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AS IT HAPPENED: *THE SECRET SAFARI*

Saturday October 6
7.30 pm

In the early 1980s, the African National Congress' (ANC) military wing realised the urgent need to create a strategy for smuggling arms from the frontline states into South Africa. The story of their ingenious solution is told in the **As It Happened** documentary *The Secret Safari*, produced with the assistance of SBS Independent, screening on SBS Television on Saturday October 6 at 7.30pm.

In the early 1980s, most weapons were smuggled across the border in small, risky missions. Many of the ANC cadres were captured and killed by the South African security forces. The idea of an undercover operation using a tourist adventure company was first mooted by Joe Slovo, at the time chief-of-staff of the armed wing of the ANC, the MK. But at the time, the chances of detection were reported as being too great. By the mid 1980s, the ANC had developed a way to seal arms, preventing detection by sniffer dogs. Meanwhile the frontline states, in particular Zambia, were continuing to offer their assistance to the armed struggle against apartheid.

Slovo, together with ANC exile Mannie Brown, registered a front company in London, "Africa Hinterland", which offered tourists overland sightseeing trips between Kenya and Capetown. The Bedford truck to be used in the operation looked like any other safari vehicle—except this one had been thoroughly and ingeniously redesigned. Under the seats where the tourists sat were secret compartments which carried up to one tonne of arms comprising handguns, limpet mines and grenades. The tourists were completely unaware. However the drivers, specially trained international volunteers from the British and Dutch anti-apartheid movements, knew exactly what the Bedford carried. What they weren't allowed to know was who loaded the truck, and who picked up and stored the arms. What they suspected was that anyone of the passengers could have been a South African agent, which in the making of *The Secret Safari*, was found to be the case.

In Zambia, prior to crossing the border into Zimbabwe and then South Africa, the drivers of the Bedford truck would leave the tourists camped for the night and take the vehicle to a pre-determined point, where they would leave it for "service". There, MK operatives would pack weapons into the specially created secret compartments. The Bedford would be picked up at a pre-arranged time by the driver and taken back to camp.

The safari would complete its journey at Johannesburg or Cape Town, and the truck would be unpacked by the drivers into a van which would be driven to a pre-determined location such as a shopping centre car park in middle class areas of the city. This van would in turn be picked up by another set of trained white operatives, and driven home to expensive white areas. The arms would be unloaded, then later reloaded into private vehicles and driven to "dead letter boxes", a safe location for concealment. The operatives would dig holes or hide the weapons, and draw maps of the exact locations. Days later these arms would be dug up by black MK fighters and taken to a central stockpile or distributed to active MK units.

Ironically, as secret talks in the late 1980s led to the release of Nelson Mandela and a negotiated settlement, it was also at this time that African Hinterland reached its height in proficiency. The presence of arms was a useful bargaining tool, but even after the ANC announced the cessation of the armed struggle at the close of 1990, the military wing Umkhonto We Sizwe took the independent decision to continue with the African Hinterland operation and the infiltration of weapons into South Africa.

Director/co-writer Tom Zubrycki is available for interview. For further details, please contact SBS Publicist Ian Phipps on (02) 9430 3794.

program publicity