

## The Security Branch's

**EX-FILES**

Michael Schmidt

## Mystery surrounds the whereabouts of hundreds of files detailing information gathered by apartheid government spies

**E**lectronic copies of Security Branch (SB) files detailing how hundreds of activists and public personalities – from current Intelligence Minister Ronnie Kasrils to artist Vladimir Tretchikoff – were spied on have vanished.

But surviving indexes of the files paint a paranoid picture of the apartheid regime in its dying days from the early 1980s until the mid-94.

They reveal how the SB and its agents spied on everything from churches, primary schools and the SA Cricket Union to the Afrikaner Broederbond; Apla, the PAC's armed wing; and the American CIA, as well as individuals who included journalists and bishops, writers and Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging heavies.

Researchers at Wits University's South African History Archives (Saha) contend that 11 back-up tapes made of the SB's computerised database at its headquarters in Pretoria have disappeared, after having been unearthed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1996.

Also, Saha says, every one of 10 requests to the National Archives by individual ex-activists for access to their personal hard-copy files has been met with the claim that the files cannot be found – raising fears the paper records have vanished too. Among the 10 requests was one by ex-TRC chief investigator advocate Dumisa Ntsebeza for access to his file. He was told it could not be found.

As the missing documents include information on police informers and turncoats, the records could be a treasure trove not only for researchers and for apartheid's victims seeking closure, but also for politicians wanting to score points off their opponents.

In February 1996, then police commissioner, George Fivaz, ordered the nine provincial Crime Intelligence (ex-SB) heads to hand him all the files still in their possession relating to individuals and organisations spied on by the old SB. But the order came too late for many of the records, as the SB had

already tried to cover its tracks.

A remarkable written response to Fivaz's request from Director Paul de Kock, Free State head of SAPS detective services, dated July 31 1996, states: "All files and documentation (index) under control of the former Security Branch in the Free State pertaining to individuals and organisations for the period 1960 ... to 1993 ... were destroyed upon instructions from Security Branch HQ Pretoria."

"No written instructions were received, but verbal instructions were given by ex-Brigadier A Oosthuizen stationed at Security Branch HQ Pretoria."

"No record was kept as to how many files were destroyed as mentioned ... no date can be given for the destruction, but it took place during the latter part of 1992 and the beginning of 1993."

Oosthuizen was apparently referring to Brigadier Alfred Oosthuizen, then head of the SB's intelligence section in Pretoria, who had issued at least

one killing order to the infamous Vlakplaas death squad, for which he was later given amnesty.

Early in Oosthuizen's career, as a young police lieutenant in Grahamstown in 1977, he had set up the roadblock, arresting a "cheeky" Steve Biko, who was murdered in detention several weeks later.

However, despite Oosthuizen's order to destroy all files, the TRC's final report noted that "there were exceptions ... several thousand files also survived in the SAPS head office, although most of them post-date 1990".

**The missing documents include information on police informers and turncoats ... a treasure trove**



3. All files and documentation (index) under control of the former Security Branch in the Free State pertaining to individuals and organisations for the period 1960-01-01 to 1993-06-12 were destroyed upon instructions from Security Branch H.Q. Pretoria.

4. No written instructions were received but verbal instructions were given by ex-Brigadier A Oosthuizen stationed at Security Branch H.Q. Pretoria.

Former Security Branch intelligence chief Brigadier Alfred Oosthuizen was fingered as having given the order for the police to destroy three decades worth of secret files.

But despite the TRC's recommendations that the remaining records be transferred to the National Archives, they languished for years in a basement at police headquarters.

Saha's former director, Verne Harris, told the *Saturday Star* that SAPS Crime Intelligence head, Commissioner Ray Lalla, told him at a meeting in 2003 that the records were in chaos and were apparently stacked in a giant heap.

The records were later transferred to the National Archives, but neither national archivist Graham Dominy nor Minister of Arts and Culture Pallo Jordan would release a list of all the files transferred so Saha could ensure none had gone missing, said Kate Allan, a co-ordinator of Saha's freedom of information programme.

And when Saha later "sought to confirm that the National Archives had custody of the data tapes, they responded that they did not", Allan said.

So Saha returned to the police; but Commissioner André Roos, head of counter-intelligence at Crime Intelligence, stated in a July 26 2006 affidavit that "Despite all these [his] enquiries, the whereabouts of the data tapes could not be located".

The importance of the tapes is that they are more easily searchable than the hard-copy files – and provide a better cross-referenced overview of the SB material. Now that the tapes appear to have vanished, Allan has raised the alarm that the National Archives, responding to Saha requests under the Promotion of Access to Information Act, had said that individual activists' hard-copy files could not be found.

Yet in a letter dated July 2007, Dominy told Saha that "the SAPS has assured the National Archives that all files have been transferred". But he tantalisingly hinted that "... apparently there are other fragmentary lists from other sources".

The National Archives also retains apartheid National Intelligence and Justice Department files.

These have proven easier for Saha to access, despite the fact that the archive, working closely with the National Intelligence Agency, is able to censor or deny access to files which may contain information deemed sensitive to national security.

Some of the files survived to tell their stories