

An Insider's Account of the South African Security Forces' Role in the Ivory Trade

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The war, or wars, which affected southern Africa from the mid-1960s to the 1990s had a major impact on Africa's elephant population and on the ivory trade, quite apart from their effect on millions of people.

Since the late 1980s, evidence has gradually emerged that large-scale poaching and ivory trading has been more than just an individual reaction to circumstances of poverty and militarisation. Elements of several of the many armies which have taken the field in Mozambique, Angola, Zimbabwe and elsewhere have hunted elephant in an organised manner and have made official (though clandestine) arrangements for marketing ivory. It has become apparent that the most important element in a sub-continental reorganisation of the ivory trade during much of this period was the South African Defence Force (SADF) and most notably the networks organised by its Chief of Staff (Intelligence). These networks encouraged their allies in the *Resistência Nacional Moçambicana* (RENAMO), the *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* (UNITA) and the Rhodesian Selous Scouts to obtain and trade ivory, partly as a means of paying for South African aid in weapons and other services, and partly as a technique of destabilisation in itself (Ellis 1994:53-69).

South Africa's own security forces became directly involved in these wars in 1967-8, after *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (the armed wing of the African National Congress of South Africa) had launched the Wankie campaign in north-west Rhodesia together with the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). South Africa sent a contingent of policemen to fight in Rhodesia and to gain direct experience of counter-insurgency. Rhodesia was to be the training-ground of many later counter-insurgency specialists, including the officers who set up *koevoet* (a counter-insurgency unit) in Namibia and some who were later to organise the police death-squads based at Vlakplaas (Pauw 1991:76, 113). The SADF maintained liaison officers with Portuguese armed forces in Angola and Mozambique (Van de Waals 1993:208-12).² There is some evidence that, from the early or mid-1970s, elements of the South African government and its security forces began actively to encourage their allies in Rhodesia, Mozambique and Angola to acquire ivory and to sell it through South Africa. This seems to have been less an individual enterprise than a systematic attempt to turn Johannesburg into the centre of the wholesale ivory trade in southern Africa. Within a short time, the South African secret services had succeeded in establishing Johannesburg as the

hub of the strategically vital trade. The economies of southern and central Africa were — and still are — linked by long-distance trade-routes in high value commodities: not only ivory, but also rhino horn, mandrax, gems and currencies (Baynham 1992). Access to these trade networks gave South African secret servants an entrée to valuable sources of information as well as of money.

For most of the period, little was known of South Africa's interest in the ivory trade and related smuggling activities outside a very small circle. But there were sufficient rumours in circulation for the SADF to hold an official inquiry in 1988, which came to the unsurprising conclusion that allegations that the SADF was implicated in the ivory trade were baseless.

The first really authoritative evidence that the SADF was indeed deeply implicated in the ivory trade in Angola especially came from one of South Africa's most experienced soldiers, Colonel Jan Breytenbach. Breytenbach joined the South African Army in 1950, and five years later left to join the Fleet Air Arm of the British Royal Navy, with which he took part in the 1956 Suez landings. In 1961 he rejoined the South African Army and became a paratrooper, eventually being posted to work with Portuguese colonial forces in Angola. In 1972 he became one of the founding officers of South African Special Forces, being the first commander of 1 Reconnaissance Commando. In 1975 he went on to form and become the first Officer Commanding 32 'Buffalo' Battalion, an auxiliary unit employing largely South African officers and Angolan troopers, specialising in service in Angola. He also founded and commanded 44 Parachute Brigade. He retired from the SADF in 1987, but has continued to work in various security jobs.³

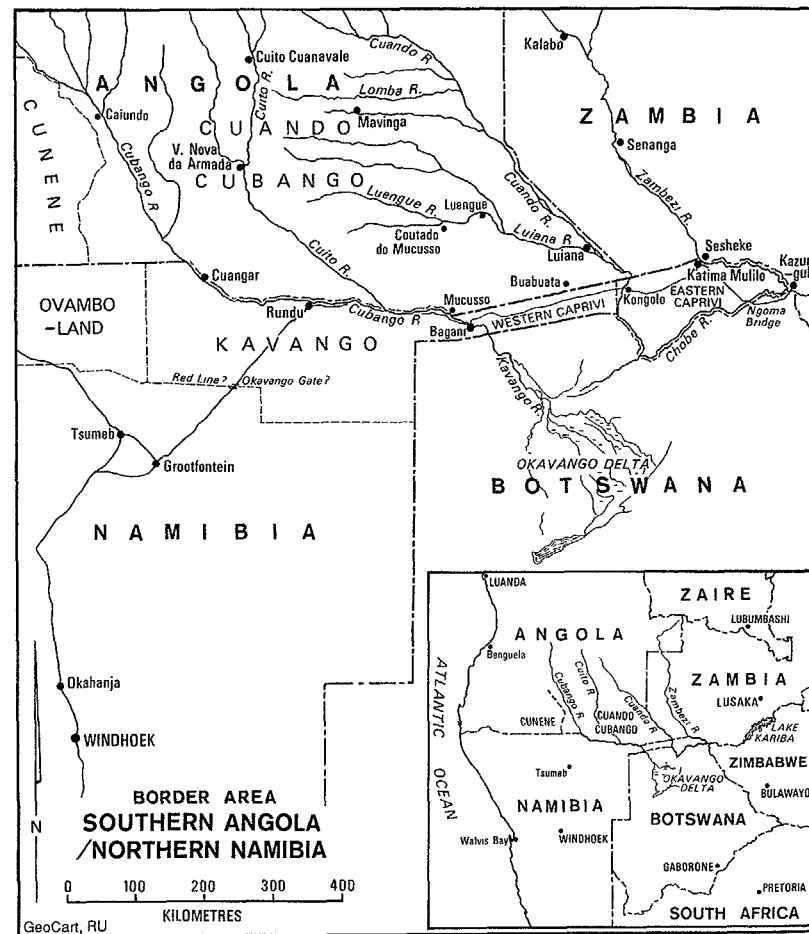
From 1970, but especially after the first South African invasion of Angola in 1975, Breytenbach spent a great deal of time on active service in southern Angola and came to know the region intimately. In November 1989 he caused considerable publicity in South Africa by giving an interview to the country's biggest-selling newspaper in which he accused the Angolan organisation UNITA of having smuggled ivory on a huge scale for many years, in complicity with officers of the SADF (Potgieter 1989). The interview reproduced below, carried out shortly afterwards, gives considerably more detail of these allegations. The interview was conducted with Colonel Jan Breytenbach at his home in the Cape Province on 8 December 1989. The interviewer was Ros Reeve (RR), who was working on behalf of the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA). Col. Breytenbach gave his unreserved permission for the EIA to use the contents of the interview in any way it wished, and the EIA kindly agreed to its being published here. We have edited the interview principally to avoid infelicities of speech. Where lengthy passages have been omitted, they have been indicated thus: (...). Otherwise, the interview record is presented as nearly as possible verbatim, in the belief that it constitutes a valuable primary source concerning the organisation of the ivory trade in southern Africa.

Interview with Col. Breytenbach

RR: Can you describe what the situation [in Cuando Cubango] was like when you were first posted to the area?

JB: It was a military operation. Cuando Cubango was being used by SWAPO [South-West African People's Organisation] as infiltration from Zambia into Cuando Cubango, then north into Cunene Province and from there into Ovambo land.

Figure 1: Map of Southern Angola/Northern Namibia



RR: And this was in '70?

JB: Nineteen-seventy. The idea was to find the possible routes. If you find the possible routes then you have to find where the water holes are, because obviously they move from water hole to water hole when they are away from the rivers. Now it was the first time I came into contact with the game situation in the Cuando Cubango. We covered the whole south eastern part of the Cuando Cubango below the Luiana River, as far as the Cuito River in the west and the Cubango River in the south and the South West African/Angolan 'cut-line'.

RR: Were you commanding one of the battalions then?

JB: I was in command of Special Forces in those days. My Special Forces troops were doing the job. We were covering this whole area for water holes, including the Western Caprivi. Now in this area we found huge concentrations of game, particularly along the Luiana River and then along the Luengue River, in the Cuito and then along the Cuando. We were doing this in August/September, which is the end of the dry season. The pans would be dried up, so all the animals, the elephants particularly, would flock to the rivers, where they could get water. And there were literally thousands and thousands and thousands of elephants in this area alone, apart from other game, like sables and buffalo and so forth. I often said in those days that in that terrain there was more game than you could ever hope to find in the Kruger National Park. It was prolific, really it was, absolutely prolific.

The Portuguese had hunting concessions there. They had some clients, you know Americans, hunting there, but they only came in for a very short period of time, because the whole place was covered in tsetse fly, so people didn't like it very much.

Over the next number of years I worked in this area against SWAPO. I worked with the Portuguese, not against FAPLA [*Forças Armadas Populares de Libertação de Angola*] so much, but against SWAPO. They had a garrison at Coutado do Mucusso. They had one at Luiana, and they had a small platoon at Luengue. We worked with these people, so I came here fairly often, and the game was prolific. The Portuguese did hunt for the table, but there was no other sort of poaching or big scale hunting going on at all.

The whole area in those days was completely devoid of any infrastructure. In fact, Luiana was just a small little base, a few mud huts and so on. At Coutado do Mucusso there were a few huts and even these had disappeared. All you find there nowadays is just a burnt out truck. At Luengue there were a few huts and that was it. I mean these are not towns as they are marked on the map. Just little dots on the map.

I worked with Bushmen trackers. They knew the area very well. They also knew about the game, and they knew what was going on. Throughout the seventies until 1976 I was in there fairly frequently by virtue of my military operations.

RR: And you were based in the Western Caprivi?

JB: The Special Forces had a training camp at a place called Fort Doppies in the Western Caprivi. And I was in 32 Battalion. We established a base on the Cubango River. I left the Special Forces in about '75, and then from '75 to '76 I was actually working with 32 Battalion. And then we worked from the Cubango River, still in the Western Caprivi. I also deployed troops, in those years, up as far as Vila Nova da Armada. I had troops by Xivonga. I had troops in Mavinga, and I had troops up near Caiundo. In all these places, there was an abundance of game, except when you got closer to the Cubango River, opposite Kavango.

Then I left for a while. I went to 44 Parachute Brigade. So I wasn't too much involved in this part of the world again. And I came back again in 1982, I think it was. I went back into the Western Caprivi. I started hearing rumours about the depletion of the game up here. When I was in the Western Caprivi, I established a base on the Cuando River where I trained people in guerrilla warfare. I was then working for Chief of Staff (Intelligence). We were working in support of UNITA. I got involved with training of UNITA towards 1984. I started training UNITA at my place.

Frama Inter-Trading Company

Because I was working with UNITA, and because I was involved in the operations supporting UNITA, I got to know about many of the inside things that were going on in CSI — Chief of Staff (Intelligence) — who I was working for. I knew, for instance, that they started up a Frama organisation, and I knew that they were cutting teak in Angola for export, so they could make money with it. I don't know what they were doing with the money because we were supplying them with everything, with weapons, ammunition, military uniforms, even with rations when they went fighting, with fuel, transport, lorries. All the logistical back-up for a UNITA army was supplied by us, which they did not have to pay for. Hundreds of millions of rands — and that I know as a fact — were spent every year on supporting UNITA. They didn't have to pay the South Africans for providing them. So where the money went to that they got for the teak I don't know. But they started the Frama organisation which started running teak out of Angola. And amongst others they had a saw mill at a place called Buabuata.

RR: When did Frama start up, about?

JB: I wasn't there when it started up, but I would say it started up in 1980 or late 1970s — '78, '79 — at that time. But when I started with CSI, Frama already existed. And the people who were running Frama were then a chap, name of Lopes, 'Lobbs', and a chap by the name of Maia. Lobbs was in Rundu. Maia was in Johannesburg.⁴

We normally called him 'Lobbs', you see. But lots of other people call him Lopes. I knew Lopes quite well. He lived in Angola. At the time when Angola collapsed

he came out with nothing, he and his family. But then he was employed by CSI, first as a pilot. We had an aircraft, and he used to fly me around when I was still in 32 Battalion, used to fly me around inside Angola to go and talk to Savimbi (UNITA's leader) and so on, with his little aeroplane. He's quite a good pilot, but then he got heart problems and he stopped flying. But he was then working for CSI for a salary.

I'm now talking about '76/'77. So after I left 32 Battalion in '77, they must have started up this Frama thing. Perhaps towards the end of '79 or thereabouts. Anyway, Lobbs had this saw mill in Buabuata, and also one in Rundu I believe. I never saw the one in Rundu, but I saw the one in Buabuata, at which they were cutting teak. And they were running the stuff out in trucks which were not supposed to be searched. The SAP [South African Police] were not allowed to search them, the South African Army were not allowed to search them, nobody was allowed to search them.

If you go south from the Cubango, you get to the Okavango Gate, which is the so-called 'red line'. There you've got a police post and a veterinarian services post. There you are searched. Police. Obviously for whatever they want. Smuggling with marijuana or whatever, or diamonds, or ivory. And the veterinarian people search your vehicle for meat, because the 'red line' forms the boundary between the so-called 'foot-and-mouth' areas and the 'non foot-and mouth' areas. So your vehicle had to be stopped and searched. But these guys, they all had a card, so they could go through.

Well, I knew about the teak thing. It was open knowledge, official. But then I began to pick up rumours about them also taking out ivory. Being a clandestine thing, it was therefore quite easy to put anything in that you wanted to put in, like ivory, like diamonds, or even marijuana, because nobody's searching you along the way. You can go all the way to South Africa without being searched. It's an easy way of getting the stuff through.

So that is what I thought initially: that they are making use of this channel. But then I began to get other vibes as well from certain officers who worked for CSI. I won't mention this one particular officer's name because otherwise he may get victimised. But this man came to me. In Rundu, CSI had a big base, supporting UNITA. And Frama was also in Rundu, although not next door to it, but fairly close to it. He came back from an operation in Angola, and he wanted to replenish his ammunition. He walked into the CSI stores — not Frama stores, CSI stores — to an ammunition box, to take out ammunition, opened the box and there were tusks inside. So then he went to another one, and more tusks, and more tusks, and more tusks, and more tusks. He was then a young captain. Then he went to his senior, who was a commandant, a lieutenant-colonel, and he said to him 'Sir, are you aware of the fact that there are hundreds of boxes of ivory in our store? Because I went in there to go and get ammunition and all I could find was ivory. I couldn't find any ammunition, just ivory'. So this chap hauled him over the coals

and said 'You'd better shut up. It's got nothing to do with you. If you put your nose into our affairs then somebody will sort you out'. This is a man working for CSI.

Shortly thereafter he was posted back to South Africa as suffering from hallucinations because he's got battle fatigue. Anyway this stuff was then sent south, flown out in boxes as dental equipment — which it probably was, dental equipment, you see — but this time it went out. I don't know where it was flown to. It was flown out by military transport, of course. I'm convinced that the air force didn't know what they were flying out. Because I can tell you this: that the air force and the army was never involved. They wouldn't allow themselves to get involved in ivory smuggling. I mean especially the army, guys on the ground who operate in the bush. Because we have lived in the bush all our lives, we learn to get a respect for the bush and to have a love for the bush and the animals in it. (...) Same with the air force. They don't do it. But these guys I'm talking about now are basically people who are not fighting soldiers. It's a civvie who's put on a uniform.

RR: Chief of Staff (Intelligence), CSI?

JB: Yes. Most of them are civilians, you see. They get a degree, and so on, and he joins the Defence Force and he puts on a uniform and now he's a colonel, or he's a major, or he's a brigadier, or he's a corporal, or whatever. But now he's got status. But he's not a fighter.

Right, so he reported this to me. Then he was off to South Africa. He did a few courses there. Then he was posted back to Rundu, but not to CSI, to the army. Because the army had their headquarters there as well, called Sector Two Zero, the army headquarters. They had nothing to do with CSI. In fact, they were not even allowed to know what was going on with CSI, because CSI is Intelligence, and being Intelligence they are always secret. And when you are secret you can do all sorts of weird and wonderful things without anybody knowing what you are doing.

So he went to Sector Two Zero as intelligence officer in the army. The CSI, Chief of Staff (Intelligence), you could almost call like the GRU in the Russian Army.⁵ Then you get Military Intelligence. Every unit has got an intelligence officer who works with tactical intelligence. Now this chap came to Sector Two Zero to work with tactical intelligence, but because we were working against SWAPO he had these agents on the ground. And he reported to me that there are CSI people involved with smuggling — with *hunting* — elephants in the Western Caprivi.

RR: Where are we now, about? Mid-80s?

JB: We're talking about 1982/83, thereabouts. So, he went to this particular place on the western side of the Western Caprivi, near a place called Bagani, and he went to the suspect poacher, who was a Bushman. He found a rifle, a hunting rifle. And he found tusks, and he traced the rifle back to a particular officer who was working for CSI in Rundu, by the name of José d'Oliviera. Now, José

d'Oliviera is a former Portuguese from PIDE [the Portuguese Secret Police],⁶ from DGS [the successor to PIDE].⁷ And he also had an aeroplane. So after enquiries which he made, this Bushman was shooting elephants and providing [d'Oliveira] with tusks, but José was providing him with a rifle and the ammunition. And he would fly these tusks south to Windhoek with his own private aircraft. But José d'Oliviera also sat in the same compound where the other CSI people sat, who were supporting UNITA. José d'Oliviera also tried to get ammunition through the Defence Force, hunting ammunition, calibres which were fairly unobtainable. So anyway, he got the tusks, and he got the rifle, and he went to the police. He reported to the police in Windhoek and said 'Now look, this man is poaching, organising poaching in the Western Caprivi'. This was the story.

He was then a major, this fellow. So he went to see José d'Oliviera, and José d'Oliviera said 'This has got nothing to do with you. You don't know what you are doing. It is not poaching. But if you keep on putting your nose into this business, then somebody much higher up than I will sort you out, [someone] in the organisation will sort you out'. Anyway, so the case was squashed. The police were told from a higher authority — I don't know who it was — to drop the whole story. It wasn't prosecuted.

José d'Oliviera, shortly thereafter, disappeared. He went absent without leave, AWOL. The police were looking for him for another reason. But they couldn't find him. So then they went to CSI and asked: 'What has happened to José d'Oliviera? We want to talk to him'. [CSI] said they don't know. He went on leave and didn't come back. They don't know where he is. But he's gone. He's missing. And eventually I hear a story that José d'Oliviera resigned from the Defence Force. But, strangely enough, José d'Oliviera — by another source — is sitting in Lisbon manning an office for CSI, where he is forming a liaison office between another organisation and Chief of Staff (Intelligence). And he speaks directly to a brigadier who sits in CSI, regularly. So he's still in CSI.

RR: Not RENAMO?

JB: I'm not going to say anything else. But this is what I'm saying: he's talking to that organisation. Speaking to them as liaison officer. So there he is, he's still there. In other words, CSI says he doesn't exist any more, he's gone out, but he's still working for them. This comes from another source in East Africa.⁸

But these things began to add up. There was something strange going on. Then I heard that Lobbs had bought up a shop and service station in Katima Mulilo. Managing it was a chap by the name of Coimbra. Coimbra has got two sons. And they were both doing their National Service in the South African Army. Both stationed in Katima. Now, I got information that Coimbra was collecting ivory and diamonds from Zambia, and from elsewhere perhaps, which he would send through to Lobbs in Rundu. And then from there it would go south, along the Frama pipeline. I had a sergeant. This sergeant was very friendly with one of the

sons. He brought me information. They were also smuggling mandrax from Zambia.

So this sergeant of mine came back with information that they were smuggling, amongst others, mandrax, and diamonds, and rhino horn, and ivory. By that time I was appointed as a Nature Conservator by South West Africa Nature Conservation Department, so now I could do more. This was in 1985, thereabouts. So I decided I was now going to infiltrate. This sergeant of mine was very friendly with this one chap. He was obviously in a position where he could supply ivory, because we were in the Western Caprivi and we worked a lot in Angola. So he approached them on my instructions, and he went to this chap and he said 'Now look, you know I want to buy myself a BMW and I'm looking for money. But I can get my hands on ivory. If I bring you ivory are you happy to take it over?' He said 'By all means, but you are talking to the wrong chap. Actually I specialise in diamonds. My brother, he's the ivory man. You must talk to him'. So he spoke to the brother, and then they made arrangements that he would bring out ivory from Angola, which he would then let them have and then they would smuggle it down the pipeline, or whatever. Well, I knew about the pipeline, but they didn't say it was the pipeline.

Then they started pestering him — this was 1986 — pestering him because he wasn't providing the ivory. I was now trying to get permission to take ivory and to get him and this ivory into the pipeline so I could get behind it. In other words, perhaps we would have to shoot some elephants to get the ivory. The bureaucratic organisation was a bit difficult but I never really could get round to getting permission from Nature Conservation to shoot elephants for this purpose. Obviously I had to get their permission. I can't just go and shoot elephants. I'm breaking the law. So by the time I left nothing had happened.

Apart from that, subsequently I got from a police inspector, a detective inspector, the whole story. After I told him this, he confirmed that this was happening; that he was, in fact, investigating the whole thing, this police inspector from SWAPOL [South West African Police]; that this pipeline existed; that they were smuggling ivory out from Angola, and from Central Africa along this Frama pipeline.

At that stage I was still certain that the people at the top didn't know, although some may have known, like, for instance, José d'Oliviera. There may have been renegade types who were trying to enrich themselves. But I was still convinced that high up, they didn't know about this. In fact I informed my boss, because then I was working for CSI. I said to them 'These people are smuggling ivory, mandrax, diamonds and rhino horn. This Frama organisation of yours'. I reported it to a certain Colonel Snyman. But I was then about to retire from the Defence Force. I was already appointed then as Nature Conservator. They asked me whether I wanted the job of park warden for the Western Caprivi. Three weeks later they withdrew the appointment, on the advice of the Defence Force who said I would

interfere with their business. Although they knew before that time that I was going to apply for this job, and I had told them many times, and they had given me the job, they stopped it.

I wrote a letter to the Chief of the Defence Force himself, General Geldenhuys, to ask him what had they got against me, because I still didn't click what was going on. He wrote me a letter back. He said 'I've got no objection to you serving in the Western Caprivi as a Nature Conservator. I hereby wish you all the luck for the future and hope you and your wife enjoy yourselves in the Western Caprivi. Cheers. Much happiness for the future. General Geldenhuys. The Chief of the Defence Force'.

They reappointed me, and I flew regularly out from CSI to go and talk to these people, and they withdrew the appointment again, because I was getting now onto their track.

The fact of the matter is that they were hiding something. Until I spoke to this policeman, who told me the whole story, and he said 'What you've told me confirms what we know'. He said to me 'As a matter of fact I thought that you were one of them, otherwise I would have approached you long ago'. And then he said to me 'But you think it's only Frama and some people just above them', he said, 'but it goes very, very high up in the hierarchy'. He didn't tell me who it was. I didn't ask him because he was busy with investigation. I didn't want to know, because I mean you can spill the beans. I don't know whether he is still busy with the investigation. I don't know who he had in mind, but it seems to be fairly high up, at least in CSI channels, where this rotteness was. How high up I don't know. But he indicated to me that I would be surprised if I knew.

So this thing was used for smuggling ivory for UNITA. But now to get back to the UNITA side of it. Now, in 1986 I went back into this area again for the first time. They were going to fight a battle here at Cuito Cuanavale. For the first time since '76, basically, I went back into the Cuando Cubango. I drove from Mucusso all the way up to Coutado do Macusso to a place called Lacoao, which is not marked. It's a logistics base for UNITA. And then went along all the way up to Mavinga. From Mavinga across to the Lomba River. Then we went back to Mavinga, then we went across. We were going to blow a bridge at Masseca. Well, this operation didn't come off. We came all the way back again. I covered about 4,000km, backwards and forwards, driving around in this area, covering particularly this area between Mavinga and the Cuito River, and to the north of it. And of course also along the south. And in the whole area, where formerly there were thousands and thousands of elephants, I saw the spoor of five elephants. And that's all I saw. I didn't see anything else. I saw two reed buck on the Lomba River, and I saw a *sitatunga* somewhere. And that same night I was presented with the *sitatunga* which had been shot by my UNITA bodyguard and given to us to eat. I think it's the last *sitatunga* they shot in the whole of Angola, quite honestly. One of the rarest buck in the world.

Poaching by UNITA

Now, I must also give you some other examples of UNITA's nature conservation efforts. I think this operation was August/September, if I remember correctly 1986.⁹ (....) My base was just down the river from the 'cut line'. I had a base at Kongola. Over a period of about three months I found eight hippos, floating down the river, badly decomposed, which meant that they had been shot fairly high up the river. We had three herds of hippo between us and the 'cut line'. So they couldn't have been shot from those herds, because I counted them regularly and they were too close to us. So these things must have come from quite a way upstream. Now this river is very windy. It's got a lot of side streams and so the hippos are always in the side pools, very rarely in the mainstream. So, in other words, if you find eight floating down in the mainstream, a lot more must have been shot away from the mainstream who got stuck in the reeds, who couldn't get out into the main stream. So when I say eight, you can probably multiply that by about five at least if not more.

Now, recently with this Okahandja haul of ivory¹⁰ a lot of hippo tusks were found amongst the tusks. Hippo tusks are actually a better quality than ivory from an elephant because it's denser.

Anyway, one day my wife and I went upstream into Angola, and we went for a picnic. There are some nice islands there. And while we were having the picnic they were shooting over our heads from the UNITA side. So I got angry and I got into the boat and I drove up to where the shots were coming from. I drove into the side stream and there were these UNITA's, four of them. They were armed with AK47s and were shooting at crocodiles. And there was this big hippo floating on its back, legs in the air. I accused them of shooting this hippo, and they said no they didn't shoot the hippo. This thing, well, they just found it floating. It was full of bullet holes.

They use AK47s. It's an automatic rifle. You put it on automatic and you fire bursts. Look, UNITA has the worst shots in the world. I mean they can't hit the back side of a bus at five yards. So when they plough up the elephants they use automatic fire. They bring it down eventually. Just empty the magazine at it. No you can imagine if they shoot into a herd, a number of them are injured. They will get away, because the elephants don't stand around to be shot at.

Anyway so now, they were shooting at the crocodiles who were trying to feast on this hippo which they had shot. This was one of the hippos which was in a side pool, which had never floated downstream. And I was very angry about this and reported it to these people in Rundu. I said that 'Your bloody stupid people are shooting all the hippos, and I found so many hippos floating downstream'. And then they sent out a signal that it must be stopped, but only because I saw it spotted it. Otherwise they wouldn't have done anything about it.

Another indication that there was a lot of shooting going on north of the border was a wounded elephant that we found south of the border. We found several, qu

a number of them. Full of bullet holes. And I can't even tell you how often that you find them, you know, drag marks. Drag marks of an elephant dragging his leg, or something like that, coming from across the 'cut line'.

The elephant population started to go down. Initially, in 1982 when I arrived in the Caprivi, back from 44 Parachute Brigade, I got airborne with some nature conservators in their helicopter. One day we counted 5 000 elephants within about a 5km by 5km area. There were lots of herds, but that's the most I ever saw in my life. After that they started to go down. So these elephants obviously were under pressure in the Cuando Cubango and they were coming across. So the elephant population was building up in the Western Caprivi. And then that also started to go down. And the reason why it was going down was because the poaching started to be carried out inside the Western Caprivi Game Park.

In 1986 or '87 I flew in a chopper from the Cuando to a place near Fort Doppies and I counted in a 10sq km area, precisely 20 elephant carcasses which had been shot with the tusks taken out, inside the Western Caprivi. This was not any more in the Cuando Cubango, this was now spilling over into the Western Caprivi. I'm not saying that UNITA aren't in the Western Caprivi. What I'm saying is that the focus was beginning to shift to where there were still elephants left. These were elephants shot by people coming along the Cuando from the Western Caprivi, poachers paid by Coimbra and his sons, although not openly. So now the poachers were handing it over to an intermediary, a chap actually living near Kongola, and he would hand it over presumably to Coimbra, because Coimbra was actually the collecting point. Now you must remember one thing, that these people rarely would handle the ivory themselves. The ivory gets cashed and it gets taken out, and they just handle the money. I mean a guy like Lobbs handles the money. But all his subordinates, they handle all the stuff along the way. And then they will take it through to Rundu, by various means. One means I'm going to tell you about which they used, which I know about. I don't know what other means they used. But he had a red Land Cruiser, Coimbra. He was always fiddling around somewhere in the Western Caprivi. I found the spoor all over the place.

Now this red Land Cruiser was suspected of taking ivory through one night to Rundu. So he loaded the stuff, ostensibly, and left. But in front of him moved a military truck, and behind him moved another military truck. So it went through the Western Caprivi, it went through Bagani, of course. The Cubango River, there was a flow point there. I don't know whether they checked it there or not, but anyway, he went through there. The police knew he was coming and they set up a road block outside Rundu for him, because they wanted to catch him now with the ivory. It was Coimbra. The military truck in front went through the road block and went on. The red Land Cruiser came in, stopped and was searched. They found nothing in it. It went through. And then the last military truck also went through. You know a military truck wasn't searched, and it also went through.

It was only later that the police discovered that the driver of the first military truck was one of the sons of Coimbra, and the driver of the second military truck was the other son of Coimbra. So obviously they were sending the first military truck through to see whether it was going to be stopped and searched. It wasn't searched, so they were safe. The red Land Cruiser was searched because they were expecting it. And the third vehicle, which was the second military truck, was also not searched, and it had the ivory on board. So, that's one of the ways they did it. As I said, his sons were national servicemen in Katima Mulilo, and how they managed to get these trucks, I don't know. Maybe they volunteered to go and get some supplies or whatever, and they fitted in this whole trip with this Land Cruiser. They went along as well. They were acting as a red herring. And there were, they reckoned, something like 70-odd tusks on board.

A friend of mine, a commandant in 32 Battalion — his name was Jan [name unidentifiable] — he found in Rundu a cache of ivory with one of these FNLA troops, working for Lobbs. Thirty-Two Battalion consisted of former FNLA troops.¹¹ Now some of them were discharged eventually and worked for Lobbs. So he started to use some of them as poachers. And this man was found with, in his back yard, 82 tusks on information which Jan, a member of 32 Battalion, got. So he took this case to court and he wanted this man charged. And that case was squashed from higher up. Eighty-two tusks involved in this particular thing.

Another chap worked for Lobbs, and he also ran a construction company. They were constructing a road from Kongola in the Eastern Caprivi, south. This chap was Portuguese. In his kitchen, under the floor, they found 76 tusks. They took him to court. He got himself the best lawyer you could get, because you couldn't afford one from Windhoek, and he was charged for possession of ivory. He got a fine of R50 for 76 tusks, which he paid gladly, plus the lawyer's fee, and he also gave the lawyer a tip for several thousand rand, to show him how happy he was. And this guy didn't have the money. So this money must have come from Lobbs. I mean it couldn't have come from anybody else.

So this was the sort of thing that was going on the whole time. Every time something crops up, you know somebody's caught with ivory or somebody's caught with this, that or the other, then it gets squashed, or they pay a fine and that's the end of the story. No problem at all. I'm not saying that the magistrate was in their pay. I'm not saying that at all, because this was a very clever lawyer. Because in this particular case he pointed out that this guy couldn't be tried under the Nature Conservation Ordinance for South West Africa, because the Eastern Caprivi, up till 1976 I think it was, fell under the Transvaal. They were administering directly from Pretoria — the Eastern Caprivi — so therefore the Transvaal Nature Conservation laws were applicable to the Eastern Caprivi. And nobody had changed that by law or by another ordinance. It was still applicable.

Now, in the old days — 1910, 1940 — the fine for possession of illegal ivory was £25, you see. So he got away with a R50 fine. So there you are. This was the sort

of thing that was happening all the time. So you could never bring anybody to court. Guys who were caught in Tsumeb with ivory, and with dagga — marijuana — they had 170-odd tusks. They went to court and paid a fine. End of story. I think they also got six months, but six months is nothing. A fine is paid, six months and that's it, and they're out. And they didn't say a word in court. They didn't implicate anybody else.

Anyway, so over the years, in the Western Caprivi also, the elephants got less and less. And right at the end, when I was already out of the army, I managed to get one of my helicopter pals to fly up the 'cut line'. And I saw vehicle spoor coming in from the north, across the 'cut line', into the Western Caprivi, stopping in the Western Caprivi, and I found on that particular trip three elephant carcasses which had been shot from people coming in from the Cuando Cubango, in other words from UNITA territory. This was right at the end, before I left (...).

RR: What do you know about the pipeline and the routes out? How far can you follow it?

JB: I can follow it as far as Jo'burg, and that's it. Well, Pretoria, Johannesburg.

RR: Do you think there was just that one pipeline?

JB: No. I've got a suspicion that the same people took stuff straight from Zambia over the Kazungula ferry, through Botswana, because there were also Portuguese involved with that. Caught. And that was also a very small fine they got, by the way.

RR: That was Vieira.¹²

JB: Yes. And through the border post to South Africa. I've got a suspicion they are the same people. They were also running ivory from Eastern Caprivi, through the control point in Eastern Caprivi. It's just north of the Chobe River, and you go there through the Chobe National Park, through the check at Kazangula and then you go south again. A guy was caught in 1983, '84. He had a truck which he brought up full of vegetables to Katima Mulilo every week, selling the vegetables to the local people there and then going back empty, so-called empty. But he had a false bottom and they caught him with this ivory, something like 90-odd tusks in one consignment, coming from Katima Mulilo. Obviously from Coimbra. They were going also via Botswana (...).

Another incident I can tell you about, some time in 1987. The Director General of the Roads Department in South West Africa came to a brigadier in Windhoek headquarters. It's now SWA Territorial Force headquarters. And he said to him, 'Look these Frama trucks are coming through and nobody can stop them. I am convinced that they are carrying contraband (...). Have I got your permission to stop these trucks?' And he said 'Be my guest. Stop them.' He said 'Fine', because every time they show them a card they're not allowed to be stopped.

And he stopped a truck. Opened it. They found ivory. They wanted to take it to court in Windhoek. This brigadier was called in by the general and jumped upon from a dizzy height, and he said 'You must leave this alone. It's got nothing to do with you.' And the case never went to court. It was squashed.

RR: That was the only case you know of when Frama was actually stopped?

JB: Yes. I don't know how many trucks they searched before they got this one. That I don't know. But they found this truck. They couldn't have been too long because if they had been stopped and searched, somebody would have complained. They would have been told 'Stop searching these trucks'. So they must have got to a hot one fairly quickly.

RR: And you complained?

JB: Yes, I complained to this chap, and then they started to move me out. Then I complained to headquarters. I complained to the minister. And Rupert Lorimer¹³ raised it in parliament. And then they decided to have a Board of Inquiry.¹⁴ I eventually told the Board of Inquiry the same as I've told you now. I wasn't actually involved in stopping the trucks, or catching them at a road block or whatever, or seeing the guy with the ivory. I got all my information from other chaps, other people. I gave them the names of these people to go to, this Board of Inquiry. They didn't go to any one of them. Didn't speak to any of them. Going back, they said 'Well, there's not enough evidence to say that the Defence Force is smuggling, or smuggling ivory'. So it was just a cover-up job as far as I'm concerned. They didn't go to this major, for instance, who told me about José d'Oliviera. Neither did they go to the policemen I mentioned — two policemen involved with the inquiries.

RR: So it was a whitewash. Is that too strong?

JB: Well, they went through the motions that's all. And they did it in a few weeks, and that sort of full inquiry takes months (...).

RR: How many elephants do you think have died over the years since this started?

JB: Well, somebody said over a 100,000 elephants have been shot¹⁵ and I would agree with that.

Postscript

A spokesman for the South African Police in September 1993 stated that the police had taken statements from Col. Breytenbach concerning the ivory trade but found all of his evidence to be hearsay, and thus of negligible value. There was evidence that the ivory trade continued, although its exact extent was not clear. In October 1993, members of the South African Police Endangered Species Protection Unit seized 465 kilograms of ivory cubes in a container in Durban harbour.

The ivory was said to have been of Zambian and Zimbabwean origin (*The Citizen* 27 October 1993).

There remains considerable doubt as to the precise degree of involvement of the SADF in the ivory trade. At one point in the interview published above Col. Breytenbach suggests that ivory-smuggling was the work of a faction within the CSI only, using the facilities of the regular SADF ("I can tell you this: that the air force and the army were never involved"). At other times, he suggests that the smuggling networks might have gone wider. He also hints that knowledge of ivory-trafficking went very high up the military hierarchy. Certainly, knowledge of such a delicate matter as this would have been highly restricted for both operational and political reasons. And although our knowledge of exactly how the SADF's covert smuggling and destabilisation networks operated remains rather vague, the general impression given by Col. Breytenbach is consistent with the view that special operations units involved in clandestine work operated as much as possible on a 'need-to-know' basis, and made use of regular SADF facilities for logistical or similar purposes while avoiding the SADF line-management structure. For example, evidence presented in the inquest into the murder in June 1985 of Matthew Goniwe, a political activist, suggests that illegal operations were generally under full control and required approval at the very top of the command structure (Minnaar, Liebenberg and Schutte 1994:175-343). On the face of it, this would certainly have been the case for such a complex and long-lasting operation as the smuggling networks described by Col. Breytenbach.

Further clarification of this point would require extensive interviews with those concerned and access to official archives. At the time of writing, the South African government had instituted a judicial inquiry into the alleged smuggling of and illegal trade in ivory and rhinoceros horn chaired by Justice M.E. Kumbleben (*Government Gazette* No. 5408, Vol. 352, 7 October 1994).

Notes

1. We are grateful to the Environmental Investigation Agency and, especially, to Colonel Jan Breytenbach for permission to print this interview. Place-names in the text have been identified where possible, particularly by reference to the map in Jan Breytenbach, *They Live by the Sword*, Lemur Books, Alberton, 1990, and to Ministério das Colónias, *Atlas de Portugal Ultramarino*, Lisbon, 1948.
2. Van der Waals gives information on South African military assistance to the Portuguese colonial army in Angola before independence. Van der Waals was himself Vice-Consul at the South African Consulate-General in Luanda from 1970 to 1973, and later became a military liaison officer between the SADF and UNITA.
3. Biographical information from the dust-jacket of Jan Breytenbach, *They Live by the Sword*.
4. The two partners in Frama Inter-Trading (Pty) Ltd were José Lopes Francisco and Arlindo Manuel Maia. The company was wound up in 1986, although both men continued in business with new companies. See June Bearzi, 'Question Mark over Unita Supplier', *The Star*, Johannesburg, 19 March 1990. The name 'Frama' appears to be a compound of the first syllables of the respective last names, FRAnco and MAia.
5. *Glavnoye Razvedyvaatel'noye Upraveniye*, Soviet Military Intelligence.
6. *Policia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado*, the Portuguese secret police.

7. *Direcção Geral da Seguranca* (DGS). The successor to PIDE, which was disbanded in 1976. The DGS had an irregular military arm known as *Flechas*, which became the inspiration for later formation of the *Resistência Nacional Moçambicana*, RENAMO. See Van der Waals (1993:208) and Flower (1987:300-302).
8. cf. Vines, (1991:38) who mentions an SADF liaison officer in Lisbon named Rosa d'Oliveira. This appears to be the same person.
9. This refers to a UNITA/South African attack on Cuito Cuanavale in 1986, and not the more famous siege of the same place in 1988-9. See Bridgland (1990:17).
10. Brendan Seery, 'Ivory Gang Held: 980 Tusks Found', *Sunday Star*, Johannesburg, 17 September 1989. Detectives of the South West Africa Police arrested six men on 16 September 1989 at Okahandja, in Namibia. They confiscated 980 elephant tusks weighing over seven tonnes. It was said to be the biggest find of illegal ivory in history. At least two of the accused subsequently fled the country in defiance of bail restrictions.
11. *Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola*, the nationalist movement led by Holden Roberto. After the defeat of the FNLA by the MPLA in 1975, South Africa recruited some FN fighters and incorporated them into the 32 Buffalo Battalion, which Col. Breytenbach commanded.
12. De Wet Potgieter, 'Ivory Swoop Riddle of Mr Pong', *Sunday Times*, Johannesburg, 16 October 1988; June Bearzi, 'Ivory Mafia: Sinister Twist', *The Star*, Johannesburg, 29 October 1988. The owner of a truck seized at Kazungula border post on 10 October 1988 with 382 elephant tusks, 94 rhino horns and other contraband on board, Antonio Vieira of Johannesburg, was eventually fined R6 000.
13. Member of Parliament and spokesman on environmental affairs for the Progressive Federal Party, and, later, the Democratic Party.
14. cf. David Beresford, 'South Africa Checks Ivory Racket Claim', *The Guardian*, London, 14 September 1988.
15. An allegation made by Craig van Note of the environmental group Monitor in testimony to the US Congress in 1988. David Beresford, 'South Africa Checks Ivory Racket Claim'.

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