White Syndrome, a common cardiac condition. Other names were more imaginative. Infladel, the official administrative arm of Project Coast, was a contraction of the expression *in flagrante delicto*, while Luft was an acronym for Let Us Fuck Them –

according to Basson, his scientific mentor Lieutenant-General Lothar Neethling's way of giving a one-finger salute to those supporting the arms embargo against South Africa.

Contresida, Basson said, was taken from the French for 'anti-AIDS', while Charburn was a combination of the first names of the partners – Belgian businessmen and childhood friends Charles van Remoortere and Bernard Zimmer. (No explanation was ever offered for the 'e' in Bernard being replaced by a 'u' in the company name.) Accountant Tjaart Viljoen said he had chosen the designation Waterson for a number of the South African subsidiaries of the WPW Group as a play on the Afrikaans words for 'belonging to Wouter' (*Wouter s'n*), though Basson himself claimed Webster came up with the name.

It was a secret bank account in the name of VABN, however, that amplified the extent of Basson's clandestine activities. Cross-examining Viljoen, defence advocate Jaap Cilliers said that during the late 1980s, two shebeens were run as part of a covert Special Forces intelligence-gathering exercise. The illegal grog shops – one at Hammanskraal, the other in the former independent homeland of KwaNdebele, north of Pretoria – were controlled by Corrie Meerholz, commanding officer of the SADF's 5 Reconnaissance Battalion and Special Forces' Chief of Staff Operations, with whom Basson 'worked very closely'. The bank account, through which large amounts of cash flowed over a six-month period, was used to launder the proceeds of the operation, according to Cilliers. Viljoen testified that Basson instructed him to open an account in the name of VABN in 1990. No records were to be kept and Viljoen was regularly handed bags of cash – from R6 000 to R40 000 at a time – to deposit. The banknotes were usually in a poor state of repair, he said – so grubby that bank tellers complained and some refused to handle them. Periodically, he said, Basson asked him to withdraw cash from the account, but Viljoen never asked where the money was coming from or going to.

Cilliers told the court that VABN was actually an encoded version of WBCM – the combined initials of Basson and Meerholz. The code he claimed was used is one of the most elementary encryptions, known to every schoolboy who ever dreamed of being Biggles or James Bond, and requires nothing more than the adding or subtraction of a sequential letter of the alphabet in order to decipher the hidden message. Hence, according to Cilliers, V=W, A=B, B=C and N=M.

While the indictment against Basson accused him of having a personal interest in 45 companies used as conduits to allegedly defraud the SADF of R36 million and steal another R10 million, investigators uncovered at least as many additional companies in the course of unravelling the complex shareholdings and cross-holdings of the WPW Group and its South African arm, the Wisdom Group. In order to service an economic maze of this magnitude, an astonishing number of offshore accounts were opened at some of the world's biggest and most discreet

banks, including Credit Suisse, Banque Indosuez, Barclays, Merrill Lynch, Bank LaRoche, Lloyds, Banque Nationale de Paris, Arzi and Union.

With the exception of the Cayman Islands, where authorities declined to open the books of WPW Investments, PCM International and Medchem International, Bruwer gained access to all the relevant bank records and company registers, allowing him to track the flow of funds made available for the purchase of scientific equipment, chemicals and information for Project Coast from the point of origin – the multi-million rand SADF Secret Account – to final disbursement. The money was moved by utilising the arcane instruments of international banking, some amounts being laundered through as many as seven different accounts on three continents before being spent on assets such as an American condominium, a cottage near Windsor Castle in England, two apartments in an up-market suburb of Brussels, farms in South Africa, a golf club in Belgium, a luxury lodge at South Africa's exclusive golf resort, Fancourt, and two private aircraft.

Bruwer found that over a seven-year period, R86 million of Project Coast funds were channelled through bank accounts to which Basson had access, but which were never disclosed to Surgeon General Niel Knobel or the project's Co-ordinating Management Committee. Millions were used as short-term investments that, in turn, served as security for loans to companies within the WPW and Wisdom groups, the capital later being repatriated to the project with explanations that proposed deals had collapsed. The documents used by the prosecution were flyspecked with details of performance bonds, loans against fixed deposits, purchase of share capital, debentures, rolling fronts, a 'moving beneficiary roving jurisdiction trust', secret bank accounts in the names of official clandestine SADF projects, roundtripping, unsecured inter-company loans, transactions in dollars, pounds, Swiss and Belgian francs, forged Vatican bearer bonds with a face value of $40 million, regular reallocation of shares and restructuring of the groups, cash deposits of an estimated R20 million in Swiss bank accounts and skilful manipulation of the SA Reserve Bank's moratorium loans – designed to counter the effect of disinvestment during the sanctions era by freezing repayments of foreign loans.

Analysis of the transactions orchestrated by a career military officer and medical specialist rather than a financial fundi helps to explain how, while preparing for his trial and working as a cardiologist by day, Basson earned top marks in banking as a part-time BComm student at Pretoria University. Far from being the fiscal machinations of an amateur, the deals outlined by Bruwer denote a thorough and sophisticated understanding of international banking protocols and practices. Details of the 27 fraud charges accounted for 120 pages of the indictment, whereas the original 40 drug and murder charges were outlined in just 70 pages. Basson was prosecuted by the same team that put police hit squad

leader Eugene de Kock behind bars for life in 1996 – but De Kock's fraud totalled less than R400 000, and by comparison with the allegations against Basson, amounted to little more than the fudging of petty cash vouchers. Despite the intricacy of the Basson case, Ackermann was convinced that, since 'the palest ink is always clearer than the best memory', the documents at his disposal would prove conclusively that funds earmarked for Project Coast had been purloined for personal gain.

Towards the end of 2000, the state scored a rare and – at the time – significant victory, when the court agreed to move to Jacksonville, Florida, to hear the evidence of Webster, nominal head of the WPW Group and an international tax and business lawyer, who Basson described as a past master at thwarting sanctions. Without the verbal testimony of Webster and other foreign witnesses, the state would not have been allowed to rely on the documents they had provided. Webster had opened his files only after being ordered by the US Supreme Court to waive the normally inviolate attorney–client privilege and cooperate with the South African authorities and, along with Basson's European associates – former British secret agent Roger Buffham, urbane Luxembourg business broker Bernard Zimmer and Swiss pharmacologist Dr David Chu – had refused to testify against him in a South African court. Some of them feared prosecution as accomplices, others for their lives. The defence vigorously opposed measures proposed by the state to secure their testimony, repeatedly telling the judge none of these witnesses could afford to acknowledge the roles they had played in helping Basson circumvent international sanctions and establish a chemical and biological warfare programme for the SADF, as to do so would almost certainly hold dire consequences for them in their own countries.

As it happened, all Basson's foreign associates vehemently denied any knowledge of Project Coast. In the end, Zimmer and Chu did testify in Pretoria, but the judge refused to travel to England to hear testimony from Buffham – whom he summarily dubbed a liar on the basis of a single sworn statement in which the retired British army bomb disposal expert denied supplying equipment for which the SADF paid millions of rands, but which the state alleged was never acquired by the project.

Months before judgment day, the judge intimated that he intended rejecting the testimony of Webster and his wife, heard over a 10-day period in Jacksonville, along with that of the other foreign witnesses and those who shared Basson's jetsetting lifestyle in exchange for administering the WPW Group's extensive South African operations. Every witness Ackermann had called, 'from America to South Africa … the lot of them', had underplayed his or her involvement in Project Coast, Hartzenberg said. It was at this juncture, five months before final judgment was handed down, that Ackermann, frustrated by two years of fruitless attempts to persuade the man in the scarlet robe that the accused before him

was guilty as charged, told the judge there was no point in continuing, since Hartzenberg had obviously decided at least 18 months earlier that Basson was innocent, and it was abundantly clear to the prosecution 'who in this court is revered as the Virgin Mary'.

Ackermann's reference to a preconceived opinion echoed the sequence of events set in motion on 4 February 2000 – Black Friday, as he dubbed it – when simmering tensions reached boiling point and the state brought an application, unprecedented in South African criminal courts, for the judge to remove himself from the bench on the grounds of bias. Several incidents were cited to support the claim that Hartzenberg had prejudged the case, but the catalyst was his unequivocal statement, during presentation of Bruwer's forensic audit report, that it would 'take very little' to convince him that the WPW Group had, in fact, been established to serve the interests of Project Coast.

The fraud charges emanated from discrepancies between the flow of funds tracked by Bruwer and the explanations offered by Basson, when questioned by the Office for Serious Economic Offences. Both OSEO and the court were told that the disputed funds had been spent on:

- Equipment such as an explosives mixer, moulds and machinery installed in a secret laboratory at Special Forces headquarters, Speskop, where pyrotechnical tests were carried out under Basson's direction with a view to weaponisation of incapacitants – including the street drugs Mandrax and Ecstasy – as riot control countermeasures.
- A trip to Iran in 1988 to obtain shrapnel from chemical weapons used by Iraq and visit the site of a chemical attack.
- Acquisition of 25 Chemical Agent Monitors (CAMs) manufactured in England by Graseby Ionics.
- Blueprints of the electronic circuit boards in the CAMs, used as part of a project to 'reverse engineer' the devices in South Africa.
- Chemical and explosives alarms installed at the Speskop laboratory.
- A state-of-the-art CBW database and computer software.
- Security paper impregnated with sensors that would set off an alarm in the event of unauthorised removal of certain files from a safe in Basson's office.
- A custom-made peptide synthesiser, DNA and RNA probes and 500 g of the thymus peptide, thymosin.
- Acquisition via corrupt Croatian government officials of 500 kg of quinazolinone. (There is no reference to such a chemical in the Merck Index.)
- Proximity fuses used in 'hundreds' of 120 mm mortar bombs loaded with potent CR teargas and donated to Angolan rebel leader Dr Jonas Savimbi to serve as his last line of personal defence.
- Chemical detection test kits for use by troops in the field.

Basson was also accused of enriching himself through a hidden interest in the companies that comprised the WPW and Wisdom groups, benefiting financially from the privatisation of Project Coast's front companies, Delta G Scientific and Roodeplaat Research Laboratories, and using R1 million that originated from the project to establish the Aries Trust, registered in Jersey and naming his wife, Annette, and children Naomi and Wouter Jacques as beneficiaries. It took the prosecution months – and several thousand pages of the court transcript – to lay out how the alleged fraud was perpetrated, and it would be impossible to include details of each transaction here. The following example, however, which relates to Charge 1, is fairly typical.

On **25 March 1988**, on Basson's instructions and duly authorised by the Co-ordinating Management Committee, £1 542 840 was transferred from Project Coast to ex-MI6 agent-turned-businessman Roger Buffham's account at Lloyds Bank, Grantham, England. Basson testified that the money was used to re-equip the secret laboratory at Speskop after a fire, and that when Project Coast was shut down in 1993, both the laboratory and equipment were destroyed, along with all documentation.

The forensic audit tracked the funds through myriad bank accounts on which Basson had signing powers, as follows:

13 April 1988: Full amount less 1 per cent handling fee transferred by Buffham to Medchem Inc., Banque Indosuez, Luxembourg.

28 April: Medchem Inc. transferred £100 000 to Amfra SA, Luxembourg, £1,3 million to PCM International Inc., Cayman Islands and £100 000 to WPW Investments Inc., England.

From **August 1988** to **May 1990**, the Amfra, PCM and WPW Investments deposits were laundered through still more accounts, both in South Africa and abroad, and ultimately used as a deposit on the cottage at Warfield, England, part payment for the R10 million revamp of Merton House (a luxury property in Pretoria's diplomatic belt), a deposit on a Jetstar and payment for modifications to a King Air. Both aircraft were owned by Aeromed, a charter company within the WPW/Wisdom group, and were frequently hired by Project Coast, which paid for the flights from the Secret Defence Account.

Investigators could not find any evidence that laboratory equipment was bought with these funds, and witnesses could shed no light on these or other items Basson said had been bought. None of the scientists attached to Project Coast knew of or ever worked in the secret Speskop laboratory. The only peptide synthesis they were aware of was carried out at Delta G Scientific, on equipment purchased in South Africa, on the open market. Exhaustive investigation verified that the SADF never had more than 13 CAMs in its CBW arsenal, and it was impossible to test claims that the other 12 were given to Savimbi's Unita forces, never to be

seen again. Knobel had been told that shrapnel from Iran was analysed as part of Project Coast, but never actually saw the shards. He had also seen photographs showing the victims of chemical attack by Iraq, and had accepted that these were taken by Basson.

One of the many obstacles facing investigators was the fact that, as Basson himself said, Project Coast was so secret that 'there was no orthodox accounting … all the documentation was false'. When OSEO began delving into what appeared to be suspect transactions, the spectre of 'national security' was raised to hold up the foreign probe for two years from 1996 – despite the fact that the ANC was already in power and that the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Public Accounts (Scopa) was asking questions about the alleged misuse of public funds.

Nevertheless, Bruwer arrived at the conclusion that at all times, Basson had been the beneficial owner of the WPW Group and all its interests. His findings were bolstered by admissions from Basson's closest associates during the trial that they had lied under oath when testifying before OSEO that David Webster was the financial principal. Webster himself testified that he had never known if Basson was acting on behalf of an unidentified group or individual, but that Basson was the only person from whom he ever took instructions regarding the deals he brokered.

It was during the trial that, for the first time, Basson introduced a group of Libyan, East German and Russian intelligence agents as the *real* financial principals, on whose behalf he had structured and administered the WPW Group as part of a mutually advantageous arrangement 'from which the SADF benefited the most at all times'. The nature of this alliance is dealt with in the next chapter, but it is worth noting here that Basson claimed it was on behalf of his mysterious principals that at least £1,5 million in cash was paid into two Swiss bank accounts over a 17-month period by Dr David Chu. The latter had 'absolutely no idea' where the money came from, but was told by Basson that he had friends in England who owned a cash-based business that generated large amounts of money, on which they wanted to avoid paying income tax. A day after opening a personal account for the specific purpose of laundering these funds in September 1991, Chu received the first parcel of cash – totalling £187 000 – by courier from England. The packages arrived at regular intervals thereafter, along with instructions from Basson on a range of accounts to which the money had to be transferred. When Arzi Bank officials told Chu they were not comfortable accepting large deposits of cash from an unknown origin, he simply switched banks, at Basson's request.

An ambitious scheme to purchase the entire Fancourt golf resort was also launched on behalf of his financial principals, Basson claimed. The resort was on the brink of bankruptcy at the time, and although its assets were valued at R130 million, the asking price was a mere R52 million. Zimmer was assigned to

raise financing for the acquisition of 140 hectares of land, some completed lodges and others in various stages of construction, a Gary Player-designed golf course, a five-star hotel with 126 rooms and private suites, a health and beauty centre, an equestrian centre, and squash and tennis courts. The intention was to list the resort on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. Nova Scotia bonds worth 28 million Canadian dollars would be used as security for a bank loan, but in April 1993, Basson told Zimmer that Vatican bonds drawn on the Banco Di Napoli were available meanwhile, and that he should shop around to find a willing bank.

One of the Vatican bonds – No. 1063 – and the serial numbers of another 22, each with a face value of $250 000, were sent to Zimmer. Because the bonds could not be traded on the stock market, none of the banks Zimmer approached was prepared to accept them as security and only one – Lloyds in Luxembourg – was willing to consider advancing a loan against the unfamiliar Nova Scotia bonds. The Banco Di Napoli bonds would also be used as security for part of the amount. On 14 June 1993, Webster sent Zimmer a letter authorising him to arrange an $80 million loan for the WPW Group. While waiting for the bank's response, however, Zimmer learned that the Banco Di Napoli bonds were stolen goods, and the entire deal was shelved.

The marketing of a toddler's Bible in the United States, purchase of a McDonald's fast food franchise and a scheme to introduce a new form of American football to South Africa, were other investment possibilities Basson explored on behalf of the financial principals. They, too, never made it past the initial proposal stage.

One of the best documented deals laid before the court concerned the sale of any military force's first line of defence against CBW – so-called NBC suits. These are personal garments designed to shield the wearer against contamination from nuclear, biological and chemical attack, and are worn in conjunction with gasmasks. Cumbersome and uncomfortable, the protective gear has to be donned within nine seconds of the alarm being raised, and cannot be worn for extended periods, but it is the only effective form of protection for troops in the field. Given claims that Project Coast was, first and foremost, a defensive programme, one might have expected acquisition of these garments to be the first priority, particularly since the threat of chemical weapons being used against SADF troops was first identified during Operation Protea in 1981, according to former Surgeon General Niel Knobel.

Despite the international arms embargo, a Belgian company, Seyntex, had been trying since 1983 to sell its NBC suits to South Africa through the parastatal defence procurement agency, Armscor, but it was not until 1986 that Basson asked the company's southern African marketing agent, Charles van Remoortere, to set up a company that could manufacture the suits locally. Van Remoortere – son of a Belgian army general who once served as second-in-command to America's

General Alexander Haig as head of Nato – entered into an agreement with Seyntex to manufacture the suits under licence, and in February 1987, his company, YCVM (later renamed Technotek) signed a contract with Regent International Trading Services (RITS) to deliver 45 000 NBC suits to the SADF over the next three years. The suits, to be made by sub-contractor National Tent & Sails, had to comply with Nato specifications, but the SADF wanted its suits in nutria, not Nato green or olive drab. However, because of the urgency expressed by Basson, the first suits – approximately 9 000 of them – *were* made in Nato green, as it took four to five months for Seyntex, working in conjunction with the CSIR, to develop the nutria fabric. Van Remoortere was also contracted to supply the SADF with a range of anti-CBW accessories – rubber boots, fuller's earth gloves and 'combo pens', auto-injectors containing antidotes for a variety of chemical agents. He also imported 'containers full' of Shalom gasmasks from Israel.

It took six months for the first 1 500 green NBC suits to be delivered by YCVM, with 1 000 suits being turned out each month thereafter. Every NBC suit carries a unique identification tag denoting the batch number and roll of fabric from which it has been made – essential to safeguard the manufacturer against liability, according to Van Remoortere, in the event of a soldier dying or suffering injury from chemical attack while wearing an NBC suit. Basson told the court that a number of reports of chemical attack were received from Unita forces in Angola, and although these turned out to be false alarms, Surgeon General Nicol Nieuwoudt called a meeting in 1987 in Windhoek that was attended by Basson and Kat Liebenberg, then Commanding Officer South West African Territorial Forces. On the agenda were the need to establish CBW medical cells and verification teams and the urgent acquisition of chemical detection apparatus. Because the SADF did not have sufficient funds to equip both its own and Savimbi's troops, Basson was instructed by the top brass to 'seek donations' of NBC suits for Unita, he said.

Records show that by April 1990, Technotek had delivered 43 000 NBC suits, including a number in 'olive drab', to a warehouse in Court Street, Pretoria West. It was at this time that Van Remoortere was asked by Basson to submit a quotation for the sale of NBC suits to Armscor, resulting in the sale of 9 568 olive drab suits – 4 811 large, 1 439 small and 2 318 medium – *back* to Technotek by RITS before being offered to Armscor at a profit for Technotek of R50 per unit. The suits were delivered to the SA Medical Services stores at SADF Head-quarters in Dequar Road, Pretoria, and Technotek was paid R3,8 million by Armscor for the very suits that had already been paid for by Project Coast in terms of the 1987 contract. Documents showed that the identification numbers on the Armscor suits matched those of the original green suits manufactured by Technotek.

Towards the end of 1990, Seyntex contacted Van Remoortere from Belgium, urgently in search of a large number of NBC suits for export to 'either Iraq or Iran'. It was the eve of the Gulf War and, as Van Remoortere's administrative manager, Linda-May van Niekerk, testified, Technotek was being 'overwhelmed with enquiries and requests for NBC suits from all over the world'. Had she been able to locate 60 000 suits, she said, she could have sold them in a heartbeat. Technotek was unable to meet Seyntex's demand, however, until Van Remoortere conveyed the request to Basson. Between the two of them, Van Remoortere testified, a scheme was devised by which RITS would sell 'surplus' suits back to Technotek, and Technotek would export them to Belgium at a profit of R60 per suit. Both Van Remoortere and Van Niekerk stated categorically that the original olive drab suits which had already been paid for by the SADF – twice – were among the 31 332 suits shipped to Seyntex in two batches in February 1991. Van Remoortere said he never doubted that the deal carried the blessing of the SADF, the threat of chemical attack in southern Africa having abated by that time. It was not until he was confronted with the flow of funds by Bruwer, said Van Remoortere, that he realised the proceeds of the deal had gone not to the SADF, but to companies and individuals connected to the WPW and Wisdom Groups.

Wads of documents tracked down by investigators supported the accounts of several witnesses called in connection with the Seyntex deal, but for the first year of the trial, Basson's defence advocates offered a variety of explanations for the missing NBC suits whenever the subject arose. By the time Basson himself took the stand, depending on which witness was being cross-examined at any given time, the court had been told that:

- Hundreds, possibly thousands, of suits had been destroyed when a devastating fire broke out in a secret depot. This was because of the spontaneous combustion of the activated carbon in the inner lining of the suits, which was so finely ground that it was 'almost liquid' when poured, and even after insertion, the molecules remained in motion. A similar scenario, in Basson's opinion, had caused the inferno that caused an SAA aircraft, the *Helderberg*, to crash into the sea off Mauritius.
- Troops issued with NBC suits tore open the vacuum packs to get at the jackets, which offered warmth and comfort on long, cold nights in the bush.
- Troops purloined NBC suits to use when they returned home, since they offered 'much better' protection to motorcyclists than traditional leather.
- Troops who were bored and had nothing better to do than 'sit under a tree' poked holes in the packaging out of curiosity. Once punctured, the suits had to be discarded.
- As soon as suits were delivered by the manufacturers, they were distributed to the Army, Special Forces and Military Intelligence, and Project Coast had no

further control over them. In November 1992, for example, between 7 000 and 8 000 NBC suits were issued to Special Forces.

- Operations Modular, Hooper and Packer had seen three call-ups of Citizen Force members, and between 12 000 and 15 000 troops had been issued with NBC suits.
- The sale of more than 9 000 NBC suits to Armscor had never taken place except on paper, and the entire exercise had been a sham, engineered by Liebenberg as a way of laundering funds from the Special Defence Account for an entirely unrelated project.
- In equipping a military division, each of the 25 000 members would have to be issued with two sets of protective clothing, so as to ensure that if they came under chemical attack on the first day of a battle, they would have a reserve set as protection against further danger.
- 'Thousands' of NBC suits had been donated to Unita in 1988 or 1989 by an outside benefactor and distributed by Military Intelligence and Special Forces. However, while distribution was still taking place, the SADF issued a directive that no further operational support was to be given to Unita, only humanitarian aid such as food and medical supplies, and the remaining suits were taken back by the anonymous donors, possibly for sale to Iraq. The donation had been facilitated by American attorney David Webster.

During Basson's testimony, a variation of this last version was presented. After being ordered to find donors for the NBC suits needed by Unita, he said, he had approached all his foreign contacts, since it was imperative, from a psychological viewpoint, that Savimbi's troops be given as much protection as possible. Although 'only one or two genuine' chemical attacks had been launched against Unita, the mere appearance of yellow smoke clouds thereafter was 'enough to send them running for cover – which is how it works with primitive forces', according to Basson. Eventually, because of past assistance to one of his financial principals, alleged Libyan intelligence agent Abdur Razzaq told Basson in late 1989 that he was prepared to make a 'large' donation to Unita.

In due course, a consignment of several thousand NBC suits arrived at Durban by sea and was distributed by Armscor. While the operation was in progress, some of the suits were stored in a Special Forces transit depot and the rest by Van Remoortere at the Court Street warehouse. Following the independence of Namibia in 1989, however, it was no longer possible to transport equipment to Angola via established routes used by the SADF, and in any event, the Cuban surrogate forces had gone home and the threat of chemical attack on Unita had largely disappeared. When the SADF directive limiting future aid to Unita was received, Basson informed Liebenberg that a large number of the donated suits

remained in storage. Liebenberg told him to advise the donors, 'who might want them back'.

As it happened, this was at the precise time that Van Remoortere was being flooded with calls from people around the world, desperate to lay their hands on NBC suits needed for Operation Desert Storm. Basson claimed it was Van Remoortere who suggested the superfluous suits be sold, and said he agreed to the transaction on behalf of 'the principals', since the suits in question had never formed part of Project Coast, and remained the property of the original donors.

The forensic audit showed that the R10 million proceeds from the deal had been paid into the RITS bank account, and were used to make payments including close on R500 000 in cash to Basson over a five-month period, R900 000 to the Aries Trust, R180 000 to one of his business associates, Chris Marlow, R100 000 to RRL managing director Wynand Swanepoel, R30 000 to Basson's mother Bronwen and R16 040 to his ex-wife, Dr Marie Blom. One of the largest payments was R1 million to Lizelle Larson, the architect in charge of a R10 million revamp of Merton House, the WPW Group's flagship asset. Basson testified that all these payments were linked to the needs of his principals, and dismissed the documentation relating to the sale of NBC suits to Seyntex, including weighbills and invoices, as false.

In an attempt to refute claims by Basson that 'every troop' involved in operations Modular, Hooper and Packer had been issued with an NBC suit, the prosecution called a platoon of veterans of the three-phase campaign, including SADF officers who have become household names. The operations – the SADF's last major offensive in Angola – were aimed at halting the southward advance of Fapla and Cuban troops from the strategic town of Cuito Cuanavale, and ran consecutively from August 1987 to March 1988. Witnesses against Basson testified as follows about the threat of chemical attack, and what protection was available.

Lieutenant-General Deon Ferreira was the SA National Defence Force's Chief of Staff Joint Operations in September 2000, but from 1979 to the end of 1982, he was Commanding Officer 32 Battalion. A veteran of Operation Protea, Ferreira served as commander of 20 Brigade in southern Angola from 7 September to 15 December 1987, returning to the area periodically from January 1988 as a staff officer for Major-General Willie Meyer. When Ferreira joined Modular, only Special Forces and artillery units had been deployed. They were followed by mechanised groups and SADF infantry to provide support for Unita. His task was to prevent the MPLA and its surrogate forces 'at all cost' from taking the strategic town of Mavinga, which could be used as the springboard for a major attack on Unita's headquarters at Jamba.

Ferreira was told by Unita that there was a possibility of chemical attack, but at his tactical headquarters south of the Lomba River, the only protection was standard-issue raincoats, groundsheets and gasmasks. There was no chemical

detection equipment and Ferreira was not aware of any defensive CBW equipment or clothing being issued to Unita. The closest he came to a chemical attack was a report in mid-September from 21 Brigade, north of the Lomba River, about a white cloud hovering over the front line. He ordered the troops to evacuate the area immediately, but did not issue orders for any further protective measures to be taken. The cloud proved benign.

Major-General Roland de Vries, mobile war specialist, served in the SADF from 1963 to 1999. During Operation Bowler in pre-election Rhodesia in 1980, he was commanding officer of the X-Ray counter-insurgency group deployed in the Sembe Tribal Trust Lands. In 1981, he commanded Combat Group 10 during Operation Protea. He served as Ferreira's second-in-command during Modular, and as mobile operations adviser. Based on intelligence reports, the possibility of chemical attack was taken into account in all operational planning, with special attention paid to such factors as prevailing wind direction. All operations were conducted in conjunction with Unita, and although De Vries had 'heard on the grapevine' that Savimbi's troops had been issued with special protective apparel, all he ever saw during his forays among front-line troops were gasmasks, and these were in such short supply that De Vries himself never had one. In October 1987, De Vries met with Savimbi and his generals at Jamba, and liaised closely with them thereafter, but never saw any protective CBW equipment in their ranks. He 'heard' that SADF troops were given instruction in CBW defence before going into Angola and had been issued with some form of protection, but apart from gasmasks, he saw no such equipment.

Colonel Renier Coetzee, commanding officer of 5 Special Forces Regiment at Phalaborwa (formerly 5 Recce) at the time he gave evidence in August 2000, joined the SADF in 1970 and served with 32 Battalion during Operation Carnation (forerunner of Protea) and in Protea itself. He took part in Modular, Hooper and the early phase of Packer, stationed at divisional headquarters, Mavinga, from mid-1987 to mid-1988. Though introduced to CBW 'in theory' while on a staff course prior to his deployment in Angola, he was unaware of any NBC suits or detection equipment being issued to the SADF or Unita during the three operations. The response to intelligence reports warning of possible chemical attack was to instruct troops to don their raincoats or use their groundsheets as ponchos.

Though he was in constant and direct contact with Unita at various levels during the campaign, Coetzee never saw any protective CBW equipment in their ranks, nor at Ferreira's divisional headquarters, which consisted of 'a tent and four Ratels' (armoured personnel carriers). Fairly late in the campaign, 'some' gasmasks were issued to Unita, 'because they saw that SADF troops had them, and we gave them some so they would stop bugging us'. In response to the defence claim that the Unita troops were paralysed by terror or fled into the bush at the slightest hint of a

chemical attack, Coetzee observed wryly: 'Yes, that was often a good excuse for the Unita troops to run from the battlefield.'

Colonel Paul Fouché, SADF member from 1967 to January 1999, succeeded Ferreira as Commanding Officer 20 Brigade from December 1987 to mid-January 1988, and was involved in Packer from March until 8 May. Modular segued into Hooper about a week after Fouché arrived in southern Angola, while Packer was launched on 1 March 1988. He was initially stationed at Jamba, then east of Cuito Cuanavale. Various Unita battalions were attached to 20 Brigade, and Fouché estimated that some 2 000 SADF members and between 3 000 and 4 000 Unita troops participated in the triple operation. During Hooper and Packer, intelligence reports 'predicted' the possibility of chemical attack, but Fouché rated the chance of this happening as extremely slim. His troops were issued with the standard SADF raincoats, ponchos and gasmasks, but he was unaware of any protective equipment being issued to Unita.

Colonel George McLachlan, who quit the SANDF in 1998, was Officer Commanding 71 Brigade in Cape Town until January 1988. From 7 February to 8 March he was in command of Operation Hooper. His tactical HQ was east of Cuito Cuanavale. SADF field commanders believed intelligence warnings of a possible chemical attack, and generally factored this into their planning on the assumption that the Angolan and surrogate forces might unleash such weapons if driven into a no-win situation. Neither McLachlan's troops nor Unita had anything besides gasmasks and thin plastic raincoats for protection.

To the suggestion that since troops under his command never came under chemical attack, they would obviously not have been issued with protective clothing, McLachlan pointed out that it was basic military strategy to issue such equipment in anticipation of an attack, not after one had commenced. His closest encounter with an alleged chemical attack was a radio report from the commander of a front-line unit who had seen a suspicious-looking cloud and ordered his men to don their raincoats and gasmasks. It was a false alarm.

André Bouwer, older brother of one of Basson's prosecutors and a senior advocate with the Directorate of Public Prosecutions in Cape Town, began his National Service in 1986 with 1 SA Infantry at Tempe, Bloemfontein, before attending a junior leadership course at Oudtshoorn. He joined Military Intelligence as a second lieutenant and was assigned to train members of Unita's infantry. Bouwer was sent to Lagoa, south of Jamba, one of 11 Unita training bases run by the SADF in Angola, where he spent six months. In mid-1987, he attended a training course at Lohatla in the Northern Cape, joining the Permanent Force at the end of that year and at his own request becoming a member of 32 Battalion, founded by the legendary Colonel Jan Breytenbach. At the time, 32 Battalion was regarded as 'the' elite SADF unit, members being used for specialised operations and 'always

in the front line' of any action. He returned to Angola at the tail end of Operation Modular and stayed there until the conclusion of Packer in March 1988. Bouwer was a platoon leader in Delta Company, one of three from 32 Battalion assigned in February 1988 to storm the trenches at Tumpu, which were secured by 4 pm, when the SADF troops dug in for the night. About 12 hours later, South African tanks rolled in – and the Unita troops hitching a ride on them opened 'friendly fire' on their allies in the trenches.

Throughout his time with 32 Battalion, Bouwer was deployed inside Angola for three months at a time, returning to his unit's Buffalo Base in the Caprivi for a three-week break in between. At some point or another, he 'had contact with every single unit fighting in Angola' as, except for one occasion when they were moved by air, 32 Battalion always deployed by road, making overnight stops at numerous bases housing troops from a wide selection of units. The only training in CBW defence Bouwer ever received was a 20-minute session at the Infantry School in Oudtshoorn, which consisted of a demonstration of how to don a World War II vintage gasmask. He never had a gasmask in the combat zone, and the only protection he and his fellow soldiers had against chemical attack was their standard-issue ponchos.

Bouwer remained in the Operational Area until the end of the Angolan war, since 32 Battalion formed part of the peacekeeping and monitoring force after the September/October 1988 ceasefire, operating out of Calueque/Ruacana, but in all his time in Angola and the Operational Area, he never saw a single NBC suit among SADF or Unita troops. He did – once – see a gasmask, another World War II model, lying inside a Ratel. To a suggestion by Cilliers that he would not have known if NBC suits were stored in depots in the Operational Area, Bouwer replied that if that were the case, the SADF forces would not have been issued with standard orders 'from the top' that in the event of a chemical attack, they were to 'dig a hole, crawl into it and cover yourself with your poncho'.

Cobus Mostert, a native of Namibia, spent his first year of National Service in 1987 as a member of 1 Parachute Battalion at Tempe, before joining 32 Battalion as a second lieutenant. Like Bouwer, he took part in Modular, Hooper and Packer, and was one of nine platoon leaders deployed at the end of 1987, with artillery support, about 90 km south of Cuito. Unita and SADF troops fought side by side in all operations Mostert was involved in. From the end of 1987 to February 1988, Mostert led 10 Platoon, Delta Company, and was involved in attacks on Tumpu more than once. That winter, he and his squad were involved in a 32 Battalion operation to 'take out' 12 enemy tanks at Tachipa. The terrain was extremely hilly, and resistance far greater than the squad had been led to believe. When the tanks began chasing them, they beat a hasty retreat. Cilliers put it to Mostert that a squad of Recces was sent in to take out the tanks, and that they were on the receiving

end of a CR attack, which required them to don their protective gear. Not to his knowledge, said Mostert, but if there were individual troops who had gasmasks and NBC suits, they 'got a bargain' – he and his men were not so fortunate. Despite rumours that the South Africans could face an artillery-launched chemical attack – gas was specifically mentioned – 'we had bugger all to protect us'. Their ponchos 'were not even sturdy enough to keep the rain out, let alone any chemicals'. When the war ended, Mostert was assigned to the Joint Military Monitoring Commission, which saw SADF and Fapla troops patrolling on either side of the Angolan border. Beacons were erected 14 km apart along the length of the border from Ruacana in the west, and Mostert was based at Beacon 14. On 1 April 1989, as armed Swapo insurgents poured across the northern border into Namibia, he was one of the last men out. Lying next to an airfield as he waited for a transport aircraft to pick up the tail-enders, Mostert saw heavily armed SAAF Alouette helicopters circling impotently over the wave of Swapo fighters. The gunships, he said, were totally out of ammunition.

Lieutenant-General Dirk Verbeek, Chief of Staff Intelligence from October 1994 to June 1998 and MI's former Chief Director Counter-Intelligence, was aware of Project Coast from 1987, but had no knowledge of any foreign donation of thousands of NBC suits to Unita, or any such equipment being distributed by Military Intelligence.

Lieutenant-General Witkop Badenhorst's 29-year SADF career included command of 4 SA Infantry and Sector 10 in the Operational Area. He also served as chief instructor at the SA Army College, deputy Army chief and Chief of Staff Operations (Personnel) before being appointed Chief of Staff Intelligence (CSI) in April 1989. In 1981, Badenhorst was the commander-in-chief of Operation Protea, and his knowledge of Project Coast dates back to 1986, when he was Chief of Staff Army Logistics. From 1982 until he retired in 1991, Badenhorst said, he was 'always' in a position to know if equipment such as NBC suits had been issued to 'troops on the ground'. He was adamant that no member of the SA Army was ever issued with an NBC suit for operational use. As CSI, the SADF's logistical support of Unita fell directly under his control, and Badenhorst stated categorically that no NBC suits ever found their way to Savimbi's troops. Distribution of more than 30 000 NBC suits from a foreign source would have had to carry his authorisation, not least because freight of that magnitude would have filled several aircraft, and he would have had to authorise the flights.

Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Fox, the MI officer whose task it was to despatch the 'mountains' of equipment supplied to Unita, said he had never sent a single NBC suit to the rebel movement. 'Everything' that Unita needed – from school supplies and blankets to weapons, ammunition and medicines – was shipped from the vast warehouse under Fox's control. Meticulous records were kept of every

item supplied, and consignments were painstakingly checked by joint SADF and Unita liaison teams against written inventories on arrival at Rundu, Katima Mulilo and the San Michelle base in the Operational Area. Fox told the court that he was so familiar with what equipment was sent to Unita that, even 15 years later, it would not take him long to sit down with a pad and pencil and draw up a 'pretty accurate' list of items supplied by the SADF.

Notwithstanding the testimony presented to show that neither NBC suits nor the 12 missing Chemical Agent Monitors that featured in the indictment against Basson had been supplied to Unita, the court found that the state had failed to prove its case and acquitted him on all charges relating to these items. Details of how the judge arrived at this conclusion can be found in Chapter 12.

As the fraud case progressed, the smoke got thicker and the mirrors more cracked. The defence launched a vicious attack on forensic auditor Hennie Bruwer, accusing him of deliberately prolonging his investigation in order to enrich himself, and dismissing his report as 'the most incomplete expert testimony I have ever seen'. Long before they were called to take the stand, key witnesses were also the subject of character assassination. Webster – a partner in Baker and Hostetler, the thirteenth-biggest law firm in America at the time he became involved with Basson – was 'a blatant liar … a consummate perjurer', Zimmer was 'a dishonest man', and he and Van Remoortere were 'past masters' at concocting false documentation.

Bruwer stuck to his guns, saying he had uncovered too many discrepancies between Basson's explanations of expenditure and the flow of funds to believe anything except that at all times, Basson and the WPW Group were one and the same. It would have been enormously helpful to all concerned, he pointed out, if at any time during the preceding six or seven years, Basson had offered the explanations that were being presented as his defence in court – a great deal of time and money could have been saved. Bruwer's views echoed those of Knobel, who repeatedly made the point, under cross-examination, that Basson should have disclosed the nature of his dealings with the principals – at least to him – at the time of the OSEO investigation.

Bruwer found that when Project Coast was officially shut down in 1993, the WPW Group's assets included a $700 000 investment in Tubmaster (an American manufacturer of shower enclosures), the cottage at Warfield in England, the Tygerberg Zoo, the Jetstar, and cash in bank accounts in both Switzerland and America. From March 1993, however – a date which the prosecution pointed out coincided with Basson being placed on early retirement – both the WPW and Wisdom groups experienced serious financial problems.

As at 30 June 1993, R86 million had flowed through the various accounts of the WPW Group. R66 million of this, Bruwer found, had originated from Project Coast funds. He was unable to determine the source of the remaining R19,6 million. By

the same date, the Wisdom Group in South Africa had written off a R2,29 million loss owing to a 'general failure of farming enterprises' and a R3,5 million loss incurred by its travel agencies. R711 000 had been spent trying to keep the Tygerberg Zoo afloat and WPW North American Holdings was in the hole to the tune of $3,3 million. Inter-company loans worth R5 million had been outstanding since 1989, and in 1994 and 1995, almost all the remaining WPW assets were disposed of at a loss, including Merton House, two farms in Mpumalanga and the Jetstar. Small profits realised on the sale of the Fancourt lodge and the condominium in Orlando were used to plug holes in a rapidly sinking ship, but by December 1995, the 'miracle' for which Bernard Zimmer had been waiting had failed to materialise, and the Five Nations Golf and Country Club in Belgium declared bankruptcy, the $2 million investment 'totally worthless'.

Although it was Basson who stood accused of misappropriating public funds, evidence led during his trial suggests that high-ranking SADF officers to whom he reported might not have exercised sufficient due diligence over expenditure on the CBW programme. Annual audits were conducted, to be sure, but in the absence of supporting documentation, Basson's word was deemed good enough as proof of expenditure. No physical audits or stocktakings were ever carried out to verify that the equipment or chemicals he claimed had been bought were in fact received, and provided the transfer of millions of rands to foreign banks had been duly authorised, the generals apparently had no need to know where the money ended up.

As Niel Knobel so succinctly told the court: 'His word was enough. After all, the man was a brigadier, a senior military officer. If you can't trust him, who can you trust?'

8

Foreign Affairs

OF ALL THE strange tales told about the operations of Project Coast during Basson's trial, the one that seemed most unlikely involved links between the apartheid government's chemical warfare programme and the regime of Libyan president Muammar Gadaffi, avowed supporter of the ANC.

As the story unfolded, it was impossible to avoid asking the obvious question: why would senior intelligence agents from Tripoli, working with representatives of the very countries suspected of supplying the SADF's enemies with chemical weapons during the Angolan conflict, be willing to help Basson build up a defence against those weapons? Basson testified that they did, and moreover that selected top-ranking SADF officers both knew about and authorised the arrangement in 1986. Since the main players named by Basson as being party to this scenario – former SADF chief Kat Liebenberg and Surgeon General Nicol Nieuwoudt – are dead, they could neither corroborate nor refute his testimony that Libyans, East Germans and Russians facilitated the procurement of some of the most sensitive materials and equipment in South Africa's CBW arsenal. However, the court accepted Basson's claim that the Libyans, in particular, gained a covert foothold in South Africa long before the ANC came to power.

Basson disclosed the Libyan connection for the first time during his trial, in order to explain his involvement in the WPW and Wisdom groups. He told the court that all the assets registered to these groups, and the flow of millions of dollars through more than 100 companies on three continents, were part of a front organisation he set up on behalf of Libyan, East German and Russian financial principals, and which was 'hijacked' by the SADF to its own advantage. Included in the arrangement, Basson said, was the exchange of classified military information,

for which the only guideline offered to him by his masters in the SADF was: just make sure you get more than you give.

As head of Project Coast, Basson's task was to ensure that the SADF could combat the threat of chemical or biological attack by the Angolan forces and their surrogates, the Cubans, East Germans and Russians. The first step was to gather information, and in 1984, Basson said, he was introduced by a German industrialist named Blücher to the international 'CBW Mafia', a group of experts in the field who met monthly to swop information and help one another acquire the lethal tools of their clandestine trade. It was here, Basson said, that he formed a relationship with Abdur Razzaq, a senior Libyan intelligence agent, an East German spy named Dieter Dreier and a mysterious Russian by the name of Vorobyov. Basson himself was masquerading – albeit under his own name and nationality – as an international arms smuggler. When the triumvirate of 'principals' sought his aid to launder massive sums of money, the foundation was laid for a nine-year relationship, in which the Libyans quickly became the dominant force, with access to 'unlimited' funds. Basson claims to have been a regular visitor to Libya from 1988, but investigators, including the National Intelligence Agency, found evidence only of much later travel in connection with purely commercial ventures after he was sacked from the SADF in December 1992.

Compounding the mystery of the Libyan connection is that none of the world's intelligence agencies appears to have known, prior to 1994, that there was one. This in itself is puzzling, since throughout the 1980s, Gaddafi's secret construction of what the Americans later described as the biggest chemical weapons plant in the Third World, at Rabta, was the focus of intensive investigation by the CIA and European agencies. How they could have identified the Rabta project and the worldwide network of front companies used to build the massive installation, yet missed links between Basson and Libyan intelligence, which would ultimately also have led them to the South African CBW programme, is a question that will probably never be answered. Basson insists that throughout his tenure as head of Project Coast there was not a single security breach, and that he successfully duped every international intelligence agency regarding the true nature of his extensive travels and foreign contacts.

However, when Basson began exploring such Libyan business possibilities as a heart hospital, cigarette factory and the construction of a railway line – more than two years after being sacked as head of Project Coast – both the British and American governments presented Pretoria with *démarches*, the highest form of diplomatic protest, demanding that his movements be curtailed lest he be selling off South Africa's CBW secrets to Gaddafi.

In the world of chemical and biological warfare, nothing is ever really as it seems, and according to Basson, more than a year after Nelson Mandela became

president of South Africa, the military mandarins continued to execute 'technical manoeuvres' and 'play with the truth' in order to keep some of Project Coast's darkest secrets from not only the British and Americans, but also the ANC government.

Basson's testimony included graphic accounts of daring escapades as an international spy, and how he had created the impression among his vast network of international contacts that he was a successful South African businessman with a great deal of money to spend. At times, he admitted, this required him to don the hats of international drug dealer and money launderer, and he spent a considerable time in the witness box regaling the court with stories of his adventures, his successful deception and manipulation of those who had no scruples assisting him in sanctions-busting activities and who, in some cases knowingly, in others unconsciously, assisted in the development of the CBW programme.

The prosecution argued that these were stories invented to hide Basson's role in defrauding South African taxpayers of millions of rands. Basson countered that the prosecutors simply did not understand the process of acquiring goods and services for the top-secret CBW programme, and were clearly incapable of grasping that he had simultaneously served two masters: his SADF managers on the one hand and the foreign financial principals on the other. This curious relationship saw the foreign principals helping Basson acquire substances, equipment and information needed by Project Coast, then instructing him how payment for their assistance should be invested – although, he said, he had considerable discretion in this regard.

It was in the course of setting up and administering a multinational group of companies for the principals, Basson said, that he formed relationships with a number of foreign associates. Belgians Bernard Zimmer and Charles van Remoortere told the court how they had made bank accounts in Luxembourg available to Basson, but said they were not aware that the accounts had been used in connection with the CBW programme, except for specific deals involving defensive clothing and equipment. Americans David and Jane Webster acknowledged that they were deeply involved in management of the WPW Group, helping Basson to set up three trusts in the Channel Islands as well as myriad companies and bank accounts, but claimed they believed Basson was a wealthy cardiologist and international entrepreneur, and that they had no knowledge of his involvement in the CBW programme.

Among the many documents found in Webster's files was one headed 'Background of the WPW Group', which contained details of an ambitious humanitarian scheme to bring health care to millions of Third World citizens across the length and breadth of Africa. According to the document, the WPW Group had been set up when a group of medical doctors led by Basson was tasked

by the 'Southern African Health Authorities' to establish a number of clinics in various countries that would 'deliver patient care and do research in those fields of disease cause and treatment where inadequacies were identified'.

These activities had led to the establishment of research and development centres in South Africa in the fields of biological and chemical/pharmaceutical products, and 'a number of interesting products' had been developed, including an immuno-stimulant that 'attracted a lot of attention and was eventually sold to an [*sic*] European pharmaceutical company for a substantial amount for further development'. Rapid expansion of the group's activities had demanded the introduction of 'more formal structures' to accommodate 'the complicated international political environment in which South African companies were forced to operate (sanctions etc)', and it was to this end that Webster's services had been enlisted.

While the 'headquarters' of the group was in the Cayman Islands and administrative activities run from Webster's Orlando law office, 'operational' activities were controlled by Basson from offices in London, Brussels, Basel and Luxembourg, the document said. Both Delta G Scientific and Roodeplaat Research Laboratories were named as research facilities within the WPW Group, along with several of WPW's American, European and South African subsidiaries.

A 'specific need' for own air transport had been identified because of the 'inaccessibility of many of the regions in which we work – travel by road is not possible in most areas of Africa and airline schedules in Africa and Eastern Europe leave much to be desired'. The transport of new, unregistered chemicals and biological material by means of public transport also presented 'near insurmountable problems', according to the document. To overcome these problems, the group had acquired a Beechcraft King Air 200 and a Lockheed Jetstar II, registered in America, but which had been chartered 'by such organisations as the United Nations for various humanitarian missions'. A number of southern African heads of state also made use of the aircraft when they travelled abroad, the document claimed.

The WPW Group offered an investment service through a number of 'offshore front companies' and had a substantial portfolio of real estate, including 'two guest houses in South Africa, a residential apartment in Orlando, farm and cottage in the UK and two apartments in Brussels'. A golf resort in Belgium had 'reached an advanced stage of development' and would be opened shortly. The group had 'recently developed close links with a number of North African countries and tentatively opened trading links between these countries and South Africa'. It was envisaged that these activities would increase in the near future, particularly in the fields of petroleum products, foodstuffs and turnkey construction projects.

The document was neither signed nor dated, and both Webster and Basson denied authorship. However, references to certain activities indicate that it must have been drawn up between 1991 and 1993, and the prosecution argued that it was probably designed to support the feverish search for bank loans that followed the abrupt termination of Basson's military career. Although he disclaimed specific knowledge of the document, Webster indicated during his testimony that it was a fairly accurate picture of the WPW Group as he saw it, and that he never had reason to suspect that Basson was anything but a legitimate businessman.

Swiss pharmacologist David Chu was on such good terms with Basson that he invited him to be his son's godfather. Although Chu visited Roodeplaat Research Laboratories with a view to marketing the company abroad, he too claimed ignorance of Basson's military links or the CBW project. Former British army officer and MI6 agent Roger Buffham also distanced himself from the CBW project, stating in an affidavit that his dealings with Basson had been confined to the supply of electronic security equipment – not subject to international sanctions – by his company, Contemporary Systems Design. Buffham, who Basson claimed had 'good contacts' at Porton Down, Britain's CBW facility, was later appointed head of security for Britain's Jockey Club, and refused to testify against Basson in South Africa because he feared for his life.

Basson denounced all his foreign associates as liars, claiming they dared not acknowledge the full extent of their involvement with him lest they face prosecution in their own countries. This could hold true for at least one of his known collaborators, former Swiss intelligence chief General Peter Regli, who found himself the subject of a major investigation after Basson claimed they had been involved in a highly clandestine deal during 1992, which would have seen Basson acquire 500 kg of methaqualone and Regli a quantity of enriched uranium from corrupt Croatian government officials.

Basson's international travels began in 1981, shortly after he was appointed to establish the SADF's chemical and biological warfare programme. Believing he could glean information from both left-wing and right-wing organisations with an interest in CBW, he travelled to America, presenting himself as a draft dodger. Over a two-month period, he said, he made contact with a number of government officials who had access to official data banks, and courted an employee at the Library of Congress, through whom he gained access to both public and classified information. He also attended a conference on military medicine in San Antonio, Texas, where, he claimed in a written report on the event, he was well received by members of the US armed forces, who were more than happy to share information on CBW with him.

Also attending the conference was an American military doctor, WS Augerson. In his report on the trip, Basson claimed that Augerson had told him the USA 'does in fact do offensive research/have an offensive research capacity' and that 'any country with a chemical industry should be able to produce offensive chemicals'. Basson also ascribed to Augerson the opinion that 'chemical attack is an ideal tactical weapon against terrorist organisations', and said the American was 'very concerned about the possibilities of biological warfare in the African theatre'.

Augerson's recollection is somewhat different. At the 1981 meeting of the Aerospace Medical Association, he says, he gave an open talk on chemical protection. After a panel discussion on the subject, 'a South African physician who said he worked for South African Airlines [*sic*] asked if we could talk privately, which we did', Augerson remembers. The physician – whom Augerson now believes may have been Basson – indicated that 'during his reserve medical service he encountered indications of chemical and biological warfare capability in Soviet allied forces in Angola. He told me some stories, I asked questions. I gave no advice or suggestions.'

While Basson had claimed that Augerson 'speculated about Soviet BW [biological warfare] activities in Vietnam', the American says he did no such thing, adding: 'People like me do not speculate on such matters with foreign strangers – weather, sports, music, yes, BW no.' The South African indicated that he would be visiting the US again, and that he had 'more information' to share. Augerson says he indicated interest, 'but never saw or heard from him again'. He reported the exchange to 'the appropriate organisation' – the US Military Medical Intelligence and Information Agency (USMMIIA) at Fort Detrick, but heard no more about it. He may also have informed the Defence Intelligence Agency of the South African's interest. While admitting that he 'and others responsible for the defence of US forces were obligated to learn all we could about the capabilities and threats from our major adversaries of that period', he is adamant that 'none of us would have considered "paying" for such information by assisting South Africa in developing chemical or biological weapons'.

Augerson tried to contact Basson after the meeting by writing to him at the address given on his registration form, but received no reply. 'One can only speculate on what Dr Basson was doing with his trip notes – impressing his superiors with his access to senior officials? Putting his ideas in the mouth of others to enhance his credibility? They were not in any case a fair representation of my views or our conversation,' Augerson told the authors, though it did occur to him that one reason he never again heard from Basson might have been that some intelligence organisation had made contact with the physician and turned the situation into 'management of an interesting source'.

Augerson's response not only calls into question Basson's claims of assistance from US military officers, but also shows that US intelligence agencies were alerted to Basson's interest in chemical and biological warfare at the earliest possible moment, before it had even been properly structured.

Whether failure by the US authorities to blow the whistle on Project Coast was the result of poor communication between the various intelligence agencies, or because the project was not categorised as a significant security risk, can only be the subject of speculation. Former SA Military Intelligence deputy chief Chris Thirion confirmed that US Intelligence services were aware of Basson's activities as far back as 1985 or 1986. 'A man from the CIA asked me if Basson had taken over from Lothar Neethling – was he now the main brain in CBW? I answered that Wouter Basson was involved in CBW counter-measures and was therefore bound to rub shoulders with Neethling,' Thirion told the authors.

Basson returned to South Africa in 1981 via Taiwan, where he visited the Chinese Army Chemical School, then travelled to England to continue gathering information. There, Basson testified, he learned that retired military officers and scientific researchers were only too eager to share their information. The British, said Basson, have a peculiar habit of casting aside those who have served them faithfully, and their resentment turns them into willing purveyors of information – 'old men who are eager to talk about their achievements'. One of those he claimed 'proved most helpful' was a retired naval officer, Derek Griffiths.

Throughout 1982 and 1983, Basson travelled extensively, seeking out agents prepared to assist him. By the time construction of the first Project Coast front company, Delta G Scientific, was completed, he was making an average of 10 trips abroad each year, and it was on one such visit in 1984 that he met now-discredited Belgian toxicologist Professor Aubin Heyndrickx, who in turn introduced Basson to Hubert Blücher, a wealthy industrialist and descendant of Field Marshal Gebhard von Blücher, whose Prussian army defeated Napoleon at Waterloo. Blücher, Basson claimed, regularly hosted meetings of what was known as the CBW Mafia. They gathered at different locations every month, including the Hotel Baur au Lac on Lake Zurich, and Blücher's home in Murren, a town set so high in the Swiss Alps that it can be reached only by cable-car. Basson was introduced to the group as someone interested in purchasing protective clothing, and it soon became clear to him that each member had access to the CBW secrets of his own country.

On returning to South Africa, Basson says, he briefed the Surgeon General and Military Intelligence's Chief Director Counter-Intelligence about the so-called CBW Mafia, and was authorised by them to attend the monthly meetings. Before long, he was approached by certain members of the group and asked to be of assistance to them in laundering $250 million in cash that the East German, Dieter Dreier, had at his disposal. Basson said he had no idea where the money

came from, but suspected that Dreier might have stolen it from the secret funds of the Stasi, the East German spy agency, which began to fall apart as the end of communist rule became inevitable. This proposal, too, was cleared by both the Surgeon General and Military Intelligence, Basson claimed.

At about the same time he became involved with the CBW Mafia, Basson also met Belgian-born businessman Charles van Remoortere, who was running a group of companies in the Eastern Cape when he became aware of the need for NBC suits by military forces. Van Remoortere was opposed to the economic sanctions imposed on South Africa, and had neither a moral nor an ethical dilemma about supplying defensive equipment to the SADF. He and Basson were introduced to one another by Neethling, head of the SA Police Forensics Laboratory at the time. On a trip to Europe, Van Remoortere took Basson to meet Jean-Pierre Seynaeve, managing director of Seyntex, near Ghent. They also had meetings with Bernard Zimmer, Van Remoortere's old schoolfriend and business partner.

In order to cement their newly formed association, Basson and Neethling arranged a visit to Angola for Van Remoortere and Seynaeve, where they were taken to a hospital in Jamba to view Unita soldiers who, Van Remoortere was led to believe, had been exposed to chemical weapons. By the time Van Remoortere had his NBC factory, YCVM, up and running north of Pretoria, he had met Project Coast 'insiders' Jan Lourens, Philip Mijburgh and Wynand Swanepoel. He and Basson developed an especially good relationship, to the point where Van Remoortere made his existing bank account in Luxembourg available to Basson after being told of the difficulties he was encountering in conducting clandestine deals abroad.

Later still, Basson complained that his movements in Europe were severely restricted by his South African citizenship, and Van Remoortere suggested that he could acquire a Belgian passport by entering into a marriage of convenience with his sister. The deal they struck was that Basson would provide her with an apartment in Brussels and a car for two years, after which they would divorce. Six months later, Basson had both a Belgian passport and a Belgian wife. However, 18 months into the arrangement, relations between Van Remoortere and his 'brother-in-law' began to sour, and he urged his sister to divorce Basson immediately. She refused, having fallen in love with him, and it was not for another two years that she finally ended the marriage, frustrated by her inability to contact Basson for long periods of time.

In the interim, Basson had married his second South African wife, Annette Versluis, and was at least technically a bigamist, though he maintains that because his Belgian passport contained a false date of birth, he was 'not really' married to Van Remoortere's sister at all. During his testimony in court, Basson also claimed

that this was merely one of three bogus marriages he had entered into in order to obtain foreign travel documents. He could not remember the names of his other 'wives', but said they both came from 'behind the Iron Curtain' and were paid by covert units of the SADF for their compliance. Van Remoortere's sister had also been handsomely rewarded, Basson claimed, and proved a valuable source of information to the Directorate Covert Collection.

Van Remoortere had set up several companies to supply the SADF with protective equipment and carry out quality control on the goods. Among them were SRD and Protechnik, used by Basson as examples of how the interests of the SADF and those of his financial principals meshed. The principals had financed both undertakings, Basson claimed, because they needed a facility 'in neutral territory' for research into CBW defence at precisely the same time that Project Coast did. The arrangement suited everyone concerned, since there was no financial link to the SADF, while the principals received information about research and tests done on defensive equipment. Trial analysts found it inexplicable that anyone within the SADF would knowingly authorise a situation that allowed funding from a group allied with 'the enemy' to be used to set up a key facility for the CBW programme. The anomaly was never satisfactorily explained.

When Basson first met Abdur Razzaq, he believed him to be a senior Libyan intelligence agent engaged in a CBW programme. Basson said he told Razzaq that he was a South African sanctions-buster. Dreier was the man to talk to about procurement of sensitive equipment, Basson claimed – a top-flight wheeler-dealer in the international arms bazaar, who saw Basson as someone operating on the same level. Towards the end of the trial, two Swiss journalists tracked Dreier down to his office in Basel, Switzerland, and found a man who was 'absolutely devastated' by Basson's claims. The journalists described Dreier as a friendly and mild-mannered man, aged about 50, who was running Happy Rent, a car rental agency opposite the train station in Basel, with his son. Following this interview, Dreier contacted Basson's prosecutors and offered to travel to South Africa to testify that he had never worked as an intelligence agent for anyone, least of all the East Germans, was Swiss-born and did not remember knowing anyone named Basson. However, the judge refused to allow the state to reopen its case in order to present the testimony, saying he had no reason to believe Dreier would tell the truth.

Basson claimed that the foreign principals fell into three distinct groups, Libyans, East Germans and Russians, and that the three original corporations registered in the Cayman Islands were designed to serve one group each: WPW for the Libyans, Medchem for the East Germans and PCM for the Russians. None of them wanted to be paid in their own countries for services or goods supplied, hence the extensive network of companies in the West. Buffham, claimed Basson, was drawn into the network through Dreier, as was Dr Chu. While Basson claimed

that his American attorney, David Webster, met both Razzaq and Dreier during the course of their business deals, Webster had no recollection of ever even hearing their names, much less that they were, in fact, the people behind the WPW Group.

In 1993, Basson's trips to Libya began to raise the eyebrows of British, American and South African authorities. The foreign governments were especially concerned about the possibility that he was selling CBW secrets to Gaddafi, and the American and British ambassadors to South Africa sought a meeting with President FW de Klerk to discuss the situation. According to US Ambassador Princeton Lyman, there was grave concern that information about chemical and biological weapons was being acquired by certain states, and Libya in particular. Apart from Basson's visits to Tripoli, they were worried about possible attempts by foreign governments to recruit scientists who had been involved with South Africa's CBW programme.

Although it was Basson's own travels that sparked international concern, he was the very person called on to brief CBW experts and diplomats from both Britain and America about Project Coast. Asked by prosecutor Anton Ackermann whether he had been frank and honest with them, a scornful Basson shot back: 'Do you really think I was going to give the Americans and the British a full briefing on what we in South Africa had been doing all those years?' The suggestion was ridiculous, said Basson – his orders were merely to 'play the game', and that is what he did.

On 22 April 1994, five days before the first democratic election in South Africa, the American and British ambassadors met with De Klerk again, urging him to brief Nelson Mandela about the CBW programme. A few days before Mandela's inauguration as president, a short briefing did take place, thanks to the continued insistence of the foreign representatives.

A year later, with Basson still making regular visits to Libya, America and Britain presented a third *démarche*. Top of the agenda were Basson's unfettered trips to Tripoli. While Mandela was present during the first part of the meeting, he had left by the time discussion turned to Basson. Foreign Affairs Minister Alfred Nzo and Deputy Defence Minister Ronnie Kasrils agreed that the best way to solve the problem was to re-hire Basson as a public servant in order to exercise some control over his travel. Clearly this would lead to questions being asked, but at the time, according to Lyman, 'it was the only course of action that appeared practical', and from October 1995, Basson returned to 1 Military Hospital in Pretoria, where his military career had begun two decades before.

Soon afterwards, Basson claimed, a 'CIA agent' accosted him on the pavement outside the American embassy, threatening him not only with death, but with revealing to Gaddafi that he had been a double agent. Basson said that his reaction

was 'to get permission then and there to climb on an aircraft to Libya and tell my contacts everything', a decision that resulted in his detention in a Libyan prison for 14 days. It was not his first experience of being behind bars in a foreign country – but, he told the court, conditions in the Libyan jail were 'far better' than those in the Swiss prison where he spent almost three weeks towards the end of 1993.

Basson was by no means the only person associated with Project Coast who forged international links and received assistance from colleagues abroad. Dr André Immelman, director of research at Roodeplaat, said that while he was in America in 1984, he was approached in a laboratory by someone he believed was a CIA agent and asked pointed questions about a South African CBW programme. He denied any knowledge of such activity, but a while later his host excused himself, saying he had to attend a meeting, and suggested that Immelman should spend the time in the library attached to the laboratory. He was shown to a small room and quickly realised that every publication on the shelves related to chemical and biological warfare.

Some time between 1993 and 1996, Jan Lourens was approached by Ters Ehlers, PW Botha's last private secretary. Ehlers, who has been linked to the supply of arms to Rwanda during the genocide, introduced Lourens to a friend of his from Syria whom Lourens remembers as Mr Saroojee, and another man of Middle Eastern appearance. Saroojee 'quite openly' inquired about access to CBW technology in the form of documentation, skills or both, but since Lourens had already resigned as managing director of Protechnik, he told the stranger that he was not in a position to procure the information sought. Lourens then introduced Saroojee to Immelman, and at a meeting in a private home in Johannesburg, CBW was 'discussed openly', according to Lourens. He and Immelman asked the Syrians whether they had laboratories where chemical agents could be analysed and bacteria cultured, and suggested that they might travel to Syria in order to evaluate such facilities, if need be.

The meeting ended abruptly, with the Syrians excusing themselves to attend to other business, and neither Lourens nor Immelman heard from them again. Whether the men were Syrian at all, shopping around for skills and knowledge about chemical and biological weapons, or foreign agents trying to glean information about the South African programme, has never been established. It is, however, of some concern that, according to a former senior official attached to the National Intelligence Agency's non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction unit, the NIA was not aware of the contact.

Scientists who were involved in Project Coast remain as vulnerable to potentially lucrative offers for their skills and knowledge as their Russian counterparts, hundreds of whom found themselves out on the street when the Soviet CBW

programme was terminated. As events in the US after 11 September 2001 showed, the threat of chemical or biological attack by misguided individuals, rogue states or terrorist groups is both real and current, and constant vigilance is the only bulwark against the prospect – however unlikely – of the world as we know it ending with neither a whimper nor a bang, but with the silent whisper of a deadly plague.

9

Living High on the Hog

BY ANY STANDARDS, the hedonistic lifestyle espoused by Wouter Basson and his handpicked cohorts was extraordinary. As chronicled by a succession of witnesses playing Brutus to his Caesar – and particularly measured against customarily more Spartan military norms – it was an affront to unwitting South African taxpayers who would have to win the lottery in order to aspire to anything even resembling such luxury.

Lacking tangible proof of day-to-day expenditure beyond his means – there were no Gucci loafers or Armani suits in Basson's closet, no luxury sports cars in the driveway of his unremarkable abode, no priceless artworks on the walls – the prosecution built its fraud case on the premise that at all times, Basson and the WPW Group were one and the same, and that the material benefits he enjoyed accrued from nominal ownership by associates of companies set up for the specific purpose of laundering the proceeds of his alleged crimes.

Faced with overwhelming documentary evidence supporting this scenario, Basson presented a parallel world peopled by financial principals, a motley crew of real or alleged secret agents of several nationalities, and spiced with tales of derring-do dismissed by more than one witness as figments of a rich imagination. Confronted by documents turned up by the forensic audit, Basson simply dismissed them as false, the product of interminable 'cover stories' designed to hide transactions in the interest of Project Coast, or claimed he had no recollection of their contents. At one point, senior prosecutor Anton Ackermann's scepticism caused him to categorise Basson's accounts of life-threatening exploits as 'more Austin Powers than James Bond', and he made no pretence of believing any of the explanations offered for Basson's global jetsetting.

The first glimpse of this lavish lifestyle came just two weeks into the evidentiary stage of the trial, when attractive blonde architect Lizelle Larson began testifying about the multi-million-rand revamp of Merton House, an art deco property in Pretoria's diplomatic belt, which was bought by the Zimbabwe government in 1994 to serve as its South African embassy. The minutiae of evidence elicited from Larson and a slew of other witnesses supplied the media with titillating copy for months, and were surpassed only by the attention paid to the horrific accounts of state-sanctioned murder that marked the next phase of the trial.

Larson met Basson through former military psychologist Annette Versluis, who became his second wife in 1991. He told her he represented David Webster, a 'wealthy American' who would use the house to accommodate foreign guests and potential investors. Initially, she was authorised to spend R1 million on the project, but over the next three years, both the requirements and the costs escalated dramatically, and the final expenditure was closer to R10 million. In addition to formal living and dining rooms, the house featured four *en suite* bedrooms and a small first-floor sitting room. A planned gymnasium was never built, but there was an all-weather tennis court, jacuzzi, sauna, billiard room, library, swimming pool and a wine cellar designed to hold thousands of bottles. The three-storey house had both an indoor lift and a service elevator, a records room, walk-in safe and self-contained caretaker's flat. The landscaped garden was dotted with statues selected by Basson himself, while the finishes he chose included marble, granite, Oregon pine, terracotta tiles, special paint techniques and stained glass. The house was registered in the name of Wisdom Investments & Properties.

Basson's frequent presence at the site aroused suspicion among the neighbours of military involvement in Merton House, and the resulting public row initiated the first of a series of investigations into his activities – a 15-month internal SADF probe (including the tapping of 47 telephones), which found no evidence of any wrongdoing and accepted a sworn affidavit in which Basson claimed merely to be acting as Webster's friend and 'agent' by supervising the refurbishment. His protestations notwithstanding, the moment Merton House fell under the spotlight, Basson halted his overt involvement, telling Larson he would no longer attend site meetings and that she should not use his name in any future documentation, as 'things are getting a little warm'.

Towards the end of the construction phase, Larson told Basson she would like to play a role in the interior decoration of the house. He agreed, on condition that she visit the exclusive Fancourt golf resort near George and consult with the owner's wife, Helena Pieterse, since he favoured the 'ambience' of the traditional chintz-and-plump-couches English country house décor. Larson duly travelled to the south-western Cape, and while she and Basson discussed paint chips and

fabric swatches with Mrs Pieterse, the other members of their party played golf. The next day Larson, Basson, Annette and Merton House construction boss Niel Kirstein returned to Johannesburg in a private jet, which seemed, said Larson, to be 'under Basson's control'.

Larson heard no more of plans to furnish Merton House, and when the property was sold in 1994 at a R4 million loss, it was still an empty shell, despite Basson's claim – during his own testimony – that since the intention from the start was that the house would serve as the Libyan embassy, his task was to ensure that it was decorated in keeping with Muslim taste and tradition.

Presented with the image of Basson as ethnic décor artist, Ackermann was unable to contain himself. What exactly, he asked, was 'Moslem décor' – a profusion of copper urns and Persian carpets? And how did Fancourt's furnishings reflect Byzantine chic? In all earnest, Basson countered that the Muslim culture posed definite demands in regard to a whole range of considerations – details such as cupboards, what type of chairs were used and how they were placed in a room, even what artworks were acceptable. Thanks to 'living with these people' for several years, he was familiar with their needs, and while Fancourt was not decorated in 'Islamic' style, there was nothing about the décor there that would be offensive to the Libyans.

By the time it was completed, Merton House offered a multi-line telephone system, parking for up to 30 vehicles, a concealed bar, bidets in all the bathrooms 'to comply with the cultural needs of certain peoples' and, according to Basson, a secret bomb shelter in the wine cellar, designed to withstand a mortar attack. This came as something of a surprise to builder Kirstein, who was clearly bemused by the suggestion that he was ever asked to construct anything resembling a bunker.

Sam Bosch was as unlikely a character as one could imagine forming any kind of relationship with Basson. His military background was limited to compulsory national service with 8 Mobile Field Hospital in the Operational Area, and the only ranks he had seen since were those of the banking world, through which he worked his way up from the 1970s. He met Basson in 1989, when they were introduced by Tjaart Viljoen, Project Coast's first financial administrator and the man who ran the WPW Group's South African subsidiaries on the side.

Bosch was one of 30 witnesses against Basson to be warned in terms of Section 204 of the Criminal Procedure Act that, provided the judge was satisfied by the end of the trial that they had testified fully, frankly and honestly, they could be granted indemnity from prosecution. Even after being offered this deal by the prosecution, Bosch sought extensive legal opinion on his position, chiefly from lawyers recommended by Basson, all of whom warned Bosch of the dangers inherent in self-incrimination and advised him not to turn state evidence. In the

end, Bosch decided to place his fate in the hands of the court – and came to tell his story armed with piles of documents and his business diaries.

When Bosch was promoted to manager of Nedbank's Centurion branch in January 1990, all the accounts controlled by Viljoen, Basson and Annette Versluis were transferred there. Indeed, his first appointment in his newly elevated position was with Basson and Viljoen, on 15 January. Within less than six months, the Centurion branch became the bank of choice for all the companies under the aegis of the Wisdom Group. The seduction of Samuel Bosch had begun.

On 1 June, Bosch received the invitation of a lifetime – an all-expenses paid trip to America, hosted by Basson. In a personal letter to the banker, Basson indicated that he was involved with Wisdom Finance, a venture capital company with extensive foreign links. Among these was WPW Aviation Inc., which was poised to take delivery of a Jetstar aircraft to be used in Africa by Wisdom Finance, and Basson had been allocated three seats on the inaugural flight from Orlando, Florida, via Europe. He would be honoured to have Bosch as his guest on the trip. The third seat would be filled by Dr Philip Mijburgh, managing director of Delta G Scientific, and the trip would provide opportunities for them to meet with businessmen and bankers at 'various stops on the way home in both Europe and Africa'. They would be 'living in company houses en route', so Bosch would incur no expense. The full itinerary was attached. Bosch had kept it for 10 years and was able to produce it in court. He arranged to take leave for the trip, and although the understanding with Nedbank was that he would pay his own airfare to Orlando, he never did.

For Bosch, the magic began on departure from Johannesburg on the night of 24 June, when he discovered that he would be flying first class to London. It was, he remarked wryly, 'the first time in my life I'd ever sat up front'. But the best was yet to come. After a brief stopover in London, Basson, Bosch and Mijburgh crossed the Atlantic on Concorde, the supersonic airliner for which, shortly before it was grounded after the fatal 2000 crash near Paris, a one-way ticket cost a staggering R23 885. Even in 1990, when the foreign exchange rate was infinitely more favourable, flying Concorde was a luxury reserved for the very rich and usually famous.

In America, the fun began in Orlando, gateway to Disney World, the futuristic Epcot Center, Sea World, two major movie studios and Cape Canaveral. After spending the night with David and Jane Webster, the three travellers took a 20-minute flight in a chartered light aircraft to an airfield where the Jetstar, bought for $3,2 million, was being spray-painted. From there, they moved on to Disney World, where they stayed at the Disney Inn – an average hotel, 'nothing swanky', according to Bosch – saw the sights, and played a round of golf at the Magnolia Course, the second-toughest of the six courses at Disney World, where green fees

in 2002 ran to $125 per player and reservations have to be made up to 30 days in advance. One of the main attractions of the course is the unique 'mousetrap' on the sixth hole, a sand trap shaped like cartoon character Mickey Mouse. Evenings were spent partying at the Orange Blossom Dance Club, Orlando's trendy Church Street Station and the Epcot Center, where the visitors dined and took in a cabaret.

On Thursday, 28 June, Basson and Mijburgh were locked in a meeting with Webster, while Bosch went shopping for a set of Wilson golf clubs with graphite shafts and a .357 Magnum handgun – the only two items he paid for himself throughout the trip. The following day, the trio flew in a chartered King Air to Blowing Rock, North Carolina, where they stayed overnight with Jane Webster's mother, Caroline Roberts, after another round of golf. Set high in the Appalachian mountains, Blowing Rock has long been the summer refuge of wealthy Floridians fleeing the sweltering heat and humidity of the Deep South. Top-rated restaurants, hiking trails, fishing, horseback riding, white-water rafting, several golf courses, magnificent mountain vistas and numerous art, antique and craft galleries are among the area's attractions.

According to the legend from which the town takes its name, many, many years ago, a Chickasaw chieftain, fearful of a white man's admiration for his beautiful daughter, journeyed far from the plains to place her in the care of her Native American mother. One day, while daydreaming on the craggy cliff that overlooks the town, the maiden spied a Cherokee brave wandering in the wilderness far below, and playfully shot an arrow in his direction. The flirtation worked, and soon he appeared at her wigwam, courting her with songs of his land, and they became lovers, roaming the woodlands and resting beside the crystal streams. One fateful day, the young brave interpreted a strange reddening of the sky as a sign of trouble, commanding his return to his tribe on the distant plains, but his lover begged him not to leave her. Torn between his duty and his heart, the brave leapt from the Blowing Rock into the wilderness below. The grief-stricken maiden prayed daily to the Great Spirit until, one evening when the sky again grew red, a gust of wind blew her lover back onto the rock and into her arms. Since then, legend has it, a perpetual wind has blown up onto the rock from the valley below.

The romantic story must have struck a chord with the visitors from South Africa. Two years later, when the South African component of the WPW Group was restructured, the holding company was renamed Blowing Rock Consolidated Investments.

On Sunday, 1 July, Bosch, Basson and Mijburgh flew to New York for an afternoon of sightseeing. That evening, leaving Mijburgh behind to attend to business of his own, Bosch and Basson flew to Luxembourg aboard the Jetstar. The trip

was used to 'thoroughly christen' the aircraft, Bosch recalled with a grin, and to discuss the workings of the Wisdom Group. On the flight to London at the start of the trip, Bosch had asked Basson what line of business he was in. The response had been 'something I cannot repeat in court', but amounted to Bosch being told in no uncertain terms that this was none of his concern. On the flight to Luxembourg, Basson sketched a rough organogram for Bosch to explain how the various WPW and Wisdom companies fitted into the matrix. He told Bosch he managed these interests on behalf of Webster, and advised the banker to 'follow my lead … pretend you know what's going on' over the next few days, when they would be attending various business meetings.

On arrival in Luxembourg, Bosch was introduced to Bernard Zimmer and Mijburgh rejoined the group. They spent the evening at a nightclub before flying to Zurich, where Bosch met another of Basson's European associates, Jurg Jacomet, at whose home they spent the night. The next morning they drove to Basel, met up with Dr David Chu and the manager of Bank LaRoche for discussions on ways to facilitate a $500 000 loan for Mijburgh's company, Medchem Consolidated Investments (MCI). That evening, the manager and various senior bank officials were guests at a cocktail party hosted by Chu.

On Thursday, 5 July, the trio flew to Farnborough in England, spending the night at Fairclough Cottage, Basson's country retreat a stone's throw from Windsor Castle, and within spitting distance of the exclusive private school Eton and Ascot racecourse. Friday, 6 July was Basson's fortieth birthday, and the three men breakfasted together before driving to nearby Wentworth – Spanish golfer Seve Ballesteros's favourite links, and the venue at one time or another of almost every major international golf tournament. By this time, Bosch and Mijburgh had formed a convivial relationship, based on their mutual interest in aircraft and golf, but Basson, according to Bosch, was less adroit on the greens, and 'always had a problem with his back swing'. That afternoon, it was on to Malaga – 'flying Jetstar all the way' – and the sun-drenched Costa del Sol, where they celebrated Basson's birthday at the five-star Don Carlos, which Bosch described as a 'very grand hotel … I was impressed'. The next day, after they had played 18 holes on the adjoining Los Naranjos course, where the front nine meander through seemingly endless orange groves, the Jetstar headed home to Johannesburg.

Three months later, Bosch quit a 20-year career in commercial banking to set up BSI Financial and Secretarial Services with another of Basson's associates, Ben van den Berg, and keep the books of Roodeplaat Research Laboratories, the Wisdom Group and Mijburgh's Medchem group of companies. He also administered various trusts for Basson and Mijburgh. For the next two years, Bosch would alternate his time between 'creative' bookkeeping and a heady lifestyle, for which his first trip to America had merely laid the foundation. Both the

Jetstar and a King Air were used regularly to ferry Basson, Mijburgh, RRL chief executive Wynand Swanepoel and their guests to events locally and abroad.

If not for the underlying gravity of their testimony, the witnesses coaxed by Ackermann to disclose the smallest details of the social lives they shared with Basson might have been describing an exclusive 'Boys' Own Adventure' club. Their games were rugby, golf and motor racing, their toys private aircraft and Rolex watches, their sandpits the celebrity playgrounds of the world. There were golf excursions to the Royal Swazi Sun and team-building weekends at the Wild Coast Sun, weekend trips to Cape Town, Bloemfontein, even Twickenham in England, to watch rugby, a night flight to Sun City to take in a musical extravaganza, followed by a sunrise breakfast at Basson's home in Pretoria, several visits to Fancourt and regular travels to Europe and America.

In December 1990, while Bosch and his family were holidaying in a rented house at the Western Cape seaside resort of Hartenbos, Basson and Annette Versluis spent Christmas with them, having flown from nearby George in the King Air. In return, the Bosch family was invited to spend a few days at Fancourt, a visit punctuated by a flight in the King Air to Durban, where the group spent the day visiting Tjaart and Marie Viljoen, who were on holiday at Umhlanga Rocks. For Bosch, this was something of a high point. 'The Bosch family was not used to flying all over the place in private planes, so for the sake of my children, we went along to see the sights,' he told the court. During 1991, Bosch's wife accompanied Basson and Annette on a 'shopping trip' to Europe in the Jetstar, free of charge, while Bosch was in the party that travelled to Switzerland to buy computers for one of Mijburgh's companies, Data Image. On 16 December, he was among the guests flown to Fancourt to celebrate Viljoen's fiftieth birthday.

A luxury lodge at Fancourt – No. 1008 – was bought in mid-1991 for R1,3 million, including 16 golf club memberships at the magnificent resort, home to the likes of super-golfer Ernie Els, disgraced South African cricket captain Hansie Cronjé (until his death in an aircraft accident on 1 June 2002) and the former head of the United Cricket Board of South Africa, Dr Ali Bacher. As with all the properties registered to companies within the WPW and Wisdom groups, Basson claimed that the lodge was purchased on behalf of – and with funding from – the shadowy financial principals, both as a means of laundering the vast amount of money at the disposal of the faceless Libyan, Russian and East German intelligence agents, and to be used by them as 'safe houses'. However, the golf memberships were allocated to Basson and members of his posse – Bosch, Mijburgh, Swanepoel, Viljoen, Chris Marlow and Van den Berg – while correspondence from Fancourt was routinely addressed to Dr and Mrs W Basson at their private postal address, and named him as the 'syndicate leader'. Basson admitted during cross-examination that none of his 'principals' ever visited Fancourt.

In August 1994, when the WPW and Wisdom groups were beset by financial problems, the original lodge was sold and a smaller unit, No. 753, acquired for R375 000. Only four golf club memberships were attached to this lodge, and according to Bosch, he and Basson were the only people who stayed there regularly.

After Bosch, the most illuminating testimony about the first-class travel and five-star lifestyle enjoyed by Basson came from Viljoen. In August 1990, shortly after joining the Wisdom Group on a full-time basis, Viljoen and his wife travelled to London at Basson's behest for meetings with Chu and Roger Buffham. They flew business class – but this, Viljoen testified, was the last time he travelled anything but first class, or by Jetstar, when conducting business for Basson. The trip lasted three weeks and included Zurich and Paris, but all Viljoen's attempts to conduct business were stymied, since August is summer holiday month for Europeans.

In April 1991, Viljoen was in Basel for a meeting with Chu when Basson called him to say he was flying to Switzerland in the Jetstar, bringing Viljoen's wife Marie, Bosch's wife Elise, Annette and his daughter, Naomi, with him. The party spent a day or two in Basel before flying to England and staying at the cottage for a few days, before returning to Johannesburg in the Jetstar.

In late November, Viljoen, Kirstein, pilot John Purvis, Basson and their wives made a 10-day trip to Europe in the Jetstar, visiting Basel and Luxembourg before flying to Liege in Belgium, where they were met by a driver who took them to Durbuy. Shortly after checking in at their hotel, Basson asked the driver to take him, Viljoen and Kirstein to the 'golf club development' – the Five Nations Golf and Country Club at Mean, which Basson told Viljoen he was involved in, but which would be handled by Marlow.

From Belgium the group flew to England, spending the night at the Warfield cottage. The next day they drove to Leeds, stayed overnight in York, then toured the Midlands for a day before heading for London, where they stayed at the 'extremely luxurious' Hotel Meridien in Picadilly Circus for three nights, on one of which they took in a Noël Coward play in the West End. The rest of the time in London was spent 'doing touristy things', according to Viljoen. The last stop on the tour was Basson's favourite Marbella hostelry, the Don Carlos. While Basson, Kirstein and the two pilots played golf and their partners spent the day on the beach, the Viljoens explored the picturesque surrounding area. The following day the entire party boarded a ferry to Tangiers, where they were met by a local tour guide at the docks and taken to all the popular tourist traps, including the *souk*, where they bought clothes and carpets.

Defence advocate Jaap Cilliers told the court that the 12-day, six-country tour was made possible by the fact that the Jetstar had to go to Switzerland for routine maintenance, while the day-trip to Morocco was designed to hide a secret mission

in which Basson obtained classified documents, which were then smuggled back to South Africa rolled up in the exotic carpets and transported in a secret compartment. While Kirstein had testified that he and his wife paid for their own accommodation on the trip, Viljoen said his only out-of-pocket expenses were the ferry tickets for himself and his wife, and the kelim they bought. When he raised the question of payment with Basson, he was told not to worry, Basson would 'take care of things'. Just days after arriving home, the group of friends was on the move again – to Fancourt, for Viljoen's birthday party. He and Marie flew by commercial airline to George for dinner on the night of 15 December with Basson and Annette, Marlow, Sam and Elise Bosch.

On two occasions the Viljoens were among the guests of Medchem Consolidated Investments on three-day stays at the private Bataleur camp in the Kruger National Park. The camp, in the central section of the game reserve, has seven luxury units offering a total of 34 beds, and in January 2002 accommodation was quoted at R600 per unit per night, plus an additional R150 per person. On both occasions the Viljoens drove to the venue, but the rest of the party flew in by chartered aircraft from Pretoria, accompanied by two caterers. In addition to Basson, Kirstein, Mijburgh, Bosch, Swanepoel and Marlow, Viljoen remembered Webster, Van den Berg and Bernard Zimmer being present. Some, but not all, of the guests were accompanied by their wives, food and drink were plentiful and the emphasis was on socialising rather than any formal meetings, according to Viljoen. In fact, although he and Webster spent a great deal of time together on both occasions, the business of the WPW and Wisdom groups was never discussed.

Symbiotic as all the relationships so carefully cultivated by Basson were, the shibboleth for true acceptance into his personal cabal was the game of rugby. In November 1992, Viljoen was scheduled to attend a business meeting in Basel, just two weeks after the first rugby test in 23 years at Twickenham between South Africa and England. It had been two decades since the last clash between the two international teams, and the prospect of seeing the Springboks in action at the historic English ground after years of isolation caused a major outbreak of rugby fever among South African enthusiasts. When Viljoen suggested to Basson that the meeting be moved forward so that he could nip across to England for the test match, Basson not only agreed, but immediately arranged to go himself. Then Mijburgh, Swanepoel and Marlow decided they wanted to go, too. The night before the game, the group, now also including Kirstein, gathered at Fairclough Cottage.

On various occasions the Jetstar and King Air, and at least once a chartered Lear jet, were used to fly the rugby fans to matches in Cape Town or Bloemfontein, but their 'clubhouse' from 1989 was Suite 215 at Pretoria's Loftus Versfeld. Bought at Basson's suggestion for R160 000, the suite played host to between 18 and 20

'regular' fans, including Viljoen, Bosch, Kirstein, Marlow, Swanepoel, Mijburgh, RRL administrative chief David Spamer and Lieutenant-General Lothar Neethling. Those who were married usually took their wives as well. Guests were vague as to the ownership of the suite. Some thought it belonged to Basson, others that it was Viljoen's. For the first few years, in any event, they enjoyed someone's hospitality free of charge, but from 1993, as the WPW and Wisdom groups became increasingly cash-strapped, guests were first asked to contribute towards the cost of their tickets, then to supply their own alcohol, and later still, to bring their own food and snacks.

In 1996, with the businesses on the verge of financial collapse, Marlow instructed Viljoen to 'test the waters' with a view to selling the suite. He secured an offer of R220 000, but when he took it to Basson, was sent packing. 'He accused me of wanting to deprive him of one of the few pleasures he had left,' said Viljoen. However, two months after Basson was arrested in January 1997, Viljoen was desperate to recoup some of the money owed to his own company, Profincor, and approached Mijburgh about payment of a long-outstanding R1 million loan. Mijburgh said he was not in a position to settle the debt, and suggested that perhaps the time had come to dispose of the Loftus suite. Unable to contact Basson directly since 'he was spending just about all his time at his attorney's office', Viljoen was eventually given the go-ahead for the sale by Mijburgh. Basson received half of the proceeds, R103 000, surreptitiously collected by Kirstein in terms of a bogus agreement giving Viljoen a 50 per cent share in Arab horses owned by the builder, and paid to Basson on demand in cash instalments of between R5 000 and R10 000.

The appearance at the Pretoria High Court in February 2001 of Antoinette Erasmus – formerly Lourens – was keenly awaited by journalists, some of whom had been told earlier by Basson that she was 'the most beautiful woman' he had ever seen. After a brief reference during Knobel's testimony to the fact that Project Coast bio-engineer Jan Lourens had divorced his wife because he suspected she was having an affair with Basson, Antoinette had long been the subject of court gossip and speculation. Recruited by Mijburgh in 1985 to work for Project Coast's administrative front company, Infladel, as a librarian, the tall, dark-haired woman was listed as a director of numerous Wisdom Group companies and had signing powers on several foreign bank accounts of which Basson was the named beneficiary. As far as she was concerned, every undertaking to which she lent her name was linked to the project.

Following her divorce in August 1987, she was living in rented accommodation, until Basson told her that a friend of his, stationed in the Operational Area, wanted to buy a house in Pretoria as an investment, and that Antoinette could live in it, free of charge. Basson's mother Bronwen took her house-hunting, and she chose a

property in Lizjohn Street, Lynnwood Ridge, which she occupied rent-free from December 1987 until February 1989, when she bought the house from what she believed was a Project Coast front company. She had doubted the story about Basson's friend from the start, and told his mother she was convinced that Basson himself, or one of the front companies, was actually the owner. This belief was reinforced by the fact that her negotiations to buy the house were with Basson, she was granted a R100 625 loan by Wisdom Finance through Viljoen and Basson to supplement a R50 000 mortgage bond from a commercial bank, and the balance of the R180 000 was apparently paid by Basson himself in the form of a cheque, which he had her endorse as 'part payment'.

In July 1993, two years after marrying a 7 Medical Battalion doctor, Deon Erasmus, she sold the house, using the proceeds to settle her bond and repay part of the Wisdom Finance loan, which had meanwhile increased to more than R125 000, due to additional funds being borrowed by her new husband. For the next six years the couple made monthly payments to Viljoen from their new home in Provost, Alberta. What no one told them, until April 1999, was that the loan had been settled in full, according to Viljoen, by Basson in March 1992. Ackermann only discovered during his preparation for the trial that the Erasmuses were still servicing a non-existent debt of $30 000 Canadian, and he ordered them to halt all further payments. Viljoen's duplicity on this score was one of the cornerstones of the defence attack on his credibility as a witness, since he was unable to offer any acceptable explanation for the double payments.

Before WPW Investments Inc. bought Fairclough Cottage, it was rented by Project Coast and occupied by Patricia Leeson, who had been a bona fide employee of Delta G Scientific from January 1983, working as secretary to both the first managing director, cousin-by-marriage Dr Willie Basson, and his successor, Mijburgh, until December 1986. In February 1987, Leeson moved to England as Project Coast's administrative representative. She was under strict instructions to tell no one, including family members, that she would be working as Basson's secretary and assistant. Basson set up a bank account under the name of Biskara at Clydesdale Bank in Picadilly, on which Leeson had signing powers for payment of office expenditure. Her personal expenses, including groceries, were paid from either the Biskara account or an MCI account in the form of blank cheques signed in advance by Basson. In addition to her salary being paid into her bank account in South Africa, Leeson received a monthly allowance of £500.

Whenever Basson was in England during Leeson's stay, they would go shopping together for 'appliances' – television sets, VCRs, CD players and hi-fi equipment – which Leeson had to repackage at the cottage before shipping them from Heathrow to South Africa. For each consignment she had to type up invoices made out to

ABC Import/Export, Luxembourg – but, instead of itemising the actual goods, she was given a list of sophisticated hi-tech electronic equipment by Basson. Invoices retrieved from the files of Bernard Zimmer, Biskara's accountant, list such esoterica as: 2500 MHz sweeper with programmer; crystal-controlled Marmonic marker; 20 MHz pulse generation voltage controlled unit with pulse delay double pulse and synchronised pulse output; 1 to 5 MHz main generator with sine square and sawtooth output; waveform stabiliser with time symmetry function; sweep ramp generator; ultrasonic flaw detector model KB3130: ferrous metals only; probes; fracture toughness analyser with JIC and J integral capability; biaxial stress analyser to match fracture toughness analyser and rack adaptor.

The defence said these were examples of equipment needed by Project Coast, smuggled to South Africa hidden in the TV and hi-fi sets bought by Basson and Leeson. On arrival, the contraband would be removed and the appliances reassembled before being sold, at generous discounts, to project employees, the funds being ploughed back into the project, according to Basson. Although Leeson knew nothing about any appliances being dismantled or anything being secreted in them, the explanation sounded entirely plausible except, as Ackermann pointed out, it would have constituted a serious security breach to identify the clandestine equipment on the invoices, rather than the innocuous appliances in which they were hidden to escape attention.

Originally scheduled to stay in Britain for two years, Leeson fled back to South Africa after just nine months, unnerved at being detained by customs officials on her return from a trip to Luxembourg. Stating that they suspected her of working in the UK illegally, the officers held her at Heathrow for the best part of a day and searched her luggage. As soon as she was released, Leeson took the next flight to Johannesburg. After reporting the incident to Basson, she spent several weeks in South Africa waiting for an official false passport in the name of Alexandra Hattingh, which she used to return to England for a week in March 1988 to shut down her office.

Leeson's detention at Heathrow was used by Basson to explain the Wisdom Group's purchase of her modest flat in Sunnyside, Pretoria, in 1988. He claimed she had suffered severe psychological and emotional problems as the result of her detention by what he said were MI5 agents, and subsequently found herself in serious financial difficulty as well. A decision was taken that 'the project' would buy her flat so as to afford her a way out of her monetary problems and help restore her equilibrium, which in turn would ensure her continued loyalty to Project Coast. Leeson rejected this explanation, insisting that she was never questioned by British intelligence officers and suffered neither economic hardship nor emotional distress after beating a hasty retreat to South Africa. She had simply decided to move because Sunnyside had become 'extremely noisy', and

Basson agreed to buy the flat for the original purchase price, saying he would use it as accommodation for foreign visitors.

Leeson confirmed that at some point a post office technician had found an electronic bugging device in the flat, and that she was never really comfortable living there afterwards. The defence offered this as further proof that surveillance by an intelligence agency, probably British, placed Leeson under enormous stress, telling the court that an investigation by Basson had shown that Tony Targie, whom Leeson was dating at the time, was actually working for MI5 and had lied when he told Leeson he was divorced. He was, in fact, still very much married to a woman in Port Elizabeth, but had been instructed to get close to Leeson in the wake of her earlier detention at Heathrow.

In the world of international espionage, this would be a textbook application of what is known as a 'honey trap' – forming a romantic liaison in order to glean information. However, Leeson's version differed markedly from that of Basson regarding the timing of events. She was adamant that when the bug was found, she reported the discovery to Mijburgh, her boss at Delta G Scientific at the time. Since Leeson ceased to work for Mijburgh in December 1986 – two months *before* she went to live in England – and was not detained at Heathrow until November 1987, the bug could not possibly have been planted as the result of MI5 interest afterwards. Nor was Leeson ever told, before she heard this account in court, what Basson had allegedly found out about her former boyfriend.

In June 1989, WPW Investments Inc. paid close on R1 million for a pair of ground-floor apartments, 11 A and B, Avenue Van Becelaere, in an upmarket suburb of Brussels. According to Zimmer, who made the purchase, they were chosen by Basson's Belgian 'wife of convenience', who lived in one unit, while the second was used as a WPW office. Basson, however, said the apartments were selected by his Libyan principal, Abdur Razzaq, and the East German, Dieter Dreier, and that both of them stayed there on occasion. The forensic audit showed that the funds used to buy the apartments were those Basson was authorised to spend on the purchase of Chemical Agent Monitors, and that when the properties were sold in June 1994 at a significant loss 'because the principals no longer had need of them', the proceeds were paid into a WPW account.

Another property that Basson claimed was purchased on behalf of his foreign principals was the Tygerberg Zoo near Cape Town – a typical example of the convergence of parallel objectives pursued by Project Coast and the principals. At the time of the purchase, he said, research on heavy metals, elements and pheromones was already being done at various South African universities as part of the quest for effective crowd control measures, since certain pheromones can raise stress levels, and the first principle of crowd control is to break the cohesion. Fortuitously, the foreign principals were also pursuing this line of research, and

in 1989, when the South African programme reached the stage where direct access to a variety of wild animals was required, they instructed Basson to buy the zoo, which was owned by his mother's brother, Cyrus Steyn. The idea was that veterinarians from RRL would act as trustees, but this was never implemented, and Basson's uncle stayed on as administrator.

Antoinette Lourens played the role of the buyer, signing all the documents in the name of Wisdom Idle Winds after being told that Basson and Viljoen were acquiring the zoo, which cost R711 928, with the intention of generating funds 'for the CBW project'. The zoo, situated on a farm called Joostenberg, near Paarl, and open to the public, was still registered to Wisdom Idle Winds at the time of writing, but had fallen into disrepair and was desperately in need of major funding.

The Wisdom Group also came to own a tract of prime farmland south-east of Pretoria in the province of Mpumalanga, because the principals needed access to the agricultural sector in order to undertake 'important' research on the potential role of fungi and animal diseases endemic to South Africa in the development of biological weapons. As luck would have it, a former military comrade, tank commander PW de Jager, had bought a 524 hectare farm, Wag 'n Bietjie (Wait a Little), while working as head of security for the state broadcaster, the SABC. In 1988, Basson drew De Jager into the Wisdom web by making him a director of four companies set up to provide specific services to Project Coast.

When Basson mentioned that he was seeking attractive investment opportunities, De Jager offered to turn his weekend farming operation into a full-time business, in return for a substantial injection of capital. Almost immediately, Viljoen set up Waag 'n Bietjie Boerdery (Risk a Little Farming), in which he, Basson, De Jager and Swanepoel each invested R1 000 to acquire a 25 per cent shareholding. De Jager retained ownership of the land, which was leased to the operating company. But despite large and regular lifelines thrown out by Wisdom Finance, the enterprise failed to flourish. The bottom dropped out of the potato market, drought took a heavy toll, and within three years the venture was showing a cumulative loss of R3 million, despite the fact that a second farm, Witbank, had been bought in the interim, and that De Jager was running a 100-strong dairy herd, producing up to 20 000 litres of milk a day, and had 1 000 Drakensberger-cross-Brahman cattle grazing in the lush pastures.

Matters came to a head when Swanepoel accused De Jager of being incompetent, and he and Viljoen resigned as directors. Basson moved his brother-in-law, Corrie Versluis, to the farm to 'help De Jager milk the cows, tend the lands, herd the cattle', but within four months Bosch was instructed to dismiss De Jager, who was effectively forced to sell his land to the holding company. What happened next, according to Bosch, was as slick a financial trick as he had ever seen.

In quick succession, the original farm was sold for R340 000 to a trust administered by Basson's brother-in-law, and of which his sisters Annette and Estelle Sutherland were the beneficiaries. Part of this amount was raised through a low-interest bank loan, while a Wisdom subsidiary, Waterson Development, gave Versluis a R60 000 loan as operating capital. The administrative company, renamed BR Farming, was sold to Versluis for R35 000, payable in three instalments from May 1993 to July 1995. In terms of the loan agreement, if Versluis was unable to make these payments, Blowing Rock Consolidated Investments (BRCI) would advance him the money with which to do so.

Up to 1995, when Bosch severed his ties with BRCI, the loan had not been repaid. Through a series of book entries, the remaining R2,5 million loss suffered by the farming operation was written off, and for the effective price of R35 000 Versluis became the proud owner of the farm, its buildings and all the movable assets, including 660 lambs and 265 ewes, the cattle, pigs, agricultural implements, vehicles and equipment. The true value of the stock and implements was R276 000, according to Bosch, but the books showed a greatly depreciated worth, a bull, for example, being valued at R50 and cows at R40 each.

Despite Basson's claim that the farms could have been used to accommodate the financial principals when they visited South Africa, none of them ever set foot on the land. By June 1994, he claimed, it was 'obvious' that the mutually beneficial relationship between the SADF and the principals had run its course, and the farms were sold to Versluis as part of the 'winding-down' of the front organisations. But Basson disputed Bosch's account of how the deal was financed, claiming Versluis borrowed R430 000 from a bank and his sisters to buy the property. The farms remain in the hands of the Versluis family.

One of the WPW Group's biggest ventures was the proposed development of the Five Nations Golf and Country Club, situated at a point in the Ardennes where the frontiers of Belgium, France, Germany, Holland and Luxembourg meet. It was this geographic location, according to Basson, that attracted both his own interest and that of the financial principals. Shielded by a forest, yet linked to the outside world by the wonders of technology, the property offered not only a secure base from which to launch intelligence operations throughout Europe, but an ideal training ground – all under the cover of a commercial sporting venue. A castle on the property, which Basson said was owned by a 'well-known Arab arms dealer', featured a bomb shelter and a maze of underground tunnels, and in addition to serving as accommodation for the principals, the facilities could have been used to good advantage by agents of both the SADF's Special Forces and Military Intelligence.

Bernard Zimmer handled the purchase of the golf course for R2,5 million in early 1992. At some point, he testified, he saw blueprints of a house designed for

Basson's own use as part of a plan to develop a golf resort similar to Fancourt. However, despite pumping R5 million into the development and engaging internationally renowned South African golfer Gary Player to upgrade the existing course and extend it to a full 18 holes, WPW was unable to turn the Five Nations into either the hub of European intelligence operations, or a viable commercial proposition. By March 1995, the Mean Golf and Country Club was declared bankrupt. A phlegmatic Basson told the court that plans for SADF use of the property had fallen prey to political change in South Africa, and claimed that as soon as he was linked to the resort by the media, the financial principals 'simply walked away', abandoning their investment on the grounds that it had been compromised.

In attributing the WPW Group's asset acquisitions to the needs of the financial principals, Basson was generally vague, implying for the most part that all decisions were made by them collectively. In the case of a condominium in Orlando, Florida, however, he specified that both Razzaq and Dreier were involved, the Libyan because he needed a base from which to launch intelligence operations in South America, the East German because he had a bank account in Miami, an hour's flight or a five-hour train trip away. Basson said he had identified a suitable property, applying 'the usual criteria' for a safe house, including access roads, security and on-site parking, but Webster, who owned and lived in the condominium next door, contradicted this.

Tired of facing a daily 30-mile commute in heavy traffic from his home to his law office, Webster testified that he was delighted to learn that the Lake Ivanhoe apartments in downtown Orlando were to be sold by public auction because the developer had run into financial problems, and even more pleased when he picked up a $460 000 unit at the bargain basement price of $175 000. When he mentioned his good fortune to Basson and Mijburgh, they immediately asked him to secure a unit for WPW, to be used on the same basis as Fairclough Cottage and Merton House. With his customary efficiency, Webster bought not only a spacious residential unit in the Renaissance building, but a smaller staff apartment as well, paying $215 000 for both in July 1992.

The condominiums were empty shells, all interior fittings and finishes to be added by the owners at additional cost, but although Jane Webster understood that Basson and Annette planned to decorate the apartments themselves, they were never furnished or occupied. In September 1994, Webster sold both units for $270 000, one of the rare occasions on which a WPW asset realised any kind of profit, although the proceeds were swiftly consumed by outstanding costs incurred by the Jetstar.

Over the months it took for the prosecution to unravel the details of Basson's globe-trotting lifestyle, it became increasingly clear that the measure to which

individuals shared it was largely dictated by the positions he assigned them on his personal totem pole. While lowly administrative assistant Patricia Leeson warranted high tea at Selfridges in London and a one-time £300 cash bonus, Basson's 'extremely beautiful and *very* personal assistant' Antoinette Lourens notched up a Cartier wristwatch, a gold chain, a designer suit, first-class air travel, stays in some of London's top hotels, expensive dinners and West End musicals like *Chess* or *Me and My Girl*, in addition to financial help when she bought the house in Lynnwood Ridge.

On 2 January 1989, Basson asked Antoinette to accompany him on a trip to Britain and Luxembourg. She declined, explaining that her younger sister was visiting and could not be left alone. Basson brushed aside her protestations and solved the problem by taking the teenager along, all three of them flying to London first class. The pressing business that demanded Antoinette's presence? 'Sorting out' the filing system at the office previously manned by Leeson. Questioned about this trip, Basson said that by taking Antoinette's sister along, he had been able to reinforce his cover story as a wealthy businessman, travelling with his family.

For the Websters, the perks of taking care of business for Basson included an all-expenses-paid trip on the luxurious Blue Train for themselves and Jane's mother. Webster had 'no idea' who carried the costs, but he and the two women 'just showed up and went on the train'. On a two-week visit to South Africa in 1987, Antoinette Lourens acted as personal tour guide for the Websters, taking them to Cape Town and exclusive private game lodges. The costs were borne by Infladel, Project Coast's administrative front company.

David Webster twice attended the annual gatherings in the Kruger National Park, stayed at Fancourt two or three times and made two hunting trips to British Columbia with Basson on expeditions that had to be booked 12 months in advance. The Websters played host in Orlando to numerous visitors from South Africa, including the Kirsteins, Estelle Sutherland's daughter Annelise, Bosch, Mijburgh, Viljoen, Basson's mother and stepfather. Jane Webster routinely made payments from WPW Group bank accounts to reimburse 'anyone' who incurred expenses related to visits by Basson and all members of his family. As late as September 1996, her sister-in-law, Gigi Roberts, was paid $220 by WPW Aviation for two tickets to Universal Studios, the Hard Rock Café and Epcot Center, purchased on behalf of Basson's mother.

Hundreds of documents and months of testimony presented by the prosecution sketched a picture of the WPW and Wisdom groups' bank accounts being used to cover personal expenditure incurred by Basson and his fellow travellers: wine bought at the Nederburg auction at Cape Town's Mount Nelson Hotel for more than R10 000, the cost of setting up Annette's clinical psychology practice,

clothing purchases by Marlow, travellers' cheques for Antoinette Lourens's mother, a R150 000 loan to Kirstein so that he could import an Arab horse for his son, Naomi Basson's fees at an exclusive Swiss finishing school. Despite Basson's insistence that he never received one cent to which he was not legally entitled, received no remuneration from the principals for handling their affairs and was only reimbursed for expenses incurred on their behalf, payments such as those listed above were routinely made from the same accounts used to fund international property deals on behalf of the financial principals or pay 'sanctions-busters' engaged in supplying clandestine equipment to Project Coast.

Marlow twice attended the glamorous Monaco Formula 1 Grand Prix at company expense, accompanied on one occasion by Basson, Mijburgh and Swanepoel, who spent part of the trip viewing luxury apartments for sale in Monte Carlo. He was a frequent guest at hotels such as London's Connaught, the Conrad in Brussels and the Richemont in Geneva, while Charles van Remoortere, who amassed a small fortune through his legitimate business deals with the SADF, experienced the opulence of London's Royal Garden Hotel only twice at company expense, and 'could never afford to stay there again, if I had to pay for myself'.

When Basson heard that Van Remoortere, his wife Tanya and son were going to the Seychelles on a two-week holiday, he immediately arranged to go as well, with his wife and daughter. The King Air was used to fly a party to Benguera Island in the Mozambique Channel for three days of marlin fishing, and once, with Van Remoortere on board, made the trip to Europe. On an overnight refuelling stop in Abidjan, Van Remoortere took photographs of Basson and Jan Lourens 'fooling around', Basson kissing the aircraft's nosecone, Lourens perched on the wings, 'that kind of childish stuff'.

Surval Mont-Fleuri, the private school at which Basson's daughter, Naomi, spent a year, is situated in Montreux, overlooking Lake Geneva. Information brochures reveal that enrolment is limited to 75 students, but make no mention of the fees. However, since each student has a private bedroom with shower and toilet *en suite*, a telephone and TV set, and since extra-mural activities include skiing, water-skiing, horse riding, tennis, squash, a fully equipped fitness centre and a three-week tour of Switzerland over Easter, it is safe to assume that tuition does not come cheap.

In August 1994, Basson instructed Zimmer in writing to pay 6 000 Swiss francs to the school as soon as the proceeds from the sale of the Brussels apartments were available. Under cross-examination, he told the court it was thanks to the financial principals that Naomi had spent 'six or twelve months' at the school. Her role, he claimed, was to act as 'chaperone' for the daughter of one of Razzaq's colleagues, and she 'spent the entire year washing the Arab girl's clothes', because 'those people can do absolutely nothing for themselves'.

In their bid to show that Basson diverted funds from Project Coast for personal gain, the prosecution relied heavily on details of his opulent lifestyle and leisure pursuits. But for every example cited, Basson offered the same explanation: the interests of both the financial principals and Project Coast were best served by reinforcing his cover as a wealthy international businessman.

While Kirstein said he saw no signs that Basson and Annette lived beyond the means of a senior public servant, Van Remoortere testified that at some point between 1990 and 1994, he expressed reservations to Surgeon General Niel Knobel about what he perceived as Basson's 'lavish' lifestyle. Webster found nothing untoward in the deals he brokered on Basson's instructions, going so far as to say the amounts involved were 'not particularly high' compared with an American cardiologist's income. Antoinette Lourens, on the other hand, thought that Basson, Mijburgh and Swanepoel all led luxurious lifestyles, which were not in keeping with their jobs at the time, and that their behaviour was that of people who had 'suddenly acquired great wealth'.

Bosch, whose crafty bookkeeping was nothing short of numerical wizardry, experienced so much stress that in April 1992 he suffered an 'acute psychotic episode', which led to his arrest on a runway at Heathrow and 14 days in hospital when he arrived back in South Africa. His memory of the event is vague, but he has no doubt that it was triggered by the situation in which he found himself. He had quit his job in banking, only to find himself involved with 'farms that went bankrupt, transfers of SADF funds to personal bank accounts in Switzerland, payments for which I never saw any SADF authorisation … flitting around in private jets, watching rugby from private suites, living it up at Fancourt – it all seemed fine, but I was extremely stressed, and a very worried man'.

Against the background of Basson's affluent lifestyle, the prosecution was singularly unimpressed by his woeful account of life on the run from faceless, nameless enemies. Basson claimed that for four months in 1993, 'the year of looking for the missing money', he had to apply all his skill and subterfuge to stay one step ahead of what he assumed were agents of 'the whole world's intelligence agencies'. Traversing Europe in a bid to locate Jurg Jacomet, who had absconded with $1 million of the SADF's funds when a deal to buy 500 kg of methaqualone from a group of corrupt Croatian government officials went sour, Basson claimed he 'never slept in the same place two nights running' and avoided all his known associates after becoming aware that he was under constant surveillance.

Fearing that his pursuers were British or American secret agents, or angry Croatians who had not been paid, he abandoned his customary modes of travel, instead making use of trains or thumbing rides from motorists. Taxis had to be avoided, as all their trips are logged. Fortunately, Basson said, the Europeans were 'extremely generous' in offering him lifts, and he had no compunction about

'capitalising on my looks, and many women picked me up'. While remaining constantly on the move, he made contact daily with 'South Africa', but told no one of his situation until he spoke to Knobel towards the end of the year. Knobel arranged to meet Basson, stopping over in Europe on the way to America. Basson set the time and place, 'because I knew how to move around without being noticed', and insisted that Knobel should come alone and not, as he had proposed, with senior National Intelligence agent Mike Kennedy, whom Basson 'did not know or trust'.

When he and Knobel met, said Basson, he was so 'exhausted and emaciated' that the first thing Knobel's wife did was buy him a decent meal. He was deeply touched, as it was 'so nice to see someone from home'. Inexplicably, having flown all the way to Europe for the rendezvous, Knobel apparently failed to apprise Basson of the situation, namely that the Swiss counterpart of South Africa's Office for Serious Economic Offences wanted to question him, and had issued a warrant for his arrest. Basson said he would have turned himself in immediately had he known this, but because he and Knobel were 'obviously not on the same wavelength' he left the meeting still convinced that he was the quarry of the world's top intelligence agencies.

Ackermann dismissed this stirring account as 'worthy of a World War II partisan', and said it was highly unlikely that Basson, a seasoned international traveller with access to 'unlimited funds' via his financial principals, had hitchhiked around Europe and hidden like a cur. When he realised he was being followed, why had he not simply hopped aboard the first available aircraft and made for the safety of South Africa – first class, with splendid cuisine to boot? Visibly aggrieved, Basson replied that he had been 'on a mission … in operational mode' – under instructions to find Jacomet, sort out the mess and retrieve the stolen funds, and felt honour-bound not to return until he had some answers.

In the end, though, all his efforts were in vain, and when he eventually did decide to return to South Africa, he made the mistake of flying from Brussels to Basel, where he needed to 'tie up loose ends'. He was arrested on arrival, and spent three weeks in detention before the Swiss authorities granted him bail. His first act on being released was to take a two-hour bath at a Basel hotel and discard the suit he had been wearing 'for three weeks'. An ignominious experience, indeed, for a man accustomed to the best that money could buy, an ironic Ackermann observed.

10

Dangerous Liaisons

ON AN EARLY spring morning in March 2000, after meeting with his attorney for five hours behind closed doors, a California gynaecologist drove home, went upstairs to a bedroom and shot himself. Initially, there was nothing about Larry C Ford's suicide that indicated a need for more than a routine investigation by the Irvine Police Department. Within days, however, detective Victor Ray would find himself immersed in a headline-grabbing case that '… exposed a whole lot of more serious things … more than I ever wanted to know … the most bizarre friggin' thing I ever heard in my life'. Over the weeks and months that followed, Ray and his colleagues would uncover an internecine murder plot involving hit men with possible organised crime connections; they would also stumble upon the secret life – including strong links to Project Coast – that Ford hid behind the carefully constructed façade of a devout Mormon and devoted family man.

The revelations shocked and puzzled sleuths on two continents, and by the time the Federal Bureau of Investigation got involved, Larry Creed Ford had emerged as a shadowy individual with some highly questionable connections, kingpin of a conspiracy to assassinate his business partner, and whose backyard was the repository of a small arsenal of arms, ammunition and military explosives. Even more disturbing was his secret stash of pathogens, including cholera, typhoid and salmonella, stored in more than 30 baby food jars found in a refrigerator in the garage of his $500 000 home and a nearby rented storage facility.

By the end of 2001, as Basson's trial in Pretoria dragged on, Ford's friend of 15 years, shady Los Angeles auto repairman Dino D'Saachs, would be serving a prison sentence of 26 years to life for his role in the attempted murder of James

Patrick Riley, and his long-time mistress, Valerie Kesler, would have pleaded guilty to illegal possession of two assault rifles.

Despite evidence about Ford's links to Project Coast and his involvement in a proposed AIDS research project to be secretly funded by the South African Defence Force, Wouter Basson has steadfastly refused to comment on their relationship, and the precise nature of their 15-year association remains a mystery. However, juxtaposed against Basson's own testimony and that of various witnesses against him, the decidedly odd events in California highlight the strange company he kept. Both while he was head of Project Coast and after being dismissed from the SADF in December 1992, Basson's associates were a motley crew, ranging from drug lords, self-confessed mass murderers, con men and medical charlatans to urbane international bankers, the wives of former heads of state, military mandarins and at least one political icon.

Larry Ford, 49, was a native of Provo, Utah – Mormon heartland – whose interest in medical research won him a national award while he was still at school. He attended Brigham Young University, married his Sunday school sweetheart and enrolled at the University of California, Los Angeles medical school in 1970. After graduating in 1975, Ford joined the UCLA teaching staff, writing and co-authoring dozens of academic papers on subjects such as gynaecological cancers and the use of antibiotics in controlling post-operative infection. While they were still dating, Ford had told his wife, Diane, that he was working for the Central Intelligence Agency. When he died, she told investigators that she hadn't believed him at the time, and thought he was just trying to impress her. The CIA has denied that Ford was ever on its payroll, but an unsuccessful and still unsolved attempt on his life in 1978 by a gunman hiding in bushes of the UCLA parking lot adds credence to the likelihood that Ford was involved in unorthodox activities long before he began cooperating with Project Coast.

Ford and his family – sons Larry Jr. and Scott, and daughter Kerilyn – settled in the prosperous southern California town of Irvine in 1987, around the time that he made the first of three confirmed and probably several more visits to South Africa. Former Project Coast scientists remember attending a day-long seminar at a military installation outside Pretoria during which Ford 'taught' them how to isolate and identify various toxic substances, as well as how to turn everyday items like teabags, doilies and the pages of girlie magazines into low-grade biological weapons by lacing them with pathogens. Former research director at Roodeplaat Research Laboratories, Dr André Immelman, testified that Lothar Neethling also attended the seminar. But, although American colleagues described Ford after his death as a 'gifted' medical researcher and authority on infectious gynaecological diseases, he failed to impress the South African scientists. Immelman – who attended the seminar

under his code-name, Willem – 'didn't believe a word Ford said', and considered the American a charlatan after a month-long exercise known as Project Larry failed to turn up any lethal toxins on a variety of allegedly impregnated articles supplied by Ford.

Defence advocate Jaap Cilliers used Immelman's reference to 'days' being spent paging through magazines in search of toxins as an example of Project Coast scientists being required to research ways in which 'the enemy' could transport lethal toxins undetected across international borders. This was also the reason, he suggested, why pathogens had been added to items such as lip balm, deodorant, chocolates and the like. Not so, responded Immelman. Scientists at RRL were never instructed to test any pathogens with a view to transporting them. In fact, he pointed out, it was not at all difficult to bring bacteria into South Africa – he himself had obtained several specimens by mail order, and had them delivered to his office at RRL.

Dr Mike Odendaal, former senior microbiologist at RRL, told the authors: 'Ford spent an entire day showing us how to contaminate ordinary items and turn them into biological weapons. He explained how we should use various organisms, such as *Clostridium oedematiens*, but that didn't make sense because it is not the normal pathogenesis for this organism. Five black plastic refuse bags arrived at RRL about two days later. We didn't open them until we were in the isolation laboratories and wearing protective clothing,' said Odendaal. He and his colleagues felt cheated by Ford and saw him as 'one of Basson's cronies with no valid scientific background' after finding nothing unusual in any of the agents they isolated. However, Ford did give the RRL scientists 'ideas about how to infiltrate innocuous objects such as perfume or other household items' into close proximity of a potential target, said Odendaal.

Some of the scientists were insulted by Ford's apparent ignorance of their level of scientific accomplishment. Said microbiologist Dr Adriaan Botha: 'At that point, our enemy was the African National Congress. I was not at all impressed that someone would come all the way from the United States just to tell us you could put germs on *Playboy* magazines.'

Dr Johan Koekemoer, head of research at Delta G Scientific, was drawn into another Ford initiative – a bid to find a cure for male baldness, conducted on behalf of Breaking Thru Inc., a Newport Beach, California, facility to which Ford remained linked until his death. Koekemoer was 'surprised that Basson came to us with a request like that, since our major objective was completely different, but since he was my boss, I didn't question him – and it turned out to be quite interesting chemistry'.

Niel Knobel shared with Ford an interest in Africa's AIDS pandemic, and it was he who introduced Ford to Basson in the mid-1980s. Having mentioned to Ford soon after they met that he was deeply concerned that communist-backed

troops might use chemical weapons against South African security forces in Angola, Knobel was impressed with his 'very intimate knowledge' of chemical and biological warfare. According to Knobel, Ford was not only of 'invaluable' assistance as a non-official consultant to Project Coast, but a good friend on whom he relied 'whenever I had questions about chemical or biological weapons'. They met at the Los Angeles home of a former South African trade attaché, Gideon Bouwer, who is known to have played host to convicted felon Dino D'Saachs and Anaheim surgeon Jerry Nilsson, who were both associated with Ford. Bouwer suffered a fatal heart attack in 1990.

Knobel's relationship with Nilsson was apparently social rather than professional, and the two men spent time together when Nilsson and Ford travelled to South Africa on big game hunting trips. 'Nilsson was quite a character – a huge man, and a great hunter, or so he claimed,' Knobel told *Los Angeles Times* reporters Scott Martelle and Jack Leonard in March 2000. 'He was interested in hunting buffalo and elephant.'

Two regular guests at Bouwer's parties – Peter Fitzpatrick and Tom Byron – claimed they were recruited as FBI informers in late 1985 (at the height of the United Nations arms embargo against South Africa), and kept authorities regularly informed about conversations that took place during gala parties customarily attended by Ford, Nilsson and 'a high-ranking South African involved in that country's weapons programme'. They evidently also told the FBI that Bouwer 'bragged' that Ford and Nilsson were supplying the visiting South African with biological warfare materials. Following Ford's death, the FBI declined to comment on their earlier probe into Bouwer's activities, but a source close to the Ford investigation said the authorities 'never could substantiate anything on Ford and Nilsson – they never got anything they could sink their teeth into'.

According to Knobel, Ford was instrumental in formulating the military's anti-AIDS policy, and served as an adviser to the SADF during the 1991 Gulf War, when he supplied South African military personnel stationed in Israel with a variety of antidotes. He also faxed Knobel information on Saddam Hussein's chemical and biological weapons capability so that the South Africans could protect their embassy staff in Tel Aviv from possible attack. How Ford came by antidotes and information about Iraq's weapons, and on whose authority he assisted the SADF in this manner, are among the myriad unanswered questions about him. What *is* known is that in the late 1980s a mutual acquaintance introduced Ford to James Patrick Riley, an entrepreneur looking for new business ventures. It is unclear whether Riley had any idea what he was getting into by joining forces with Ford, but his attorney, Raymond Lee, insists that Riley was unaware of Ford's alleged CIA links or his role as bio-warfare adviser to South Africa. But Riley did know Knobel, whom he met at an international medical conference

in Hawaii, and who later arranged to have Nelson Mandela sign a copy of his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, which he presented to Riley as a gift.

With Riley providing the finance and Ford the scientific acumen, the two men set up Biofem Inc., a bio-technical research company, in 1994. By February 2000, the company was heavily in debt, but poised to make millions of dollars if clinical trials showed that Ford's brainchild, a vaginal suppository called Inner Confidence, was an effective barrier against HIV infection.

When D'Saachs went on trial in June 2000 for his part in the conspiracy to murder Riley, prosecutors claimed that Ford wanted his partner killed so that he would become sole owner of the cash-strapped company. But there may have been a deeper motive behind the botched attempt on Riley's life: his vehement opposition to Ford's proposed use of South African prostitutes as guinea-pigs for the microcide which, he claimed, would revolutionise the fight against AIDS. Irvine detectives believe that secret testing of the female suppository *did* take place in South Africa, and possibly also on American prostitutes. According to Victor Ray, when Riley was questioned about this, 'he coughed, looked the other way and said: "It might have happened".' As far as Ray was concerned, 'it probably did', an opinion borne out by Knobel's acknowledgement that he had helped Ford gain approval for the use of products made by Biofem in South Africa, but had no further knowledge of the matter.

In a note scrawled before he blew his brains out on 2 March, Ford claimed he had been set up and was not involved in the shooting of Riley three days earlier. His attorney, who refused to disclose, even to a hastily convened Grand Jury, what Ford told him in their meeting on the day he died, says Ford wished to spare his wife and children the ordeal of a criminal trial. Despite facing the prospect of spending the rest of his life behind bars, D'Saachs also refused to shed any light on the Riley murder plot. Found guilty of driving the getaway vehicle in which a masked gunman escaped after shooting Riley in the face as he stepped out of his car in the Biofem parking lot on the morning of 28 February 2000, D'Saachs never admitted being involved or named the gunman, who remained at large at the time of writing.

What mystified police almost as much as the identity of the shooter was the contents of Ford's secret hidey-hole in the backyard of his home. Acting on information received from one of his family members, they unearthed six sealed containers, buried under a concrete slab in a two-metre-deep hole. Ford's wife admitted knowing he had buried 'something' in the yard, but never pressed him about this strange action. His eldest son, Larry Jr., who was studying microbiology at Brigham Young University, told police he and his siblings knew their father had buried weapons in the backyard 'but we never talked about it'. When the containers were opened at the US Armed Forces Reserve Center at Los Alamitos,

they were found to contain 17 automatic and semi-automatic weapons, including machine-guns, and thousands of rounds of ammunition. One canister also yielded a kilogram of C4 explosive and blasting caps, which investigators said could only have come from a military facility.

Before digging up the yard, police and hazardous materials teams evacuated 200 residents and their pets from 49 houses in the immediate vicinity of the Ford home. The confused and frightened neighbours of a man one described as 'our resident Good Samaritan', and another as 'a very loving guy – a teddy bear', were only allowed to return to their homes three days later, after removal of all weapons and suspicious substances. In addition to a large sealed container of potassium cyanide and more than 30 sealed and hand-labelled bottles of suspected pathogens and toxins, the search of Ford's home also turned up between 40 and 50 hunting rifles and shotguns hidden in secret compartments and under floorboards. The FBI has never released the full results of tests conducted at its Virginia crime laboratory on the contents of the baby food jars, but did confirm that cholera, typhoid, ricin and salmonella bacteria were found in some. Cholera, typhoid and salmonella were studied and produced at RRL.

Fairly early in the investigation, when a new twist seemed to make the headlines every few days, Lieutenant Sam Allevato of the Irvine Police Department said that only the 'tip of the iceberg' had been uncovered. One of the twists involved Nilsson, questioned by police as a possible co-conspirator. Shortly before the shooting, Riley had rejected his bid to buy Biofem, saying he would never do business with the doctor, who was stripped of his medical licence in April 2000 following allegations of sexual abuse by former patients. A month after the shooting, police twice detained and questioned Nilsson, but he was never charged.

The next bombshell was hidden in court documents unsealed shortly before the start of D'Saachs's two-week trial in June 2000. An anonymous informant had notified police that Ford, whose public image was that of a church-going man, and a devoted husband and father, had been having an extramarital affair with a Biofem laboratory assistant for more than 10 years. The informant claimed that Valerie Kesler had helped Ford administer drugs to unwitting individuals during secret sex sessions, and that she had referred to the victims as 'white chimpanzees'. Authorities also looked into a number of complaints from former women patients of Ford's, but were unable to conclude that their illnesses, ranging from cancer to abdominal pain, were the result of treatment he administered.

During D'Saachs's trial, testimony revealed little or nothing about the FBI's investigation or Ford's background, though Riley gave evidence that he believed his ex-partner had worked for the CIA, and that he had boasted of working for American general Willard Wyman, who he said was in charge of a biological weapons programme. Riley also testified that laboratory books and computer files

containing the science designed to make millions for the company were stolen from his office in the three days that passed between the time he was shot and that Ford killed himself. D'Saachs, an American immigrant from Peru who was reported to have strong links to the Mafia, did not take the stand. In addition to being given the maximum prison sentence, he was required to pay Riley the sum of $108 000 in damages.

Kesler failed in her bid to sue Biofem for wrongful dismissal after losing her job when she disappeared for two months after the Riley shooting. She claimed she had gone into hiding on the advice of the police, who said her life could be in danger. However, police said they had told her only to be cautious, and never suggested she simply abscond from her job. In an affidavit supporting her claim, Kesler said she had once accompanied Ford to Africa while he was transporting 'germ warfare products', which he planned to exchange for 'research products' not available in the United States. She claimed that not only their lives, but those of everyone else on the commercial airliner were in 'immediate danger', and that Biofem had exposed her to potentially lethal chemicals without her knowledge.

On 7 December 2001, Kesler pleaded guilty to transporting and being in possession of two assault weapons that police found in her car and at her Newport Beach apartment on the day Ford shot himself. She had been held without bail for 14 months before being fined $100 and placed on probation. Kesler's attorneys claimed that the entire case against her was an attempt by the police to squeeze information out of her about the missing gunman in the Riley case, about whom she 'knew nothing'.

The Irvine police investigation expanded from a local affair into an international probe involving the CIA, FBI, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and members of the South African Special Investigation Unit. It soon became clear that Ford had been a racist who espoused right-wing survivalist beliefs and laid fraudulent claim to certain academic achievements and scientific affiliations. South African interest in him might have ended soon after his death, had it not been for the fact that one of his neighbours told the *Los Angeles Times* that Ford claimed he had once parachuted into southern Africa during the Angolan conflict, to take blood samples from dead freedom fighters so that American authorities could identify what biological agents Russian surrogate troops were being vaccinated against.

Two years later, when Basson testified in his own defence, he claimed that the primary task of one of the doctors under his command, anaesthetist Graeme Gibson, was to secretly take blood samples from members of the various liberation forces in neighbouring states. By testing the blood for HIV, the rate of infection in the defence forces of Zimbabwe, Angola and Mozambique could be extrapolated, and Gibson also had access, through the covert Directorate Special Tasks, to members

of rebel movements such as Unita, Renamo and the Lesotho Liberation Army, as well as to armed forces in Malawi.

The AIDS research project was authorised by Project Coast's Coordinating Management Committee, according to Basson, as part of a study to determine 'whether AIDS alone would allow the SADF to win the war'. Whether or not Ford was secretly involved in this project, or had merely heard about it and claimed the credit for himself, is not known. However, media interest in Ford's links with Coast – and especially with Knobel – flared anew following the end of Basson's trial, raising expectations that at least some of the questions about the American's role may yet be answered.

The acquisition of a peptide synthesiser, DNA and RNA probes, sophisticated laboratory equipment and peptides formed the basis of six of the major fraud charges against Basson. The deals were constructed to confuse, and the explanations offered in various forums when the expenditure was questioned were convoluted. It was in this regard that the spectre of an Iranian connection to Project Coast was raised during cross-examination of Knobel.

At the time Basson claimed to have been dealing with government officials in Tehran, South Africa was actively engaged in supporting Saddam Hussein in neighbouring Iraq's eight-year war against the repressive Iranian regime, led by the Ayatollah Khomeini. Basson testified that early in 1988 he travelled to Iran with the assistance of Belgian toxicologist Professor Aubin Heyndrickx, whose membership of the Western European Defence Alliance ensured access to any chemical warfare zone. The purpose of the visit was for Basson to acquire shrapnel from projectiles fired by Iraqi forces against the Kurds, so that the type of chemicals being used by Baghdad could be identified.

While in Iran, Basson met a member of the People's Security League named Hashemi, who, he claimed, subsequently proved to be of immense value to Project Coast in the procurement of 'sensitive' equipment. The shrapnel Basson acquired was supplied by Hashemi and analysed at both Delta G Scientific and the SA Police Forensic Science Laboratory. Shortly afterwards, an urgent need arose for a highly sophisticated peptide synthesiser. (A peptide synthesiser is used to make the building blocks of proteins, which are made up of amino acids. Peptides – a number of amino acids linked by a chemical bond – influence many of the 'messages' relayed within the body, and peptide synthesisers are a standard feature in pharmaceutical laboratories.) The Coordinating Management Committee (CMC) had already authorised funding for this equipment, and more than $2 million had been transferred to a Swiss bank account in anticipation, but the acquisition process was beset by major problems. Fortuitously, Basson's financial principals struck a deal in terms of which Hashemi would procure the peptide synthesiser and Basson, in turn, would help Iran acquire a large consignment of NBC protective garments.

However, defence advocate Jaap Cilliers explained to Knobel, as the deal was about to be closed, Iran's intelligence chief and Hashemi's boss, Mohammed Ravi Abdullah, was suddenly recalled to Tehran to face allegations of pocketing unauthorised commissions on unrelated arms deals. Basson later learned that on arrival, Abdullah was summarily tried and executed. As a result, the peptide synthesiser could not be delivered, but Hashemi was able to supply Basson with DNA and RNA probes and a quantity of the thymus peptide, thymosin. Rather than go through the time-consuming process of seeking authorisation and funding from the CMC anew, Basson paid for these items with some of the funds reserved for the peptide synthesiser.

Some time afterwards the peptide synthesiser was indeed acquired, as part of a new deal brokered by the mysterious Libyans, East Germans and Russians. However, Cilliers informed Knobel, the peptide synthesiser was not needed for AIDS research, as he and the CMC had been led to believe, but for work on 'one of the most dangerous aspects of chemical warfare … brain-altering substances which are … the international community's single biggest CBW nightmare, with terrifying implications for the human race if abused'.

Despite being manager of Project Coast, Knobel had no knowledge that any such research was done, and although he was told by Basson that the peptide synthesiser had been bought, he never actually saw it himself. Nor did anyone else tracked down by the prosecution, though Cilliers cited an affidavit in which forensics expert Lothar Neethling claimed he had seen the equipment on a visit to the laboratory at Speskop, and was aware of the research being conducted. During cross-examination of forensic auditor Hennie Bruwer in February 2000, the saga of the peptide synthesiser was taken further. According to Cilliers, an elaborate May 1989 deal involving three companies – Blackdale, Copperdale and Tagell – in the sale of NBC suits was all a sham, carefully constructed to hide the acquisition of the peptide synthesiser in terms of the original agreement with Hashemi and Abdullah.

What the court did not learn until August 2000, when chain-smoking Luxembourg business consultant Bernard Zimmer travelled to South Africa to testify, was that Hashemi and Abdullah were slick international con men, who may very well have added $325 000 of Project Coast's funds to their ill-gotten gains. Zimmer explained that he and his partner, Charles van Remoortere, were introduced to a Liberian-registered company, Tagell, by Basson and British telecommunications mogul Wilfred Mole in 1989, with a view to negotiating a $65 million contract for Van Remoortere's South African-based company, Technotek, to supply NBC suits and accessories such as gloves, boots and belts. Delivery would be via Blackdale, co-owned by Zimmer and Van Remoortere, and a series of meetings took place in London with Mohammed Ali Hashemi, managing director of Tagell,

and Mohammed Ravi Abdullah, whose UK-based concern, Copperdale, would act as Tagell's agent.

Negotiations included a demand by Tagell that Blackdale create a performance bond to the value of 5 per cent of the contract – or $3,2 million. Blackdale did not have access to this amount of cash, so, Zimmer testified, as had been done often and successfully in the past, he and Van Remoortere approached Basson for a loan. Within days, Basson had deposited the full amount in Blackdale's Swiss bank account, and it was used as security for the performance bond. In return, Blackdale asked Tagell to provide a letter of credit, but the draft was 'totally unacceptable' to Zimmer and Van Remoortere, as it failed to specify that the deal involved NBC suits. They cancelled the performance bond, but Abdullah indicated that Tagell wanted to pursue the deal, requesting that Blackdale issue a $1,6 million cheque as security against delivery or breach of contract.

Several meetings and much haggling followed, and at some point David Webster flew to London to vet the contracts before Blackdale's directors agreed to pay Tagell the lesser amount of $325 000. Zimmer took the cheque to London and handed it to Hashemi in person. A week later, Blackdale had still not received Tagell's letter of credit, so Zimmer returned to London, only to be told by Hashemi that the deal was off, because Blackdale had created 'too many problems' regarding the performance bond. However, Tagell would retain the $325 000 as compensation. Asked by senior prosecutor Anton Ackerman how he had felt on hearing this, an indignant Zimmer replied: 'How do you think I felt? But I could not kill them, because there were quite a number of them in the office.' Zimmer immediately instructed his lawyers to sue Tagell, and informed Basson about the loss. To his surprise, Basson was 'not especially perturbed'.

The matter dragged on for two years, until Zimmer's lawyers advised him that Blackdale alone had no chance of winning a legal battle against Tagell and Hashemi, but that if he could persuade other companies that had fallen prey to similar duplicity to join the action, there might be some chance of success. Zimmer located two companies in France, including a shipyard that had been forced to close down, and others in Poland and Indonesia that claimed to have been defrauded by Hashemi. Then, during what should have been a routine game of his favourite pastime, bridge, Zimmer asked a member of his foursome, who happened to be a senior British public servant, if he had any contacts in the Metropolitan Police. He was given the name of Detective Sergeant Michael Hill, who subsequently launched a thorough investigation into the affairs of both Hashemi and Abdullah, which not only revealed connections that Britain's MI6 would have preferred remain secret, but cost the enterprising detective his job.

When Hill took his findings to the Special Branch, he was warned that Hashemi was 'known to Box' – the Whitehall euphemism for the British secret service –

and soon afterwards was ordered by his superiors to drop the case. When Hill refused to do so, he was suspended, suddenly found to be medically unfit for duty and eventually forced to take early retirement. What Hill had found was that Hashemi – an engineer in his native Iran – was a notorious international crook with friends in high places, who had pulled the identical scam perpetrated against Blackdale on numerous companies throughout the world. Despite this evidence, Zimmer was unable to persuade any of the companies he had identified to proceed with legal action, but when German telecommunications giant Siemens fell prey to the same con man, the Metropolitan Serious Fraud Office took up the case, leading to Hashemi's arrest in August 1997.

A report in *The Guardian* on 6 February 1999 finally revealed the astonishing truth: Hashemi was an Iranian-born international arms dealer who had spent nine years spying for MI6 and facilitating covert deals on their behalf for Iran, including the purchase of Silkworm missiles from China. Prior to his arrest, the English-educated American citizen had led an exotic life, jetsetting around the world to negotiate multi-million-dollar arms deals. He had a yacht, three flats in an expensive Westminster block (one of which served as Tagell's business premises), a Rolls-Royce and a Cadillac. After meeting Margaret Thatcher at the home of then British Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe, he donated £55 000 to the Conservative Party's coffers. His partner in crime, Abdullah, turned out to be a Sandhurst-trained former Jordanian army colonel.

Held for 16 months in Belmarsh prison, south-east London, Hashemi appeared before Judge Andrew Collins at the Old Bailey in December 1998 and pleaded guilty to three charges of fraud and one of using a false passport. According to *The Guardian*, two additional charges against him were dropped as part of a deal to prevent potentially embarrassing information about MI6 operations being disclosed in court.

Hashemi's real name was Jamshid Hashemi Naini, but he was known by various aliases, including Mohammed Hashemi, James Khan, Mario Cabrini, Mohamed Balanian, Abdula Hashemi and Jamshid Khalaj. A letter from Detective Sergeant Colin Holder of the Metropolitan Serious Fraud Office, dated 12 January 1999, informed Zimmer that Hashemi had pleaded guilty to using Alpha Enterprises & Trading SA, James MacKenzie International Trading, Haskell Investments Ltd and Lisbon International SA to defraud various companies: Anlane, Victorimex (a state-owned agricultural concern in Vietnam), Dragerwerk AG (a German medical and industrial goods manufacturer), Octagon, Hagenuk Telecom GmbH (a German supplier of cordless and satellite phones) and WL Gore & Associates (the Delaware, US, manufacturer of a waterproof fabric, Gore-Tex, which had been discussing the supply of NBC suits to the Iranian military).

Not disclosed during Hashemi's trial, but outlined in documents filed with the London court, was the full extent of his intelligence links, disclosed by *The Guardian* the day after his sentencing. He had been recruited by MI6 shortly after arriving in Britain in 1984, and asked to pass on Iran's 'shopping list' for arms and other equipment. But Hashemi and his brother, Cyrus, were also well known to the American CIA, and key players in a 1980 covert operation known as the October Surprise, when they acted as conduits for secret negotiations between leading members of America's Republican Party and the Iranian *mullahs* about the release of 52 American hostages held by Khomeini's government.

The brothers were approached by William Casey, Ronald Reagan's presidential campaign manager at the time and later director of the CIA, to ensure that the hostages were not released until after the 1980 presidential election. The idea was to sabotage the re-election of Democrat Jimmy Carter, whose administration had been negotiating the release of the hostages for months. Casey's plan was that the hostages would be freed on the day Reagan was inaugurated. In return for delaying their release, Iran would be supplied with certain arms. The plan worked, but two years after Reagan entered the White House, his administration was pilloried for what became known as the Iran-Contra deal, which cost American Marine Colonel Oliver North his job.

In April 1999, a footnote to the Hashemi saga was written when his Mayfair solicitor, Michael Palmer, was jailed for three years after being convicted of plundering the estates of dead clients. Some of the £1,2 million that he obtained by fraudulent means between 1992 and 1996 was used to advance loans to his good friend, Dodi Fayed, son of the millionaire owner of London's Harrods department store, and the man killed with Britain's beloved Princess Diana in an August 1997 Paris car crash. The loans were repaid before Fayed's death, but Palmer pocketed the interest.

The upshot of the abortive Blackdale-Copperdale-Tagell deal was that Zimmer and Van Remoortere took it upon themselves to repay the $325 000 lost to Hashemi. Zimmer rejected the suggestion by Cilliers that there was never a genuine deal on the table for Blackdale to sell 100 000 NBC suits to Iran, and that the entire transaction had been a bogus deal to hide the purchase of Project Coast's peptide synthesiser. As far as he and Van Remoortere were concerned, said an indignant Zimmer, this was both a genuine and potentially lucrative deal, and there was no need for Basson to append 'James Bond cover stories' to the transaction. If Cilliers accepted Basson's version of events, he had clearly been misled by his client, 'just as I was', said Zimmer. If Basson was offering the clandestine purchase of a peptide synthesiser as his defence, perhaps he 'should have been a movie director instead of a bad businessman'.

Van Remoortere confirmed that he saw the proposed sale of NBC suits to Iran as a legitimate business opportunity, and said he was the architect of the deal,

which was 'not particularly complicated' for an international trader like himself. He, too, knew nothing about the purchase of a peptide synthesiser being hidden in the deal.

When Basson himself testified about the Blackdale-Copperdale-Tagell deal in August 2001, new players had been added to the cast. By 1987, he said, it had become imperative that he visit as many chemical attack sites as possible. Clinical profiles of victims had led to the dawning realisation that 'something was changing' in the field of chemical warfare. Whereas most chemical weapon fatalities had been the result of burn wounds in the past, there were growing indications that pulmonary failure had become the biggest killer of those exposed to these weapons.

Basson said that through a group of German and Austrian physicians, and with the help of the German intelligence agency, Project Coast gained access to victims of chemical attacks at congresses hosted by Heyndrickx in 1986 and again in 1988. In late 1987, Heyndrickx's 'boss' in the United Nations monitoring team, Jan Marsk, told Basson he was sending Heyndrickx to Iran on a fact-finding tour, and that Basson could go along, travelling on UN documents as a Belgian citizen.

Basson had long stated through his advocates that he was able to acquire contaminated shrapnel and take photographs of victims following an Iraqi attack on the village of Velapjar. Confronted by prosecutors with the fact that no record could be found of a chemical attack on any Kurdish village in January or February 1988, and that no map or authoritative reference work contained any reference to a village called Velapjar, Basson became vague about the exact time frame of the visit, and by the end of his testimony, his best estimate was 'somewhere between January and March'.

The significance of the date was the belief by prosecutors that when originally asked to explain payments made to Heyndrickx, Basson had contrived a story based on the well-documented nerve-gas massacre of an estimated 5 000 Kurds in the village of Halabja, launched on Friday, 17 March 1988. When Ackermann suggested that Basson must have been something of a prophet in order to pay Heyndrickx for a journey to a bombed village two months before the Iraqi aircraft even left the runway, Basson could not remember the precise date of his trip.

During a briefing session about chemical attacks by the Iraqi forces, Basson claimed, he managed to lay his hands on some shrapnel, which was taken back to Belgium on his behalf by Heyndrickx. Basson also befriended a 'young security guard' named Hashemi, and confided in him that he was not completely satisfied with the proof of chemical attack that he had seen, since neither the weapons nor the shrapnel on display confirmed conclusions reached beforehand by studying photographs and clinical profiles of victims. Adhering to the shrapnel were bits of a 'black tar-like substance', but according to Basson, since the chemical agent

used was supposed to have been mustard gas, there ought not to have been any residue on the metal – the liquid should all have been dispersed on explosion. He thus suspected that Iranian government officials were conducting a propaganda exercise, and had doctored the shrapnel shown to the UN team. Fortunately, Basson testified, young Hashemi slipped him a single piece of shrapnel, which was 'the real thing'.

While the briefing was under way, a report came through that the Iraqis were attacking the Kurds, and young Hashemi – the security guard – invited Basson to accompany him to the scene of the attack. So swiftly did they move that Basson was in time to take photographs of projectiles still in flight, and of the smoke. A day or two later, he was also able to pick up shrapnel from the target area, which proved, when analysed, that the Iraqis had used cyanide against the Kurds.

As luck would have it, the young security guard turned out to be the son of the very man who would later be involved in the Blackdale-Copperdale-Tagell deal, and it was through Hashemi the younger – promoted since their last meeting to an important position in the Iranian arms procurement agency – that Basson channelled his search for a peptide synthesiser. He had previously tried to include peptide research in Project Coast, but scientists at Delta G had 'neither the time, knowledge or ability' to conduct such advanced research. The CMC, however, had ordered Basson to find a place and people who could investigate the offensive application of peptides.

There were, of course, no human test farms in South Africa, but Basson claimed he had visited one in Russia and been offered 250 g of a specific natural peptide. Later, he calculated that to harvest that amount of the human growth hormone would have required the plundering of 300 000 corpses – 'and they must have been in Siberia, since that is the only place one would find so many'. Biological warfare expert Professor Milton Leitenberg of the University of Maryland told the authors that this growth hormone is obtained from the pituitary gland of cows, and there would have been no need to extract it from dead humans.

Through the young Hashemi, Basson was introduced to a Russian defector, from whom he learned that scientists behind the Iron Curtain had cracked the use of peptides as a weapon, and had established that biological agents were the most effective method of administration. Basson realised that while the growth hormone he was offered by the Russians must have been harvested from corpses or manufactured in a laboratory, bacteria could in fact be used to administer mind-altering peptides – and it did not take long for him to figure out that the Iranians had already reached that point.

The synthesiser Basson sought would have to be able to make 30 or 40 peptides at a time, have a built-in analytical ability and be linked to the bio-production

process that would create the bacteria. Elements of the process were computer-driven, and in the early 1990s, freely available computer capacity was minimal in comparison with that of the military, he testified. Because of the international arms embargo and sanctions, this was an even greater problem for South Africa, and since Project Coast would require a computer with a capacity that was simply not available at the time from a single supplier anywhere in the world, it would have to be custom-built by a dedicated team.

Basson said it took him between six and eight weeks to acquire the specifications and gain agreement that Hashemi's people would supply the equipment – at a price. The question, though, was how to hide the deal. The Iranians were keen to include their purchase of NBC suits in the transaction, but Basson had no idea how to do so. However, Mole advised him that during previous deals, he had learned from Webster to use a performance bond, and this struck Basson as a good idea.

Basson said he was not involved in the NBC suit deal at all, except in so far as the SADF would issue a false end-user certificate through him, using established channels to circumvent the international arms embargo against Iran. He said all the contracts for the piggyback deal were drawn up by Webster and Mole and that both Zimmer and Van Remoortere were aware that their sale of NBC suits would disguise an entirely separate transaction. Unfortunately, Basson learned from young Hashemi that there were people within Tagell who had stolen funds from the Iranian government. The culprits were recalled to Tehran and the ringleader publicly beheaded. Basson was of the view that the Iranians would have liked to do the same to Hashemi the elder, but he then learned from the son that the father was actually a triple agent, working for British, American and Iranian intelligence. Only then, Basson claims, did he realise that Hashemi senior was a very important man who enjoyed enormous protection – something he later confirmed from US intelligence documents.

The peptide synthesiser deal was beset by problems, and kept changing in regard to exactly what Iran would deliver, and at what price. In the end, all Basson could get out of the Iranians were the probes, which he later established were of Chinese origin. When they became available, he took them, because even if the proposed peptide synthesis could not be done, the probes could be used by the tissue culture research unit at RRL.

While negotiations for the rest of the system continued between himself, young Hashemi and the Russian defector, Basson also told Swiss pharmacologist Dr David Chu what was needed, and *he* spoke to another group of Russians with whom he was in touch via the financial principals. It was via this route, Basson said, that the peptide synthesis system was finally obtained, the Iranian deal having collapsed.

The peptide synthesiser was the subject of intense investigation and lengthy cross-examination of Basson, but despite casting an ever-widening net, prosecutors never found a single individual to corroborate Basson's claim that the apparatus had been bought and used for the purpose he described. Compounding confusion over the issue were Basson's claims of multiple applications of the equipment, and inconsistent explanations about its eventual fate, but at the end of the trial the judge said there was no doubt in his mind that the equipment had been bought, and ultimately swopped for 500 kg of methaqualone. The state's insistence that this was not the case was 'inexplicable', said Hartzenberg, since the forensic auditor had 'clearly' followed the wrong funds. As can be seen in Chapter 12, some of the judge's most scathing criticism of the prosecution related to charges involving the peptide synthesiser.

Basson testified that production of the thymus peptide and research on its effect on the immune system had been done *in vitro* at the secret Speskop laboratory, while human trials were carried out in Swaziland. Research on growth hormones and 'two or three' brain peptides was also done at Speskop, and two or three new peptides – growth hormone variants – were made. The problem of penetrating the brain-blood barrier was overcome by having subjects sniff the peptides, which were then absorbed through the mucous membranes. Peptide pills called Thymu-Vocal were administered orally, and even though gastric juices destroyed most of the substance, three to five per cent absorption through the gastric canal proved sufficient for research purposes.

Challenged by Ackermann about his scientific qualifications and ability to perform such advanced experiments, Basson launched a blistering attack on the handpicked team of scientists working for Project Coast. Lucia Steenkamp – the first person in South Africa to obtain a doctorate for her work in peptide synthesis – and her boss, Dr Hennie Jordaan, were not knowledgeable enough and 'no one', not even Delta G Scientific chief executive Dr Philip Mijburgh (Jordaan's son-in-law) believed either of them capable of manufacturing the thymus peptide. As for scientists at Roodeplaat, whatever they knew about human brain functions was taught to them by Basson 'and my doctors'. He, on the other hand, was sufficiently qualified to 'make a contribution in all fields of research', and had mastered all the scientific fields involved. Steenkamp might have known more about the practical steps involved in manufacturing a peptide, but as to what they could *do*, Basson alone had the answers and, under the tutelage of a mysterious Bulgarian named Georgiev [author's note: no documents pertaining to this individual are available – this spelling is the most likely, according to Basson's pronunciation and perusal of reference works on Bulgarian surnames], who came with the package, was able to manufacture a molecule himself in time.

Basson acknowledged that when he ordered the super-synthesiser, he was aware that Delta G Scientific already had a peptide synthesiser, that it had been purchased on the open market, and that Jordaan was cognisant of its abilities. What exactly, asked Ackermann, could the new peptide synthesiser do that the existing equipment could not? 'Make toasted cheese,' was Basson's sneering response.

The services of both Georgiev and a Russian translator, Sergei Estinev, had been contracted through the MAIS Corporation, a Zurich-based agency for free-lance East Bloc scientists, which was actually a front for the Russian KGB, Basson claimed. Georgiev's task was to install the peptide synthesiser and manufacture the thymus peptide, while Estinev accompanied Basson on 'several' visits to the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow in connection with problems experienced with the equipment.

Peptide synthesis was only one aspect of the highly secretive work carried out in the clandestine laboratory at Special Forces headquarters of which prosecutors could find no proof. Not one of the handful of people Basson claimed manned the laboratory was known to any of Project Coast's mainstream scientists. Pyrotechnical tests with a view to the weaponisation of incapacitants, such as the methaqualone and MDMA manufactured by Delta G, were also performed at Speskop, according to Basson. Despite the extreme level of sophistication such tests entail, he said he was assisted by only two people – Hekkies van Heerden, a Special Forces ammunition expert (who has since died) and Bill Grieve, an explosives expert who trekked south on the eve of Rhodesian independence.

Under cross-examination, Jordaan had been told by Cilliers that Basson was helped to solve problems related to the aerosol delivery of nerve gas mixed with incapacitants by Dr Gerald Bull, the brilliant Canadian physicist and ballistician, who collaborated with South African engineers to produce the G5 155 mm field gun/howitzer, which has a maximum firing range of 48 km. When his contravention of the UN arms embargo during the latter half of the 1970s was uncovered, Bull was charged with illegal arms dealing in America, pleaded guilty on the advice of his lawyer and served a six-month jail sentence in 1980. In March 1990 he was gunned down in the doorway of his Brussels apartment, allegedly by Mossad, the Israeli secret service, to halt development of a 'supergun' for Saddam Hussein.

Jordaan told Cilliers that as far as he knew, Bull had been an artillery expert rather than a chemist, and while he was hesitant to express an opinion as to whether or not the Canadian aero-physicist would have been qualified to assist Basson in the field of bio-chemistry, it seemed to him that 'a great many claims made in this court could qualify as bull'. Even the judge laughed out loud.

Bull would feature once more during Basson's trial. In December 1996, just seven weeks before he was arrested in possession of Ecstasy, Basson received a fax from Bill Grieve, described by former colleague Sybie van der Spuy as 'an

outstanding explosives expert'. At some point prior to the 1994 democratic election, Grieve had moved to England, and on 2 December 1996 was living comfortably in a quiet village near London's Heathrow Airport. The fax he sent Basson contained both a warning and an offer of safe harbour. Addressed to 'Wouter' from 'Bill', it read:

> *Greetings. Thank you for your prompt response to my request for a fax number and for replying the other night.*
>
> *I believe that what I said is valid. No dramatics – no exaggeration and would advise you to take precautions in Europe, especially Schweitz. You will remember that is where Mr J Bull [sic] was dispatched. All details to be explained when I see you face to face. As you know details are already held on you by the authorities there and elsewhere. It seems we are to be connected together for life by some sort of umbilical cord.*
>
> *I also believe from information that you may well be pressurised after 14/12/96.*
>
> *I live 16 minutes drive from Heathrow, in a very quite [sic] village undisturbed by the flight paths, two miles from Uxbridge underground station and two miles from Iver station (Brit Rail). I am fairly central to locations in London. I have a Georgian styled 4-bedroom home with a superb guest suite. You are most welcome to stay if you want to. I will also pick you up at Heathrow if you want me to. I cannot collect from Gatwick. Traffic is horrendous.*
>
> *Although I travel frequently, if you give me short advance warning, I will make sure that I am here for the duration of your stay. I have got fairly substantial 'open' doors and am also quite well settled and established here.*
>
> *Let me know if there is anything else I can do for you.*
>
> *I look forward to hearing from you in due course. Take care.*

Found among a number of documents seized from Basson's home by narcotics detectives on the day of his arrest, the fax attracted no particular attention until August 1998, when South Africa's National Intelligence Agency received information from a 'friendly' foreign intelligence agency that prompted a closer look at some of the thousands of documents in four steel trunks retrieved by investigators in the wake of Basson's detention. One trunk had already yielded an estimate for removal of Basson's household goods to a foreign country, and an invoice dated April 1995 for storage of certain items in a Midrand warehouse. Now investigators retrieved a second invoice from the same company, Around the World Removals, for storage of items on behalf of Grieve.

Armed with a search warrant, police raided the premises, and found a padlocked steel trunk containing a number of dummy weapons of the kind used for training

purposes. A week later, after being contacted by the warehouse owner, they removed an additional 21 trunks from the premises under heavily armed guard and in utmost secrecy. The trunks were found to contain an alarming collection of what investigators described as 'highly sophisticated' arms and ammunition, including landmines, limpet mines, hand grenades and various automatic weapons. One trunk was filled entirely with nitro-glycerine. Other explosive devices found included a booby-trapped car jack and can of coffee. All the ammunition and explosives were live and dangerously unstable after being in storage for some time – and all were being stored for Grieve, who had paid the costs involved from his new home in England.

Of as much interest to Basson's prosecutors as the weapons were the other items crammed into the trunks: typical tools of the covert operator's trade, including wigs and other accessories to create a disguise, silencers for a variety of weapons and hundreds of original files and documents relating to CCB projects.

Since 1989, a succession of official inquiries into activities of this clandestine SADF unit had been severely hampered by claims that the files had last been in the possession of CCB 'managing director' Joe Verster, after which they mysteriously disappeared. Now prosecutors had stumbled on a significant number of the missing files, and would use several of them to support their case against Basson – including a progress report on the suspension of a baboon foetus from a tree in the garden of Archbishop Desmond Tutu's official residence at Bishopscourt, Cape Town.

Following the discovery, NIA agents and Basson investigators made repeated but futile attempts to interview Grieve in England. Retired NIA counter-intelligence section chief Rein Botha testified that appeals to British intelligence agencies for assistance in making contact with Grieve simply went unanswered.

In his book *Plague Wars*, British author Tom Mangold mentioned the fax Grieve sent Basson. However, the copy produced during hearings of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission in mid-1998 had certain references and geographical locations whited out, and it was not until Basson's trial that the original, which had been treated by forensic scientists to restore the excisions, revealed the full content and identity of the sender. Mangold suggested that the correspondent was a 'key member' of 'Die Organisasie' (The Organisation), a group of former Rhodesians and South Africans now living in London but with links to British, American and other international groups 'who are taken very seriously by the South African intelligence community, and who have as a common objective the return of a white-dominated government in that country'.

Mangold did not identify the source of his claims, but the consensus reached by South African investigators and intelligence was that the 22 trunks of weapons and classified documents stored for more than three years in Grieve's name were hidden for one or both of the following purposes:

- To escape detection during the late-1992 investigation into the so-called Third Force, which led to a top-level purge of 23 SADF officers by State President FW de Klerk.
- To hide the weaponry in anticipation of the putative 'civil war' that right-wing factions, including large sections of the security forces, were reportedly planning in the run-up to the 1994 democratic election.

In the absence of an explanation from Grieve, investigators could do little more than speculate about the intended uses of the arms cache – or how he came by the 'missing' CCB files. Exhaustive independent inquiries by the authors also reached a dead end, though it was possible to determine that 'Bill' is William Leslie Grieve – operational aliases John Taylor and CJ Davies, born on 10 August 1950 and a former member of the Rhodesia Guard Force.

Since moving to the English county of Hampshire with his wife, Suzanne, Grieve has worked in the helicopter, avionics and security industries. South African intelligence agents believe he enjoys the protection of the British Police Special Branch in return for information about dirty tricks operations and other sensitive matters. Intelligence sources have suggested that he is known to the Special Branch under the code-name Procrastination.

Basson's defence counsel claimed that the warning fax from Grieve was turned over to the NIA when it was received in December 1996, and that this was the reason NIA bodyguards were assigned to protect Basson. Former NIA deputy director-general Mike Kennedy, who was specifically ordered by FW de Klerk in November 1989 to probe alleged abuse of Project Coast, disputed Basson's claim. While it was correct that Basson had been under NIA surveillance constantly from the end of 1996, he said, this was because Basson told him a message had been sent 'from Europe' to two of his former colleagues, warning them that if they went back to Libya, their lives would be in danger, and that they should pass the same information on to Basson.

Kennedy confirmed with American intelligence sources that Basson's life might indeed be in jeopardy because of his links with Libya, and a team was assigned to protect him and his immediate family. The NIA's concern, said Kennedy, was that Basson might be kidnapped and forced by a hostile regime to reveal his knowledge of chemical and biological warfare. However, the fax from Grieve was first seen by Kennedy on 1 February 1997, after Basson's arrest, and played no role in the NIA's assessment of any danger to Basson.

The only explanation Basson offered regarding his relationship with Grieve was that he was a member of the three-man team that conducted pyrotechnical tests in the secret laboratory at Special Forces headquarters with a view to weaponisation of incapacitants. He was not asked if he had any knowledge of

the arms cache and CCB documents stored by Grieve prior to his departure for England, or whether he had given any consideration to Grieve's offer of sanctuary.

For the average person, a circle of acquaintances that includes both self-confessed mass murderers and the wives of heads of state is hardly the norm. Nevertheless, even the international media were surprised when Basson was linked, in turn, to Nelson Mandela and his ex-wife Winnie, her successor, Graça Machel, and France's erstwhile First Lady, Danielle Mitterand.

Madame Mitterand featured prominently, albeit innocently, in what prosecutors said was nothing more than an elaborate scheme to circumvent foreign exchange regulations. As spelled out in a 23-page document, Project Contresida would advance the objectives of OPALS (the Pan-African Organisation to Combat AIDS), a legitimate network of medical specialists headed by Professor Marc Gentilini of the Pitié-Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris, and served by Madame Mitterand as honorary president.

The document outlined plans to organise various projects in sub-Saharan Africa, including research and development for anti-AIDS drugs, the building of clinics and diagnostic centres and the purchase and stockpiling of drugs needed to treat the opportunistic diseases that plague HIV-positive patients – at a cost of $50 million. The proposal included plans for a research laboratory, production facility and diagnostic centre in Johannesburg, and a network of polyclinics to be built in Mozambique, Lesotho, Swaziland, Malawi and Namibia, and the apartheid government's ethnic 'homelands' of Bophuthatswana, Transkei, Ciskei, Venda and Lebowa. Mobile clinics staffed by medical teams would operate from each polyclinic.

Because of the far-flung and often inaccessible terrain to be covered, and the generally poor condition of the roads, independent transport would be required – one twin-engined aircraft capable of transporting six to ten patients, a medical team and supplies at a time, and 20 four-wheel-drive vehicles capable of long-range cross-country travel while transporting four patients and a medical team, and fitted with refrigeration facilities for the transport of medicines and blood samples.

The clinics would be served by 12 medical teams, each consisting of two doctors, four nurses, a psychologist and a social worker. Owing to an already well-developed infrastructure, South Africa would house the hi-tech laboratories needed, and the entire project would be managed by Basson under the guidance of the Paris-based OPALS management board and the Regional Health Organisation of Southern Africa (RHOSA). The latter would issue South African government bonds as security for the loan, to be repaid over seven years from income generated by the research and development laboratory, production of pharmaceutical products, grants and

payments from the World Health Organisation, the European Economic Community, unnamed foreign governments and welfare bodies.

Mindful of the 'utmost sensitivity' of the project for the governments concerned, given that 'close cooperation between the local health authorities in southern Africa is still in a very early and sensitive stage' and the fact that financiers might wish their identities to remain confidential, the document stipulated that the Contresida Trust had been established offshore and would be administered by reputable American and English legal firms. Distribution and application of the funds would be administered by the trustees through PCM International Inc., registered in the Cayman Islands. South African health authorities would guarantee the loan by issuing gilt bonds at par value and lodging them with a suitable bank in the Caymans, which would then provide security for the loan to the original source of the money, thus keeping the entire transaction at arm's length.

In April 1991, Dr David Chu sought – and received – the following from Basson in support of his quest for funding: a letter from an OPALS executive member verifying that Contresida was a recognised sub-project; a letter from the SA Medicines Control Council stating that Basson was a respected member of the South African anti-AIDS programme; a letter of assurance from Basson that the funds would be used only for the anti-AIDS programme; and power of attorney to represent Basson in obtaining the loan. Despite all these assurances, the loan was not granted, according to Chu, because Basson never produced certificates of guarantee from the South African government.

Basson testified that the elaborate scheme was nothing more than a cover story for the laundering of $250 million on behalf of one of his financial principals, alleged East German spy Dieter Dreier – and that the 'South African government' was aware of this. The Reserve Bank, Basson claimed, was 'only too happy' at the prospect of a foreign investment of this magnitude lying in its vaults for 'five or ten years', and a Reserve Bank official (whose name he could not recall) even supplied the name of a commercial bank (which he preferred not to mention) through which the funds could be channelled.

As far back as 1988, said Basson, AIDS was such a controversial subject that it offered the ideal front for a covert operation. Asked by Ackermann to identify the South African government officials who had authorised this money-laundering scheme, Basson specified former SADF Chief of Staff Finance, Admiral Bert Bekker, and the Reserve Bank officer whose name escaped him.

Basson's version of the OPALS scheme was one of many examples of scenarios never put to the witnesses concerned under cross-examination. He claimed that he and Chu had compiled the OPALS document together, and that agents of the SADF's Military Intelligence had infiltrated the organisation 'to find out what they were up to'. Although Basson was never a member of OPALS, he had attended a

three-day symposium hosted by the organisation in Swaziland in 1987, and the application for a loan from a Lichtenstein bank was supported by a letter from Madame Mitterand approving plans to develop anti-AIDS drugs in Africa, to fight African AIDS. Indeed, Basson smirked, it had given him 'great delight' to embroil her in a cover story to this extent, and he had no fear at all that his deception would be discovered by the French intelligence service. If Madame Mitterand had travelled to South Africa and expressed a desire to visit the facilities mentioned in the document, he would simply have taken her to the SA Medical Research Institute, the single biggest AIDS research facility in the country at the time, where 'some of the people' were on Project Coast's payroll.

Patently, said Basson, while the OPALS document contained elements of truth – the secret to any successful front operation – it was 'rubbish' to even suggest that financial grants would be forthcoming from the World Health Organisation or the European Economic Community, since both were actively boycotting South Africa at the time. Another 'element of truth' was a reference to Basson being a member of a regional health committee: during 1990 and 1991, he served on a committee appointed by the Minister of Health to assess standards of academic training for South African doctors. In the end, he claimed, the entire plan was abandoned 'because there was some or other problem with the Lichtenstein bank'.

Of all the dangerous liaisons Basson is reported to have formed, the one with Libya remains the most enigmatic. Advocate Jaap Cilliers chose the fourth morning of evidence in the trial to drop the first of a barrage of bombshells that would send journalists scurrying for their cellphones. Cross-examining Grant Wentzel, the Ecstasy dealer whose cooperation with police led to Basson's arrest, Cilliers suggested that Global Management, a company in which Wentzel was involved, had done some 'very interesting deals'.

On one occasion, said Cilliers, Basson and another partner in the business, Solly Pienaar, had travelled to Libya to pick up a considerable amount of cash that was delivered in person to Nelson Mandela's private home, and used to pay legal costs incurred by Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, who was on trial from late 1991 to March 1992 on charges of abducting and murdering a teenage activist, Stompie Seipei.

Though Cilliers mentioned no date for his client's alleged trip as Mandela's secret courier, it seems safe to assume that it must have taken place during or soon after her trial. Yet Basson was very much a serving senior SADF officer and head of Project Coast until December 1992, and as such, just about the most unlikely candidate to serve the ANC leader in the manner suggested. In his own testimony, Basson avoided any reference to this mission. He did, however, tell the court that he had made several secret trips to Libya long before he was sacked from the SADF, although no record could be found of any such trips prior to 1993.

Pienaar, unquestionably the most entertaining witness called against Basson, took the stand without warning on St Valentine's Day 2001, exhibiting a casual demeanour that did not endear him to the judge. The tone was set when Ackermann craved the court's indulgence for the witness's attire – black pants and a black-on-black collarless shirt that would have drawn admiring glances in any dance club – and for the fact that he would most likely testify in a trendy bastardisation of his home language, Afrikaans, interspersed with select English words and phrases. It was left to the judge's clerk to make a whispered suggestion, soon after questioning began, that Pienaar should not sprawl in the office chair provided, or spin it around in the witness box, but sit still and speak into the microphone designed to capture his testimony on tape.

The heart of Pienaar's value to the state was his account of how and when Basson and Mandela had become acquainted. By the time Mandela was released from prison in February 1990, Pienaar – a card-carrying ANC member since long before that date – had already forged contacts with a number of high-ranking ANC officials. In the run-up to the 1994 election, he was entrusted with making travel arrangements for both Madiba and other high-ranking ANC executives. He accompanied Mandela on virtually all flights during this period, got to know Winnie Madikizela-Mandela well and formed a personal relationship with Graça Machel and her family.

Around the beginning of 1993, Pienaar heard from his ANC sources that Muammar Gaddafi's government wanted a railway line constructed in Libya. Pienaar is nothing if not a man with a keen eye for the main chance, and he approached South Africa's rail transport corporation, Transnet, suggesting they should submit a tender. While the outgoing apartheid regime had declared Libya an enemy state because of Gaddafi's overt support of the ANC, it was already clear that the incoming ANC government would have an entirely different relationship with Tripoli, and that a whole new area of international trade was about to open up. Nevertheless, Transnet was not yet ready to deal direct with Libya, and Pienaar was advised that only the Department of Foreign Affairs would be able to facilitate contact between the two countries.

Since his support of the ANC had not escaped the NIA, Pienaar knew that his credentials would hold no sway with the old guard diplomatic corps, and he dropped the idea. However, during a conversation with Basson's drug-dealing associate, Grant Wentzel (whose brother-in-law Pienaar had been at university with), he mentioned the problem, and was immediately assured that Wentzel knew just the right person, an international businessman, to help. Wentzel set up a meeting at a Pretoria restaurant, where Pienaar met both Basson and Wentzel's business partner, Jerry Brandt.

When Pienaar revealed that he was working with the ANC and had a good relationship with Mandela, Basson enthusiastically seized on the prospect of major

business opportunities. Excited by the possibility of making money from the proposed $10 billion railway line project, he assured Pienaar that he not only had the right contacts, but was personally acquainted with Transnet chief executive Anton Moolman. In return for his assistance, Basson suggested, Pienaar might be of help to him. He wanted to sell his recently refurbished home in the exclusive Pretoria suburb of Waterkloof, and believed the Mozambican government might be interested in acquiring the property as an embassy. Perhaps Pienaar could act as facilitator for such a deal?

Some nine months earlier, Pienaar had met Yusuf Murgham, head of the visa section at the Libyan embassy in Harare. Any visits to Libya had to be arranged through Murgham, but Pienaar – who said he knew Gaddafi's intelligence chief – dismissed claims that Murgham was a high-ranking Libyan intelligence official. Within weeks of their first meeting, Pienaar was making arrangements for a Transnet delegation to visit Libya, but first, he testified, he had to arrange for Basson and Murgham to meet. Since there were no diplomatic relations between South Africa and Libya, he chose the neutral ground of neighbouring Botswana for the introduction.

Pienaar was adamant that Basson and Murgham had never met before, but Basson insisted that they had deliberately pretended not to know one another, having been involved in a number of deals on behalf of the financial principals for some years already. As far as Pienaar was concerned, this was a 'blatant lie'. Basson had been 'quite nervous' about the meeting, given the international attitude towards any contact with Libya, and any suggestion that Murgham – a 'poor, ordinary man' – ever had access to millions of dollars was ludicrous. According to Pienaar, Murgham resigned as a Libyan public servant some time after meeting Basson in 1993, when he was recalled to Tripoli, because he had married a non-Moslem Zimbabwean woman, fathered two children and elected to go into business with her father, a chicken farmer. When Pienaar had last spoken to Murgham telephonically in December 1999, the Libyan had been 'shocked' to learn what had been said about him during the Basson trial, and fearful that if the 'stories' that were being spread found their way back to Libya, there could be serious consequences for his family.

During the second half of 1993, however, because Murgham trusted Pienaar implicitly, he accepted Basson without question. At the time, Libya could be reached via one of only two routes: by boat from Malta, or the more popular choice, through Djerba, a holiday resort on an island off the coast of Tunisia, then by road across 400 km of desert to Tripoli. For what Pienaar insists was Basson's inaugural trip, the Djerba route was chosen. Basson's Jetstar, piloted by Tom Cummings and Piet Colyn, took off from Grand Central Airport with Basson and Pienaar on board. They landed in Harare to pick up Murgham and an unscheduled passenger, the son of the Libyan ambassador to Zimbabwe.

The aircraft made one refuelling stop 'somewhere in Africa', and on arrival in Djerba the delegation was met by members of the Libyan Foreign Affairs Protocol Section. This, according to Pienaar, was a department set up after the imposition of sanctions, which had bought a fleet of 'about 300 Mercedes-Benzes' specifically to transport visitors across the desert. Pienaar had absolutely no doubt that this was the first time Basson had set foot on Libyan soil. From comments and observations made during their stay, he said, it was 'obvious' that Basson had never before been to Tripoli, where they held a series of meetings with Libyan Transport Department officials.

On returning to South Africa, Basson was to pursue the railway line project with Transnet, and it was at this point that Pienaar was drawn into Global Management, a move first mooted at his initial meeting with Basson. The company was run by Wentzel and Brandt, with Basson 'popping in' from time to time, when he and Pienaar would discuss the Libyan project and the possibility of expanding contacts to such areas as the export of fruit juice. Oil imports were among their early aspirations, but this idea was scrapped when they established that Libya produces a light, sweet crude, not suitable for the South African market.

According to Pienaar, Transnet submitted a tender for the railway line project after he introduced Moolman to Libyan Foreign Minister Omar Muntassar while the latter was in South Africa to attend the May 1994 inauguration of President Nelson Mandela, but the project was abandoned amid mounting international pressure on Libya to hand over the Lockerbie bombers.

Between the testimony of Pienaar – clearly aggrieved at having been deceived by Basson about his true identity – and that of Basson himself, the issue of contact with Libya became one of the most contentious of the trial. Pienaar accused Basson of lying when he claimed that he and Murgham had arranged a secret visit to South Africa by the Libyan Foreign Affairs Minister as early as mid-1992, and vehemently denied that he and Basson had gone to Libya to collect money for Madikizela-Mandela's legal expenses – but he did acknowledge that on several occasions he had ferried large amounts of cash from Libya on behalf of the ANC.

The one thing on which these most incongruous of partners did agree, was that Basson once cooked prawns for Nelson Mandela. On one of their visits to Mozambique, where Global Management was looking into a number of potential business opportunities, Graça Machel gave Pienaar a parcel of prawns to take to Mandela. When Pienaar told her he had no idea how to prepare the crustaceans, Basson offered to do the honours, and on their return to Johannesburg the prawns were duly cooked one evening, by Basson, at Mandela's Houghton home, and enjoyed by a party of about 10 people.

Pienaar insisted that this was the only time he ever took Basson to Mandela's home. Basson, however, claimed that he visited the Mandela house four or five

times, and had met Mandela through Transnet's Moolman long before the prawn evening with Pienaar. He was vague about the exact circumstances and unable to provide details of any other contact with Mandela because 'such occasions were not important enough' for him to remember. But surely, Ackermann insisted, when Pienaar took him to the Houghton house and introduced him to the future president, Mandela must have said something to indicate that he already knew Basson? This, too, Basson could not remember.

That the full extent of Basson's association with Pienaar, Murgham and Mandela was not revealed during the trial is clear from various snippets of evidence.

Jerry Brandt disclosed that Pienaar was a friend of Mozambican president Joachim Chissano's brother, and that at some point Basson had obtained approval from the Mozambican authorities to set up a bank in the neighbouring state. Among the documents retrieved from the four steel trunks was a letter dated 10 September 1992, which confirmed that Chissano had authorised plans for 'the bank', but Basson denied being personally involved, saying he had merely advised Wentzel and his partners at Global Management regarding a scheme that would give the ANC a share of the privatised State Bank of Mozambique. Chissano's brother had an interest in various Global deals, including an air charter licence, cashew nuts, oil for Zimbabwe and Zambia, and jet fuel, which would have come from Libya, as far as Basson could recall. He himself had cut ties with Global immediately after conclusion of the company's first business deal, which had to do with the importation of seafood from Mozambique – in which Graça Machel played a role. After this, his role in Global was purely advisory, and he visited Maputo several times in this capacity, staying with Machel as a house guest on a few occasions.

Pienaar admitted that he had tried to interest the Libyan government in buying Merton House, the Pretoria mansion refurbished by Basson at a cost of more than R10 million, and Basson confirmed that Pienaar took Mozambican officials to view his home in Aries Street, Waterkloof, with a view to a sale. Other documents found in the trunks refer to Global deals involving property in Maputo, prawns and Saracen armoured cars, and the mysterious involvement of both Basson and Murgham in an international incident concerning British Prime Minister John Major.

Basson claimed that one of his objectives in cultivating a relationship with Mandela was the resolution of the stalemate regarding the hand-over of the Lockerbie bombers. To this end, although he had ceased to be a military officer almost two years earlier, he was instrumental in an SADF operation to pass a letter from Gaddafi – in which he proposed that Mandela should be appointed as a mediator in the Lockerbie affair – to the British premier during his official visit to South Africa in September 1994. Pienaar testified that this was merely one of 'many'

letters from Gaddafi passed on to visiting heads of state. Gaddafi frequently used Mandela as a go-between in his ongoing battle against international sanctions, said Pienaar, and letters were delivered by either Murgham or the Libyan ambassador.

During Major's visit, Murgham was unable to gain access to Mandela, and he and Pienaar decided to use their relationship with Defence Minister Joe Modise by asking him to hand the letter to Major or a member of his party during the departure ceremony at the Waterkloof Air Force Base. Basson, said Pienaar, played no role in the exercise at all. Basson himself testified that SADF chief General Georg Meiring had set up a meeting, at which he was introduced to Modise for the specific purpose of arranging that the letter be handed to Major on the apron at the air base.

Basson also claimed that between 1992 and his inauguration, Mandela was a regular passenger on the Jetstar flown by Aeromed, becoming such a frequent flyer during 1993 that in certain African states the Jetstar became known as 'Mandela's aircraft'. He said no payment was sought for Mandela's flights, and that Pienaar was not in charge of these travel arrangements, merely acting as 'liaison' on some of the early trips. After that, according to Basson, 'the ANC contacted us and Mandela flew wherever he wanted, free of charge'.

At one point, the financial principals even considered replacing the Jetstar with a $20 million Falcon 50EX, which offered a longer flying range, for Mandela's convenience, according to Basson. He and Zimmer had gone so far as to arrange demonstrations of this aircraft by the French Air Force, but it was never bought, because of problems regarding the financial principals' line of credit with manufacturers Dassault.

While Basson's claims about Mandela's use of the Jetstar went unchallenged, the former president did issue a statement denying that any funding was received from Libya to cover his ex-wife's legal expenses.

During 1996 the South African Parliamentary Sub-Committee on Public Finances asked pertinent questions about Basson's contact with Libya, including the dates and purpose of his visits and whether or not he had met Gaddafi at any time. The response, delivered by Meiring in his capacity as SADF chief, was that at the time he visited Libya, Basson was not employed by the SADF or conducting business on behalf of the SADF, and had travelled to Libya as a private citizen, and hence no further information could be supplied.

Basson claimed that this was part of a high-level SADF strategy to protect 'sensitive' aspects of Project Coast, and that the answer given was formulated at a meeting attended by Meiring, the Chief of Staff Intelligence and Chief of Staff Finance.

Pienaar testified that had he known the truth about Basson's military background and links to the National Party government – an institution that he detested

– he would 'never have had anything to do with the man'. As it was, once his association with the former CBW project chief became public knowledge, it caused him enormous embarrassment, and took a heavy toll on his cherished relationships with high-ranking ANC officials.

Pienaar's suspicions were first roused by a radio report linking one Wouter Basson to the South African CBW programme. He drove immediately to Basson's home and asked if it was true. Basson blithely denied that he was the man referred to, telling Pienaar there were several other Wouter Bassons who had been involved with the security forces during the apartheid era.

Pienaar believed him, not least because Basson had 'never come across as being a military man, playing the role of sophisticated businessman to perfection'. But when Pienaar was visited at home by an NIA agent and questioned about his relationship with Basson, and Basson's Libyan connections, he realised that there could be a problem. Again he confronted Basson, and again Basson denied being the man in question.

It was only when Pienaar saw a flurry of news reports linking Basson not only to the SADF and CBW, but also to 'a series of horrible murders' that it dawned on him that he had unwittingly become involved in business with 'one of the former government's biggest agents'. When Lieutenant-General Pierre Steyn, Secretary of Defence and the man whose damning report had led to Basson being sacked in December 1992, told Pienaar that the subject of the media reports lived in Aries Street, Waterkloof, Pienaar finally knew beyond any doubt that his business associate and the former SADF officer were one and the same person.

And that, Pienaar said, was the end of all his dealings with Basson.

11

Blame the Dead Man

IF THE MAD Hatter had invited him to a tea party at any point during his 30-month trial, Wouter Basson could have doffed a different *chapeau* with every sip of Lapsang Souchong that passed his lips. The chiaroscuro portrait painted by his lawyers during cross-examination of the state's 153 witnesses was that of an extremely busy man who wore a variety of hats during his tenure as head of Project Coast.

In challenging the testimony of witnesses ranging from international business broker Bernard Zimmer to self-confessed mass murderer Johan Theron, defence advocates Jaap Cilliers and Tokkie van Zyl placed heavy emphasis on their client being the victim of a political witch-hunt, and accused all those who implicated him in criminal activity of doing so only to save their own skins, hide a sanctions-busting past or because they held a grudge.

After 21 months of hearing testimony from the state witnesses – and securing Basson's early acquittal on 15 charges in June 2000 – the defence called only one witness: Basson himself. By the time he began to testify on 23 July 2001, the vignette of the accused before court was that of a soldier devoted to nothing so much as duty, a faithful servant of the system and the conflict that shaped his psyche.

Basson's denial of guilt on all charges had been reinforced throughout the state's case by saddling dead men with the onus of orders issued or ignored, and dismissing potentially incriminating documents as either false or beyond his ken. The spirits of former SADF and Special Forces chief Kat Liebenberg, Surgeon General Nicol Nieuwoudt, shady Swiss arms dealer and some-time intelligence informant Jurg Jacomet, 5 Reconnaissance Regiment commander Corrie Meerholz,

munitions expert Hekkies van Heerden, German industrialist Hubert Blücher, Unita leader Jonas Savimbi and others were frequently invoked to explain the activities of which Basson stood accused.

Several of those who testified against Basson were subject to vicious character assassination or denigration. The defence even managed to reduce South Africa's most formidable fighting men – the redoubtable Recces – to caricatures: gibbering idiots who had to be supplied with tranquillisers before taking part in cross-border raids, armed with crudely fashioned poison-tipped screwdrivers for self-defence, gathering intelligence in 'official' shebeens. Former business associates were portrayed as ruthless money-grubbers devoid of conscience; those charged with financial administration of Project Coast reduced to the level of clerks; scientists dismissed as pedestrian; Military Intelligence officers demoted to the ranks of security guards.

Given the calibre of key witnesses with whom the prosecution had to work, it was almost too easy to attack their individual failings, but there was a special animus to the calumny reserved for former Barnacle operator Johan Theron.

During the nine weeks Basson spent in the witness stand, every aspect of his association with Project Coast came under the microscope. For the first time, the court had the opportunity to hear and observe at first hand the man portrayed at various times as a brilliant cardiologist, alleged purveyor of lethal toxins, pre-eminent CBW expert and career officer ousted in a military purge. The prosecution was confident that any lingering doubts the judge might have after a parade of witnesses had pointed the finger of guilt at Basson, even though this demanded that they incriminate themselves in mass murder, drug-peddling and international fraud, would be laid to rest by relentless attention to detail and discrepancy, to say nothing of the documents produced at every turn.

Liberally salted with jargon more readily found in best-selling spy thrillers than legal tomes, Basson's testimony was tapestried with threads that even the most dextrous of fiction writers – Frederick Forsyth, John le Carré, Tom Clancy and other masters of the genre – would be hard-pressed to stitch into a coherent read. Anton Ackermann later argued that while Basson displayed an 'exceptional' gift for romanticising every situation, placing himself at the centre of daredevil escapades in selfless service to God and country, his elevation of 'perfectly mundane business deals' to the level of heartstopping imaginary spy dramas served only to underline the absence of such adventure in his real life.

Co-prosecutor Dr Torie Pretorius was somewhat less charitable, pointing out that, by his own admission, Basson's entire association with Project Coast had been built on lies, deceit, misrepresentation and the ability to manipulate situations to his own advantage. In the process, he had acquired 'a collection of personae', become a glib and highly skilled liar, wheeler-dealer and international

drug smuggler, especially adept at improvising plausible cover-ups in order to extricate himself from potentially tricky situations. Furthermore, Basson had told the court that the most valuable lesson taught by Special Forces was how to withstand interrogation by employing deceit – a strategy and technique he had applied throughout the trial in order to deliberately mislead the court, according to Pretorius.

The judge was swayed not one iota by these submissions, telling prosecutors well in advance of his final judgment that during 40 days of listening to Basson, he saw no sign of an argumentative witness, merely one who 'tried to lay the facts before the court'.

Basson is clearly exceptionally intelligent, and his academic qualifications are impressive – a double medical speciality in cardiology and internal medicine, an MSc degree in physiology and physiological chemistry and a BComm obtained part-time in the run-up to his trial. He is also a qualified military explosives expert, founder and former commander of the SADF's Special Forces medical support battalion, author of the psychological profiles used during selection of Special Forces operators, and was the medical officer on South Africa's nuclear weapons project even while head of Project Coast. He has travelled the globe and has at least a working knowledge of several foreign languages, has rubbed shoulders as comfortably with notorious international arms smugglers and drug dealers as with the likes of PW Botha, Nelson Mandela, former French First Lady Danielle Mitterand and a succession of SADF generals and senior Cabinet ministers in both South Africa and Libya.

References to front companies, financial 'engineering', cunning 'manoeuvres' designed to create illusions, pseudo-deals, façades, 'orchestrate events' and others in similar vein trip off Basson's tongue as easily as another man might say hello. Articulate and eloquent, he had a plausible answer to every question – although when challenged on even the most minor of his avowed abilities, his inherent narcissism surfaced, leaving his testimony as littered with the 'firsts' to which he lays claim as with scornful dismissals of those considered minnows in the murky waters where he alone swam as a shark. Directors of Project Coast's front companies 'didn't have a clue' that they were actually working for the military, and fell 'hook, line and sinker' for the cover story he spun. Scientists whom he handpicked for the project turned out to be not only 'impossible to manage … supreme egotists who shamelessly stole one another's ideas', but were simply not up to the advanced research demanded by CBW, leaving him to carry out the most sophisticated and clandestine experiments himself.

Depending on what question was being put to him, Basson alternated between the imperious and the obsequious. Challenged as to whether he had ever actually been in the heat of combat, he informed Ackermann that he had, in fact, been

awarded the highest military decoration a non-general in the SADF could receive. Shortly afterwards, pressed to explain discrepancies between written responses to inquiries about aspects of Project Coast's finances and his explanations in court, Basson effortlessly segued into the role of humble servant, claiming he had merely acted as a scribe – been 'the lowly brigadier in the corner' – and had played no role in compiling the documents furnished by Niel Knobel to the Office for Serious Economic Offences.

The court record contains almost as many references to 'Libya' as did the trial of the Lockerbie bombers. It was thus fitting that in September 2001, Ackermann shared a podium in Sydney, Australia, with his Scottish counterparts in the Lockerbie trial, when they received international awards for their prosecutorial skills. But while the main objective of the Lockerbie trial was to prove Libyan involvement in the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103, Ackermann was bent on convincing Hartzenberg that Basson's claims of Libyan fingers in South Africa's chemical and germ warfare pie were no more than a 'romantic fantasy'.

The prosecution was snookered by the fact that while there were oblique references to 'the financial principals' behind the WPW and Wisdom groups of companies throughout the trial, the first time Basson put names to this amorphous group was during his own testimony. State witnesses could thus not be canvassed on the roles played by Abdur Razzaq, Dieter Dreier, Simon Puhrer and a Russian identified only as Vorobyov.

The evidentiary value of documents on which so much store was set by the state was diminished by one of three explanations: they were false, compiled only to bolster cover stories for the *real* business of Project Coast; Basson had no recollection of ever seeing or receiving them; they contained details of deals and schemes for which 'there must have been a good reason at the time' but which no longer came to mind. Where dates on documents did not coincide with his time frame of events, Basson pronounced them errors. Even official SADF documents, including some from his personal file, others bearing his own signature, apparently contained incorrect dates. Documents produced in court were, for the most part, 'cited out of context', Basson claimed. While 'reasonably sure' that his foreign associates would have shredded all the paperwork that would clarify matters, he believed that documents reflecting the true state of affairs 'must' have existed at some point.

The SADF was under an obligation to protect collaborators who 'took huge personal risks' to assist them during the sanctions era, and this was not only a moral, but also a pragmatic consideration. Clandestine suppliers could have turned on the South African authorities at any time, resulting in enormous embarrassment for both the former and present governments. It was a source of huge frustration, said Basson, that the case against him had caused all his foreign associates to be publicly named. Their role had been 'so sensitive' that even after

he was sacked from the SADF – indeed, right up to the last meeting of Project Coast's Coordinating Management Committee in 1995 – there was a conscious decision that certain information would not be disclosed to the various investigators or to the ANC government. The Foreign Affairs Department, in particular, was not to be told 'certain things'. Having protested his impotence to shield cohorts against the judicial process any longer, Basson then denounced them all as thieves and traitors, spies and sanctions-busters, money-launderers and moles, linking them to activities far more damning than anything the prosecution had disclosed.

Instructions to Bernard Zimmer to move funds between companies in the WPW Group were based on the wishes of the principals, whose 'drones' and 'lackeys' included former British intelligence agent Roger Buffham, Swiss pharmacologist Dr David Chu and Belgian toxicologist Professor Aubin Heyndrickx.

Around the middle of 1986, Basson said, he realised that Dreier and Puhrer 'had a man in England', a notoriously difficult country in which to conduct clandestine operations. Basson reported this to Military Intelligence, who in turn passed on the information to South Africa's military attaché in London. In one of numerous examples of serendipity, the attaché reported that the man in question was no stranger, and had already made tentative overtures with a view to helping South Africa circumvent the arms embargo. The attaché had just been invited to attend a demonstration of the Medusa anti-aircraft-hijacking system being marketed by Buffham's company, so Basson went in his stead, making contact with Buffham at the Royal Air Force Club.

Not only was Buffham a crucial link in the money-laundering chain, he had 'good contacts' at CBW research institutions in Britain and was a valuable source of information. In addition, according to Basson, he was a Justice of the Peace, and 'extremely useful' when documents had to be certified – as in the case of two Special Forces operators who needed to obtain British passports in stereotypical spy thriller fashion, using the names and birth dates of dead babies or children. Buffham was also 'a genius' at generating paperwork to lay false trails, having been both well trained by and intimately familiar with the workings of MI6.

Previously attached to the Royal Ordnance division, Buffham was a man who 'knew his weapons', said Basson. However, financial greed had long since replaced loyalty to the crown, and by the time they met, Basson's understanding was that Buffham was working for the East Germans and Russians. He proved invaluable to Project Coast, helping Basson procure stolen blueprints for the electronic circuitry of Chemical Agent Monitors, a CBW computer database developed at Porton Down that could predict disaster scenarios in the event of a specific substance being used in a chemical attack, and custom-made equipment for a secret laboratory at Special Force headquarters, Speskop. In a sworn statement,

Buffham denied supplying any of these items, and investigators could find no trace of them. He was, however, handsomely rewarded for his assistance, once being handed £50 000 in cash at Heathrow Airport by Patricia Leeson, suitably mysterious under the code-name Vanessa and wearing a red dress for recognition, on Basson's instructions.

Asked why, when they already had a man in place in England, the principals had needed Basson to locate, buy and manage the cottage at Warfield on their behalf, his response was that in the world of international espionage, one always had to have a 'fallback' position. Buffham never knew about Fairclough Cottage, but for all Basson knew, he might have arranged any number of additional safe houses for the principals. After all, Basson said, he himself had stayed in no less than 11 safe houses while under the protection of the National Intelligence Agency.

Bernard Zimmer was a 'financial engineer' with a special talent. He could be given a set of books that simply could not be made to balance, and within a week, according to Basson, he would have found a way to fudge them that would stand up to even the closest scrutiny. Their association began in December 1986, when Zimmer was given authority to make available an existing bank account in Luxembourg, through which Basson could channel funds. Basson claimed that it was not until he heard testimony to this effect in court that he realised the account was that of Charles van Remoortere, and not his father, but he made liberal use of it, nonetheless, as did the Commanding Officer Special Forces.

Van Remoortere came to Basson's attention when Belgian industrialist Jean-Pierre Seynaeve told him he had a 'man in South Africa'. Basson contacted Van Remoortere and told him what the SADF needed in the way of protective CBW apparel. Van Remoortere duly informed Basson that everything required would be obtained through Seyntex.

Biskara, said Basson, was a subsidiary based in England and used by Coast to purchase certain electronic components, which were secreted inside television sets, video recorders and CD players bought by Patricia Leeson. It was also used by Zimmer and Van Remoortere to import 'all kinds of knicknacks from Swaziland' – candles, glass ornaments and the like. The amount of freight flowing to and from Biskara made it a familiar name among British customs officials, which suited Basson admirably, as the company built up a credible profile and did not attract undue attention.

Asked by Ackermann if he had never considered the possibility, given the substantial amounts of money flowing through Van Remoortere's accounts on behalf of both Project Coast and the financial principals, that some of the funds might have gone astray, Basson responded: 'Not for a minute. I had control over Van Remoortere's wife and children, which means I had total control over him. I had no fear that he would take money he was not entitled to.' Uncertain that he

had heard – or understood – Basson correctly, Ackermann asked him to explain precisely what he meant by 'control' over Van Remoortere's family. 'Oh nothing, Your Honour – it was just a silly little joke,' said Basson. A few days later, Ackermann asked the question again, and this time Basson said that what he had actually meant to convey was that in the unlikely event that Van Remoortere had ever taken the money and run, he would have been in a position to track him down 'anywhere in the world', thanks to the full support of the South African government.

Like Zimmer, David Chu also had a special talent – he could locate chemicals no one else had been able to source. Basson met him in late 1988 or early 1989 when Dreier sought help in laundering $250 000 in cash of undeclared origin. Basson testified that Medchem Forschungs, a Swiss company within the WPW Group run by Chu, was set up on Dreier's instructions to provide the pharmacologist with a front for his activities, after Chu found himself in 'some kind of financial difficulty – possibly litigation or even bankruptcy'.

Basson said that from 1988 onwards he made 'several' visits to Libya, but 'usually' met with his principals at Djerba, a popular holiday resort on an island off the coast of Tunisia, 'which was easier to access' and served as the port of entry to Libya after international sanctions were imposed. He gave details of only one trip to Djerba, when he was accompanied by Chu, who had chartered an aircraft in Switzerland. On arrival, Basson said, he met with Razzaq and his southern African lieutenant, Yusuf Murgham, while Chu went off to a meeting of his own, concerning 'entirely different matters, in which I had no interest' somewhere in the airport. When Chu had testified seven months earlier, his version was that Basson had asked him to arrange a charter flight to Tunisia at some point between 1990 and 1993. At the last minute, Basson asked Chu to accompany him, but on arrival, 'went off to a meeting with someone' while Chu cooled his heels in the airport terminal for about two hours, waiting for him to return. Cilliers put it to Chu that the reason he stayed at the airport was because 'the Libyans' with whom Basson had an appointment refused to have him 'anywhere near the meeting'. Chu had no idea what Cilliers was talking about.

Basson was aware that Russian CBW scientists were 'defecting in droves', carrying with them whatever they could as communism collapsed. It had become the norm, he said, that when key scientists from the Russian programme travelled to Switzerland on holiday, they smuggled small amounts of vital chemical substances or biological cultures with them, lodging the contraband with Swiss lawyers to sell for top dollar. This gave rise to a 'huge' black market, with a company called Med-Alfa acting as a front for the Russian scientists and becoming 'a kind of CBW flea market'. Chu had access to Med-Alfa, and at Basson's request was able to obtain 500 grams of the thymus peptide, thymosin, which was of crucial importance in the treatment of AIDS patients.

Chu was also used to play the role of a wealthy foreign investor on a visit to Roodeplaat Research Laboratories, designed to reinforce the perception among employees that RRL was funded from abroad. Asked by Ackermann why the principals had not approached 'their man Chu' directly to launder large amounts of cash sent from England by courier, Basson supposed it was 'because I was a good source of stories – and you need good stories to launder funds'.

Heyndrickx, said Basson, operated at the lowest level of the pecking order – a true bottom-feeder, *agent provocateur*, mercenary and propagandist for the Russians and East Germans. While head of toxicology at the University of Ghent, Heyndrickx – whose reports claiming chemical weapons were used against Unita in Angola in 1986 had been touted by the SADF as proof of a CBW threat – had created a non-existent organisation, Unido-Tiaft, 'as a front through which the Russians could demonise the Americans over the use of chemicals during the Vietnam War', and to 'find out who was who' in the international CBW community. Heyndrickx had a 'weakness for money' and was well paid by the Russians, even while he was working for the United Nations as a chemical warfare verification expert. He had misled UN officials 'for years', said Basson, but his reports on what became known as the Nylon Bomb finally saw him being totally discredited as a scientist. The Nylon Bomb was toxic, and initially seen as a new chemical weapon. But, said Basson, what Heyndrickx was given to analyse was a bomb of which the active substance was a nylon compound. He had been misled by the Russians, who had simply taken an ordinary smoke bomb and raised the toxicity levels of the smoke-generating chemicals. Neither shrapnel nor soil tests at the point of impact would find proof of anything but a normal smoke bomb. Only a few people 'are smart enough to figure out what the Russians had done', said Basson, and Heyndrickx was not one of them.

Basson and his scientific mentor, Lothar Neethling, on the other hand, had determined that the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) was 'a Russian front' – or at least, he claimed in a 1984 report, that 'certain divisions' of the authoritative organisation were funded from Moscow, 'though of course the Swedes deny this'. [SIPRI, established in 1966, is funded annually by the Swedish government, and all its research is based on open information sources.]

In 1984 Basson met Wilfred Mole, a telecommunications tycoon who had been 'a major sanctions-buster' for pre-independence Zimbabwe. Mole was an invaluable ally, not only assisting Basson in his quest for equipment covered by the arms embargo, but allowing his company name and premises to be used as fronts for Project Coast transactions, though he was aware only that Basson was a Special Forces officer. They developed an 'excellent' relationship, and Mole taught him a great deal about international business and sanctions-busting, said Basson. Having been authorised by Pretoria to set up a money-laundering web

for the financial principals, Basson told Mole of his dilemma – how to proceed in a manner that could not be traced back to the Libyans, Russians and East Germans with whom he was dealing.

Mole identified Webster as the right man for the job, 'and the next thing I knew, we were on a plane to the Caymans'. Mole 'must have' given Webster sufficient information for him to realise that what the lawyer called 'funny money' would be involved, because 'everything happened very quickly'. Basson told Webster he was involved in procurement of 'sensitive equipment' for the South African security forces, but did not reveal his military rank when they met. Within a day or two, however, their conversation turned to matters military.

While Webster testified that he always believed Basson was a former rather than serving military officer, Basson insisted that the American was aware of his status from at least early 1988, when he introduced him to Nieuwoudt in his office. Although Basson was wearing civilian clothes, he said, 'every troop in the place saluted me, every corporal drew to attention as I passed' and it must therefore have been obvious, particularly to an ex-military man like Webster, that Basson held a high rank. On the same trip, 'someone' identified the need for Webster to visit the Operational Area, and Basson was ordered to make the arrangements. Doctors from 7 Medical Battalion accompanied Webster and Mole, and on their return, Basson recalled, Webster remarked that he could not understand why the South African troops polished and buffed their boots every night, since as soon as they put them on again the next morning, they were covered in dust.

Back in the Cayman Islands, Basson said, all Webster required of him was to name the three corporations he registered. Webster explained that in order for the scheme to succeed, he would have to set up plausible front companies, with excellent cover stories, for which he would provide the guidelines. But he would need the name of an individual with whom he could communicate, and a 'real person' of impeccable reputation would have to be identified as a believable figurehead in the event of an intelligence probe. Basson left it to Webster to decide who the nominal office-bearers and shareholders should be, and although initially taken aback by the proposal that he himself be named as the WPW Group's vice-president, he agreed after realising that he could exploit this cover to his own advantage.

Webster was a 'past master' at generating documents, correspondence and enough paperwork 'to keep the CIA occupied for weeks on end', according to Basson. In the beginning, Basson was 'really green' about such matters, but Webster proved a useful tutor in the field of international banking, money management, tax havens, circumvention of sanctions and how to conduct clandestine deals. The biggest advantage of 'hijacking' the WPW Group was that Basson could use the structures as his personal cover, while simultaneously channelling SADF

and Project Coast deals through them, all without the principals being aware of his duplicity.

The subterfuge worked extremely well. In fact, said Basson, his only criticism of Project Coast was that he lived his double life for too long. When one worked under cover for any length of time, the 'second skin' became so comfortable that eventually, the imaginary persona even began to show up in one's correspondence – hence the preponderance of references, in documents before the court, to instructions being carried out at his behest or on his behalf. It was indeed uncanny, Ackermann observed, that in the 23 boxes of documents turned over to the prosecution by Webster, not a single reference was made to any of the financial principals.

Basson's testimony was punctuated with digressions into textbook lectures on military strategy and tactics, the therapeutic properties of specific substances, the technical demands of scientific research, and the philosophy and practice of chemical and biological warfare. Lashings of braggadocio were leavened with an occasional *soupçon* of disingenuousness. Had he gone to the University of Cape Town, as planned, Basson 'might have been Minister of Health today'. He had been appointed head of Project Coast because no one within the SADF at the time knew anything about CBW, and 'in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king'. He had always had great difficulty distinguishing between 'offensive' and 'defensive' CBW research, since although the doctrine underlying the SADF's programme was always a 'defensive' one, it really was not possible to have one without the other.

Basson had 'never really figured out' what was meant by national security, and had 'no idea' what the State Security Council did or where it slotted into South Africa's security force structure. Equally, he had 'no clue' what the 1995 *démarches* issued by the British and American governments were about, 'except that they insisted on knowing from Mandela what Project Coast had entailed'. His feeling, Basson said, was that the two countries 'did not want the information to end up in ANC hands'.

While not a qualified forensic pathologist, Basson had performed his share of autopsies – in fact, one of his professors had suggested he should specialise in this direction, but he found the work 'too gruesome' – and had seen a few 'meat bombs' in his time, the result of failed parachute jumps. He thus knew that a body thrown into the sea from high altitude would disintegrate on impact, and had read that after 24 hours immersed in salt water, no toxins would show up in a human body.

His knowledge of drug-assisted interrogation was confined to what he had read about the so-called truth serum, but in his opinion, said Basson, the only effective interrogation technique was to question someone from a position of prior knowledge – physical violence would not work, as the subject would know

that death was to follow. He could not comment on whether or not Pivalyn, a bright yellow rat poison, would have been the ideal substance for CCB operator Danie Phaal to mix into the orange 'Jungle Juice' he had fed to a prisoner of war since, as an officer, Basson 'never drank Jungle Juice' and had no idea what colour it was.

Acting as the representative of a senior Libyan intelligence agent at a time when Libya was South Africa's enemy had never been a problem for him, said Basson, because the Libyans were *not* South Africa's enemy at the time, since 'we have never waged war against them'. As for Tripoli's support for the terrorists who *were* the SADF's enemies, it all depended on one's perspective – the South African government had been identified as 'one of the biggest terrorist organisations in the world', and in any event, politics was not his problem. Regarding the morality of setting up a safe house for Libyans, East Germans and Russians in England – a country traditionally friendly towards South Africa – Basson was 'not so sure' that England *had* always been so friendly, 'except when it suited her'.

In any routine criminal case, finalised over a week, the official court record might run to 700 pages. In the Basson case, his testimony alone covered 4 521 pages, teeming with what the prosecutors called 'inventive spy stories' and 'imaginative improvisations'. As Basson the raconteur related one anecdote after another, the prosecution became increasingly outraged at the volume of information that had either not been put to relevant witnesses at all during cross-examination, or had undergone substantial revision in the interim.

During the run-up to Zimbabwe's first democratic election from 27 February to 3 March 1980, Basson was 'the most senior' military doctor involved in Operation Concept, which saw some 5 000 SADF troops deployed along South Africa's northern border, poised to intervene in the event of the election going awry. However, witnesses who placed Basson inside Zimbabwe during the late 1970s, and testified that he was involved in pseudo-operations there, had been mistaken, he said. During that period, he spent a single weekend at a military base inside the country while dealing with a mass outbreak of food poisoning among the South African troops.

His interest in infectious diseases dated back to the mid-1970s, when the Surgeon General sent him to Iran to be of assistance after several thousand people had died of necrotising entero-colitis when 'the entire potato crop' along the northern border with Russia was hit by a deadly mycotoxin. About a year later, Basson was sent on another mercy mission, arranged at the request of the American government. In a C5A Galaxy – a transport aircraft 'so big we could have played soccer in it' – Basson and 'a few colleagues' were flown to a secret laboratory in the jungle of Zaire, to treat and evacuate American scientists who had fallen prey to their own experiments with haemorrhagic fever.

When the prosecution pointed out that potato blight is not a mycotoxin and that the South African medical team involved in the first recorded case of ebola in 1976 had included Professor Margaretha Isaacson, the potato problem became a fungus, Trichothecane, and Basson said his trip to Zaire had occurred 'a few months earlier' and that serology had shown that the patients he treated successfully at 1 Military Hospital had contracted not ebola, but a 'variation' of the killer disease.

Trichothecane (or T2) is an anaerobic mycotoxin commonly known as 'Yellow Rain', which American authorities accused Russia of supplying to its allies for use in South-East Asia during the late 1970s and early 1980s, particularly in Laos. As a chemical warfare agent, the mycotoxin has the advantage of becoming harmless within 24 hours of being exposed to oxygen, making it ideal as a means of clearing inhabitants out of a strategic area so that occupying forces can move in. Some scientists claim that this mycotoxin occurs naturally in South-East Asia as the result of mass defecation by swarms of honey bees as they leave their hives, but no records can be found of such an occurrence in the fertile 'Koue Bokkeveld' region of South Africa, which Basson claimed was 'the only place in the world, outside northern Iran, where the fungus is found'. Nor, although the mycotoxin is extremely dangerous when the fungus grows on stored grain or other dried goods, can any records be found of potato crops being attacked while still in the fields – and the first genetically engineered potatoes grown in South Africa are currently thriving on lands in the Koue Bokkeveld.

By the time Project Coast was initiated, Basson claimed, 'the world' was moving away from lethal CBW agents towards irritants and incapacitants, not least 'because of CNN'. The advent of 24-hour real-time television news coverage had influenced global thinking on the use of chemicals in combat, said Basson, because 'it doesn't do any good for TV viewers to see thousands of corpses on a battlefield'. While Basson claimed that by 1980 the danger of known CBW agents was so great, the toxicity so high, that there was 'no need' to develop anything more lethal, historical evidence shows that both the American and Russian programmes were focussed on developing lethal agents at that time.

Despite dismissing Project Coast's scientists as being incapable of conducting the advanced research he led in a secret laboratory at Speskop, Basson testified that a substance had been developed that could be 'sprayed onto enemy airfields and turn the tarmac into a sticky goo' – a far more effective way of rendering a runway unusable than pitting it with bomb craters that could be repaired fairly quickly. There was 'stuff' that could destroy aviation electronics, bridges and other concrete structures and fuel depots, and research had also been done on 'something' that would destroy a fuel dump or render all fuel in it unusable.

These claims were never put to scientists during cross-examination. Nor were any of the former employees of Delta G Scientific asked about research Basson said they conducted on a 'super-toxin' developed by the Russians, which could 'penetrate every item of protective clothing, and gasmasks, ever made'. Through his East German friends, a small quantity of the agent was obtained – or perhaps it was only the formula – and when Delta G established that a 14-step process was needed to manufacture the super-toxin, leaving 'far too much margin for error to allow any large-scale production', Basson was able to 'reassure the Americans' that widespread use of the substance was unlikely.

Apart from numerous anecdotes about CBW and military operations, Basson's testimony was spiced with *bons mots* about interpersonal relationships. At times he deliberately misled the CMC, submitting false details about his travel plans, for example, so that 'even if a CMC member was a spy, the false information would be of no use to the enemy'. This caution about a possible spy in the highest echelons of the SADF did not, apparently, extend to Basson establishing who knew what about his activities on behalf of the financial principals. He had never briefed Knobel or any other CMC member on who they were, or that he was administering the WPW Group on their behalf, because he 'assumed' each general, in turn, 'would have been briefed on the situation by his predecessor – that's the way it works in the military'.

The Jetstar, which featured a cargo hold 'large enough to smuggle all kinds of contraband', had frequently been used to ferry Unita leader Dr Jonas Savimbi to America, Basson claimed, and was 'welcomed' everywhere, even at military bases in England and at Andrews Air Force Base near Washington. And of course, he added 'there is no better place from which to smuggle classified documents than a US Air Force base' so that, in addition to 'suitcases stuffed with $100 notes' that Savimbi brought back from these trips, the aircraft also carried 'mountains' of classified documents.

Basson was unable to say what benefit there might have been for Blücher, the German industrialist who introduced him to the 'CBW Mafia', once the WPW Group was up and running. Perhaps Blücher had been working for the CIA or KGB, he suggested – or perhaps he had been trying to 'gain control of all available CBW technology with a view to the coming of the Fourth Reich'.

Basson had never considered that his clandestine links with the CBW Mafia, Libyan and East German intelligence agents exposed his family members to any danger. In fact, Razzaq and Dreier had stayed with his mother, and in his own home, during visits to South Africa. Generous payments to members of his family from bank accounts administered on behalf of the principals had been reimbursements for expenses incurred during such stays, or for 'services rendered'. Basson himself had never accepted any remuneration from the principals, but had also been refunded for all expenses.

Although Basson denied ever supplying toxic substances to anyone for use against 'enemies' of the apartheid state, he admitted that he would have done so, if asked, provided the 'targets' were to be eliminated on foreign soil. He disclaimed all knowledge of the Sales List kept by André Immelman as a record of toxins supplied from Roodeplaat to Basson, members of the Security Police and Civil Cooperation Bureau, but said the items entered against his name could have been used 'for further research' or during training of military agents embarking on foreign missions.

In classic military fashion, Basson had introduced 'red' and 'blue' plans as a quality control measure when substances manufactured by Delta G Scientific were tested by RRL. The concept was used particularly when evaluating measures designed to protect SADF members and VIPs. RRL's team, for example, would be instructed to come up with a plan to eliminate a target in a specific location and situation, while Delta G's team would be given the same scenario, but told to devise ways of avoiding elimination. Basson would evaluate both plans and draw specific conclusions that could be incorporated into VIP protection procedures. Sometimes he took matters a step further, with specific outcomes being tested on animals. The problem with these exercises, however, was that 'most' of the scientists had an entirely different perception of the 'war games' Basson had people play, mainly because none of them had a military background, and the 'games' were thus open to misinterpretation.

Some items spiked with poison were used by Basson to train agents – from Military Intelligence, for example – on how to take care of themselves abroad. They were taught basic rules of survival against a CBW assassination bid – for example, if staying on the third floor of a hotel, they should not buy a soft drink from the vending machine on the same floor, but rather use a machine on the floor above or below. Or they would be given two identical chocolates, such as those left on pillows in all good hotels. One would be laced with a toxin, the other not. It was up to the agents to try to identify the potentially lethal chocolate through close examination.

Basson claimed he also researched a variety of ways of transporting CBW agents into South Africa, for example by having toxins added to innocuous articles such as lip balm, deodorant and stationery. During his lectures on CBW safety for spies, he used these items to illustrate the dangers lurking everywhere. His students 'loved it' when he drove home the point by feeding poisoned food or beverages to animals bought especially for this purpose 'from pet shops', including white mice, tropical fish and snakes. With the exception of the dead Corrie Meerholz and one Bruce MacIver, Basson could not recall the name of any of the '40 or 50' Military Intelligence agents who had attended his lectures – and none of the demonstrations had been captured on film. By 1987, Basson said,

Project Coast had concluded all the research that was necessary on lethal CBW substances for conventional weapon delivery, and there was no further need to work on deadly nerve gases such as sarin, tabun or VX. However, the VIP component of the programme, including anti-terrorism, continued, with research being done on the use of laser beams and light waves to disorientate people. The latter were also among claims not put to scientists when they testified.

Regarding his arrest for possession of Ecstasy, Basson claimed he had driven into the parking lot at Magnolia Dell, where he was to meet with Grant Wentzel, a little early, as a lifetime of military eating habits had left him with a mild gastric disorder and he needed to use the toilet urgently. The prosecution argued that he had come up with this excuse to explain what could only be described as suspicious behaviour, once he realised that the parking lot had been under police surveillance, and that he had told Wentzel, during their recorded conversation, that he had first made sure 'everything was OK' at the rendezvous. Had the court conducted an inspection *in loco* of the area, the prosecution's argument about the high improbability of an emergency pitstop might have carried more weight. The entrance to Basson's home at 41 Queen Wilhelmina Drive was directly opposite the Magnolia Dell parking area – and why anyone would elect to use a public latrine in preference to the equidistant lavatory in his own home remains a mystery.

Basson testified that his ties with the financial principals had been severed because he 'probably became an embarrassment' to them. Having invested an estimated R20 million in South Africa, chiefly to purchase properties where none of the principals ever set foot, and millions more in the WPW Group, they had simply 'walked away', he claimed. His last contact with them had been towards the end of 1995, and no one had contacted him since regarding an amount of $550 000 in a Swiss bank account to which only he and Webster were signatories, the substantial investment in the Webster family business, Tubmaster, or the proceeds from the sale of the Warfield cottage, which were being held in trust by Webster. These were among assets frozen by the South African authorities prior to Basson's trial, but, he told the court, since it was not his money, he couldn't care less what happened to these funds.

Basson testified that the single most important lesson taught by Special Forces was: if you find yourself being interrogated by someone who 'does not know what he is talking about, spin him any story that you like … talk as much rubbish as you can within the first 24 hours [after being taken prisoner] so that your comrades have enough time to get away'. There was a period, while actively involved with Coast, when he would even have been prepared to lie under oath in order to protect the project – and in fact *had* done so. He had also deliberately misled numerous people, including National Intelligence agents, a Swiss magistrate and

'most' of the people who surrounded him. But, he said, after consultation with his lawyers, he had decided in late 1997 that he would lie no more.

Asked by Pretorius how he had managed to reconcile his dual role – that of medical practitioner, who had presumably sworn the Hippocratic Oath, and a career soldier, who at the very least had supplied medication to the Security Police for use to sedate targets of cross-border abductions – Basson said it had not been difficult at all. Firstly, at his alma mater, Pretoria University, the more modern Physician's Oath was taken, and, secondly, he accepted that anyone on whom the substances he supplied were used was an identified enemy of the state – and he had no problem whatsoever with operations launched against legitimate military targets on foreign soil, if this could help protect the South African population. The patients to whom he owed an obligation of care were the innocent civilians living in South Africa, not those targeted for action by the security forces.

His personal philosophy as a soldier was that he had no qualms about external operations against legitimate military targets. When conflict could not be resolved legally or politically, military options had to be pursued, and in such circumstances the SADF was entitled to use whatever weapon was available to achieve the objective. If he had ever been asked to provide lethal toxins for use in Kat Liebenberg's 'toys' – the special applicators made under the aegis of Project Coast – anywhere outside South Africa, he would have had no compunction about doing so, said Basson. Fortunately, however, no one had ever asked.

On 26 September 2001, the prosecution halted its questioning of Basson. Pretorius placed on record that the entire defence strategy and progression of the trial had been planned 'with military precision', Basson making up imaginative explanations for every accusation as the case against him unfolded. He had deliberately misled the court on numerous points, right down to moving the date of his appointment at Speskop, in order to place as much distance as possible between himself and self-confessed hit man Johan Theron, while still launching a concerted attack aimed at demeaning and belittling the former Military Intelligence colonel.

The same strategy had been applied against every other witness who implicated Basson in criminal activity – yet he was unable to offer the court a credible or logical reason why so many people, from so many different levels and branches of the SADF, to say nothing of civilians from all walks of life, would falsely implicate him in specific murders, in the CCB conspiracy to eliminate enemies of the state, and in highly suspect financial deals.

Was spreading disinformation part of the CBW project, or something taught by Special Forces, along with techniques to withstand interrogation, asked Pretorius? Basson could not remember – he had 'spoken so much rubbish over the past

18 years'. And with that, said Pretorius, the prosecution and the accused had finally found a point on which they could agree.

12

Stranger Than Fiction

JUDGMENT DAY. Thirty months and some 300 court days after Basson's trial began, Judge Willie Hartzenberg chose a crisp, early autumn day, Thursday 11 April 2002, for the final reckoning.

Among insiders, any residual doubts about the outcome had already been dispelled. Five months before, senior prosecutor Anton Ackermann had effectively retired from the arena, delegating summation and final argument on the fraud charges to his junior, Werner Bouwer. During a particularly acrimonious exchange, Ackermann told the judge he saw little point in continuing to seek Basson's conviction, since despite the massive body of evidence before him, Hartzenberg had clearly not shifted one iota from the bias and premature presumption of innocence that had given rise to an application for his recusal in February 2000. In any other case, Ackermann's dramatic gesture would have made news headlines. In this one, it passed all but unnoticed, the almost inevitable final act in a running battle between the bench and the prosecution for which the stage was set on the very first day.

The pre-trial period had evoked huge international media interest. This was, after all, the first time in the world that the head of an official chemical and biological warfare programme had faced criminal charges, and the shocking claims of abuse and sinister experiments made during the Truth Commission hearings had resounded across the globe. The trial itself attracted considerably less attention, and had it not been for a small core of Pretoria-based journalists who kept it on their daily agenda, the Basson case would have gone largely unreported. Few media organisations can afford to assign staff to a single story for more than two years, and the foreign media abandoned attempts to follow proceedings as

soon as it became clear that they would be conducted principally in Afrikaans, as opposed to the TRC hearings, which were in English.

South Africa's legal system entitles an accused to be tried in his or her mother tongue, and while interpreters are used when an indigenous African language is involved, the same does not apply to proceedings in the two historically official languages, English and Afrikaans. Consequently, both public and media interest in the case was thin, spiking only at critical junctures, such as when evidence on the human rights violations was led.

This limited attention made the scene at the Pretoria High Court on judgment day even more extraordinary than it would otherwise have been. The judge had departed from protocol by allowing photographers in court on the first day of the trial, but on the last he went much further, and on 11 April 'Court TV' came to South Africa. Not only were photographers and television crews allowed in the courtroom, but the proceedings were televised live on two South African channels. Speculation that Basson would leave the court a free man had already piqued media interest, and the fact that this would be his first appearance in public since suffering a mild stroke on 10 February aroused even more curiosity.

A mere fortnight had passed since the last legal arguments had been heard – a reasonably clear indication that Hartzenberg had long since reviewed and evaluated the evidence. However, the prosecutors had been convinced since 11 February that the judge planned to acquit Basson on all charges. That was the day on which they learned that in January, Hartzenberg had applied for and been granted a three-month period of extended leave. When Ackermann raised this while lodging the state appeal, he pointed out that by arranging a leave of absence at a time when the state was still in the throes of presenting final argument, Hartzenberg had sent an unmistakeable message: there would be no sentencing phase following his verdict. The judge dismissed Ackermann's interpretation as 'ridiculous'.

That Basson himself anticipated a favourable verdict was clear from his agreement, five days before, to address an international media conference 'within an hour' of the court rising, and his inadvertent disclosure, at the same time, that a celebration – his family insisted it was a 'thanksgiving' – had already been arranged for the evening of Friday, 12 April.

When the judge chose a Thursday to deliver his verdict, and made it known that he would do so from 8.30 am rather than the usual 10 am starting time, there was some expectation that he would say little beyond pronouncing the accused not guilty. Throughout the trial, court had adjourned at noon on Thursdays, to allow Hartzenberg to play a standing game of golf at the Pretoria Country Club, the lost time being made up by tagging half an hour onto daily sessions for the rest of the week. But on 11 April, the only albatross on Hartzenberg's mind was the one that had been hovering over his head since 4 October 1999,

when he became Basson's sole judge and adjudicator, and it was not until shortly before 5 pm that he read the last of some 300 pages of a 1 453-page judgment that exonerated the accused completely.

As Basson hugged first his lawyers, then his mother and daughter, applause broke out in Court GD, led by five former SA Defence Force generals: Magnus Malan, Constand Viljoen, who had recently stepped down as leader of the conservative Freedom Front opposition party, Joep Joubert, on whose watch as Special Forces commander the CCB had been most active, Dirk Marais, who spearheaded the highly successful campaign to dissuade apartheid's warriors from approaching the Truth Commission for amnesty and Niel Knobel, who had been one of the prosecution's main witnesses. Their presence affirmed that no matter what he had been accused of, the erstwhile head of Project Coast was still very much a favourite son.

In the rush to record their jubilation over the verdict, the generals were effusively supportive of Basson and the CBW programme, and scathingly critical of a perceived ANC-led witch-hunt against apartheid's security forces. Inevitably, the spectre of Malan's own joust with justice was raised as yet another example of spurious accusations levelled at members of the old guard by their former enemies. (In October 1996, he was one of 20 former SADF, Security Police and Inkatha Freedom Party members acquitted of the murder of 13 people – including six children under the age of 10 – at KwaMakhutha in 1987. The charges arose from Operation Marion, a covert SADF plan to train and arm members of the IFP to foment political violence in KwaZulu-Natal.)

The tumultuous outburst in Hartzenberg's courtroom all but drowned out Ackermann's announcement that the state would appeal against the verdict, but three weeks later the chief protagonists were back in court, and an irascible Hartzenberg granted prosecutors leave to appeal against his refusal to recuse himself from the case. By then Basson had resumed practising cardiology at private hospitals in the Pretoria area, was exploring the possibility of a wrongful dismissal suit against his former employers, granting interviews to a select group of foreign journalists and garnering his financial resources. He lost no time in lashing out at the prosecution and the government. At an international media conference the morning after his acquittal, Basson called the state decision to forge ahead with an appeal 'irrational'. The R40 million he estimated had been spent on his prosecution – a figure dismissed by authorities as 'hugely inflated' – would have been far better used to supply five million doses of the controversial anti-retroviral drug, Nevirapine, and the 'basic cost' of an appeal would save the lives of another 250 000 HIV-positive mothers and babies, he said. It was not clear whether his calculations included the estimated R10 million shelled out on his defence by the very government he saw fit to castigate. As a former SADF member, all his legal

fees came from coffers filled by the same taxpayers who footed the prosecution bill. Nevertheless, as the opening gambit in a campaign to divest himself of the 'Dr Death' epithet, it was a masterstroke. In the most public of all forums, with the eyes of the world's media on him, the man who was only too willing to exchange his surgical scrubs and scalpel for the cloak and dagger of apartheid's CBW spy, donned the mantle of human rights activist, appealing to the authorities in 'our hard-gained democracy' to reconsider priorities, use available funds effectively for the 'betterment' of the population, and decide what South Africans needed most: medicine or retribution.

Of all the issues involved in the transfer of political power in South Africa, the role played by the security forces was the most volatile and emotional. By 1994, an entire generation of young white men had been exposed to the 'total onslaught' mindset underlying the system of compulsory military service, and thousands of them had gone straight from the classroom to the combat zone. The universal camaraderie unique to those who have shared foxholes and trenches was no more dissipated by political change in South Africa than it was in the US by the vilification of American soldiers returning from the jungles and rice paddies of Vietnam. Even veterans who come, in time, to ponder the righteousness of their particular war, invariably hold the politicians rather than the military culpable.

It ought thus to have surprised no one that former SADF members of all ranks adopted a pejorative attitude towards the Truth Commission, and perceived every investigation into alleged military misconduct as part of a campaign to dishonour either the institution or individuals. Ackermann almost certainly had this prejudice in mind when he told Judge Hartzenberg, in a hard-hitting opening address on 25 October 1999, that neither the SADF nor any of its units, nor even its chemical and biological warfare programme, were being placed on trial. The case against Basson, Ackermann stipulated, was about criminality 'as old as the Bible', and with the exception of the drug charges, the alleged crimes had been recognised 'for centuries' as violations of two of the Ten Commandments: *Thou shalt not steal* and *Thou shalt not kill*.

Despite this preamble, the judge observed at various points during the trial that the events under review had taken place in a 'war situation', and his final judgment left little room for doubt regarding his views on prior probes into alleged military malfeasance.

It took little to persuade Hartzenberg that six of the most serious charges against Basson should be dropped even before the trial began. His ruling – the first in a series adverse to the state – was based on the alleged crimes having been committed on foreign soil and thus beyond the jurisdiction of his court, and on a blanket amnesty granted to all security force members who served in the South West Africa/Namibia operational area during the protracted bush war. This amnesty had

been proclaimed in an extraordinary *Official Gazette*, No. 5725, by Louis Pienaar, administrator-general of SWA/Namibia, on 7 June 1989 – two months after all security forces in the disputed territory had been confined to barracks, and just five months before the election that led to Namibia's independence.

Never disclosed in public until the Basson trial, the proclamation states: 'No criminal procedures may be instituted or continued following the date of this proclamation in any law court against any person … in respect of a crime committed by such person at any time prior to the date mentioned, in the territory or elsewhere', and covers all members of the SA Police, SWA Police, SADF and SWA Territorial Force who 'in the execution of their duties and activities in the territory committed an act or neglected to commit an act which represents a crime'.

The amnesty put paid to Basson being tried for:

- the murder of an estimated 200 Swapo detainees injected with Scoline and Tubarine before their bodies were thrown into the sea;
- a plot to murder Owamboland administrative official Peter Kalangula by smearing a toxic substance on the handle of his car door;
- a CCB plan to poison the water supply of Swapo refugee camps outside Windhoek with vibrio cholera.

When Hartzenberg rejected the state argument that a conspiracy to murder ANC activists had been formed on South African soil, and thus within his court's jurisdiction, charges were also dropped in relation to:

- the proposed murder of Ronnie Kasrils and Pallo Jordan while in exile in London;
- the death of Gibson Mondlane in Mozambique in 1987;
- the death of Enoch 'Knox' Dlamini in Swaziland.

The court did allow witnesses to testify about their roles in these incidents, as part of the state's bid to show that Basson was actively involved in a broad CCB conspiracy to 'eliminate enemies of the apartheid state', but the quashing of six charges on which the prosecution had built its strongest case was a severe blow from which it never fully rebounded. By the end of the trial, relations between the state and the bench had deteriorated to such an extent that Ackermann took the highly unusual step of placing on record the 'untoward malice and hostility' that the judge had shown towards prosecutors during exchanges in chambers – normally as sacrosanct as lawyer–client privilege.

The scope and complexity of the case, coupled with the passing of more than 15 years since many of the alleged crimes were committed, caused eyebrows to be raised when Hartzenberg opted to act as sole adjudicator, eschewing the help of assessors who might have acted as a sounding-board for his own impressions. The

prosecution would later argue that the test of guilt demands nothing more taxing than 'the reasonable man's' view, and that the British and American legal systems do not even require adjudicators of fact to be legal *savants*. A jury might include a plumber, housewife, teacher or accountant, required only to listen to the evidence and weigh the probabilities before delivering a verdict, on the basis of which an offender could even be sentenced to death. All Hartzenberg had to do, Ackermann urged, was place himself in the shoes of any one of 12 imaginary members of a jury of Basson's peers, and there would be 'neither doubt nor ambiguity' about his guilt.

Hartzenberg declined the suggestion, and found that the state had failed to prove its case beyond reasonable doubt. His final judgment was the product of daily summaries of the evidence, with a clear emphasis on 'concessions' made by witnesses during cross-examination and the evidence-in-chief of Basson, which was cited not only at great length, but in many instances verbatim. Where different versions of events are compared and discrepancies highlighted, they invariably favour the accused – despite the judge having formed the opinion that Basson 'was not entirely frank when answering the fraud charges, claiming lack of memory in respect of any living person involved in the transactions under review'. Hartzenberg ascribes this lack of candour to Basson having testified in 'such a manner as not to implicate anyone else', then notes that it would be 'all but impossible' to decide where he had lied and where not.

While the many typographical errors in the judgment may be laid at the door of the transcriber of the judge's tape-recorded dictates, Hartzenberg alone must bear responsibility for the factual errors that occur. Apart from a slew of incorrect names (both of companies involved in the fraud charges and individuals, including some witnesses) there are several indications that the judge's attention might have wandered at times, or that he did not fully digest the significance of certain testimony. The most glaring example occurs at paragraph 679, which deals with the testimony of former National Intelligence agent Kobus Engelbrecht. According to the judgment, the NIA launched surveillance on ANC supporter Sol Pienaar to ascertain the nature of his relationship with Yusuf Murgham, former visa officer at the Libyan embassy in Harare, having become aware of a flight to North Africa undertaken by Basson, Murgham and Pienaar. Hartzenberg then states: 'The flight took place in the middle of **1992**' [in other words, while Basson was still head of Project Coast].

This is a crucial error, since much of Basson's defence relied on his links with Libyan intelligence agents, in the interest of Project Coast, from as early as 1988. The state called a number of witnesses, including business associates of Basson, NIA agents and high-ranking military officers, to show that no record could be found of any contact between Basson and anyone in Libya until *after* he was sacked

from the SADF in December 1992 and began seeking business opportunities in his private capacity. The court record is unequivocal. When Engelbrecht testified on 13 February 2001, he said that the flight in question came to the attention of the NIA in the middle of **1993**, and that he was absolutely certain Basson's first trip to Libya took place only *after* his dismissal from the SADF.

Another factual error concerns the Military Intelligence probe into alleged financial irregularities within Project Coast. The judge observed that the investigation encompassed 'all the relevant problems raised by this case', and that answers furnished at that time – 1992 – were the same as those given during the trial. The state had argued that Surgeon General Niel Knobel was misled by the accused, but '… if Knobel said in 1992 that R10 million was spent on a laboratory, it would have been simple enough to verify [the existence of the laboratory at Speskop] through physical inspection'. However, expenditure on equipment for the laboratory at Speskop did *not* form part of the Military Intelligence probe, which looked only at Basson's involvement with Merton House, air charter company Aeromed and specific companies within the Wisdom Group, including the farming operations in Mpumalanga.

It was not until the Office for Serious Economic Offences began asking questions six months later that Knobel offered written explanations, based on details gleaned from Basson, including the claim that funds paid into the bank account of Roger Buffham had been in respect of equipment for the Speskop laboratory. The OSEO queries were dealt with in a series of letters from Knobel during 1993 and 1994 – by which time, according to Basson's testimony, the laboratory and all the equipment had already been demolished as part of Project Coast being shut down.

The judge also appears to have misunderstood the motives of key witnesses Mr K and Johan Theron for testifying against Basson on the human rights charges. For Mr K, said Hartzenberg, the prospect of being granted immunity from prosecution in return for implicating Basson in murder 'was worth a wheelbarrow full of gold'. What Mr K actually testified was that once he had severed all ties with Barnacle (forerunner of the CCB) in August 1982, it would have *taken* 'a wheelbarrow full of gold' for him to talk about or get involved again 'with those people'.

As for Theron, the judgment claims that he had 'no choice' but to testify and implicate Basson, 'after his gruesome deeds were uncovered by the Truth Commission'. In fact, Theron never went anywhere near the TRC, and details of his murderous past were not dealt with there. On the contrary, investigator Colonel Dawie Venter testified that he had deliberately delayed finalising Theron's sworn affidavit *because* it was not to be made available to the TRC. Both Theron and Venter testified that until the middle of 1997, no investigator even had an inkling about Operation Dual, that it was Theron himself who disclosed the gory details to Venter and that the TRC was not involved at all.

Certain references in the judgment to the Goldstone Commission are bemusing, to say the least. Dismissing the charge that Basson was part of the conspiracy to eliminate enemies of the state, Hartzenberg said there was no proof that he had even been aware of such a plot, let alone that Project Coast had been linked to the CCB's internal operations in any way. In fact, he stated, 'it was not until the **Goldstone Commission** that it became general knowledge that the CCB had conducted operations inside South Africa at all'. One can only assume that he had in mind the 1990 Harms Commission of inquiry into state-sponsored hit squads, since the later Goldstone Commission did not conduct investigations into the CCB's internal operations.

Other factual errors suggest that the judge was indeed 'bored to tears', as he told the prosecution at one point during the trial. FBI agent Mary Rook became a Special Agent for the CIA. The Special Forces Club in London emerged as the Special Courses Club. Witness Henri van der Westhuizen was renamed Van Rensburg – in two sections of the judgment, pages apart. The judge evidently placed no store on the prosecution's efforts to show that there is no record of any chemical attack on a village called Valapjar, where Basson claimed to have witnessed Iraqi forces bombarding the Kurds in early 1988, and that photographs showing victims of this attack were almost certainly among those released by the United Nations following the well-documented chemical attack on the town of Halabja in March 1988. In Hartzenberg's judgment, the unrecorded attack on Valapjar is accepted as fact.

Much of Basson's testimony is reflected elsewhere in this book, but how it was dealt with by the judge warrants further attention here. For ease of reference, the information has been grouped together in the three sub-categories of the case – though, inevitably, there is a measure of overlapping. Unless otherwise indicated by means of parentheses, the sections below have been taken directly from the judgment, and thus represent Hartzenberg's findings on cardinal aspects.

THE FRAUD

The WPW Group was established and administered by Basson to serve the interests of Project Coast and other covert foreign operations run by the SADF and SA Police. The Wisdom Group served the same purpose in South Africa. The group was set up after Basson was asked to launder $250 million in cash on behalf of his financial principals – Libyan, East German and Russian secret agents who formed part of a multinational 'CBW Mafia' – and purchased valuable real estate on three continents for them. Libyan intelligence, in the person of Abdur Razzaq, gained a foothold in South Africa from as early as 1988, entering the country via the independent homeland of Transkei and using the Jetstar and/or King Air

and/or Piper Seneca flown by Aeromed to traverse the country. From 1990, Razzaq played the leading role in the affairs of the principals, and in 1988, through Razzaq, Basson met Yusuf Murgham, whose responsibilities included monthly payment of ANC cadres in exile in southern Africa.

A condominium in Orlando, Florida, was bought at Razzaq's request to serve as the base from which he would launch covert intelligence operations in both the USA and South America. Luxembourg-based Genavco was established to enable 'the Libyans' to buy six Boeing aircraft from the Belgian Air Force for between $40 million and $50 million, but the deal fell through. Roger Buffham's company, Contemporary Systems Design, and David Chu's company, Medchem Forschungs, were set up with capital supplied by one of the principals, Dieter Dreier. Various South African companies that served Project Coast, including Systems Research & Development and Aeromed, were also set up with capital supplied by the Libyan principals. Two farms in Mpumalanga were bought to allow the principals to study fungi and other aspects of agriculture that could be harnessed for CBW. The Tygerberg Zoo was bought as part of research into the use of heavy metals and pheromones for crowd control, and research reports were furnished to the principals.

At the end of 1991, Basson entered negotiations with contacts at the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow for the purchase of 500 kg of methaqualone. By 1992 it had become clear to him that the Russians would not be able to supply the product, and talks with Croatian government officials were launched as an alternative. On 23 December 1992, he brought the Croatian methaqualone back to South Africa in the Jetstar and placed it in an SADF depot. Former Swiss intelligence chief General Peter Regli had brokered the deal as part of a much larger transaction in terms of which he was to acquire enriched uranium from the Croatians.

Thousands of NBC suits – made by the Belgian company, Seyntex – were donated to Unita by Razzaq. The suits arrived in late 1989/early 1990 [hence after implementation of UN Resolution 435, which led to Namibian independence and the withdrawal of both SADF and Cuban forces from the Angolan theatre of conflict]. Distribution of the NBC suits to Unita was halted when the SADF adopted a policy of supplying only humanitarian aid to the rebel movement in future, and the remaining suits were sold on behalf of the principals, the funds being ploughed into the WPW/Wisdom groups. A payment of R100 000 to RRL managing director Wynand Swanepoel, for example, was used to buy a house in Pretorius Street, Pretoria, which could serve as offices for the principals. Four of the principals were accommodated by Annette Versluis [Basson's wife] during 1991 for six weeks, and she was paid R150 000 from the proceeds of the

NBC suits to cover the cost of their food, transport and clothing, which she bought for them.

Hundreds of 120 mm mortar bombs were loaded with CR at Speskop and donated to Jonas Savimbi to form his last line of defence. Proximity fuses costing more than $3 million were bought abroad for use in these bombs.

In 1988, Basson witnessed a chemical attack by Iraq on the town of Valapjar, while on a visit to Iran with a group of UN monitors. Payment for the trip was made almost three months in advance. Analysis of shrapnel showed that Iraq had used a combination of mustard gas and cyanide. Chemical Agent Monitors were obtained for the SADF and Unita via Belgian toxicologist Professor Aubin Heyndrickx and his boss, Jan Marsk, Dreier and Buffham. At some point the SADF was asked by the Israeli Defence Force to provide them with one of these CAMs.

Scientists in Iran were engaged in advanced peptide research, and while negotiating with Iranian agents for a state-of-the-art peptide synthesiser, Basson was offered an amount of human growth hormone that 'must have been harvested from 300 000 bodies in Siberia, since that's the only place you can have so many bodies'.

Basson would have supplied a false end-user certificate to Iran if the proposed sale of NBC suits involving the companies Tagell, Copperdale and Blackdale had materialised, but the entire deal was actually set up to hide his purchase of the peptide synthesiser. Ackermann had been 'so incensed' by the accused's claim that a peptide synthesiser *was* bought that 'he literally became tongue-tied every time he had to use the term in court'.

The state had gone out of its way to publicly humiliate the accused during cross-examination regarding the fact that in order to obtain his MB ChB degree, he had only needed Chemistry I. Lucia Steenkamp had been blatantly antagonistic towards the accused, and for the most part, Hennie Jordaan shared her sentiments. [Steenkamp and Jordaan were involved in peptide synthesis as part of AIDS research at Delta G Scientific.] Neither of them had any idea of the advances that had been made in peptide synthesis during the project's lifetime, their knowledge being eight or nine years out of date. They had not known that equipment was available that could synthesise 96 peptides simultaneously, self-correct and monitor the microbiological development of peptides. Clearly, Basson had conducted research on peptides that neither Steenkamp nor Jordaan had been told about, and these witnesses had been called for the sole purpose of trying to prove that he was not qualified to undertake such research. In the judge's mind, however, there was no doubt that the equipment was bought and ultimately swopped for another 500 kg of methaqualone. He was at a total loss to under-

stand the state's insistence that none of this ever happened. Clearly, Hennie Bruwer had tracked the wrong funds.

Documents retrieved from the files of foreign associates such as Webster, Bernard Zimmer, Buffham and Chu were all false, hence they must have destroyed the genuine ones. SADF documents produced in court contained errors – for example, Basson's personal file was incorrect in stating that he had been transferred to the command of Special Forces at Speskop in 1980. He did not set foot at Speskop until September or October 1981. Documents indicating that funds were to be shifted from Project Coast's 1992/93 budget to the 1991/92 financial year for the acquisition of chemicals were also incorrect. The funds were actually moved from the 1993/94 budget to the 1992/93 financial year [and thus covered the Croatian deal].

Danish secret agent Hendrik Thomsen gave Basson Vatican bearer bonds with a face value of $5 million so that he could exert pressure on Croatian authorities to unfreeze Jurg Jacomet's bank account, in which $1 million of SADF funds was tied up. Thomsen later suggested that Basson simply cash in the bonds to make up the SADF's loss – but the bonds were found to be forgeries.

Pyrotechnical tests on incapacitants were conducted to prototype stage, and Hartzenberg had no reservation about finding that the secret laboratory at Speskop *did* exist, that the work claimed by Basson *was* done there, that the laboratory was dismantled and all the equipment destroyed when Coast was shut down because of the changing political climate. Large quantities of BZ were purchased for weaponisation, and the reason forensic auditor Bruwer could find no record of $2,4 million being paid for a BZ variant was that the funds came from 'elsewhere' within the SADF, not from Project Coast.

The entire fraud case had been built on the forensic report, which had at its core a letter from Webster to Basson stating that the attorney would act as Basson's nominee as president of the WPW Group. Any challenge to the state premise that 'Basson = WPW' was the source of serious discord and had, in fact, led to the February 2000 application for the judge to recuse himself. During 1992, Military Intelligence had looked into Basson's involvement with Merton House and the SADF was quite happy about the WPW Group. 'But then OSEO got involved.'

The Contresida/Opals scheme was a cover story for the laundering of $100 million, in which the SA Reserve Bank was involved.

Chu was nothing but a money-launderer and a dishonest man to boot. He had known full well that he was a sanctions-buster for the SADF.

Zimmer's protestations of innocence regarding Project Coast were equally false. Webster knew he was moving 'funny money', and was happy to perform the services for which he was well paid, as was his wife, Jane. Obviously, once accusations of wrongdoing thrust Basson into the international spotlight, none of the financial principals would have come forward to lay claim to funds remaining in bank accounts or Webster's trust.

Charles van Remoortere was an opportunist who made a great deal of money out of CBW – and for a man who claimed to be telling the truth, he contradicted himself a great deal. He would say anything, in the judge's opinion, to save his own skin. When questioned about the sale of NBC suits to Seyntex, he had 'floundered like a fish out of water' and blatantly lied. While it was 'totally unreasonable' of the state to hold Basson accountable for the fate of the NBC suits once they had been delivered to the Army, it had been his impression that the defence 'listened to all the testimony' and 'adapted the evidence to fit the version of events offered by the accused', but had nevertheless failed to prove that the NBC suits sold to Seyntex on the eve of the Gulf War were SADF property and that the deal was unauthorised.

There were 'overwhelming' indications that Basson was *not* WPW. The group had obviously been a vehicle through which various services were provided to the security forces. The judge had repeatedly asked Ackermann and Bouwer *who*, besides OSEO and the prosecution, the complainants on the fraud charges were, and was still owed an answer. Discrepancies between answers to OSEO's questions and those given in court could be attributed to the Coordinating Management Committee's decision, in force until 1995, that certain sensitive information about Project Coast was not to be disclosed to anyone, including the Parliamentary Select Committee on Public Accounts.

The state claimed that it would have been 'unheard of' for Basson to work with Libyans, Russians and East Germans as part of Project Coast, but the court knew, for example, that he had travelled to both Russia and Croatia. In the case of *Orda AG vs Nuclear Fuels Corporation of South Africa*, it had emerged that South Africa sold uranium to Russia at a time when no diplomatic ties existed between the two countries. As had emerged from the highly publicised case of [former government information chief Eschel] Rhoodie, normal Treasury controls and regulations were known to be suspended when politics dictated that this was prudent, and Basson had the added burden of having to bypass international sanctions as well.

The state, said the judge, had effectively scuppered its own case. At the outset, it had claimed that none of the equipment mentioned in the fraud

charges had ever been acquired by Project Coast. As the case proceeded, this position shifted, and the state began to back-pedal, claiming that if the equipment had, in fact, been bought, it had not been paid for with the funds that the accused said were used. There was, however, no escaping the fact that the alleged R36 million fraud represented almost the entire amount of Project Coast funding that was sent abroad.

He had 'no idea' why charges had even been formulated regarding alleged personal gain from the privatisation of the front companies Delta G Scientific and RRL. There were no grounds whatsoever for the allegations, and the charges had been stillborn.

THE MURDERS

No court could possibly find Basson guilty of complicity in the execution of five Renamo members identified as secretary-general Orlando Cristina's assassins. The document recommending their elimination was unsigned, and every witness called by the state had denied knowledge of chemical interrogation forming part of the SADF's investigation. As a commandant at the time, Basson was not in a position to influence the SADF's decision on the fate of the assassins. This charge vividly illustrated the state's approach to the case. The state had formulated a theory based on what it believed had occurred, then called witnesses to substantiate that theory. Instead, the witnesses had totally demolished the theory – but even this had not prevented the state from asking the court to find the accused guilty. The state had simply argued that whenever witnesses contradicted the theory, the court should look at the total picture, and reject the exonerating evidence. No attempt had been made to declare a single witness hostile on the grounds, for example, of an earlier contradictory statement. It was not clear to the judge what legal principles he was supposed to apply in order to ignore direct exonerating evidence in favour of circumstantial evidence. The state had simply chosen not to call witnesses whose testimony would not support the theories formulated.

There was overwhelming evidence before the court that no chemical interrogation had taken place. Kobus Bothma, one of those allegedly involved, flatly denied that this had happened, and the third person allegedly involved, Philip Mijburgh, had not been called as a witness. The court found that no one connected to the Cristina murder had been chemically interrogated.

As soon as forensic tests on the exhumed remains of Victor de Fonseca showed that the amount of Thallium in his body was too low to have been the cause of his death, the state ought to have realised that there was 'no

hope' of securing a conviction on the basis that Basson was involved. The entire argument related to this charge had been 'naïve'.

While it was 'entirely likely' that the Reverend Frank Chikane's clothes had been contaminated with some or other substance, the state had failed to prove that this was paraoxon, that it had emanated from RRL, that it was the paraoxon given to Chris, Gert and Manie by André Immelman or that Chris, Gert and Manie had smeared anything at all on Chikane's clothes. Tests by the FBI had failed to find any trace of a toxin on his apparel.

As a cardiologist, it was highly unlikely that Basson would have condoned a plan to induce a fatal heart attack in Dullah Omar by administering an overdose of digoxin. Furthermore, Basson knew very well that Omar's medication, Inderil, was pink, not white. [The judgment overlooks the fact that none of the witnesses testified that Basson saw either the pills or the powder involved, and thus would never have been in a position to point out the discrepancy in colour.] In any event, digoxin was a legitimate medication and its proposed use could thus never form part of the alleged conspiracy to kill enemies of the state by means of *toxic* substances. Both of the CCB's plans to murder Omar – by using a Makarov pistol and his heart medication – fell outside the ambit of the alleged conspiracy to use toxins as instruments of assassination. There could thus be no suggestion that Basson was involved in such a conspiracy in regard to Omar – he was as innocent as he would have been if someone had run down Omar with a vehicle.

The only reason Theron and other CCB operators had implicated Basson in the murders they committed was to save their own skins. Bothma had an additional motive, namely continued pursuit of his medical career. All the self-confessed hit men were scared of being prosecuted themselves, and knew they would have to implicate Basson if they hoped to escape this fate.

As the CCB's medical coordinator, Mr R had acted as courier for legitimate medical supplies only. The CCB had ceased to operate in 1989. There was no proof that Basson had known about any abuse of substances supplied by RRL, or that evidence to the Goldstone Commission offered any reason why Basson should have known about the CCB's objectives and methods. No significance could be attached to the fact that Basson was asked to help shut down the CCB in 1992, that funds for 'Special Forces' operators in Europe were channelled through Basson or that loans were made by companies within the Wisdom Group to military doctors who set up practices specifically to serve Special Forces operators. There was no proof that Basson was aware of the CCB's activities during the late 1980s, or that they made use of poison. [The CCB was not officially shut down

until early 1991, following the inquiry by the Harms Commission. The Goldstone Commission never investigated the CCB. Operators testified that in 1989 they were instructed to wind down all current activities in South Africa so that the full resources of the CCB could be focused on disrupting pending elections in neighbouring Namibia. Basson's reference to Special Forces operators in the context of funding was a euphemism for the CCB, as testimony by Floyd and Mr R showed.]

Toxins added to items such as chocolates and cigarettes were used during 'war games' introduced by Basson to test the abilities of both RRL and Delta G Scientific. Baboon foetuses from RRL were used by Basson as part of his peptide synthesis research. The state had failed to prove that the foetus suspended in a tree in Archbishop Desmond Tutu's garden had been supplied by RRL.

The court accepted without reservation that the 'gruesome' murders described had been committed, but found that Basson was not involved in them, and that the meeting with Loots at which Basson allegedly agreed to supply Theron with drugs never took place. Theron was 'a decidedly strange man' who had taken a scientific approach to Operation Dual, which was his brainchild, as was the idea of placing poisoned beer randomly at taxi ranks in the Eastern Cape. This was a plan so bizarre that it could 'only have been thought up by the same man who devised Operation Dual and single-handedly executed that plan'.

It was 'impossible' for Basson to have been involved in planning the laboratories at Speskop with Theron, since he had not set foot on the premises until September 1981. [By implication, all SADF documents referring to Basson's transfer to Special Forces before the end of 1980 are therefore incorrect, as is the evidence of several witnesses who placed him at Speskop during 1980.] While it was correct that Basson was in charge of medical support for Operation Protea in mid-1981, had been involved in the mass outbreak of food poisoning among SADF troops on the eve of Zimbabwe's independence and the mercy flight to rescue American scientists from Zaire, it was 'unlikely' that, while a clinical assistant, he would have had access to the SADF's medications as claimed by Theron. The court could not rule out the likelihood that Theron had direct access to the drugs stored at Speskop.

The trip to Fort Rev by Theron and Basson had never happened, and there had been no exchange between Mr K and Basson regarding the effectiveness of the 'stuff' used to inject victims.

As far as the Dukuduku incident was concerned, the judge 'would have liked to see the death certificates signed by Bothma after he certified the three

victims dead'. They would probably have said something like: 'Unidentified black man. Cause of death: overdose of Scoline and Tubarine while not attached to ventilator.' He wondered, said the judge, if the death certificates would also have had to be thrown into the sea – or perhaps they were to be kept on file somewhere.

The plan to feed poisoned Jungle Juice to a detainee at Ondangwa was 'decidedly odd'. Why could the man not simply be killed at Ondangwa? If he was part of an experiment, why had he not first been flown to South Africa before the substance was administered? Phaal had been a poor witness, contradicting himself whenever he found himself in trouble on the witness stand, and the entire state case regarding Basson's involvement in this incident was rejected. Theron's account of a body being cremated in the furnace at Speskop was also rejected. The whole case rested on speculation and the evidence of a single witness 'with every reason to implicate the accused'.

Trevor Floyd had not been a good witness, and had lied about where he got the poison for the London operation against Ronnie Kasrils and Pallo Jordan. His testimony about picking up a toxic substance from Basson to be smeared on the door handle of Kalangula's car in Owamboland had been incoherent. Bad as Floyd was, however, Phaal was worse. There was absolutely no evidence indicating that De Fonseca had been poisoned, and no proof that Basson handed Phaal a vial of toxin at Waterkloof Air Force Base. Nor was there any proof that Knox Dlamini died after drinking poisoned beer from RRL, or even that he was poisoned at all. Henri van der Westhuizen testified that the poisoned beer he handled came from EMLC.

'No one' knew what was in the flasks given to Pieter Botes by Immelman, and Basson had 'no idea' that any cholera bacteria from RRL were issued to anyone. The state had failed to prove that Basson was aware of any of Theron's death flights, and Basson had denied that the special applicators made by Jan Lourens were given to him. [On 24 July 2001, during his evidence-in-chief, Basson testified that General Kat Liebenberg told him that certain special applicators – Liebenberg's much-vaunted 'toys' – were being used in the international arena, and asked if the SADF had such devices. He then ordered Basson to manufacture a number of items – like the screwdrivers, umbrella and walking stick – for the purpose of conducting tests and training agents against whom such items could be used as stealth weapons. Bio-engineer Jan Lourens testified that he handed the finished products to Basson.]

The state, said the judge, had 'not understood at all the purpose of manufacturing super-toxins'. When prosecutors discovered what substances had

been made at RRL, they simply made the deduction that this could not have been for any innocent purpose – there must have been an underlying nefarious intent. The court accepted without reservation the testimony of Theron, Floyd, Phaal, Bothma and Mr K regarding the heinous crimes they perpetrated – but, said the judge, they 'failed to do what the state hoped they would do, namely successfully incriminate the accused'.

THE DRUGS

In 1985, pharmacist Steven Beukes made 100 000 Mandrax placebos on the orders of the commanding officer, Special Forces, to be used by operators to infiltrate the drugs-for-arms routes used by the ANC's armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK). Basson did not tell Beukes that the substance he was turning into tablets was inert, because the need-to-know principle applied. The judge found it 'highly unlikely' that Basson had offered 100 000 Mandrax tablets to Danie Phaal in 1992 to sell to surfers at Jeffreys Bay. In light of the legal wrangle in which Phaal was embroiled at the time [CCB agents threatening to expose covert operations unless they were paid their full pension benefits], Basson would not have made such an offer to Phaal, as it would merely have added grist to the mill of his legal battle. The state had based its entire case on 'pure speculation'.

The court could not decide whether the black refuse bag stuffed into a box of wine given to Basson was the result of a slip-up or a set-up by Grant Wentzel, but in any event, Basson's version of events was accepted, along with the fact that he had stopped at Magnolia Dell on the morning of his arrest to use the toilet, and then driven around the park to check that his son had arrived safely at his nursery school, before meeting Wentzel. The probabilities surrounding the Magnolia Dell sting operation were overwhelmingly in favour of the accused. Wentzel had engineered the entire operation, implicating Basson only to save his own skin following his arrest at Rustenburg, but Basson's version of events was 'far more probable'. The court found that Basson did not supply Ecstasy to Wentzel.

Basson had no idea what was packed into the four steel trunks stored by Samuel Bosch, and did not even realise, until after his arrest in January 1997, that Bosch was custodian of the trunks. Basson had taken whatever steps were necessary for the destruction of Project Coast documents, and he neither packed the trunks nor knew what [including small quantities of cocaine, Ecstasy and Mandrax] was in them.

Cocaine had been smuggled into South Africa for Project Coast hidden under a consignment of bananas, because the chemicals sprayed onto the bananas to preserve them in transit confuse drug sniffer-dogs.

THE PROJECT

Basson was a secret agent, and the state's claims that he romanticised events and spouted fantasies about his exploits were 'absolute hogwash'. Project Coast was a 'phenomenal' success, and only the Russian CBW programme was superior. American and British authorities were 'amazed' to learn what Project Coast had achieved on a relatively small budget. [Details of the briefings given to the foreign experts by Basson remain shrouded in secrecy, but the following were among claims made during the trial, and accepted by Hartzenberg as fact.]

- Libya, East Germany and Russia played a major role in supplying the project with equipment and chemicals. Other foreign suppliers were Czechoslovakia, Croatia, China, the USA, Britain and Iran.
- Viruses were genetically engineered at RRL to render them resistant to known treatments. [Scientists at RRL testified that no viruses were genetically engineered, and apart from a single vial of HIV-infected blood, no viruses were kept at RRL.]
- There was one verified chemical attack against Unita troops in Angola, and weaponised CR was used once by SADF troops during Operation Modular (1987/88). However, Basson also claimed that there were 'multiple' chemical attacks in Angola, 'many more than have been publicly reported', and that 'people died from exposure to nerve gas'.
- There was a P4 laboratory at RRL, equipped with glass reactors of East Bloc origin, and a tissue culture division. [RRL scientists testified that the facility had only a P3 laboratory, and no tissue culture division. Plans for construction of a P4 laboratory were never executed.]
- Basson was involved in a project led by German and Austrian scientists during the 1991 Gulf War, which determined that US forces had used BZ against members of Iraq's Republican Guards. BZ was found in their urine samples, and video footage of Iraqi forces emerging from their bunkers showed facial expressions and a gait commensurate with the profile of BZ exposure. The probe concluded that the Americans had used a BZ variant that had also been tested in South Africa, but was rejected because of the dangers it posed. In 1992, 500 kg of BZ was bought with the help of Abdur Razzaq. A combination of methaqualone and BZ was weaponised to prototype stage and the SADF 'had only to say the word' before large-scale production was launched.
- Three major incapacitants were developed as part of Project Coast. Basson could not say whether any documents exist as proof of this achievement, but 'the British' were extremely impressed when he briefed them in 1994. Weaponisation of methaqualone produced by Delta G

Scientific in 1988 under the code-name Project Mosrefcat was halted when the substance was found to heighten the aggression levels of those exposed to it. Weaponisation of all incapacitants, with the exception of CR, was carried out at Speskop by Basson, Hekkies van Heerden, Bill Grieve and 'a number of youngsters' from the SADF Ammunition Corps.

- Weaponisation of incapacitants is a difficult process as, ideally, the substance should be ingested through the nasal mucous membranes. Ecstasy had to be manufactured by Delta G Scientific from scratch, because acquisition of a formula was not good enough. All formulas acquired from other CBW programmes include deliberate errors. The effects of incapacitants made at Delta G were tested at RRL.
- Armscor (Denel) subsidiary Swartklip Products had neither the ability nor the facilities to carry out the pyrotechnical tests required prior to weaponisation, which were conducted by Basson and his crew at Speskop between 1988 and 1992.
- Project Coast was the name of the *offensive* CBW programme. When Basson was sacked and Colonel Ben Steyn took over as project officer, the name was changed to Project Jota, and the purpose became purely *defensive* (i.e. from the start of 1993). Research records from RRL were captured on fibre optic discs by Data Image.
- The peptide synthesiser bought for $3,2 million was used for research on both brain-altering substances and AIDS. The Hypoxis plant was also researched with a view to finding a cure for cancer. The only caveat regarding peptide synthesis was that it should not result in permanent brain damage. The peptide synthesiser had also been a 'handy resource' in the weaponisation of chemical substances.
- The CMC met formally three to four times a year, though some members held monthly informal meetings. After Kat Liebenberg became Chief: SADF the informal meetings took place three to four times a month. The CMC did not want to know who Basson was dealing with or how he obtained what was needed, but none of the members ever complained about his activities, and he was authorised to resort to theft, bribery or black market deals. In view of the system of audits that was in place, claims by the state that financial controls were dismally lacking throughout the lifetime of Project Coast were based on the 'wildest speculation imaginable'.
- Incapacitants and irritants are both essential components of a CBW programme, along with NBC suits – which, after all, the judge notes, 'have to keep mustard gas out'.

- At the end of 1986 the WPW Group was set up because, all ties between the SADF and Delta G/RRL having been severed, Basson had to start procuring the project's needs abroad. [All the evidence presented indicated that the severing of ties between the SADF and the front companies only became an issue when privatisation was placed on the table – four to five years later, in 1990/91.]
- Weaponisation of the incapacitants and the need to acquire CAMs and wet detection kits for operations Hooper-Modular-Packer formed part of the WPW Group's activities. According to the judge, 'everything was going well – until a new president came along in 1989' and FW de Klerk's February 1990 speech heralded a new political dispensation for South Africa. Production of incapacitants was accelerated so that weaponisation could be concluded prior to the signing of the international chemical convention in January 1993. Meanwhile, privatisation of the front companies was also set in motion. 'The Goldstone Commission finds out about the project. By the end of 1992, it becomes obvious that weaponisation will not be completed before the deadline. The Minister of Defence orders all the drugs destroyed. Various loose ends have to be tied up.'

One of the most incongruous passages in Hartzenberg's judgment occurs in paragraph 2033. Having endorsed claims by Basson and Knobel that Project Coast was an unqualified success, the judge deemed it appropriate to cite the following as 'a good example' of the need to preserve the project's achievements – a 'national asset' – for future generations:

'In the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks in America, I saw a report on CNN about concern over certain flights by crop-sprayers. I could not understand this concern and the next morning, I asked the accused [under cross-examination at the time] to explain it to me. He explained that the aircraft could be used, for example, to spray anthrax spores over a large area. By the time people began to show symptoms of illness a few days later, no one would be likely to link the contamination to the crop-sprayers.'

Why Hartzenberg found it necessary to include this vignette in his judgment, and how it serves to illustrate Project Coast's putative achievements, is not at all clear. If future generations need to consult a 'national asset' secured under the most stringent measures imaginable in order to figure out that chemical or biological agents can be dispersed by a crop-sprayer, one can only pray that South Africa never faces a CBW attack.

Throughout the nine weeks that Basson was in the witness stand, the judge appeared as absorbed by his accounts of daring escapades – coming under fire

and diving into roadside ditches in the Bosnian conflict as he raced towards Austria with his contraband methaqualone, being knocked out by CR on entering a test chamber to find out why a baboon was placidly peeling a banana after exposure to the potent teargas – as he was fascinated by the details of chemical and biological warfare.

Basson had been an 'excellent' witness – even the prosecutors had said so, though 'all three of them contended that this was because he was so intelligent that he was able to invent and come up with imaginative answers, and was a master of deception'. At times, Hartzenberg had the distinct impression that merely *because* Basson said something, the state dismissed it as untrue. By contrast, six of the key witnesses against Basson had perjured themselves, hoping to escape retribution by falsely implicating him in their own criminal deeds. Three weeks after Basson left his courtroom a free man, Hartzenberg refused to grant indemnity from prosecution to Johan Theron, Danie Phaal, Trevor Floyd, Mr K, Dr Kobus Bothma and Grant Wentzel.

Every shred of evidence by Wentzel about events that culminated in Basson's arrest in a police drug trap was rejected, and the judge found that he had staged an elaborate charade to protect the real – and unidentified – source of the Ecstasy he was peddling.

Theron, Phaal, Floyd, Mr K and Bothma had testified only because their backs were against the wall. Their involvement in 'monstrous' crimes had been exposed, and while none of them had tried to hide this, they had, to a man, attempted to mitigate their moral culpability by drawing Basson into the plot. The judge accepted their evidence in so far as it was self-incriminatory, but dismissed all testimony that implicated Basson.

Theron had lied about the meeting with Loots, the visit to Fort Rev, the burning of the body at Speskop and the bizarre poison beer plan. Phaal had lied about being told by Basson that De Fonseca had died and about being offered 100 000 Mandrax tablets to sell to surfers. Floyd's memory for detail was hopeless, and while this was probably because he could genuinely not remember what had happened, or when, the fact that he testified as though his recollection of events was clear made him a dishonest and non-credible witness.

Mr K had delivered valuable evidence for the state about the origin and establishment of Barnacle. Discrepancies were probably due to bona fide mistakes or fading memory, but his claim of being aware from the outset that the accused was supplying substances used to kill people could not possibly be true. The only conclusion the judge could draw was that Mr K had deliberately fabricated testimony against Basson in order to save his own skin.

Bothma's role in the 'macabre' Dukuduku operation had been firmly established,

but a question mark hung over the reasons he gave for his participation and the use of the jelly-like ointment. He had been neither credible nor honest.

Technically, refusal of indemnity immediately placed these six witnesses in the legal firing line and liable to prosecution. The judge had certainly made it clear, during a heated exchange with prosecutor Torie Pretorius some months earlier, that the wrong man was in the dock. He simply could not understand, said Hartzenberg, that Pretorius had persisted in conducting a 'witch-hunt' against 'a man like Dr Basson' while no charges had been brought against Theron. Whether or not these self-confessed killers ever face prosecution is likely to be as much a moral as a legal consideration. Having secured their cooperation in the case against Basson, state advocates could be loath to betray their own witnesses by instituting criminal proceedings, but there is nothing, in terms of the law, to prevent them from doing so.

More fortunate were Project Coast's scientists and a number of CCB agents, despite the fact that some of them were extremely reluctant witnesses and one – the nephew of a prominent minister in the last apartheid Cabinet – had to be forced to testify by means of a court order. Among those granted indemnity by Hartzenberg were former RRL scientists André Immelman, Daan Goosen, Mike Odendaal and Klaus Psotta, pharmacist Steven Beukes, pilot Matie van der Linde and armourer Mr Q, CCB operators Slang van Zyl, Staal Burger, Calla Botha, Pieter Botes, Mr R, Mr T and Mr C. Despite striking the judge as being 'patently malevolent' towards Basson, bio-engineer Jan Lourens was also granted indemnity, albeit with 'some hesitation' on the judge's part. The irony of this decision was that Lourens had long since been granted amnesty by the Truth Commission, having been the original whistle-blower about the use of toxins and 'special applicators' as instruments of assassination.

Even in a case as unusual as Basson's, the story might have ended there, barring the tidying up of legal loose ends, which under normal circumstances would draw little more than parochial attention. But despite the massive volume of information that it placed in the public domain, the prosecution of Basson left too many questions unanswered, too many avenues begging for exploration. In part, at least, this lack of resolution was because of a series of gag orders issued by the judge.

Before Basson even entered his plea of not guilty on all charges, his lawyers sought exclusion of the transcript of his October 1997 bail hearing, on the grounds that it contained extensive reference to his testimony during 39 days of interrogation by OSEO in 1994. As with evidence presented to the Truth Commission, OSEO testimony may not be used against a defendant in a court of law, but the defence sought to have the entire transcript declared inadmissible even before the state had indicated that it might want to use an expurgated version.

On the morning of Monday, 15 November, the judge granted the application for exclusion of the bail hearing, accusing the state of 'ambushing' the accused and thus violating his right to a fair trial, then trying to 'slip the record in through the back door'. It was a seminal moment in the case. Niel Knobel was about to start testifying, and as manager of Project Coast he was the first witness who would have been able to furnish the court with details of the project, official front companies and specific financial transactions that could be measured against the version previously offered by Basson. Denied this opportunity to highlight possible discrepancies that would bolster its case, the state was at a decided disadvantage – and there was worse to come.

A year later, the court also ruled the transcript of a three-day debriefing of Basson by the National Intelligence Agency inadmissible. The document included Basson's answers to many of the questions at the very heart of the most serious criminal charges against him, including allegations of murder and the chronology of his contact with Libya. Senior NIA personnel involved in the January 1994 exercise were not even permitted to use the 166-page transcript as an *aide mémoire* while testifying, because it could not be certified as correct, the NIA having meanwhile recycled the tapes used to record the session.

Pretorius had indicated that the transcript contained 'approximately 15' confessions by Basson related to some of the charges against him. Three high-ranking counter-espionage agents had grilled Basson on a wide range of subjects when they became aware of trips he made to Tripoli after being sacked from the SADF. Companies, individuals, South Africa's chemical and biological warfare programme, Third Force activity, Basson's background and career, his international links, the dumping of chemicals in the Atlantic Ocean, human experiments, alleged abuse of toxins made by RRL and covert military operations were among the matters canvassed by the NIA.

Mike Kennedy, deputy director-general of the NIA until December 1999, testified from memory that while Basson had made no admissions of involvement in murder, 'specific incidents' had prompted agents to ask him if he had not realised that he *had*, in fact, been party to the unlawful deaths of certain people. Basson's response never wavered, Kennedy said. 'He was adamant that they were all military targets, and that it was thus not murder.'

Other information that was available, but not presented, was:

- The testimony of Roger Buffham. Having scored a major coup when Hartzenberg agreed to travel to Jacksonville, Florida, in September 2000 to hear the evidence of attorney David Webster and his wife Jane, the prosecution sought a similar dispensation regarding Buffham. However, after reading a sworn statement in which Buffham laid out the extent and nature of his dealings with Basson, the judge discounted the value of his evidence, ruling that it could not justify

the cost to South African taxpayers of transferring proceedings to England. Buffham indicated in his statement that he was prepared to cooperate with the investigators, and would be willing to testify in South Africa on condition that he had 'endorsed and notarised' assurances about his personal safety and the protection of his rights outside the jurisdiction of the British courts. After being given such assurances by Ackermann, however, he backtracked, saying he feared for his life. The judge said Buffham appeared 'thoroughly unwilling to testify' and clearly had 'his own agendas', which created the strong possibility that he would not be a truthful witness.

- Testimony of three foreign witnesses whom the state sought to subpoena after the defence had closed its case. Ackermann wanted to call former Swiss Military Intelligence chief General Peter Regli and two of Basson's financial principals, Dreier and Murgham. It had not been possible for the state itself to call these witnesses, Ackermann explained, as it was only during Basson's own testimony that their roles were spelled out, and the prosecution had thus not been able to track them down earlier. Furthermore, the state had expected that Murgham, at the very least, would be called as a defence witness. Regli had been willing to travel to South Africa and testify all along, but until a few weeks earlier this information had been withheld by the Swiss authorities, who were conducting their own investigation into his dealings with Basson and South Africa's CBW programme. Regli had recently contacted Ackermann and indicated that he was available, while Dreier had been tracked down by two Swiss journalists, and had indicated in an interview – of which Ackermann had a transcript – that he was also willing to testify against Basson. The judge refused the application, commenting that he was fully aware of the investigation into Regli's activities and believed he was willing to testify only to promote his own cause in Switzerland. He did not consider any of the three witnesses to be essential, and doubted that they would admit to having participated in sanctions-busting or sharing classified information with South Africa, any more than had Chu, Zimmer or Webster.

Hartzenberg's verdict has far-reaching implications, particularly in respect of certain statements made by Basson about CBW. It could take years of dedicated research by experts in the field to distinguish fact from what the prosecution tended to dismiss as fantasy, but which the judge accepted as the truth. In private communication with the authors, foreign CBW experts severely criticised the prosecution for allowing what they considered 'egregious' claims to go unchallenged, but in all fairness, there was little else they could do. Basson is the closest thing to a CBW pundit that South Africa has, and compartmentalisation of Project Coast ensured that there was no one else who could present the court with a global and informed perspective on how it was run or what it achieved. It would have been exorbitantly

expensive to appoint a foreign CBW expert as a consultant to the prosecution for the duration of the trial – along with a translator – and even that might not have been productive. The most controversial claims made by Basson did not emerge until he himself testified – by which time the state had already closed its case. Given his refusal to allow Regli, Dreier and Murgham to be called at that point, there is no reason to believe the judge would have allowed a rebuttal witness from the scientific community either.

The public was denied access to certain information even when witnesses were called. Former CCB agents, regular SAAF pilots and serving National Intelligence and Military Intelligence agents were protected by court order from being identified or photographed. Pretorius argued that anyone who threatened to expose details of covert operations that featured in the trial could still be targeted for elimination. Former security force members who were not called as witnesses were afforded similar protection, at the behest of the defence. Charles Zeelie got as far as identifying the photograph of one of the three senior security policemen, Chris, Gert and Manie, to whom toxins from RRL had been delivered by André Immelman, before Cilliers intervened. It would be grossly unfair if these photographs fell into the hands of the media, he said, since the subjects were not to be called as state witnesses and would have no chance to put their side of the story. He could 'just see what is going to happen … tomorrow morning, their pictures will be splashed all over the newspapers, and they will be named as the people who tried to murder Frank Chikane'. The judge banned publication of the photographs or the men's surnames.

The hearings in Jacksonville were closed to the American media, at Webster's request. Hartzenberg ruled that since the attorney's evidence was pertinent only to the 27 fraud charges against Basson, he had a valid concern that some members of the media, deprived of the benefit of having heard all prior testimony, could make the error of linking Webster to the alleged human rights abuses, a situation that would undoubtedly be detrimental to both his physical and economic well-being. In order to avoid any distortion, the hearings were thus closed to all journalists except two who had covered the trial from the outset, and had accompanied the court to America: Zelda Venter of the *Pretoria News* and Gillian de Gouveia of the SABC. Even they were warned that linking Webster to anything but the fraud charges would carry severe sanctions.

As the trial dragged on, the civility and professional courtesy normally extended by opposing advocates to one another and to the presiding officer became seriously eroded. The die had been cast in February 2000, just two weeks into the testimony of forensic auditor Hennie Bruwer, when the judge's comments about the WPW Group serving Project Coast's interests gave rise to one of several legal precedents in the case.

It was only the thirty-fifth court day of a projected three-year trial, and the judge's admission prompted the state to seek his recusal on the grounds of bias and prejudging the case. Applications for recusal are not foreign to the South African legal system, but had previously been confined to applications by defence counsel and civil litigation. The action against Hartzenberg was the first against a criminal trial judge by the prosecution, and was based on a decision taken only after careful consideration by the head of the National Prosecuting Authority, Bulelani Ngcuka.

Several skirmishes between the prosecution and the bench were cited in support of the application, with the state arguing that the cumulative effect of the judge's approach indicated that there was 'absolutely no chance' of Basson being convicted on any of the 27 fraud charges, at least. Hartzenberg had constantly appeared to seek and highlight factors implying Basson's innocence, and at times, said Ackermann, had even seemed to be offering 'cues' on which the accused could build a credible defence. Having already created the perception that the case against Basson was a 'waste of time', the judge had repeatedly directed barbs at the prosecution, to the point where Ackermann felt that 'I have become your verbal punchbag'. All the defence would have to do, it seemed, was intimate that the WPW Group and Project Coast were linked, and the state 'might as well pack its bags and go home'.

The judge – younger brother of right-wing Conservative Party leader Dr Ferdi Hartzenberg – had built his reputation on the bench over 17 years as an astute arbiter of commercial litigation. He refused to step down, dismissing the application for his recusal as 'frivolous, mind-boggling, absurd and unfounded in its totality'.

By the end of the marathon trial, the animosity in court was almost palpable. When the state sought leave for both Ackermann and Pretorius to cross-examine Basson, given the diverse nature of the specific aspects of the charges each had focused on, Cilliers vehemently opposed what he called 'yet another' attempt by the state to 'throw all the rules of litigation by the board'. Why was such emphasis placed at every turn on the 'uniqueness' of this particular case? The principle of cross-examination by a single prosecutor had prevailed for centuries, and was a fundamental tenet of a fair trial. No South African court had ever strayed from that tried and tested principle, and it would be 'highly prejudicial and grossly unfair' for the Basson case to be the first. The objections notwithstanding, the judge granted the state application on the grounds that he believed it would hasten the end of proceedings.

Having made the concession, however, Hartzenberg directed some of his most caustic remarks at Ackermann and Pretorius during Basson's cross-examination. A question asked by Ackermann had been answered 'about 60 times'. Did Ackermann

not understand what the witness had said? Some time afterwards, the judge intervened again. Why did Ackermann persist in asking the same question over and over? Did he believe the court was 'totally stupid'? Or was he doing so 'with the express purpose of getting on my nerves?' Pretorius was stopped halfway through presentation of a series of published media reports citing Basson as the source of certain information when the judge accused him of 'apparently being in search of sensationalism'.

At one point, Ackermann told the judge that the state was clearly wasting its time – Hartzenberg had indicated on various occasions, both in court and in his chambers, that if the accused did not enjoy such a high profile, the court would have taken an 'entirely different' approach to the case. That approach was most likely the one spelled out by Cilliers, who said the state had 'so many problems' that in any other criminal case, the presiding officer would long since have called the advocates into chambers and asked the prosecutors: 'Have you nothing more substantial to place before me?' But the state had chosen to exploit the high media and political profile of the Basson case, said Cilliers, even though in reality it had 'so many defects that if it were *not* for the high political profile, it would never even have come to court'.

The heated debate that led to Ackermann turning over delivery of final argument on the fraud charges to his junior came just three days into the process, at the end of November 2001. It began with Hartzenberg stating that as far as he could tell, 'not a single person in the ranks of the SADF' had ever suspected Basson of purloining funds for personal gain, and that the entire investigation launched by OSEO at the end of 1992 and culminating in this trial, had been a 'huge embarrassment' to former SADF members, none of whom ever expressed concern or had 'any problem' with Basson's activities. In the 'grey world' of CBW, the judge remarked, 'everyone knows what anyone else is doing'. The accused had been specifically ordered to infiltrate the international CBW milieu, and had done so successfully, making contact with a host of people who had been of assistance to him. By all accounts, the SADF was entirely satisfied that it 'got what it paid for', while the financial principals had also been happy, since they were furnished with the same research findings as Project Coast – albeit in an 'edited' form.

Ackermann was stunned. In other words, he asked, did the judge accept that while the SADF was at war in Angola against such forces as the Russians, the results of CBW research conducted in South Africa were being fed directly to the enemy? The crux of the accused's version, he pointed out, was that the SADF had paid for CBW research wanted by the foreign principals. Ergo, the SADF's top brass, including General Kat Liebenberg, must have been feeding its declared enemies information on CBW that could be used against South Africa's own troops. If that was the judge's belief, said Ackermann, 'every general serving in the

SADF at that time would have to be charged with high treason for knowingly supplying the Russians with South Africa's chemical defence secrets'.

'But Mr Ackermann,' said the judge, 'the information *came* from the Russians – clandestinely, to be sure, and at a cost of millions. By the early 1990s, it was obvious to all of us that huge political change in South Africa was imminent, after all.'

No, said Ackermann, he was not concerned about the politics of the 1990s – he was talking about 1986, 1987, 1988, when the WPW Group was set up. During those years, South Africa was the target of an unmitigating campaign of terrorism, in which Libya was deeply involved. Former South African Foreign Minister Pik Botha had not been called to testify in the case, but Ackermann would lay his head on a block that if he had been, he would have stated unequivocally that during *those* years, 'there was no contact or liaison of any kind between any Libyan and anyone in the South African government or the SADF'.

The judge refused to entertain the argument. Certainly there would have been no 'overt' links, 'but the Libyans most definitely had an interest in what was going on in South Africa', he averred. Yes, replied Ackermann – their interest was in supplying bombs used against civilians in Wimpy Bars and landmines planted on farm roads. Basson had purchased the King Air in 1988, and claimed the aircraft was then used by Razzaq and his cohorts, while under surveillance by Military Intelligence. 'If Libyans were traversing South Africa at that time, they could have had only one purpose: identification of possible targets for terror attacks, and if this court accepts that scenario, a number of former SADF generals – including Kat Liebenberg – will be turning in their graves,' said Ackermann.

After several more exchanges in similar vein, Ackermann simply ignored the judge's questions and comments, continuing to read his heads of argument into the court record after informing Hartzenberg it was quite clear that he was incapable of entertaining the concept that Basson had lied under oath.

The judge snapped back: 'And in three days of listening to you, Mr Ackermann, all I have learned is that as far as the state is concerned, everything said by the accused that does not support your case is a lie … your entire argument boils down to a claim that the accused is incapable of telling the truth.'

That was not entirely accurate, said Ackermann, and if the judge wished, he would take the time and trouble to go through the record of Basson's testimony, highlighting all the passages that the state accepted were, in fact, truthful.

Again the judge snapped back: 'I don't understand why you are climbing on your high horse, Mr Ackermann. I was only asking why the evidence of the accused could not be reasonably, possibly true.'

Because, said Ackermann, the accused consistently had 'at least five answers' for every question put to him, and some of the explanations offered were 'risible,

bordering on the absurd', while in other instances he had manipulated evidence given by state witnesses in order to give his own version of events a ring of veracity.

The sharp debates were not ignored in Hartzenberg's final judgment, where he pointedly remarked that there was 'an enormous responsibility on prosecutors not to become involved in criminal investigations'. They were expected to remain objective, and not to try to secure a conviction at any cost. He could not believe the prosecution had pursued the De Fonseca charge, nor the charge relating to allegations that Roland Hunter was to be killed with mamba venom.

The state had 'tried to relate everything involving the accused to the alleged fraud, for example the return of the peptide synthesiser twice to Europe for repairs', and the prosecutors would have 'done well to sit down and think things through before jumping to conclusions'. As part of the seven-year investigation, two senior advocates had travelled to Canada for the sole purpose of consulting with Bothma on two aspects of the case. Why could an investigator, either from South Africa or from Canada, not have dealt with this matter? That would be the normal procedure. In his opinion, said the judge, the time was not yet ripe for prosecutors to play the role of investigators as well. [In fact, the trip in question was used to consult with four people who had emigrated to Canada, three of whom were called to testify in the case. It is worth noting that during 2001, the National Prosecuting Authority Act was amended, specifically to allow for prosecution-led investigations in what Ngcuka called 'a fundamental departure from conventional wisdom about the need for a wall to exist between investigation and prosecution'. Ironically, Ackermann and Pretorius blazed the trail for this approach when they brought Eugene de Kock to book.]

The state, said Hartzenberg, was required to prove its case beyond reasonable doubt, but in prosecuting Basson, theories of events had been put forward, and as soon as these were assailed by the evidence, the court had been expected to discard all dissenting views. 'In other words, the prosecution decided in advance what the truth was, then expected the court to support its version. In the process, the state lost sight of the fact that any accused is considered innocent until proven guilty, and tried to place the onus on Basson to explain exactly how Project Coast was run, and to explain expenditure of every cent,' Hartzenberg stated.

The judgment made no reference at all to obstructions encountered by investigators. Senior members of the Special Investigation Unit testified that they were given the runaround by SA National Defence Force officers after Basson's arrest, and that even the personal intervention of ANC deputy defence minister Ronnie Kasrils failed to turn up crucial files and documents that might have answered some of the questions posed by the trial. Veteran sleuth Colonel Dawie Venter and his men were 'shunted from one SANDF officer to another and sent from building to building' for more than a year without success, and eventually had to obtain a

search warrant for the SANDF archives. All they wanted were the personal files of five self-confessed military murderers, the medical records of four alleged victims, documents relating to the medical staff stationed at Speskop, the records of 1 Military Hospital's dispensary and Basson's personal file, covering his 19 years in uniform. The cupboards were decidedly bare – no trace could be found of 1 Military Hospital's records or any files dealing with the conflict against Swapo in Namibia. There were no documents about the CCB either. In fact, the only document investigators were given, after almost two years of trying, purported to be Basson's personnel file – containing 15 sheets of paper. Not much for a career that spanned almost two decades.

Some of the answers to the Coast enigma were found in the four metal trunks crammed with classified information that should have been destroyed after being captured on CD-ROM, but in the interest of 'national security', most of these will never be made public. The 16 CD-ROMs themselves are suspect. Secured in a safe within a vault to which only two keys exist – one of them in the possession of South Africa's president – they have never been reviewed by an independent CBW expert, and according to Basson's successor, Colonel Ben Steyn, the information on the discs that he has seen is confined to 'published literature'.

The ink on Hartzenberg's judgment was barely dry before foreign media groups began scrabbling at the dirt raised by the case. For those with the time, financial resources, stamina and valour to sift through the detritus, rich rewards could lie in seeking answers to questions such as the following:

- Since Basson did not authorise the supply of lethal toxins from RRL to the CCB and Security Police for use against enemies of the apartheid state, who did? And how high up in the security chain of command was the manufacture and distribution of pathogens for this purpose sanctioned?
- What has happened to the financial principals and their assets, including an investment in US-based Tubmaster, the Tygerberg Zoo, at least one Swiss bank account and the proceeds of the sale of the cottage in England?
- Why, given the reportedly close links between the SADF and Libya, did senior military officials tell the Goldstone Commission probing a reign of terror against 'soft' targets by Apla, the militant wing of the Pan African Congress, that Libya was the chief source of PAC funding, with $14 million having been provided by Tripoli in 1991 alone? The 1993 Goldstone probe followed a two-year series of bloody attacks launched from the Transkei, favourite stomping ground of the principals, according to Basson. The Goldstone Commission also heard from the SADF that Muammar Gaddafi was considering becoming the PAC's primary source of funding in its armed struggle for the 'total liberation' of South Africa. Is it conceivable that while some elements of the SADF were working hand-in-glove with the Libyans on CBW, their colleagues were doing

everything possible to staunch a Libyan-funded terror campaign against civilians? And why, in particular, would Kat Liebenberg – one of the few who knew about his Libyan connections, according to Basson – continue to condone Basson's contact with the Libyans on CBW until 1995, having authorised a Special Forces raid on an Apla safe house in Umtata in October 1993, which left five youngsters between the ages of 12 and 19 dead? Surely he, as SADF chief, was the one officer who must have known that Apla was being funded by Libya?

- What, if any, were the links between the funds laundered through the WPW Group and the missing CCB millions? One of the earliest allegations whispered about the possible abuse of SADF funds in 1992 was that a group of Special Forces and CCB operatives were salting away millions diverted from covert project funds under the guise of 'legitimate' transactions, and that up to R140 million had been stashed in foreign banks with a view to a right-wing coup in South Africa. Could the structures set up by Basson have been hijacked and used as conduits to this end?
- What was the true nature and extent of contact between Basson, Knobel, and California gynaecologist and probable CIA agent Larry Ford? Subsequent investigations linked Ford to a network of ultra right-wing survivalists in the US, and uncovered evidence that the stash of weaponry and deadly pathogens found buried at his home was one of several secret caches in states such as Nevada, Utah and Florida. What were the 'fun' projects in need of funding to which Ford referred in a letter to Knobel in July 1991? And why, as documents found in the blue steel trunks showed, did Basson arrange for Ford to launder these funds through a Swiss bank account administered by Bernard Zimmer?
- What lies behind the mysterious or sudden deaths of several people linked at some point to covert military units? Corrie Meerholz was so badly burned in a single-vehicle accident on the road between Phalaborwa and Pretoria that even his dental fillings melted, and the only way he could be identified was by his Rolex watch. Dr Gerrie Odendaal and his pregnant wife perished in a light aircraft crash. A question mark hangs over the death of Fort Rev intelligence officer Dave Drew. Swiss intelligence informant Jurg Jacomet succumbed to a sudden and virulent form of skin cancer.

  Garth Bailey, a former police intelligence officer in Rhodesia, died in 1 Military Hospital in January 1983 after spending several weeks in the Caprivi on a survival course. Something happened during that course that required all participants to have blood tests. After having his blood drawn, Bailey ended up in intensive care, attached to life-support equipment for the last 48 hours of his life. He was cremated by the SADF almost immediately, and his wife, Daphne, was merely given his ashes. When she tried to gain access to his

medical records, she was told they were classified, and would remain so for five years. Seven years after her husband's death, Daphne tried again, but was told she could not obtain the records, which were 'in a secret file at Special Forces headquarters'. At least two different death certificates were issued to Bailey's family. One states that he was ill for two weeks before he died. On two of the certificates, the cause of death is given as myasthenia gravis, while another attributes death to a brain virus. Daphne has reason to believe her husband was poisoned, a view supported by NIA agent Mike Kennedy, who was involved in an investigation into his death. Medical experts consulted by the authors are of the opinion that Bailey's symptoms were consistent with botulinum poisoning.

In the immediate euphoria of Basson's acquittal, former generals were quick to claim that Hartzenberg's verdict proved, yet again, that the SADF had never been involved in anything but textbook military operations. But in their haste to cash in on the exoneration of one of their own, the generals – led by Malan – overlooked one of the judge's most damning findings: All the murders – or eliminations – committed under the aegis of Operation Dual *did* take place as described.

The judge rejected evidence that Basson was involved in supplying Barnacle and CCB operators with drugs used to administer lethal injections to the victims, and deflected attention from the toxins produced by Project Coast scientists by finding that the state had failed to prove such substances were used as murder weapons, but there was no way around the fact that the aircraft used were under the direct control of the commanding officer, Special Forces, and were piloted by regular SA Air Force members (with the exception of Mr K).

To intimate that the diabolical extermination plan was the work of a rogue operator or group of 'loose cannons' with not a single link to the SADF chain of command, is as naïve as the judge's failure to address the evidence of pilots Matie van der Linde and HAP Potgieter that their orders to make the death flights came from successive Special Forces commanders: Fritz Loots, Kat Liebenberg and Joep Joubert.

Despite all indications to the contrary, there was an expectation in some quarters, until the last, that Hartzenberg's judgment would vindicate the dedicated team of investigators who had spent almost 10 years uncovering an alleged R36 million fraud against a top-secret military project, as well as some of the most heinous murders perpetrated by agents of the apartheid government.

Instead, his findings reinforced the perception – created by such failed legal exercises as the 1990 Harms Commission of Inquiry and the 1996 KwaMakhutha trial – that the top echelons of the former SADF appear somehow to be above the law. Coupled with the fact that the vast majority of CCB agents have still not been

publicly named, that they have not been required to disclose details of their covert cross-border activities – or even all their operations inside South Africa – and that Project Coast's deepest and darkest secrets will almost certainly never be revealed, Judge Willie Hartzenberg's findings have, unfortunately, done far more to shield than shame those who can never answer truthfully when asked, as inevitably they will be: So what did *you* do in the war, Daddy?

Sources

The primary sources for this book are the evidence and supporting documents presented at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's hearings in 1998 on South Africa's chemical and biological warfare programme, and during the trial of Dr Wouter Basson in the Pretoria High Court from 4 October 1999 to 11 April 2002. A limited amount of information was obtained through personal interviews or correspondence between the authors and the individuals concerned. Additional sources are:

CHAPTER 1: Criminal trials of Eugene de Kock and Ferdi Barnard; Harms Report, 1990.

CHAPTER 2: Official documents from the Rhodesian armed forces; interview by Peta Thornycroft with MJ 'Mac' McGuiness; *Biohazard*, Ken Alibek's book on the Russian CBW programme; *Baltimore Sun*, C&EN.

CHAPTER 5: Trial of Eugene de Kock.

CHAPTER 6: JP de Villiers, Perspectives in Chemical Warfare.

CHAPTER 8: Interview in Basel by Philippe Burckhardt and Jean-Philippe Ceppi with Dieter Dreier.

CHAPTER 10: *Los Angeles Times*; Orange County Register; *The Guardian*; Metropolitan Serious Fraud Office, London; Human Rights Watch report on the chemical attack on Halabja; *Plague Wars*, by Tom Mangold and Jeff Goldberg; *Arms and the Man*, by William Lowther.

25th August, 1977.

The Officer Commanding,
SPECIAL BRANCH HEADQUARTERS.

c.c. The Director-General,
CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE ORGANISATION.

ISSUE OF EQUIPMENT : 8.8.77 - 17.8.77.

During the period under review, the following have been issued:-

59 Sets of Clothing.
2 Sets of Cigarettes.
1 Set of Medical Supplies.
2 Sets of Assorted Food and Drink.

Resultant terrorist deaths have been confirmed as follows:-

1 Killed Sinoia
2 Killed Beit Bridge.

One group of ten terrorists is believed to have been seriously affected and is no longer operating in the Beit Bridge area.

Nineteen African civilians in the Beit Bridge area have been murdered by terrorists, who believed that they were responsible for giving them poisoned food.

It will be noted that there is a considerable decrease in the quantity of materials directed into the field during the fortnight under review, this being due to

(a) staff shortage in the field and subsequent inability to recruit contact men,

and

(b) the shortage of necessary ingredients which are to be obtained from South Africa within the next two weeks.

The low kill rate reflected herein is again due to lack of follow up and accurate reporting by stations to whom material has been supplied.

Officer in Charge Operations,
SPECIAL BRANCH HEADQUARTERS.

28th November, 1977.

The Officer Commanding,
SPECIAL BRANCH HEADQUARTERS.

c.c. The Director-General,
CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE ORGANISATION.

ISSUE OF EQUIPMENT : 14th TO 27th NOVEMBER, 1977

During the period under review, the following items have been distributed:-

365 items of clothing to cover 231 terrorists
86 tins meat
5 medical packs
6 cartons cigarettes
10 tubes toothpaste
12 pkts biscuits
2 tins jam
12 packets Mopani worms
15 tins peas
1 bottle Codein
3 FPLN Ratpacks
3 bottles Arsenic
6 x 28g Strychnine
3 pkts "dog" biscuits
1 bottle Portuguese brandy
32 bottles Penicillin
2 bottles Vit. B Complex
1 bottle Chloroquin
1 bottle Milk of Magnesia
5 ampoules Feruganol injection

External

Results have been confirmed as follows:-

16 terrorists dead at Bikita
14 terrorists dead at Selingwe
36 terrorists dead at Ryahunde
1 terrorist dead at Chiredzi
12 terrorists dead at Gwelo

A total of 79 terrorists killed.

Officer in Charge Operations,
SPECIAL BRANCH HEADQUARTERS.

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Wouter Basson boards the Jetstar

Business-bound on arrival at Lubeck, Germany. Flanked by the King Air pilots are Charles van Remoortere and Basson, with Jan Lourens (right)

Wynand Swanepoel, managing director, Roodeplaat Research Laboratories

Bio-engineer Jan Lourens in Scotland

Dr Deon Erasmus, former 7 Medical Battalion member

Basson putting his feet up

Basson and Delta G Scientific
managing director Philip Mijburgh

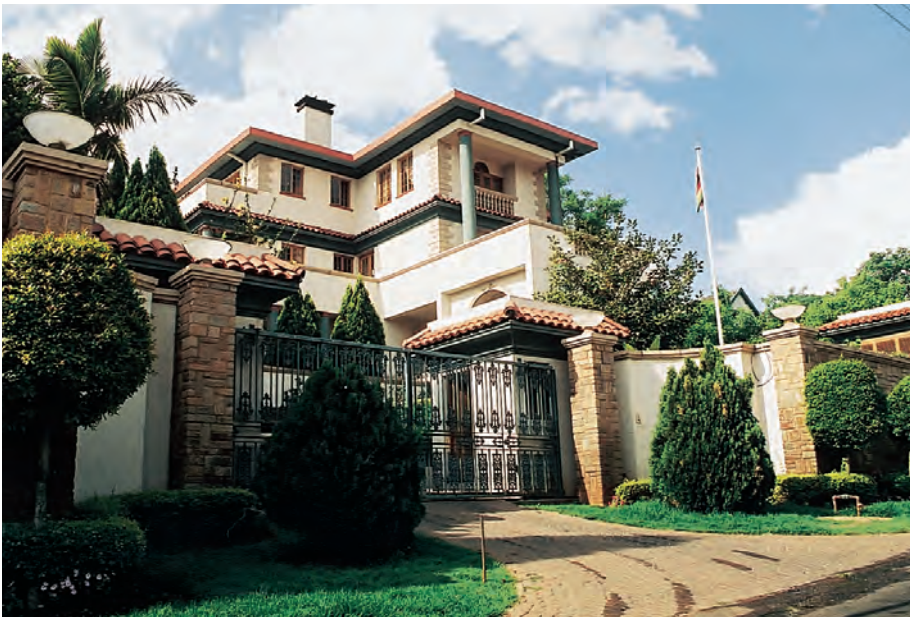
Banker Sam Bosch and Basson

Cuisine à la Basson

A kiss for the King Air's nosecone

Trying out a peacock chair for size

Jan Lourens and Basson in the King Air



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Basson was involved in the refurbishment of Merton House, in Arcadia, Pretoria, at a cost of R10 million. The property was later sold to the Zimbabwean government for R7,5 million and continues to serve as an embassy

Accountant Tjaart Viljoen dining out with Basson and his wife, Annette Versluis

Belgian businessman Charles van Remoortere

PW de Jager, another of Basson's business associates

Dinner in Luxembourg for Bernard Zimmer, Basson, Jan Lourens and Charles van Remoortere, with the King Air pilots (back)

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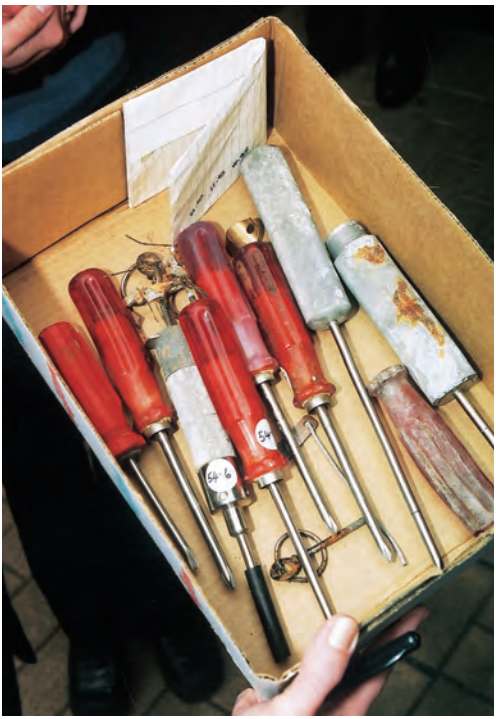
Roodeplaat Research Laboratories, Project Coast's biological facility, built on a smallholding north-east of Pretoria



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Some of the deadly 'special applicators' designed by Jan Lourens to release poison on contact

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Former Surgeon General Niel Knobel takes the oath
before testifying at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

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Former SADF chiefs Magnus Malan
and Constand Viljoen (seated)

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Philip Mijburgh, former Delta G Scientific
managing director, appears before the TRC

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A message scrawled and signed by Basson on a wall in Cape Town's Café Maroka during the 1998 TRC hearings

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Basson arrives at the TRC offices in Cape Town prior to being forced by the Cape High Court to testify about Project Coast

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Dentist Wynand Swanepoel, who was managing director of SADF front company RRL

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Dr Schalk van Rensburg, former director of laboratory services at RRL

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Basson finally testified before the Truth Commission on 31 July 1998 – just hours before the TRC's mandate expired – after being ordered to do so by the Cape High Court. His appearance had been stalled for months through legal action by his advocates

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Senior prosecutor Anton Ackermann and accountant Tjaart Viljoen, one of Basson's closest business associates and a key state witness

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Samuel Bosch, Basson's personal banker, spent 15 days testifying against him

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Judge Willie Hartzenberg, who acquitted Basson on all charges

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Basson hugs his advocate, Jaap Cilliers, after being acquitted on all charges in April 2002