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## New book reveals security police had hand in Rietbok plane crash

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About Town, with Jimmy Matyu



Prof Johan Bruwer

THE ghost of an American doctor of philosophy and anti-apartheid activist, Audrey Rosenthal, who died in the Rietbok disaster near East London 42 years ago, has found space in a recently published book. *The Tall Assassin: The Darkest Political Murders of the old South Africa* by Alan D Elsdon says Rosenthal's death in the SAA Vickers Viscount crash was a well-calculated murder.

About two years ago in this very column I wrote that questions about the air crash were still unanswered. Now on reading the book by Elsdon, a former security policeman, I know the air crash was the work of Gen "Lang" Hendrik van den Bergh, alias "Lofty", the head of the Bureau of State Security (Boss).

The book further confirms the long-held suspicions I had that both the former apartheid regime and its obsequious security police were behind the death of Rosenthal.

On March 13, 1967, Rosenthal walked into my Golden City Post/ Drum office at Court Chambers in North End carrying a light brown briefcase. She told me that she was an anti-apartheid activist and ANC sympathiser, and a University of California lecturer.

She was on a six-week information tour to South Africa. She had met some ANC exiles both in London and Lusaka, and was working for Defence and Aid in the UK (banned in

SA at the time) to identify political prisoners and their dependants.

This was in August this year confirmed in an e-mail by Martin Legassick, who was her boyfriend at the time and was anxiously waiting for her in Britain when he heard of the air crash.

As a precautionary measure, Rosenthal and I decided to do much of our talking by taking a slow stroll holding hands amicably. She took her briefcase.

This sight drew curious stares of passers-by as it was not common at the time to see a black man and a white woman walking and holding hands. We noticed the security police were watching us through binoculars from the second floor windows of New Law Courts.

In the late afternoon Rosenthal left in a taxi to board a plane to East London.

On Pages 92 and 93 of the book, Elsdon writes: "On 13 March 1967 Audrey Rosenthal was followed to the Court Chambers building in the suburb of North End. As always, she carried her light brown briefcase.

"She later emerged with Jimmy Matyu, a well-known ANC member and activist. The two walked along the streets as if the city belonged to them. It infuriated the conservative white agents."

He also revealed something I had not known about Rosenthal -- that she was a member of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), an agency of the US government providing national security intelligence to senior US policymakers.

The next morning, I heard about the Rietbok crashing into the sea off Kayser's Beach on a "stormy night", killing all 25 on board – 20 passengers and five crew members. Also on board was the acting head of the Broederbond and vice-principal of the University of Port Elizabeth, Prof Johan Bruwer, who had publicly slammed apartheid as racial discrimination.

He was Rosenthal's host. Elsdon writes that Rosenthal had been under surveillance from Jan Smuts Airport when she landed and two policemen had followed Bruwer from his home to the PE airport.

The mystery that still remains is the identity of "Mechanic", who on the instructions of Van den Bergh acted as an airport technician to inspect the undercarriage of the Rietbok before the plane took off from the PE airport.

After I wrote about the air disaster I received a flood of e-mails from Kayser's Beach residents who claimed that before the crash they had watched some activity along the beach suggesting the aircraft was intentionally lured off course by a decoy radio navigation beacon set up. After the crash, the activity suddenly ceased and the next morning the area was cordoned off by police.

Van den Bergh was the most feared man in the old South Africa. He conducted a reign of terror and masterminded apartheid's ideology of total onslaught against communism and those Afrikaner leaders who deviated from the rigid path of repression which led to several violent deaths.

According to this book "based on facts", Van den Bergh is implicated in the assassination of HF Verwoerd, the death of Nic Diederichs, Steve Biko's murder, as well as the murders of Anton Lubowski and Prof Johan Heyns.

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