had told him that he wanted to have Coetzee killed in London.
Flores was fired from Military Intelligence for disobeying orders. De Kock said Flores was destitute and that Vlakplas had to look after him and his family for about a year using the secret fund. De Kock said that he spent about R100 000 on Flores and his family.
Despite the fact that Eugene de Kock had embarrassed the government of FW de Klerk, broken his promise of February 1991 that his unit would only seek to maintain law and order in the Republic, and planned the murder of a South African citizen abroad, no steps were taken against him. It was clear that he acted with as much impunity as ever before and that the Vlakplas dirty tricks had not stopped.

Chapter Eight

The shooting party

It was a peculiar group of men, armed with semi-automatic rifles, pistols and hand grenades, that assembled at three o’clock on the morning of March 26, 1992, just outside Nelspruit on the road to Komatipoort in the Eastern Transvaal.

One man was portly and balding, another burly and bearded, while a third was small and looked hardly old enough to be out of short trousers. The leader of the unit was a big, stocky man with a thick pair of glasses.

It was a Vlakplas death squad, led by Colonel Eugene de Kock. The henchmen were all members of his ‘inner circle’, people who could be trusted and who knew how to kill. Amongst them were Chappies Klopper, Willie Nortje, Rolf Gevers and Dougie Holtzhausen.

The men were about to teach five would-be bank robbers a lesson. The robbers, they believed, were part of an ANC crime syndicate which robbed banks on behalf of Winnie Mandela, former wife of ANC leader Nelson Mandela. In fact, one of the robbers was her former driver.

Some of the men were still slightly intoxicated from heavy drinking sessions the previous two days. But on that early morning, they were tense, their fingers eager to squeeze the triggers of their automatic rifles.

The previous night, the men had already decided not to take any prisoners. They were going to kill the robbers and set their vehicle alight to destroy all evidence. They would say afterwards they had been shot at, had returned fire and that the robbers’ minibus had exploded.

At 3.20 a.m. the Vlakplas men had got the message: the minibus was on its way. Twenty minutes later, the unsuspecting driver drove into an ambush. A small inferno erupted around him as the Vlakplas men pumped more than 220 bullets into the minibus. Two of the passengers who were still alive following the attack were executed afterwards.

Two hand grenades and two AK-47 assault rifles were thrown into the minibus, it was sprinkled with fuel and set alight, exactly as planned the night before.

One of the Vlakplas men who was apparently unhappy about the operation knelt down and started praying.

A few minutes after the ambush, all that remained was the burnt-out minibus, pock-marked on all sides with bullet holes, and the bodies of three charred men. One was still at the steering wheel, his eye sockets staring, his hands welded to
the steering wheel. Two men lay sprawled behind him, their limbs grotesquely distorted. The body of another man lay in the road, having been flung there by the explosion of hand grenades planted in the vehicle.

It was a perfect operation, except for one small hiccup: the fifth would-be robber was not in the minibus. He was waiting for his accomplices at a nearby filling station. De Kock despatched a team to take care of him.

For the rest of the men, celebrations followed. They drank at the Fig Tree Hotel afterwards, where Chappies Kloppre would boast to people in the bar: 'I emptied my whole magazine into the chest of the driver.'

In fact, the night before and the day that followed were nothing but an orgy of murder and booze.

Christiaan Willem Geldenhuys is a balding and portly man who resembles the prop of a small club's fourth rugby team. Geldenhuys was a policeman for 27 years, in a career that included service in the security police, in Koeweet and in the Murder and Robbery Unit. When he left the force, he had reached the rank of captain but was suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

From early 1992, the Murder and Robbery Unit in Pretoria and the Vlakplaas unit undertook joint operations, ostensibly acting against criminals who were planning to commit armed robberies.

Geldenhuys was known as a heavy drinker, a 'man's man'. A month before the Nelspruit ambush, there was a similar operation near Pretoria, in which three would-be robbers, two of them unarmed, were mowed down by a team of Vlakplaas operatives and murder and robbery detectives. At a celebration following the Pretoria shootings, Geldenhuys drank so much that he fell into a fire and then got into a fight.

Geldenhuys was a friend of Eugene de Kock, a man he admired, respected and killed with. But as he was getting into the witness box in February 1995, the policeman was changing sides. His demeanour left no doubt that this was not where he wanted to be.

On his right was the presiding judge, Mr Justice Willem van der Merwe, with the big crest bearing the words 'EUV' (unity is strength) above his head.

But Geldenhuys and De Kock were united no more. Once they stood together as a deadly killing squad, but on that day, Geldenhuys turned against his friend.

Geldenhuys was witness number 54 on the list of 163 witnesses the state intended to call to prove the former Vlakplaas commander guilty of, amongst others, murdering the four would-be bank robbers and their accomplice.

Geldenhuys was the first important witness to give an account of the Nelspruit ambush and another murder that followed later that day. He would be followed by a host of state witnesses, many of whom had participated in the killings.

When Geldenhuys entered the witness stand, a muscular, blonde man in row three of the public gallery muttered angrily and audibly.

'That's Rolf Gevers, one of Eugene's men,' somebody told me. I tried to speak to him, but he wouldn't engage in conversation.

At the time, Gevers was still a member of the faithful band of 'old boys' who presented a united front against witnesses like Kloppre and Geldenhuys. During recesses, they filed towards the dock to shake the Colonel's hand and bring him hamburgers or hot dogs. But more important, they were always ready to provide De Kock's legal counsel with ammunition to discredit state witnesses.

However, in July 1995, self-preservation triumphed over loyalty when the 'old boys' switched sides and were whisked away into a witness-protection programme. Their empty seats in the public gallery appeared to be an ominous sign for Eugene de Kock.

A day or two before the ambush, the Vlakplaas men started the journey to Nelspruit. Rolf Gevers and a colleague, Charlie Chatte, travelled together. They arrived around lunchtime at the historic village of Pilgrims Rest and went to the Royal Hotel for a drink. They sat there until dark and drank beer, rum and brandy.

Soon after they left the hotel, Gevers fell asleep behind the wheel and overturned the car. He spent a night in hospital, but was discharged and declared fit and ready for the operation.

Sergeant Dougie Holtzhausen and Warrant Officer Willie Nortje drove together. On their way, they stopped at a farm where they drank some mampoer (peach brandy). Their combi ran out of petrol. Later that day, they arrived at the Drum Rock Hotel in Nelspruit.

Eugene de Kock and Captain Chappies Kloppre arrived at the Drum Rock Hotel with 'two typists from Vlakplaas' with whom they disappeared 'for about three hours'.

When Chappies Kloppre took the stand, his exceptional youthful looks belied his testimony as he talked of drinking at roadside pubs on the way to a killing. 'We stopped at all the hotels next to the road to have a drink. I can't remember how many places it was, but we stopped basically everywhere for a drink. I was quite drunk when I got to Nelspruit.'

The typists, Kloppre said, came along 'as an excuse to get out of the office'. Like a bright schoolboy in a quiz show, Kloppre sucked on his lower lip, eagerly awaiting the next question.

'It was a Volkswagen Jetta, Your Honour,' he replied to a question on what kind of car he was driving. Then, after a small pause: 'Sixteen valves.'

It was agreed from the outset that no prisoners would be taken, and on the eve of the operation, which was spent at the Drum Rock Hotel overlooking a valley outside Nelspruit, plans were laid to plant weapons in the minibus carrying the victims before setting it alight to destroy evidence and to deceive investigators.

Geldenhuys said a prime motive for the operation was financial. The policemen would claim reward money for the recovered arms - which they had planted - and
R20 000 as payment to the informer, Ben van Zyl, who would lure the targets to their death.

Ben van Zyl testified that he became involved with the Vlakplaas unit after leaving the South African Police in 1989. While working as a private detective he assisted Holtzhausen in the arrest of a woman for possession of AK-47 rifles. Afterwards, he became a Vlakplaas informant.

Van Zyl met Tiso Leballo, purveyor of cocaine and AK-47s and sometime driver of Winnie Mandela, in 1991. Van Zyl told Vlakplaas that Leballo was part of a gang acting on behalf of Winnie Mandela and which engaged in robbery. In fact, Van Zyl told them he had been personally introduced to her.

Holtzhausen devised a plan to involve Leballo and his accomplices in a robbery at Coin Security in Nelspruit. The plan was aborted when the robbers failed to arrive. But a month later Van Zyl, known to Leballo and the four others only as ‘John’, persuaded them to try again.

Van Zyl convinced the five robbers to rob Coin Security in Nelspruit on the basis that he had financial problems. His bank had put pressure on him about a R20 000 overdraft, he told them. He nevertheless believed the men were robbers and they should, therefore, be killed.

‘I felt these were robbers. They don’t ask for or give any mercy. According to our source, they were given military training by the ANC. I still regarded the ANC and the PAC as the enemy. If my adrenaline starts pumping, I want to destroy the enemy,’ Holtzhausen testified.

The Vlakplaas men were told that the would-be robbers were previously involved in a robbery in Witbank, in which a white woman was shot through the head. ‘Therefore, they had to die, because an innocent white woman died going to the bank. She had to kneel before she was shot,’ said Klopper. But by the time of the Vlakplaas operation, Joseph Malinga and seven others had already been arrested in connection with the Witbank murder.

Leballo and his accomplices were told by Van Zyl that he would supply them with a minibus and AK-47s. The minibus, supplied by Vlakplaas, had belonged to a Springs hotel owner and friend of De Kock who was in financial trouble and needed the vehicle stolen to claim insurance.

The ambush was to take place under an overhead bridge on the road between Nelspruit and White River. Alerted by police radio that the minibus was approaching, the policemen took up their pre-arranged positions.

Holtzhausen: ‘When the first shot goes off, your adrenaline starts pumping. You act automatically. Somebody can shout at you to stop shooting, but you keep going. You shoot until the enemy lies still and is out of action.’

Klopper: ‘I stood in front of the row of people. I had to shoot the driver. I emptied my magazine on him. The minibus stopped. When we got closer, we could hear groaning coming from the bus. I fired shots in the direction of the sounds. The person who sat on the left-hand side looked as though he was trying to get out of the window of the minibus. We couldn’t miss him. We shot him.’

Constable Johannes Swart: ‘I moved towards the vehicle, and heard someone moaning in the back. Klopper was right next to me when I heard someone shout: ‘Finish up!’. One of the men in the back tried to get up. I fired about five shots into his chest.’

Willie Norrie said one of the victims was lying next to the minibus. ‘He was burning and at one stage De Kock said to me I must shoot him. I told him, no man, in any case he’s going to die because he’s badly burnt.’

Holtzhausen: ‘I ran back to get an AK and a hand grenade. One of the passengers hung out of the window with a wound in his neck. Everybody was quiet by now and looked dead to me. I took the AK and fired shots inside the minibus so that there would be cartridges. Chate was standing next to me with a can of petrol. I threw the AK and two hand grenades, their pins still in place, into the minibus. Chate sprinkled petrol into the minibus and set it alight.’

Vlakplaas operative Jannie Hanekom was unhappy about the operation. He fired only two shots with his nine millimeter pistol, and it was said that he afterwards knelt down and started praying.

Eugene de Kock was not supposed to be involved in the shooting because he had been involved in a similar incident at Piet Retief in June 1988 when nine ANC infiltrators had been killed. But according to evidence, he emptied at least one magazine onto the minibus.

‘He just couldn’t help himself. He had to shoot,’ said Klopper.

Before investigators arrived from Nelspruit, Klopper pulled his car across the road and set up a blue police light on the roof in support of the pre-arranged cover story that the minibus had sped past a police roadblock and that the occupants had opened fire on the police.

Within hours of the shooting, General Krappies Engelbrecht arrived at the scene, and refused to allow the Nelspruit police to take statements from the task force ‘until we had talked in Pretoria’.

A few days later, the close-knit cabal met in De Kock’s office to collude in preparing their statements, which were then amended ‘three or four times’ by Engelbrecht.

‘I was fired upon from the minibus. Bullets were flying past me. If my life and that of my colleagues were not in mortal danger, I would not have fired on the minibus,’ Geldenhuys lied in his affidavit.

‘Suddenly there was automatic gunfire from the minibus. We returned fire, whereupon it burst into flames,’ swore Chappies Klopper.

‘We wanted to prevent a tragedy and decided to arrest the suspects before they could rob a bank,’ Holtzhausen lied.

Minutes after the ambush, informant Ben van Zyl said to Eugene de Kock: ‘Tiso Leballo was not in the minibus. If we don’t get him quickly, I’m a dead man. He will recognise me.’
Leballo had temporarily escaped death by waiting in a separate vehicle at a filling station for his accomplices. De Kock ordered his men to take care of the problem by kidnapping him and ‘getting rid of him’.

Captain Rolf Gevers was the senior officer in charge of the killing of Leballo. In August 1995, he also took the witness stand and in a clear, calm voice, recalled an event of unspeakable horror – of how they had killed Tiso Leballo and disposed of his body.

The judge stared at him for long periods of time. Gevers mostly looked straight ahead of him, avoiding the eyes of De Kock.

‘You ask no questions, you hear no lies,’ he said in court when asked why he followed illegal orders from Eugene de Kock.

Shortly after being instructed by his commander to take care of Leballo, Gevers met two black Vlakplas policemen outside Nelspruit. They had somebody in the boot of the car. It was Tiso Leballo.

‘He was blindfolded. We took him out, tied his hands, and stuffed a piece of cloth into his mouth. We put him back into the boot of our car.’

For the remainder of the day, Gevers and his accomplices drove around with Leballo tied up in the boot. They had to wait for two colleagues to go back to Pretoria to fetch explosives with which to get rid of the body.

They sat drinking for several hours under a tree near Ohrigstad waiting for their colleagues to return, while the car with Leballo in the boot was parked in the sun. It was late summer in the Eastern Transvaal, and Gevers said it was hot, but they never thought about the man’s agony in the boot. He was in any event going to die.

They eventually took Leballo to an old open-cast asbestos mine near Penge that was completely deserted. They took their captive to one of the mining ruins where they interrogated him.

‘We started questioning the suspect. We were rough with him. We asked him about illegal weapons transactions. We knew he was Winnie Mandela’s driver and we asked him about weapons. We hit and kicked him, but he couldn’t tell us anything we wanted to know.’

It was then time to kill him. According to Gevers, Warrant Officer Duiviel Brits took him aside and asked him who was going to do the shooting. ‘I said I will. He gave me a loaded .38 revolver. I stuck it in my pants.’

Gevers told Leballo that they were satisfied with his answers and were going to release him and take him back.

‘We drove back to the vicinity of the open-cast mine. When we got to the edge of the open-cast area, Brits stopped the car and said he saw something interesting and wanted to go and have a look. We said to Tiso he must come with and I took him by the arm. We were friendly with him. We went to the middle of the open-cast mine, where Brits suddenly grabbed Tiso. ‘Shoot! Shoot!’ he shouted. I took the revolver out, held it against Tiso’s heart, pulled the trigger, but the first shot didn’t go off.’

Leballo writhed and wriggled, and according to evidence in court, might have wet his pants at that stage. Brits, still holding him, shouted again: ‘Shoot! Shoot!’

‘I shot him three times in the chest. He fell to the ground,’ Gevers said.

Another policeman who was on the scene remembered it slightly differently. ‘I saw him being shot in the head as well. The blood splattered on my shoes,’ testified Johannes Swart.

They took the dead man’s clothes off. ‘Warrant Officer Vermeulen and Sergeant Chate had two or three bags with them. There were yellow and blue sausage-like explosives in the bag.’

They put the dead man in a sitting position – which Vlakplaas operatives called the ‘Buddha position’ – and tied the explosives to him.

‘We drove a kilometre away, and detonated the explosives. It was already dark and we went back with torches. There was just a big hole in the ground where he had sat. We went to a nearby ruin where we spent the night. Late that night we burnt his clothes in a big drum. Tiso had brown leather shoes which Brits took because he said they were too nice to destroy,’ said Gevers.

The men drank until they fell over. Early the next morning, they went back to the place where they had blown Leballo up.

‘For the next three hours, we walked around looking for pieces of human flesh to make certain that we had destroyed all evidence. The biggest piece we got was the size of a finger nail, only about half a kilogram of flesh and bone. We held this in our hands. We put the pieces of flesh in the hole and blew them up. We searched again for pieces of flesh and blew them up again.’

‘When asked under cross-examination how he felt about the operation, Gevers simply said: ‘It’s not nice to shoot a person.’

Swart said: ‘The whole incident bothered me. It was not a good thing that we had done. It was wrong, and it shocked me.’

The men left and went back to Nelspruit where they bought more liquor for the road. Before they arrived in Pretoria, they stopped again for liquor. When they got back to Vlakplas, De Kock told them they could claim R2 000 for the next five months ‘for a job well done’.

When Gevers testified about the murder of Leballo, it wasn’t the first time Mr Justice van der Merwe had heard a tale of how a body was reduced to nothing. Tiso Leballo wasn’t the first victim to be blown up by Vlakplas.

Eugene de Kock testified that long before the death of Leballo, he had taken an askari to Penge mine to blow him up. The askari, Johannes Maboti, escaped from Vlakplas and allegedly became Winnie Mandela’s lover. He was re-arrested by the security police and given to De Kock to kill. ‘I shot him dead, but walked away when they blew him up. That wasn’t my strong point.’

Earlier in the trial, Chappies Klopper had described how he and three other Vlakplas men had used ‘five or six explosions’ to obliterate the corpse of Sweet Sambo, a suspect who had died during interrogation.
After each blast, they scoured the bush for pieces of body and bone, making a pile out of these which was then blown up again. The rest would be speedily removed by ants.

"But how did you collect the pieces?" the judge asked. "You did it, tell me. Show me how you did it."

Klopper held out his hands and showed how he had carried the grisly load. He said: 'We picked up pieces until our hands were full.' His voice faltered, his head dropped and he gasped for breath.

When I spoke to Klopper afterwards about Sweet Sambo, he just shook his head and said: 'We did it. We did it for Eugene de Kock. Fuck knows why. But I still suffer from it. You don't forget a handful of human flesh.'

Just after the Nelspruit killings, the Vlakplaas men celebrated the success of the operation. Ferdi Barnard was also there: 'Chappies Klopper and some of the other members told me how they had shot the robbers, and how the one guy got blown out of the minibus. And still in great detail, with a lot of laughing and that, told me the oke was on fire. Another oke was also lying there, and they didn't know if he said bye-bye or whatever, but Klopper told me how he emptied his R-5 into that man. Klopper with his angelic and nice boyish face, said that to me.'

In comparison with Klopper, Rolf Gevers appeared to be an accomplished and experienced soldier. He became a policeman in 1980 when he was only 18 years old. He spent many years with the Security Branch in Namibia before joining Vlakplaas in 1991.

But by December 1994, he had gone on early retirement at the age of 32. He suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder and severe depression.

Psychologist Dr Nicky Swartz says his disease is 'permanent, it's irreversible, it's chronic. We see depression, we see aggression, we see frustration, we see isolation. The person feels that he does not fit into society any more.'

Gevers saved his own skin by testifying against De Kock. Maybe his punishment will be that he will have to live what psychologists call 'a living hell' for the rest of his life.

Somebody told me later that Gevers has a son of about five. I've since then wondered: what is the boy going to do when he grows up and learns of his father's atrocities? How is Rolf Gevers ever going to explain them to his son?

Several other men who participated in the Nelspruit ambush and murder of Lebalo suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. Christiaan Geldenhuys is one of them. Snor Vermeulen and Charlie Chate, the men who packed the explosives around Tiso Lebalo, also left the force after suffering serious trauma. Johannes Swart, the man with blood on his shoes, suffers from the same illness. So does Duivel Brits, the policeman who held Lebalo.

De Kock said that several of his men had to go for psychiatric treatment. 'Two
Chapter Nine

A hidden hand

January 12, 1991, and as more than 100 people were praying and mourning at a night vigil organised for a slain ANC member, a gang of raiders hurled a hand grenade into the tent and opened fire with AK-47s. Thirty-eight people were killed and 40 injured in one of the most brutal attacks in the war between ANC comrades and Inkatha impis in and around Johannesburg’s strife-torn townships.1

Twelve Inkatha members were later arrested in connection with the attack. Three of the men were confidants and associates of the Transvaal youth leader of Inkatha, Themba Khoza.

A few months earlier, Khoza and his three confidants had been arrested for the illegal possession of firearms when weapons, including an AK-47, were found in the boot of his car. Khoza was later acquitted because of lack of evidence. Where did Khoza and the Zulu impis get the weapons used in the attack and transported in the boot of his car?

In 1991 and 1992 virtual full-scale civil war raged in Natal, while townships in and around Johannesburg were on fire as ANC comrades and Inkatha impis did battle. At the time, National Party politicians said it was simply ‘black-on-black’ violence and that most of the weapons had been smuggled into South Africa through Mozambique and Swaziland, and distributed in the townships.

Anyone who watched television news in the two years after the unbanning of the ANC in February 1990, would have been an armchair witness to horrific scenes of blacks murdering blacks in South Africa’s townships. Ordinary people could have been forgiven for reacting with despair to the brutality and barbarism in the townships, and for having concluded that it might be best, after all, if whites continued to govern the country.

According to the Human Rights Commission, more than 20 000 people died in political violence in South Africa between the mid 1980s and April 1994. More than 1 200 people died between August 1990 and March 1991 in townships in and around Johannesburg.2

People on all sides were both perpetrators and victims. But the conflict was not a matter of acts of spontaneous violence carried out at random by foot soldiers. On the one hand, supporters of the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the ANC were the victims of Inkatha death squads, set up, trained, armed and supported by the apartheid government and its security forces. On the other hand, numerous Inkatha supporters were the targets of death squad actions launched by elements of Umkhonto we Sizwe, self-defence units and militant comrades.

This ‘hidden hand’ fomenting violence in South Africa’s townships and in Natal became known as the ‘third force’. Since his release in February 1990, Nelson Mandela had warned FW de Klerk and his government that rather than stopping the bloodshed, the security forces had become embroiled in the violence through supporting and arming Inkatha.

Commenting on the allegations of a third force, Adriaan Vlok said: ‘We are investigating it with vigour, because if there are people behind it, if there is a so-called third force, then ideally we would like to catch them ... but so far we have found no evidence’.3

Mandela warned that what South Africa was facing was the beginning of a Renamo-style organisation. Here he was referring to the South African-backed rebel movement in Mozambique, at the time trying to overthrow, undermine and destabilise the existing order in Mozambique.

It was only years later that the full picture emerged of how the apartheid government and its security organs had devised a secret and devious strategy to disrupt and wipe out the ANC through the formation of a ‘third force’.

Since the early 1990s, Vlakplas had been one of the units stoking ‘black-on-black’ violence by supplying Inkatha impis on the East Rand near Johannesburg and in Natal with tonnes of weapons.

Nineteen years ago, a young security guard met an ambitious Zulu handyman at the building society where they both worked. The pair came from different worlds – Brood van Heerden was a former security policeman, and Victor Ndlovu was a member of Inkatha. But they built a long-lasting friendship, founded on their mutual hatred of the ANC. Van Heerden speaks Zulu fluently.

Van Heerden became a policeman in 1971, and served in Namibia and Rhodesia before being transferred to the Security Branch at John Vorster Square. He left the force in 1978 and joined the United Building Society as a security guard. This was where he met Victor Ndlovu.

Van Heerden re-joined the Security Branch in the 1980s, and said that he detonated a bomb in a cinema where the movie Cry Freedom was being shown, planted a bomb at a night club in Hillbrow and was a member of Eugene de Kock’s team that had blown up Khotso House.4

Van Heerden was transferred to Vlakplas in February 1989, where he participated in the ‘tubing’ of askari Moses Nthehelang and transported weapons from Namibia back to Vlakplas. He left the police a few months later and went back to the United Building Society, where he was again in charge of security.

However, he remained in contact with De Kock and his former colleagues at Vlakplas and one of his first ‘freelance’ jobs was to try and arrange for HIV-infected askaris to spread HIV amongst Johannesburg’s black prostitutes.
By the middle of 1990, the civil strife between Inkatha and the ANC in Natal had spilled over to the Transvaal. A clear pattern emerged. First, Zulu-speaking outsiders would be bussed into the hostels. Second, a bloodbath would take place inside the hostels as the outsiders battled for supremacy with the established residents, many of whom would flee. Third, the hostels having been secured as Inkatha strongholds, the imis would set off on nightly rampages against the communities around them, indiscriminately killing and looting. Large areas around the hostels became desolate no-go areas.

The Inkatha occupation set off a terrible chain of events as ANC comrades who had armed and organised themselves into self-defence units retaliated. They ambushed the hostel inmates as the inmates walked through the streets, shooting them and hacking them to pieces. In the end, there were no guiltless parties, only innocent residents who became engulfed in an orgy of violence.

Van Heerden was visited by his Inkatha friend who introduced him to Thembekhoza. They wanted to know: can you help us with weapons, and why are the police not helping Inkatha in the Transvaal in the same way as in Natal?

In June, Van Heerden made a visit to his former commander at Vlakplas and told him about the Inkatha request. A week after Van Heerden's visit, De Kock and Willie Nortje met Khoza and Ndlovu and discussed the supply of weapons to them.

De Kock said he initially refused Khoza's demand for weapons because 'I did not want to get involved in a war', but at an Inkatha funeral in a township near Johannesburg, the ANC threw a hand grenade at the mourners. This event convinced De Kock that the ANC were wiping out Inkatha and he then decided to provide the organisation only with grenades and ammunition, as it already had enough other weapons.

'I was convinced that South Africa was on the verge of a civil war and I knew that the white people would not be prepared to fight for their existence. The only way out was to help Inkatha.'

De Kock met Khoza and senior Inkatha official Victor Ndlovu at Van Heerden's flat. 'Khoza told me they were being destroyed by the ANC. The Zulus were not trained and armed with only spears and knobkerries.'

Nortje said he had to prepare ten M-26 hand grenades by removing the numbers and cleaning them. A week later, De Kock gave the hand grenades to Van Heerden, who kept them in his office in the bank building for a week before he handed them to Khoza.

'I heard the next day that many people had died and were injured, but Khoza wanted more weapons,' Van Heerden said.

For the next two and a half years, De Kock and his men would provide AK-47 and SKS assault rifles, belt-fed machine guns, pistols and revolvers, M-26 and Russian-made F1 hand grenades, home-made bombs, home-made shotguns, mortars, rocket launchers and landmines to Inkatha in Johannesburg and Natal.

Van Heerden, De Kock and Nortje became card-carrying members of Inkatha.

They also registered several senior Inkatha officials as informants and paid them monthly allowances from the police secret fund.

A picture of a state-sanctioned, but secret third force emerged from the evidence and affidavits of De Kock, Van Heerden and Nortje. They justified their involvement with Inkatha by claiming that they merely tried to help the movement to defend itself, although this is contradicted by the fact that Inkatha was given bombs, hand grenades and heavy machine guns that could fire between 600 and 1 000 bullets per minute.

Referring to Thembekhoza and Humphrey Ndlovu, Anton Ackermann said: 'These are people that sowed death and destruction here in the Transvaal, isn't it?'

De Kock: In the process of defending themselves, they did sow death and destruction.

Ackermann: And you associated yourself with these people?

De Kock: I back any person trying to defend himself.

Ackermann: These are people you are prepared to walk a road with?

De Kock: I don't know which road. I didn't lead them in their attacks. I gave them advice.

Ackermann: You also provided them with the necessary means?

De Kock: That's all they needed, the rest they had already.

Ackermann: You were friends?

De Kock: No, we weren't. We didn't eat from the same plate.

Ackermann: You had a common enemy?

De Kock: Yes, we had a common enemy. My enemy's enemy was my friend.

He said that the arming of Inkatha took place with the sanction and blessing of the police top command. 'There was a very brotherly relationship between Inkatha and the security police because they had a common enemy.'

FW de Klerk said in his evidence to the TRC: 'There is no basis on which any senior policeman could have been under the impression that it was okay to do this type of thing. One of the first things I did (when I became State President) was to call the top police officers from across the country together and to say that this was the end of the government asking you to be politically involved or to advance any political cause.'

De Kock said he was at first hesitant to supply AK-47s to Inkatha, but one night at a Vlakplas function, he discussed it with Generals Krappies Engelbrecht and Nick van Rensburg, who 'liked the idea'. They decided, however, that instead of providing AK-47s, they would manufacture shotguns. General Basie Smit agreed to sign a false claim to enable De Kock and his men to buy material for the shotguns. A former Rhodesian friend and engineer helped them to manufacture 150 shotguns, 100 of which were given to Thembekhoza, while the rest were sent to the commissioner of the KwaZulu Police, General Jac Buchner.

'But Inkatha wanted the real thing, and we started supplying them with AKs.
Van Rensburg knew about this. We also started providing them with explosives and landmines. At one stage, Inkatha used their ammunition too quickly because they shot on full automatic, and we had to convert the weapons into semi-automatic so that they could fire single shots only and save ammunition. The Zulus were very unhappy about this," De Kock said.

The Vlakplas commander provided explosives to Khoza and showed him how to manufacture home-made bombs from empty ice-cream buckets. They became known as 'bucket bombs'.

Van Heerden became the middle man between Khoza and De Kock, who gave him a scrambler to put on his phone whenever they made arrangements for the delivery of weapons. De Kock also gave Van Heerden a police radio to monitor police movements so that he could inform Khoza about police raids on hostels and road blocks. Van Heerden drew up maps of ANC strongholds and areas controlled by them and Vlakplas paid for the transport of Inkatha supporters between Ulundi and Johannesburg. The funds came from a special slush fund.

In September 1990, Themba Khoza was arrested at a road block with weapons in the boot of his car and was detained. Next day, De Kock and Nortje visited him in jail in Vereeniging, and according to De Kock, Nick van Rensburg authorised De Kock to pay his bail of R10 000. Nortje had to arrange with a friend from ballistics to remove and replace some of the working parts of the rifle so that the weapon could not be connected to acts of violence. Khoza was later acquitted on the charge of illegal possession of firearms because of a lack of evidence.

Nortje said the weapons for Inkatha were initially stored at Special Forces headquarters in Pretoria, but during the Goldstone investigation into military intelligence, De Kock and Snor Vermeulen had to find another storage facility. The weapons were transported by truck to an arms manufacturer, Mechem, where they were stored in two containers. Heavy weapons like mortars, bombs and RPG rocket launchers were stored at the police college near Pretoria.

Vlakplas registered Themba Khoza, Humphrey Ndlovu, Victor Ndlovu, James Ndlovu and three other Inkatha officials as informants and paid them between R800 and R1 000 per month. Khoza and Humphrey Ndlovu were given cars. Van Heerden said he was never compensated for his services, but De Kock did give him money for groceries as the Inkatha officials always ate at his home.

Van Heerden said he also had to arrange a meeting between De Kock and KwaZulu minister Celani Mthethwa, who was registered as an informant and who became good friends with De Kock. Mthethwa wanted weapons to distribute to Inkatha impi in the Port Shepstone area of southern Natal.

Nortje and De Kock drove to Ulundi on two occasions on which they delivered AK-47s, ammunition and hand grenades to Mthethwa's ministerial house. De Kock said he also handed him ANC documents on how to set up self-defence units. Van Heerden said Mthethwa twice came to Johannesburg to fetch AK-47s and ammunition which he transported back to Ulundi in his black ministerial car. This was safe because he was never stopped or searched.

De Kock said that Vlakplas was not the only police unit distributing weapons to Inkatha. He testified that Nick van Rensburg told him one day that he had to submit a false claim for R20 000 because the commissioner wanted to buy spears for Inkatha. He said he also received a 'weapons shopping list' from General Bertus Steyn in Natal.

De Kock said he stopped dealing with Khoza when he was warned that the Inkatha leader was drawing two salaries from the security forces: one from Vlakplas and the other from the National Intelligence Service, whom he was also working for. The relationship between them then soured.

The idea of a 'third force' was a brilliant stroke: to use Inkatha as a bulwark against the United Democratic Front and ANC by building up the organisation as a counter-revolutionary force. Its impi would be organised into death squads by training, arming and supporting them. This would allow the architects of this evil plan to foment 'black-on-black' violence, yet shrug their shoulders and tell the world that blacks were simply not capable of ruling.

The idea of forming a 'third force' goes back to the mid-1980s when the struggle against apartheid reached unprecedented levels. The state adopted equally drastic measures to counter these threats, which included the use of terrorism and guerrilla warfare.

According to the minutes of the State Security Council, the formation of a 'third force' was discussed at a meeting on May 12, 1986. 'The third force must be mobile with a well-trained capacity to effectively wipe out terrorists. It must be prepared to be unpopular and even feared, without marring the image of the Defence Force or the police. The security forces must work together in the setting up of the third force in order that those who undermine the state are countered with their own methods.'

FW de Klerk attended the State Security Council meeting, but denied that a third force was ever formed. During his submission to the TRC, he was asked: 'Would a reasonable person - a member of the security forces who is enjoined to use the strongest possible methods to combat the revolution - not interpret that this was said to authorise killings and assassinations?'

De Klerk: As far as I know, not having been directly involved then, there were at all times general rules and guidelines ... that we were not above the law. That was the ethos of our approach.

Truth Commissioner: For a member of the security forces, for a member of the Security Branch ... when that person is told: develop ways to effectively wipe out terrorists - use their own methods to do so. His reasonable interpretation, Mr De Klerk, is to use the methods he knows so well. No reasonable man cannot foresee that a man would interpret such statements to mean: you can kill, you can assassinate, you can bomb.
De Klerk: We tried to adhere to Christian norms and principles. That was the ethos under which I grew up and under which I served: firstly as an ordinary Member of Parliament, then as a minister and that was the ethos also in the cabinet under my presidency. I reject the implication that there was this almost immoral everything-goes-in-a-state-of-war. That was not the philosophy within which I lived, within which I operated and within which I served.

Two hundred Inkatha soldiers were recruited and secretly trained by Military Intelligence in the Caprivi in northern Namibia in 1986. The training became known as ‘Operation Marion’, a ‘third force’ that was armed, financed and directed by the SADF, although the top leadership of Inkatha also knew about the purpose and activities of the group.

The SADF masterminded the Caprivi training and controlled the trainees. After stirring up violence in Natal, the impis were bussed up to the Transvaal in 1990, and Eugene de Kock and the generals saw a golden opportunity to deliver a final blow against the ANC.

June 17, 1992, and in an obscure township 65 kilometres south of Johannesburg, one of the worst massacres in South Africa’s political history took place. Inkatha assailants, wearing red headbands and wielding axes, knives, spears and automatic weapons, slaughtered 45 men, women and children.8

Hours later, the world witnessed the image of a nine-year-old child impaled by a spear, and grief-stricken families and angry young comrades vowing revenge on the Inkatha inmates of the KwaMadala hostel from which the attack had originated.

Nelson Mandela said ‘I can no longer explain to our people why we want to talk to a regime which is murdering our people’. In a ferocious attack on FW de Klerk, he said that the Boipatong killings had been the work of ‘faceless murderers who worked closely with the government’. A few days later, the ANC withdrew from constitutional negotiations, plunging the country into a political crisis.

In his response, De Klerk defended the security forces, which he claimed were not involved in the massacre and which, he said, operated with impartiality. The Boipatong massacre happened a day after the ANC’s Soweto Day launch of a mass action campaign. The commissioner of police issued a statement declaring the first day of mass action to have passed off peacefully, but then the Minister of Law and Order, Hernus Kriel, put a cynical political spin on the massacre by blaming it on the ANC campaign. His spokesperson, Captain Craig Kotze, said ‘the political temperature had been pushed unacceptably high’ by the ANC campaign which had ‘created a climate making incidents such as these more easily happen’.

A few days after the massacre, De Klerk attempted to visit Boipatong, but was forced away by angry residents. The posters said it all: a picture of De Klerk, his eyes coloured in bright red like a devil’s, and the words: ‘How many more deaths? De Klerk GET OUT’.

The government’s insensitivity to township violence and its refusal to accept any responsibility for the carnage was reiterated by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Pik Botha, when he addressed a United Nations Security Council meeting a month after the Boipatong massacre and said that to ‘accuse the government of fostering violence was an insult’. He maintained that most of the violence was the result of ethnic and political conflict between ANC supporters and Inkatha.

The Goldstone Commission could find no direct evidence of police complicity in the attack, although it was told that all 13 hours of recordings of communications between the operations room of the South African Police internal stability unit and police officers on the day of the massacre had been accidentally erased. The commission heard from seven witnesses who testified that the police had assisted in the massacre.

I asked Eugene de Kock during one of my visits to him in prison whether he knew anything about the Boipatong massacre, but he denied that either he or any of his men were in any way involved.

It is possible that his weapons could have been used in the attack. The massacre took place at a time of increased weapons supply to Inkatha, most of which were distributed to hostel inmates.

According to Brood van Heerden, De Kock had always stressed that the weapons had to be handed to bona fide Inkatha members in the presence of indunas at the hostels.

Riaan Stander says that the Vlakplaas men were involved in the attack. ‘The night after Boipatong, or maybe it was a day or two days afterwards, I saw two of the members coming back, reporting back to Eugene, and at that stage they were wearing disguises and you could see that they did not look like normal policemen.’9

Stander says they said to him it had been a very successful operation as it was a ‘turning point’ in the war between Inkatha and the ANC.

A few days after the massacre, Corrie Goosen says, the Vlakplaas ‘boys’ had a braai at the brothel in Johannesburg. Members of the Directorate of Covert Collection of Military Intelligence were also present.10

‘We had a party there, and these things were discussed. De Kock and one of the guys of Military Intelligence, whom I only knew as Arthur, discussed Boipatong. They gave the weapons to Inkatha, but as I understood the whole thing, there was not supposed to have been a massacre. They only gave the weapons to Inkatha so that they could defend themselves. I heard De Kock saying that he was sorry that it had happened like that,’ says Goosen.

Arthur, I was told afterwards, was the pseudonym for a former Rhodesian called Geoff Price. A former member of the Rhodesian security services and a director of the Zimbabwean Central Intelligence Organisation, he had come to South Africa at the end of 1981 and had joined the security police before becoming a member of the Directorate of Covert Collection.

Goosen, of course, is not a shining example of uprightness and honesty, while
Stand is vague about his knowledge of De Kock’s complicity in the Boipatong massacre.

It is impossible to determine how many people have died from bullets fired from Eugene de Kock’s guns or how many houses and people were blown apart by his hand grenades and bombs, but his arming of Inkatha may be the greatest legacy left behind by his command of the police counter-insurgency unit at Vlakplaas.

De Kock, his comrades-in-arms and the generals brought South Africa to the brink of an abyss, during the time he was ostensibly responsible for investigating and infiltrating illegal arms routes and arresting arms smugglers.

Brood van Heerden said De Kock never wanted to become involved in train violence, but after several train incidents, Victor Ndlovu and Themba Khoza would say to the Vlakplaas men: ‘We hit them again.’ There is little doubt that De Kock’s weapons must have found their way onto the trains.

Amongst the victims of third force henchman like Eugene de Kock are those within his own ranks: dedicated and upright policemen who battled to find the weapons and to stop the carnage. One such man is Captain Thys du Plessis, the former commander of a Soweto mobile train unit. For several years, he tried in vain to stop the senseless killings on the trains, search the wagons and disarm commuters. He failed, and one day in July 1993, he collapsed. Today he is still a nervous wreck and he will never lead a normal life again.11

This is how Du Plessis describes his collapse: ‘That Sunday, I said to my wife that things were getting too much and I couldn’t handle it any more. She asked me what was wrong, and I said to her I was going “off my trolley”. I would take my fire arm and start threatening people. Everything became blurred and the next moment, I woke up in hospital. I sat there and cried like a baby.’

He was diagnosed as suffering from severe depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. His psychologist, Dr. Nicky Swart, says: ‘He suffers from extreme, catastrophic stress which broke him down emotionally. He will never be able to work as a policeman again. I think he may at some stage be able to do a few small things that interest him, something like a vegetable garden, but we must remember that the smallest thing is going to set him off again.’12

When I met Thys du Plessis shortly after he was forced to take early retirement on medical grounds, he said: ‘I often think I should take a pistol and get rid of this problem. But then I think of my family and try to come to terms with what I am. My wife told the children that although their father looks healthy from the outside, he is in fact a very sick man. When I feel this monster building up inside me, I have to warn them to get away. I’m still scared I’m going to hurt them.’

De Kock continued to supply weapons to Inkatha long after he had left the police force in April 1993. He also became involved in training Inkatha impi near the Umfolozi game reserve in Natal.

In October 1993, six KwaZulu administration trucks were loaded by De Kock with arms, explosives and ammunition and driven to an Inkatha base in Natal. De Kock said Inkatha member Phillip Powell asked him for the arms and ammunition in order to train Inkatha self-protection units.

‘He once told me with tears in his eyes that he was tired walking amongst the bodies of his people which were mowed down by the ANC. This was only about defence, because they were being destroyed by the ANC.’

The weapons were collected in two consignments. According to evidence produced in court, De Kock and former Vlakplaas operative Snorre Vermeulen collected four truckloads of ammunition and explosives from Mechem on October 1. By then De Kock had already left the police, but he was introduced to Martinus Gouws, who was in charge of the armory of Mechem, as a member of the force and he said that the police wanted the explosives for the training of students. Gouws said Mechem had had an enormous amount of arms and ammunition in its armory and had decided to get rid of the excess.

De Kock claimed that the weapons were to be used for self-defence and training, but this is a list of the arms that were loaded at Mechem: 700 anti-tank mines, 1 000 hand grenades, 1 400 rifle grenades, 14 400 AK-47 rounds, 15 191 R-1 rounds, 182 RPG-7 rockets, 120 mortars, 1 428 rifle grenades, 125 kilograms of explosives, 98 anti-personnel mines and RPG rocket launchers.

Three weeks later, De Kock collected another 395 kilograms of explosives, 188 mortars, 288 hand grenades, 7 500 rounds of ammunition and 200 shrapnel mines from Mechem, also destined for Natal.

De Kock: This was about the survival of Inkatha. They (the ANC) were busy exterminating Inkatha on the East Rand and in parts of KwaZulu, and it was decided to form self-defence units so that they could protect their own people.

Ackermann: How do you defend yourself with a rocket launcher?

De Kock: It’s an anti-tank weapon, but is also suitable for taking the enemy out when he is hiding behind ant hills, big trees and rocks.

Ackermann: Tell us more about the mortars.

De Kock: It is very good for defending a kraal [traditional village].

Ackermann: How do you defend your kraal with a mortar?

De Kock: Well, depending on where your enemy is, if they are on a hill or a rock formation, you can take them out with a mortar.

Ackermann: I have a note here that this mortar has a range of up to three kilometres?

De Kock: That is correct.

Ackermann: And your 81 millimetre mortar?

De Kock: It has a range of between five and six kilometres. I have walked into many ambushes and if it wasn’t for mortars, we wouldn’t have survived without injuries.

Ackermann: We also heard about land mines, I think it was Claymore mines?
De Kock: they contain a thousand pieces of shrapnel ... and are very effective for defending a base against attacking troops. They have a terrible effect on troops storming you.

Phillip Powell asked De Kock to assist him in training Inkatha self-defence units (SDUs) at their secret Mlaba camp near the Umfolozi game reserve, but De Kock said when he arrived there that conditions were atrocious. There were virtually no sanitary services, or running water and some of the people were sick.

He told Powell that he couldn’t help him unless conditions were improved. Two weeks later, Powell called him again and said facilities had been upgraded.

One of the Inkatha commanders in the camp was a man with a most remarkable story: Daluxolo Wordsworth Luthuli, grandson of Chief Albert Luthuli, former President General of the ANC and Nobel Peace Prize laureate.

Following in the footsteps of his legendary grandfather, Daluxolo Luthuli went into exile in 1963 to join the ANC’s armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe. He received military training in the Luthuli camp in Tanzania and Odessa in the Soviet Union. He was arrested upon his return to South Africa in 1967 and sentenced to ten years’ imprisonment, which he spent on Robben Island in the company of Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and the rest of the incarcerated ANC leadership.\(^{13}\)

After his release from the island, he joined Inkatha, although he still secretly worked for the ANC and had several meetings with Umkhonto we Sizwe Chief-of-Staff Chris Hani in Lesotho. But by the middle 1980s, he had been drawn into the Natal conflict and found himself increasingly supporting Inkatha. Luthuli eventually became commander of Inkatha’s armed wing and was amongst the 200 impis who were secretly trained by Military Intelligence in the Caprivi.

One of the first attacks masterminded by Luthuli and his Military Intelligence handlers and carried out by a team of Caprivi trainees was the massacre of 13 people, mostly women and children, at KwaMakhuta (Natal) in January 1987.

‘There were literally hundreds of incidents ... so many that they have blurred my memory. I accept that under my control and direction many lives were lost, many people sustained injuries, hundreds of houses were destroyed or damaged and a huge quantity of personal property was lost.’

Luthuli said he was instructed by the Inkatha leadership in 1993 to train self-protection units for Inkatha at the Mlaba camp. ‘The central committee had decided that this was a system whereby the armed wing of Inkatha could be increased.’

He said Powell appointed six instructors, two white men and four black men, to assist in the training. ‘When these instructors arrived they were accompanied by a third white man who wore thick glasses. He was thick-set in build and quite tall ... Problems arose from the outset. My men were against white involvement ... and did not trust their set-up. Many groups came and went from this camp and they numbered 400 to 600 on each occasion. I last heard that there were 8 000 trained SDUs,’ Luthuli said in an affidavit, dated March 1995.

All of Eugene de Kock’s arsenal did not find its way to Inkatha. Long before he had left the police on early retirement, he tried to set himself up as an arms dealer and flew around the world trying to enter the armaments business.

He admitted in court that shortly after the exposure of Vlakplaas at the end of 1989, he decided to become an arms dealer and subsequently flew to eastern and western Europe, where he made contact with dealers in Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Germany and Austria. He imported a hundred Glock pistols and said he was on the verge of clinching a deal to sell South African-manufactured G-5 cannons to Serbia when the United Nations slammed an arms embargo on the Serbs.

It was illegal for any policeman to run a private business venture, especially one that was involved in trading in arms, without the permission of the commissioner of police.

In January 1993, more than three months before De Kock left the force, Ferdi Barnard told me that the Vlakplaas commander had become a gun runner and had registered a company by the name of ‘Honeybadger Arms and Ammunition’. On business cards carried by De Kock, Honeybadger – which had the same emblem as the Vlakplaas unit – said it dealt in ‘all arms, local and international’. De Kock frequently flew overseas under the name of ‘Lourens de Wet’,\(^{14}\)

I was also told that some of South Africa’s most notorious security forces members, past and present, had banded together in a secret, well-trained and well-armed organisation called the ‘Badger Unit’. Its members included former operatives of the CCB, Military Intelligence and the security police. Badger was said to be involved in arms smuggling and providing arms to Inkatha.\(^{15}\)

The police said the revelations, published in The Star newspaper, were ‘devoid of all truth’ and that Honeybadger was a legitimate police operation created to combat illegal gun-smuggling and that the existence of the Badger Unit would be investigated. It probably never was.

De Kock continued to smuggle arms to Inkatha, offer weapons to arms dealers and arm himself and his men with machine guns, bombs and hand grenades as they awaited the Armageddon they predicted would accompany the coming of the new South Africa.

Democracy meant political freedom for millions of black South Africans, but for Eugene de Kock, the beginning of a life behind bars.
The trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, but they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal ... this normality was much more terrifying than all the atrocities put together.

Hannah Arendt
_Eichmann in Jerusalem_
A report on the banality of evil.

**INTO THE HEART OF DARKNESS**

Confessions of Apartheid's Assassins

Jacques Pauw

JONATHAN BALL PUBLISHERS · JOHANNESBURG