

## **Statement to the Commission of Inquiry into TRC Stopped Cases**

**Case Reference:** The Rietbok air crash, 13 March 1967

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This statement is submitted to THE JUDICIAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ALLEGATIONS REGARDING EFFORTS OR ATTEMPTS TO STOP THE INVESTIGATION OR PROSECUTION OF TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION CASES (TRC CASES INQUIRY) by Honourable Madam Justice Khampepe.

I wish to highlight this summary of information submitted by Johannes Bruwer to the TRC in 1998 about his father Professor Johannes Bruwer, one of the passengers of the Rietbok air crash in this claim of a stopped TRC case.

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## **PROFESSOR JOHANNES PETRUS VAN SCHALKWYK BRUWER (52)**

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## ABOUT (1967)

*Prof. BRUWER*

### 1. Personal

Also known as "Hannes Bruwer"

He was born on 23 September 1914 in Barrydale, the son of Abraham Petrus van Schalkwyk (Piet) BRUWER and Margritha Petronella Magdalena HAASBROEK.

He was the **acting chairman of the Broederbond** and vice-rector of the University of Port Elizabeth. He was enroute to Johannesburg, catching the connecting flight from East London. He was due to be picked up by his daughter Griet. He was going to Pretoria where he was going to be appointed as a **roving ambassador for African countries** based in Zambia.

His last residential address was 1 Avon, Surbiton Street, Port Elizabeth.

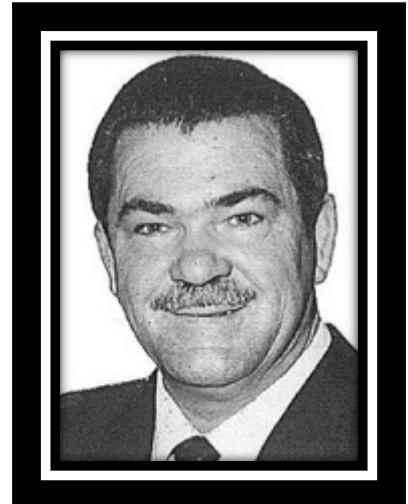
He married Cornelia Dorothea GUTTER in Nyanje, Zambia. Their four children, two of whom are married:

- Bertha Magrieta BRUWER
- Pieter Gutter BRUWER
- Margaritha (Griet) Petronella BRUWER (married LE ROUX)
- Johannes Petrus van Schalkwyk BRUWER (journalist)

In addition to the statement of my sister Griet Le Roux, I wish to summarise the information submitted to the TRC in 1998, together with the AFORAT (Associated Families of the Rietbok Aircraft Tragedy).

“I, Johannes Bruwer, was in Standard 10 at Pearson High School in Port Elizabeth, had **two secret service officers** [state security] coming to the school. I and some other pupils had dropped off my father at the airport, and so they asked me if we had seen my father boarding the plane with our own eyes. It was like they were making sure it was the right person who was dead.”

Below is all the information gathered that point to grave concerns about the circumstances of this air crash.



# JOHAN BRUWER LETTERS (SON) submitted to TRC 1998

## 1. Fresh evidence that the Rietbok wreck was found during the official investigation in 1967.

The newspaper *Die Burger* on Monday this week (January 27, 1998) reported that it was in possession of physical evidence that the precise location of the Rietbok wreck had been located in 1967.

The report (translated) states among others: "This evidence, in the form of scanning printouts of the seabed at Kayser Beach, near East London, is in sharp contrast to official declarations that the location of the wreckage was unknown and that the bodies of those on the plane were never found."

"The printouts, of which copies are in the possession of *Die Burger*, were made during the official search for the wreck immediately after the disaster by a private firm, **Underwater Technical Centre (UTC)**.

"The UTC used a metal detector to establish the location of the wreck. The location of the main wreckage is shown on the printouts, as well as a second piece of wreckage which could be a wing or the tail part of the plane.

■ "Family members who at the time attended the sitting of the commission of inquiry into the disaster, yesterday confirmed that the printouts were never offered as evidence, "*Die Burger*" reports.

The report quotes **Mr Emlyn Brown**, director of the National Underwater and Marine Agency (Numa) in Cape Town as saying he believed the wreck had indeed been found in 1967. Brown said:

"By studying the scanning printouts and other reports of the disaster I was able to pinpoint the location of the wreck precisely. The only thing that we do not know, is why everything was just covered up and kept quiet."

**According to Brown it would be easy to find the wreck with present day sonar technology and photograph it using remote control video cameras.**

## 2. Conflicting statements made to the media in 1967 about the recovery of bodies.

On March 14, 1967, the morning after the Rietbok disaster, it was widely reported – in newspapers as diverse as *Die Burger* and the *Rand Daily Mail* - that 21 bodies had already washed ashore, and that there was little hope that the other four people on board would be found alive. (According to *Die Vaderland* of March 15, 1967, this information was also broadcasted over the radio.) In a page one lead the Afrikaans paper *Dagbreek* added the Rietbok had been found in 70 feet of water.

However, by March 15, 1967, these initial reports were all denied by officials connected to the investigation into the disaster. According to *Die Vaderland*, the origin of "the rumour" - that 21 bodies had washed ashore - could not be established.

### 3. Conflicting statements made to family members in 1967 about the recovery of bodies.

Shortly after the disaster, at least two family members of victims were contacted and asked to come and identify the bodies.

■ My brother, Piet Bruwer of Piketberg, was telephoned during the night of March 13. He was told that several bodies and pieces of wreckage had washed ashore near Kayser's Beach and was asked to come and identify the body of my father, Professor JP van S Bruwer. My brother says he was told it would not be too distressing, as my father had not been too badly disfigured

My brother immediately left Piketberg, drove through the night by car and reached East London the next morning. At Kayser's Beach, which by that time had been cordoned off, he was asked to wait for a certain police officer. When the officer arrived, he told my brother it had all been a mistake, no bodies had been found.

My brother, who holds a private pilot's licence, then tried to hire a small plane to fly over the scene of the disaster. He was told this was not possible, as the airspace above the area had been sealed off on orders of the minister of defence, PW Botha.

My brother then tried to hire a boat to search the sea near the beach but ran into the same problem: it had been declared a no-go area by the minister of defence.

My brother was not even allowed to approach the beach to put a wreath on the water in memory of our father.

■ As you know, according to **Helen Brown**, the niece of one of the Rietbok disaster victims, Julie Venturas (21), Venturas' mother had a similar experience. She says the mother was contacted after the disaster - and was not only asked to come and identify Ventura's body but was given a detailed description of what she looked like and what she was wearing. However, a few hours later she received another phone call to say that it was all a mistake - no bodies had been found.

■ At least three bodies floating on the water, many pieces of wreckage and an oil slick were seen by personnel on board two navy minesweepers, the SAS Mosselbaai and the SAS Johannesburg, who searched the area immediately after the disaster. This was confirmed to reporters of *Die Burger* this month (January 1998) by the commanders of the two vessels, Captain Des Reaper (now retired in Simon's Town) and Captain David Forsight, currently commander of the naval unit SAS Port Rex in East London.

According to Captain Reaper, who was in overall command of the two vessels at the time, from the deck of the SAS Mosselbaai he "personally saw two bodies among the pieces of wreckage in the searchlight. The one was a man and the other a young woman with fair hair". He says because of the high sides of the mine sweeper they were unable to retrieve the bodies. "We later turned the vessel around to retrieve the bodies but could not find them."

Reaper says several pieces of floating wreckage were recovered - including "a piece of the pilot cabin to which the plane's licence number had been affixed".

If bodies and pieces of wreckage (including several windows kept afloat by air trapped between the double panes) were seen floating on the water at a known location, why could the Rietbok wreck not be found there by the investigators?

Every single piece of minor wreckage that washed ashore and was found by members of the public in the weeks after the disaster - none of which included crucial evidence such as

the plane's instrumentation panel, which could clarify the cause of the disaster - was confiscated by either police or security police members.

#### 4. Conflicting statements made in 1967 on the finding of the Rietbok wreck.

At least two newspapers, *Die Oosterlig* and the Afrikaans Sunday paper *Dagbreek*, reported in 1967 that they had reliable information that the wreck of the Rietbok had been found by divers - but that this was being kept secret by the Department of Transport.

■ On Wednesday, March 29, 1967, two weeks after the Rietbok disaster, *Die Oosterlig* (a now defunct sister paper of *Die Burger*) wrote an editorial slamming "the sudden veil of secrecy" surrounding the air disaster:

This is a brief translation: "The circumstances surrounding the Viscount Rietbok which fell into the sea near East London with 25 people on board, continue to be cloaked in secrecy.

"According to an investigation by a representative of *Die Oosterlig* the wreck has been found by divers, and it has also been established that it is still in one piece.

"We believe that our facts are correct. But on inquiry to the Department of Transport there has been no comment.

"This is an oracle like attitude of which the public can make no sense - except if they want to make the deduction from this that *Die Oosterlig*'s facts must, for lack of a firm denial, be correct.

"Why this nonsensical secrecy by the Department? No one has the right to disregard the public interest and the personal feelings of those intimately involved in the case of a disaster such as this that has befallen the Rietbok. It is injudicious and crude."

The editorial closes with the "friendly suggestion" that the Transport Department "lift the nonsensical suppression of news regarding the Rietbok"

■ According to a report in *Die Burger* of June 14, 1967, a reporter of the Afrikaans Sunday paper *Dagbreek en Sondagnuus* was threatened with prosecution by Judge CS Margo, chairman of the official inquiry into the Rietbok disaster, for reporting certain allegations concerning the wreck.

On June 4, 1967, the reporter, Johan Meiring, had claimed that a diver taking part in the official investigation had told him the wreck had been found in 70 feet of water and that it had broken into three pieces.

Judge Margo during the inquiry in June 1967 twice ordered Meiring to name the diver, but Meiring refused. However, he said he would name the diver in confidence. Judge Margo refused this offer and said Meiring should be prepared to go to jail as he was going to refer the matter to the Attorney General.

Meiring then said the diver had already testified before the commission.

Judge Margo then recalled Desmond Dorrington and Tony Bevan-Lean, members of the official search group, but they both denied having met Meiring or having contacted him. Dorrington also denied that he had ever seen the wreck.

These denials must be considered with the fact that soon after the official search for the wreck started, the divers concerned had been ordered not to speak to anyone, including the media.)

■ Incidentally, the initial team of navy divers assigned to search for the wreck was replaced by a team of divers from a private firm in Cape Town.

## 5. Sudden death of the head of the SAA's preliminary investigation into the Rietbok disaster.

- Immediately after the disaster on the night of March 13, 1967, South Africa Airways despatched its own investigating team to the scene. The team was headed by Captain Jimmy Boyd, a former pilot and well-known at the time as an amateur golfing champion. By March 17 he had reportedly finished his preliminary investigation and was due to fly back to Johannesburg that morning to report back to SAA. On a phone call to his wife that evening, Captain Boyd mentioned words to the effect of; '*Some shady things going on here.*'

However, that morning there was no reply to knocks on his hotel room door in East London.

When the door was opened, Capt. Boyd was found dead. It was presumed that he may have died in his sleep of a heart attack, but the circumstances around his death remained uncertain. The coincidence of him dying as he was about to report to the SAA is striking.

Newspaper reports at the time said there was uncertainty about who had taken over further investigations. Some reported that the Defence Force was handling it, while others mentioned officials of the security branch of the railway police. There was nothing to suggest that Capt. Boyd, an administrative official of the SAA, had shared any of his personal findings with any police or other parties involved in the search operation. As a former pilot he may have noticed something untoward regarding the crash fuelled by the unsettling, guarded manner the official investigation was being handled.

## 6. An unsubstantiated allegation recently made concerning the Rietbok disaster.

Minister, besides the above circumstances, which are a cause of deep concern to family members of the victims, several troubling allegations have surfaced in recent weeks in reaction to reports on investigations by Willem Breytenbach of *Die Burger* into the Rietbok incident.

They include the following allegation, which I am hesitant to mention as it was made by an anonymous caller and cannot be substantiated. I decided to bring it to your attention only because it seems to correlate with the description of the Rietbok wreckage allegedly shown on the scanning printout which is now reported to be in possession of *Die Burger*.

On January 13 this year, *Die Burger* carried this report (translated):

BLOEMFONTEIN - Somewhere in the Free State there is a retired man who says he occupied a "sensitive" post in the old dispensation and has in his possession not only information on the mysterious disappearance of the SAA passenger plane the Rietbok and its 25 passengers 30 years ago, but also a piece of the aeroplane.

The man, who yesterday phoned *Die Volksblad*, sister paper of *Die Burger*, said the plane was blown up by a faction in the former government as the family of Prof Johannes Bruwer, former Vice-rector of the University of Port Elizabeth, **suspect**

**"Bruwer was the target.** He was to become South Africa's first roving ambassador in Africa, but on the other hand he was regarded by some as a communist. He was such an important target that the lives of the other passengers were not taken into consideration. The man said from the nature of his work he had met Bruwer at the UPE twice before his death. "I was also there when they removed the plane from the sea in the Eastern Cape. It is a lie that the plane and passengers were not found.

"Divers brought a part of a wing to the surface. The divers and the piece of wing were quickly taken away. I was with a highly specialised aeroplane technician at the spot where the divers came out of the water.

"We later picked up a small aluminium plate with the aeroplane's details. I still have it."

The man said he later saw underwater photographs of the Viscount taken by divers. "The plane lay on its side. The fuselage was intact, and the rear part of the tail had broken off."

According to the man he was going to do nothing with the information and the aluminium plate. "I could write a book with this and other sensitive information on similar things. But it is too dangerous."

Bruwer's one son, Piet Bruwer, yesterday said. "Nothing prevents the man to make available information and plate he possesses anonymously. It could shed more light on the matter"

## 7. Further indications that evidence was suppressed during the initial inquiry in 1967 (tapes).

In my letter of 16 January 1998, I mentioned that, according to the last recorded message of the Rietbok pilot, Captain Gordon Lipawsky, he could see the lights of the runway at East London and would be coming in to land in a few minutes.

My brother, Piet Bruwer of Piketberg, had mentioned this message - which he personally listened to in the air-control tower at East London the day after the disaster - to me some time ago, but I did not realise its significance at the time. I have since discovered that the message he heard contradicts evidence led at the initial inquiry led by Judge CS Margo in 1967.

■ I have verified the following with my brother:

On March 11, the day after the Rietbok disaster, Piet Bruwer went to the air-control tower at East London and asked a staff member on duty whether he could listen to the tape of radio conversations with the Rietbok. The staff member was very sympathetic and allowed him to do so.

Though it is a long time ago, my brother recalls hearing Captain Lipawsky speaking quite clearly, in a normal tone of voice, and making no mention that there was anything wrong. Lipawsky said he could see the lights of the runway at East London airport. He also said goodbye to Port Elizabeth as he was now handing over radio control to East London. Then there was a sudden silence. Lipawsky's normal tone of voice had not changed before this silence - it was just suddenly cut off.

According to my brother, he returned to the air-control tower the next day to try to hire a light airplane and to file a flight plan for a search flight over the sealed-off area around Kayser's Beach where the Rietbok was said to have crashed. He was told by the staff member who had played the tape to him, that he had been berated by senior officials who had been very disturbed at the fact that he had allowed my brother to listen to the tape. My brother was also informed that no flights were allowed over the scene of the disaster.

- My brother says he found it strange that the radio message which he had heard quite clearly was not mentioned later at the official inquiry. According to him it was testified that that part of the tape was just filled with incoherent noise.
- According to reports on the proceedings of the Inquiry (*Die Burger* of June 13 and June 22, 1967), the senior air control officer at the East London airport at the time, Mr G.M. Lesley, testified that Capt. Lipawsky had contacted the air-control tower in East London only once during the flight from Port Elizabeth, when the Rietbok was flying over Port Alfred. Capt. Lipawsky had informed him that visibility was about three-quarters of a mile. Lesley further testified that at about 7.08 pm he had determined that the wind was growing stronger. He tried to contact Capt. Lipawsky to tell him that a landing would be almost impossible but could not reach the Rietbok over the radio.

This contradicts what Piet Bruwer heard on the tape.

- In a report on June 22, 1967, on the previous day's proceeding, *Die Burger* writes: "Earlier in the day, Mr PL Erasmus, who is leading evidence in the inquiry, handed in a sworn statement from the controller of air traffic in East London. In it, the controller, Mr Leslie Gordon, says the Rietbok only once contacted the airport - and not twice as he had earlier testified. The Rietbok was at a height of 4 000 feet when the airport was contacted.

"Mr Erasmus said a recording made at the airport in Port Elizabeth proved that the last contact with the plane had been made 25 minutes and 33 seconds after it had taken off."

## 8. Further indications that the wreck location was known immediately after the disaster.

Last week *Die Burger*, who with its sister papers *Beeld* and *Volksblad* have been running a series of reports on the Rietbok disaster, was contacted by **Mr Donald Card**, a former mayor of East London and a retired businessman.

Card said at the time of the Rietbok disaster he had been an officer in the East London branch of the security police.

According to a report in *Beeld* (11 February 1998), Card said: "During the night of March 13, 1967, shortly after the plane had fallen into the sea, I and three other members of the security branch were summoned by our commander, Colonel Koos Kruger, to his office.

Kruger said he had been informed by security headquarters in Pretoria that a foreign woman, who was a big communist, had been on board the Rietbok. We were ordered to

immediately go and patrol the shoreline near Kayser's Beach and to be on the look-out for this woman's light brown briefcase."

According to Card, he and his colleagues were told that security headquarters were interested in the documents in the briefcase.

"We were to treat it as highly confidential information and were not allowed to talk to anyone about the order. We were already busy on the beach before the rest of the rescue team and the other police officers were deployed."

Card said he was also convinced that divers had found the wreck of the plane thirty years ago.

"I suspect the large scale cover up may have come connection with the order about the communist on board the plane."

According to Card, it is however possible that they were looking for Prof Johannes Bruwer's briefcase and that the reference to a woman had been untrue.

■ Minister, in itself, there's nothing sinister in the fact that the security police were looking for a briefcase, even if it was really my father's briefcase. In the light of his appointment as roving ambassador to African states he may well have been carrying documents which it would be in the government's interest to retrieve.

What is strange, however, is that the security police search team was immediately despatched to a very specific spot - Kayser's Beach, the very same beach where it was initially reported that 21 bodies and many pieces of wreckage had washed ashore.

If the location of the Rietbok at the time of its sudden disappearance was unknown, and if - as according to the official testimony - it had last contacted East London while flying over Port Alfred, much further south, how could security headquarters in Pretoria know where exactly to go and search for a briefcase that might have washed ashore?

From Port Alfred, with "visibility of three quarters of a mile", Capt Lipawsky would not have been able to see the runway lights at East London. From above Kayser's Beach, which according to maps is about 25km to 30 km from the East London airport, he would have been able to do so. The version my brother gives of Cap Lipawsky's last radio message, together with the specific order from security police headquarters, **strengthens indications that the location of the Rietbok wreck was in fact known** and may possibly even have been pinpointed by radar at the moment the plane disappeared.

## 9. Navy diver Mr Malcolm Viviers' account aboard a minesweeper in 1967.

Another eyewitness, a former navy diver involved in the search for the Rietbok in 1967, has come forward to confirm that the wreck of the aeroplane was found immediately after the disaster in 1967, but that this was not divulged by the authorities at the time.

This witness, Mr Malcolm Viviers, also claims that bodies were found in the wreck, but that this was kept secret from family members:

An account of the Rietbok incident given by Mr Malcolm Viviers, who reportedly was a navy diver on one of the two minesweepers involved in the search for the plane in 1967.

A report by Willem Breytenbach which appeared in *Die Burger* on 5 February 1998 states the following (translated):

"PORT ELIZABETH - The silence about what exactly happened on board the minesweepers which 30 years ago had to search for the wreck of the passenger plane Rietbok in the sea near Kayser's Beach was broken for the first time yesterday. In an interview with

Die Burger Mr Malcolm Viviers, a local building contractor, yesterday confirmed that the wreck of the Rietbok had indeed been found, and that video footage was taken of it. During the search for the wreck Viviers was doing service as a navy diver on one of the navy's minesweepers, the SAS Johannesburg. (...) Viviers yesterday said the navy minesweepers had soon after the disaster already determined the location of the wreck and had marked it with a red buoy in the sea.

The wreck was only about one and a half kilometres from the beach, and we took the professional diving team of Underwater Technical Services (UTS) to the location on board the minesweepers.

"The divers of the UTS had some of the most modern equipment, including an underwater video camera contained in a frame with underwater lights. I was eager to dive with them, but the commander of the minesweeper would not allow it," he said.

Viviers said he himself saw parts of the wreck on the video screen of the underwater camera which had been set up in the "rope room" ("toukamer") of the minesweeper.

"The nose of the plane, the tail, as well as the wings had broken off. However, a large part of the fuselage was still in one piece and some of the passengers were still strapped into their seats."

According to Viviers some of the senior officers were very disturbed when they discovered that he had gone to look at the video screen in the "rope room". "The divers of UT'S and the rest of the crews of the minesweepers were ordered not to speak to anyone about the finding of the wreck.

"They said they were going to leave the plane and the bodies in the water just as they had been found, because it would cost too much to raise the wreck."

"Minister, besides the above account by Mr Viviers, which I feel should be verified with him by your department, several other allegations have been made in the past month of which you should be informed: Lichtenstein & Submarine."

## 10. Second diver in the past month, Mr Paul du Plessis breaks silence about the event.

An eye-witness account confirming that the wreck of the Rietbok was found in 1967 - and that this was kept secret from the public - was published in *Beeld* today (19 February 1998). This account by Mr Paul du Plessis of Bredasdorp, a professional diver who was reportedly involved in the search for the wreck at the time, is of such urgent importance that it should immediately be brought to your attention.

The report, translated in full, reads:

"Port Elizabeth. - More evidence concerning the cover-up of the Rietbok disaster thirty years ago came to light yesterday when a second diver broke the oath of secrecy about the events.

This diver is the second one who in the past month has confirmed that the wreck of the Rietbok, containing several bodies, was indeed found on the seabed near Kayser's Beach.

Mr Paul du Plessis yesterday confirmed from Bredasdorp that he had done contract work for the private company **Underwater Technical Services (UTS)** and had been part of the

firm's team who, on orders from the department of transport, had to search for the wreck.

"My job was to control the technical equipment, and I was in control of the safety of the divers.

Although I did not dive myself, I can confirm that we did indeed find the wreck.

However, we were ordered not to make known any information about it.

"Among others, we had to remove the small plate in the cockpit which **indicated that the Rietbok had initially been the personal plane of President Fidel Castro of Cuba**, and we also had to tie down loose pieces of wreckage so that they would not spread further," he said.

Although Du Plessis confirmed that there had indeed been bodies inside the wreck, he would not say whether the bodies had been removed by the divers.

"We were later suddenly withdrawn from the salvaging by the department of transport, as they would be handling it themselves from then on," he said.

■ Minister, this evidence ties in with the physical evidence of the scanning printout showing the location of the Rietbok wreck made by the same firm, UTS, which I mentioned in a previous letter, and is of such importance that I feel a statement should be obtained by your department from Mr Paul du Plessis.

■ A report in *Die Burger* of 18 March 1967 confirms that Mr Paul du Plessis was among the team of divers searching for the wreck. According to the report, the team consisted of: Tony Beval-Lean, Des Duringlon (leaders), Dave Mead, Michel Fascio, Charlie McBride, Owen van Kerken, Paul du Plessis, Stan Botha, Dave Harland, Mike Cownley, Bert Green and Ian Milne.

■ The reporter of *Die Burger*, Mr Willem Breytenbach, who interviewed Mr Du Plessis, has also allowed me to give you his office phone number in Port Elizabeth: 041-503-6111. He says he is willing to provide you with Paul Du Plessis's phone number and address and to give you any more information you may need

## 11. Statements made to *Die Burger* by Mr Joe Lichtenstein.

A report by Willem Breytenbach published in *Die Burger* on 7 February 1998, contains the following (translated):

"PORT ELIZABETH - Divers of the private firm Underwater Technical Services thirty years ago tied down huge nets around the wreck of the passenger plane Rietbok to make sure that as few pieces of wreckage as possible would later wash ashore

Mr Joe Lichtenstein, a prominent businessman, yesterday said this information was conveyed to him and his family by one of the private divers shortly after the search for the wreck had been called off.

According to him the diver had befriended his father when they bought parts for equipment at his enterprise in East London.

"After they had completed their assignment, one of the leaders of the diving team came to visit us in our beach home in the coastal town of Hamburg. He told us that they had indeed found the wreck and had drawn nets around it."

According to Lichtenstein, the private diver's account corresponded with the information divulged last week by a former navy diver when he broke the 30-year secrecy over the events around the disaster.

Lichtenstein said the diver of UTS has also claimed that there was a political motive behind the cover-up of information about the disaster.

"About six months later a piece of one of the Rietbok's wings washed ashore at Hamburg, we took it to the airport at East London, where air-control officials identified it as part of the plane. This discovery was also kept secret and nobody wanted to talk about it. Something strange was definitely going on."

## 12. The reported sighting in 1988 of a submarine in shallow waters near the area of the Rietbok disaster.

The reported sighting in 1988 of a submarine in shallow waters near the area of the Rietbok disaster.

A report by Mr Willem Breytenbach which appeared in Die Burger early this month (February 1998) under the heading "Submarine seen near Rietbok" contains the following statements made by two commercial fishermen (translated):

"Port Elizabeth - The mystery of the Rietbok air disaster deepened yesterday when it was revealed that a submarine had been seen ten years ago in shallow waters near the location of the plane wreck.

This information was revealed after a navy diver earlier this week broke the 30-year secrecy concerning the events around the disaster and confirmed that the wreck had indeed been found and that video material had even been taken of it.

Two commercial fishermen, Messrs Kallie Rademeyer and Buck du Plessis, yesterday told of how they had seen the submarine in the shallow waters near the wreck in **1988**.

"We were busy floating lines when we suddenly hear a droning noise. At first, we thought it was an aeroplane, but then we saw the water churning and the periscope of a submarine emerging," Rademeyer said.

The two men and their crew were astonished to find a submarine in such shallow water. "We found it very unusual, and we immediately reported the incident by radio to the harbour captain at East London. We only later realised that it was exactly where everybody says the wreck of the Rietbok lies,"

Du Preez yesterday said he was visited after the incident by members of the former coast guard. They wanted the precise co-ordinates of the place where the submarine had been seen.

Family members of the victims of the Rietbok ( . ) yesterday expressed their concern that the submarine might have removed important evidence.

## 13. Reasons why there is a strong possibility that the plane may have been sabotaged by the previous government.

My father, Professor JP Bruwer, was one of the 25 people who died in the Rietbok disaster in 1967. In the light of certain allegations which have recently surfaced fresh investigation into the matter were any bodies recovered. This, despite the fact that according to the pilot's last recorded message he was nearing the runway and would be landing in about four minutes. The plane must have been very close to the shoreline.

The reason for my request, such a long time after the incident, is that in the past week certain claims have been made public which have strengthened the view held by myself and members of my family that there is a strong possibility that the plane may have been sabotaged and that the true nature of the disaster may not have been revealed by the previous government. In the light of certain political circumstances at the time, it is also possible that, while 25 people perished in the Rietbok disaster, my father may have been the primary target of an assassination by a "dirty tricks" faction within the security or intelligence branches of the government at the time.

Before briefly outlining these circumstances, which until now have not been made public, let me mention two of the allegations made in the past week:

- A Cape Town historian, **Mr Emlyn Brown**, who is reportedly involved in the salvaging of the luxury liner Waratah which sank off the Wild Coast in 1909, last week claimed that he knew the location of the Rietbok wreck.
- This week a reputable source alleged that during the investigation into the Rietbok disaster in 1967 photographs were taken of the wreckage by Navy divers, who were ordered to maintain strict secrecy. In one of the photographs the body of a young woman could allegedly be seen protruding from the wreckage.

This photograph was allegedly described by the late Mr Frans van Wyk, a former chairman of the Wool Board who was a member of the former Defence Council (government "could not allegedly have this finding of the wreck was kept secret as the government "

Before turning to the specific reasons for suspecting that my father, Professor JP Bruwer, may have been the target of an assassination, let me give some general background on him:

He was a social anthropologist by profession and vice rector of the University of Port Elizabeth in 1967. In a political context he was also an influential Afrikaans intellectual and had been a key witness in the World Court hearing on Namibia (then South West Africa) in The Hague.

At the time of his death, he was acting chairman of the Broederbond but was considered a controversial figure in Afrikaner circles as he strongly criticised fundamental aspects of the apartheid policy. In several newspaper articles and published speeches, he pointed out major contradictions in the ideology of apartheid. Among others he stated his view that in practice it was proving not to be based on the benign promotion of indigenous cultures but on racial discrimination and that it could not be enforced for long. He questioned the inequitable distribution of land among black and white, the division into separate categories of whites, Indians, Chinese and coloureds, and pointed out that the segregation of white and coloured Afrikaans-speaking citizens could not be justified on the basis of "cultural differences"

Some white Afrikaners branded him "a traitor" ', "a liberal" and even "a Communist". In short, he was not a typical Broederbond leader and in the view of some not a desirable one.

Shortly before his death certain extraordinary circumstances arose. Premier John Vorster, who had been in office for about six months after the assassination of Verwoerd, and the foreign minister at the time, Dr Helgard Muller, approached my father to take up an unprecedented post as a roving ambassador to African states. He was to be based in Zambia, with the approval of former president Kenneth Kaunda. (Kaunda had a longstanding friendship with my father, who had previously spent more than two decades in the former Northern Rhodesia as an educationist. He had at first been a missionary teacher, later establishing a normal college at Katete and serving for some

time as Secretary of Education. Many of his former Zambian pupils, who I believe included Kaunda himself, held him in high regard.)

In retrospect I believe that Vorster, after Verwoerd's death, may have seen a window of opportunity to reconsider the apartheid policy and that the appointment of my father as roving ambassador was part of his brief and eventually unsuccessful attempt at "detente" and re-establishing contact with the Frontline states.

On March 11, two days before the Rietbok disaster, Dr Helgard Muller came to Port Elizabeth and spent a day with my father to discuss the ambassadorship. When my father boarded the Rietbok on March 13 he was on his way to a final meeting with Vorster in Pretoria before the announcement of the new post, which was to be made public the next week.

But that night the Rietbok disappeared, and nothing came of the plan, which was never made public. Kaunda sent my mother a telegram expressing his condolences, and a letter inviting her to visit him in Zambia.

If the Rietbok was sabotaged by some right-wing "dirty tricks" department to stop this attempt at renewed contact with African states, it succeeded very well. And if this was the case, the assassination of a Broederbond leader by government agents may well have been too embarrassing to explain.

During the investigation into the disaster, the shoreline near East London, the sea area surrounding the supposed location of the crash and even the airspace above was sealed off under martial law declared by the minister of defence at the time, PW Botha, as far as I can recall. No one, not even family members, were allowed near the site.

It is true that there may be some totally different reason for the disappearance of the Rietbok, but I and others in my family feel the circumstances were extraordinary enough to warrant further investigation.

Several other strange events occurred around the incident. To be brief, I will not mention them all, but they include **a call to my father's secretary**, Mrs Benjamin, from a "travel agency" a few days before the disaster. The travel agency told her they wanted to offer my father a special discount if they could handle his bookings, as they knew he travelled a lot. She told them that unfortunately his next flight had already been booked on the Rietbok, but she would contact them in future. However, when she did try to make a booking for another planned trip a few days later, she found that the travel agency did not exist.

A few days after the disaster I was visited by two men in suits at the Pearson high school, where I was a matric pupil. The headmaster introduced them as "security policemen". A student of my father and I had accompanied him to the airport, and they wanted to know whether I had seen him, with my own eyes, get on the plane. I answered yes, but they repeated the question two more times, quite sternly, which caused me enough distress to remember the incident.

In the light of the circumstances I have sketched, I would be grateful if you could consider a renewed investigation into the Rietbok disaster. The members of 25 families still have no explanation of what happened in that terrible event three decades ago.

I can be contacted at City Press in Johannesburg, where I am a sub-editor. (1998)