

KBP-4

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

SOUTH WEST AFRICA/ NAMIBIA  
A Quick Look at a Troubled  
Land

American Express Travel Services  
Merbrook, Box 9395  
123 Commissioner Street  
2000 Johannesburg, South Africa  
November 1981

Mr. Peter Bird Martin  
Executive Director  
Institute of Current World Affairs  
Wheelock House  
4 West Wheelock Street  
Hanover, New Hampshire 03755 U.S.A.

Dear Peter,

The chance to visit South West Africa/ Namibia was unexpected, but an opportunity I jumped at. I met an ex-National Serviceman in a bar one evening in October. He had spent almost a year in Windhoek, with occasional trips to the border. He had also just recovered from a broken back; the chain on his motorcycle had broken and sent him flying. I thought he might have been one of the elite motorcycle border patrolmen. It turned out he had so much time to kill during his assignment there, that he had done great quantities of dirt-bike riding.

This fellow had a buddy up in Windhoek, a law officer about to finish his one year tour there. While this ex-serviceman made many promises of assistance with flights, tours, and accomodation—all of which he subsequently broke—he did indeed know a

lieutenant in the Army's Windhoek legal office.

In mid-November I started on the 1600 kilometer trip from Johannesburg to Windhoek. It was the inaugural voyage in my Institute vehicle, a Volkswagen Golf (synonymous with Rabbit). I had chosen white for the color of the car because I had been told it kept the interior cooler in places with harsh sunlight. No such luck. The drive through the drought stricken veldt of South Africa and SWA/Namibia was long, hot, and dusty. If the



Welcome to one of the SA war zones

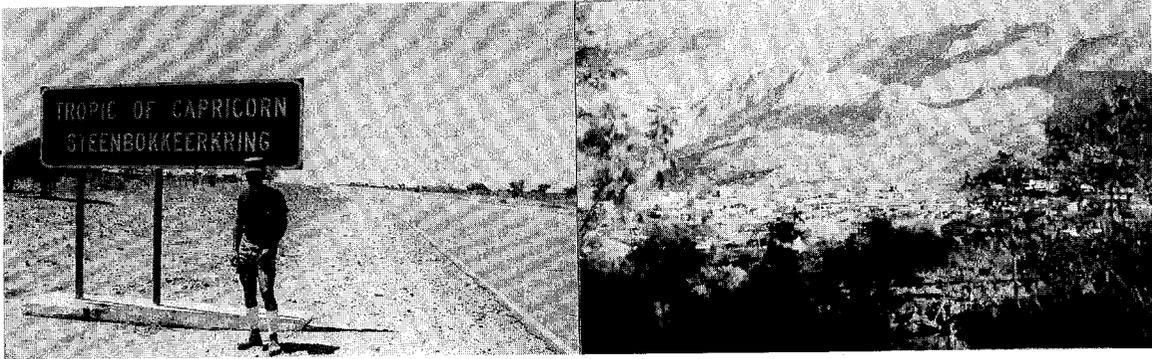
color of the car helped keep it cool I didn't notice. I felt poached.

Perhaps more seasoned travellers have seen greater and lonlier expanses of land, but if so I'd like to know where. It was not uncommon during that three day drive to not pass another car in either direction for an hour.

Even Zimbabwe's often burned-out stretch from Beitbridge to

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Kendal Price is a Fellow of the Institute studying the cultures of South Africa, her black homelands, and the bordering African nations.



Henry Miller's literary namesake; Lunar Namibia

Victoria Falls, at least some of it looked like a normally healthy countryside just going through a bad period. Some of the land on the way to Windhoek looked like the pictures of the surface of the moon.

After leaving Mafikeng, Bophuthatswana I drove all day to Kuruman, a small town on the edge of another of the seven pieces of Bophuthatswana. (Bophuthatswana is one of the homelands that accepted independence from South Africa. It is landlocked and broken into separate unconnected parcels of land.)

Kuruman's campground was trimmed, mowed, and manicured like a Japanese garden. The toilets and showers were cleaner than many hotels I've seen. They were absolutely spotless and after I stopped worrying about washing my obviously brown body in their whites-only bathroom, I enjoyed it thoroughly. However, as I was stepping out of the shower two Afrikaners walked in and began brushing their teeth. They wore the knee socks, polyester shorts, and short sleeve shirts of rural whites. When I greeted them in halting Afrikaans they stared at me with some surprise, and responded quietly "Goeienaand." Good Evening. Even in such a short greeting I think they heard my foreign accent, and decided I was not

a South African "Coloured," (the majority of whom are Afrikaans speaking). Note: To avoid these sorts of encounters I would have gladly stayed in the facilities for nonwhites, were there any.

I slept well that night in my Eddie Bauer Portable Motel, and the next morning I drove from Kuruman to Upington. It was less than two hour's drive from Upington to the South West African/Namibian border. Because there was no border post or customs between the Republic of South Africa and South West Africa/Namibia, I was able to drive straight through to Keetmanshoop. I camped once again and by the following evening I was in Windhoek, the capitol.

I booked into the Safari Motel, where some of the Western Five Contact Group stays when in town. The Motel's schlocky plastic signs and everything-under-one-roof set-up (there was the Safari Motel Petrol Station, Caravan Park, Road-house-fast food, Steak House, and Beer Garden), reminded me of a slightly larger monstrosity called "South of the Border" in one of the Carolinas. I later discovered the only reason diplomats stay at the Safari is because it is at the edge of town, and security for them is easier than downtown at the high-rise Kalahari Sands.

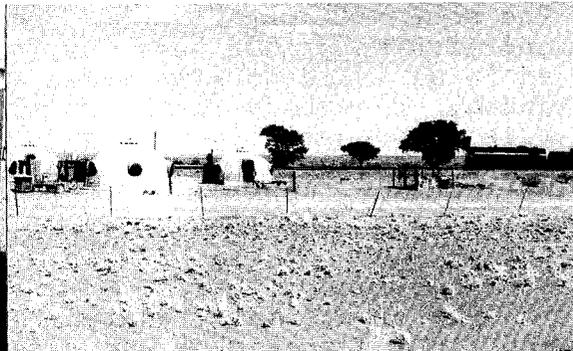
I tried to locate the army lieutenant with whom I was

to make contact, and discovered he had gone away for the weekend. So, my acquaintance in Johannesburg had let me down completely and had not even contacted his friend about my visit. Correction, at least there was a South African Defense Force Army lieutenant who went by the name I had been given. Fortunately it would turn out to be a good introduction after all.



Everpresent town liquor store

have upon people. For example, this young lieutenant addressed me as "Sir" even though he was my own age and I wore no uniform. Perhaps that's not quite correct. He might have been impressed or even envious of my "uniform" the de rigeur worn khakis and frayed button down shirt of Eastern American Establishment Preppies. However, I rather doubted that and while I



Modular railworker housing

The following Monday I caught up with the Army lieutenant, and even though he had no idea who I was, he agreed to meet me later that afternoon at the military headquarters compound.

When I arrived I felt some apprehension, or perhaps intimidation is a better word. I was visiting the Namibian headquarters for the South African Defense Force, the Army of an admittedly white supremacist government. As I signed in, had my camera bag searched, climbed the stairs and entered the room full of officers dressed in brown, I suddenly felt very black.

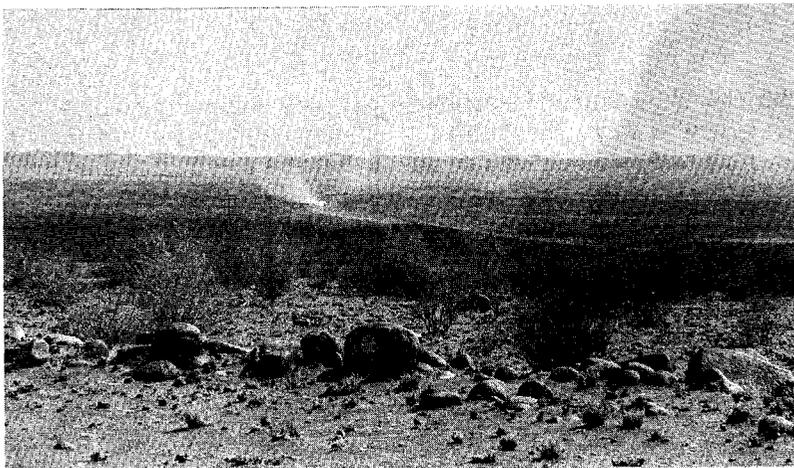
A tall, soft spoken, shy looking officer asked me straight away, "what would you like in your coffee, Sir?"

It is strange the effect a uniform or lack thereof can

might have rationalized that my clothes represented a morally superior position to his, I felt that in the current situation his outfit represented more clout. I wondered when I should start saying "Sir" in return.

The dilemma was short-lived. Within minutes the jocular atmosphere created by this group—as would be created by any group of young, well educated guys forced to work together in one place—soon outweighed all other things and I was made to feel quite at home. The lieutenant I had come to see was not there when I arrived, so I just took a chair in the corner of the room. There was room for only two desks and half a dozen extra chairs. Even in the limited space, a law officer was conducting an interview.

The first lieutenant was taking the statement of a young, extremely tanned, and rugged looking second lieutenant.



Dusty, drought stricken veldt of SWA

down the marijuana statement. I'll call them Michael and Jim, respectively.

They all nodded with interest as I explained my fellowship to them. It created a better atmos-

The second lieutenant had been involved in an incident with marijuana. Everybody in the room tried unsuccessfully not to smile when the young lieutenant said soberly "and we all tried a sample of the substance... once," and he couldn't keep a straight face either.

The lieutenant I wanted to see finally showed up and turned out to be a real firebrand. Within minutes of talking with one another he let me know his enthusiasm for my project and disdain for what the South African Defense Force was doing in South West Africa/Namibia.

He thought in some ways it was an army of occupation and that it was illegal by most standards of international law. I was surprised by the strength of his attack on the military establishment. He said, "don't be fooled by this uniform. I in no way agree with the policies of South Africa, nor do I think what the military is doing up here is correct."

The next afternoon I returned to the South African Defense Force (SADF) headquarters and met the lieutenant who I will call Rick. He introduced me around and I met the shy fellow who had brought me coffee as well as the first lieutenant who had been taking

phere once they knew more about what I was doing. Rick had been open with me, but I had had the chance to tell him more than the others. The day before everyone had just acted as if I was giving a long title to "reporter," and they all had squirmed a bit. Now they were eager to make sure I got a good overview of the situation, and Jim thought out loud of the people he could arrange for me to see.

Jim and Rick took me into another office that had a large detailed map of SWA/Namibia on the wall. They explained where the operational areas were, and where it was safe to travel.

Jim said, "it's mostly a war of mines."

I said, "just like the U.S. tried to win the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese."

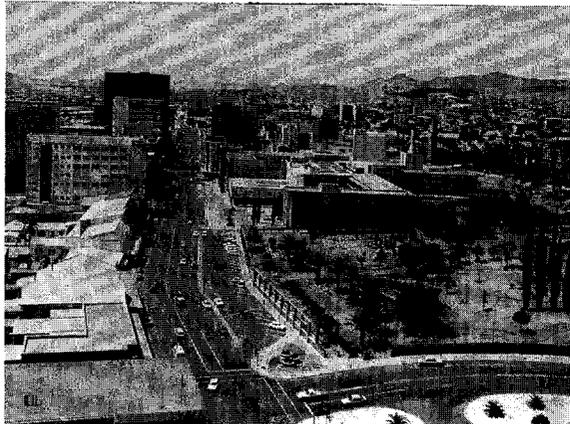
"That too, Rick said. "But Jim was talking about land-mines."

"They've got numbers up there that'll disintegrate a Rover," Jim said. "So, it becomes a back and forth game. They plant them and we try and find them."

"That's what those bug-like trucks are for?" I asked.

"They're mine-resistant troop carriers," Jim explained. "They're called 'Buff's' which is short for buffel which is Afrikaans for buffalo." They looked more like Rhino's to me. Anyway, Jim explained how all of the mine

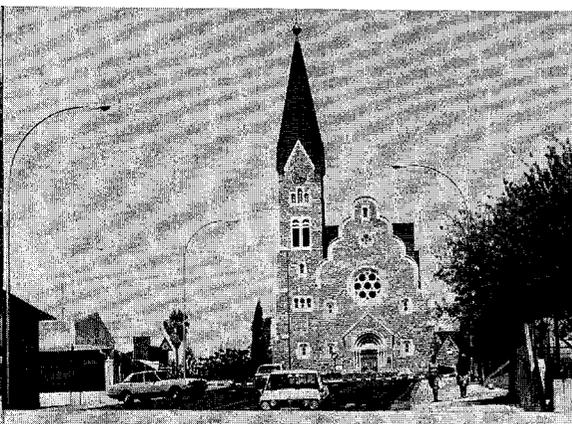
resistent vehicles have wedge shaped bodies to deflect the blast of a mine. The parts that carry the troops and the part that carries the driver are only connected to the chassis by wire cable. Inside, all of the soldiers are strapped in snugly with shoulder and lap seatbelts. There are large roll bars for the bigger portion of the vehicle, and the driver's compartment is enclosed in steel plating and bomb-proof glass. When one of these hits a mine, the wheel is meant to come right off. Next off are the sections carrying the troops or driver, with the cables meant to restrain the cab or troop section



to sustain in a mine "incident"—as the SADF officially calls them.

Jim spoke of the "Buffels" with pride. When Rick left for a few minutes he told me in a confidential tone, "to the Permanent Force ("lifers") members you aren't a vet until you have gone over a mine in a 'Buff!' So, instead of sweeping some roads for mines each day, somebody will just ghost it in a "Buff." "Ghosting" turned out to be driving as fast as possible down the road until you either hit a mine or could drive back and say the road was clear.

"Why don't you drive on



Windhoek is cosmopolitan with a strong rural German influence

from flying too high. The roll bar protects the men in the back from the obvious risks of landing upside down. The bomb proof glass protects the driver not only from the concussion of a blast, but from the intense heat of a mine explosion. If everybody is strapped in correctly, all loose things are tied down, and all are wearing their earplugs when the "Buff" they are riding in drives over a land mine, they can walk away with as little as a headache. However, a few broken ribs and a concussion are more typical injuries

up there and see things for yourself?" Jim suggested.

"In my Volkswagen?"

"Sure," said Jim. "They'll make you drive in a convoy if it's a really dangerous time or place."

"He can't drive up there," said Rick who had just returned.

"Yes he can," insisted Jim.

"No he can't," said Rick.

"I don't think I will," I said. "But thanks, Jim."

That evening Michael and Rick met me at the Safari Motel to talk. Although the discussion was very lively, neither of them

spoke of more than their opinions, and it was most instructive for me to watch the two of them interact. They both were from the Durban area, were English speaking South Africans, and had the same educational background. Michael had just begun his year long stint in Windhoek. In most of the things he said it was obvious he felt obligated not to criticize the military.

On the other hand Rick wanted to make sure I got a balanced picture of the military situation in SWA/Namibia. He thought the only information I had about the war with SWAPO was from South African sources. He felt all of the press was very biased in

ular case that I wasn't supposed to know about and which was top secret..." he took a sip of his drink and Michael tensed. I could see the apprehension on Michael's face as he must have wondered for that moment whether or not the Scotch had loosened Rick's tongue. I wasn't sure if I wanted to hear it either, at least not with Michael around.

We need not have worried. In the moment he paused to look at us both, he picked up the concern. He took another sip of his drink and then told the story like I'm telling you this one, without any incriminating details.

Rick had to leave after an hour, but Michael and I



### Country...

favor of South Africa, and much of it was pure propaganda. So, he offered his criticisms vehemently, and made no effort to hide his enthusiasm for having an American listener. Occasionally, Michael looked uncomfortable about what Rick was saying, and at one point he was actually alarmed.

I had asked them if they thought the frustration of anti-guerrilla warfare had produced any side effects in the boys when they returned.

Rick said, "for sure, for sure. I know of one partic-

### ...And urban Namibians

were going to watch a television documentary about the war. We walked from my room to the motel's lounge and took seats with an audience that included a few other South African white soldiers. We were going to be watching "On the Border" a two part special about the war on the border between SWA/Namibia and Angola. It was produced by the South African Broadcasting Company, and written and directed by South African war correspondent Al J. Venter. Judging by the number of articles and photographs by Venter in a South African

magazine called Scope, and an American abomination called Soldier of Fortune\* (which sells very well here), he is the only journalist allowed free movement in the war zone\*\*

The film was introduced as a documentary, but soon after it began it was apparent that objectivity or any semblance of balance had been left on the cutting room floor. Journalistic and even artistic integrity also took a beating during that hour.

Venter provided only three interviews with combat soldiers and they all were American volunteers. As reasons for their involvement they all offered simplistic opinions on stopping Communism, and supporting good causes like South Africa. They appeared quite proud to be in the South African Army, and were so eager to express themselves on camera it almost looked staged. (Staged in this case could have been South Africans talking with American accents. This is not an improbable suggestion considering the number of radio DJ's and locals who can put on a convincing American accent. Also, there was no proof offered that the men were or had been American citizens, e.g. U.S. passports, or photos from their American military service that they all claimed to have done.)

The remainder of the film included explanations of the tactics of the "Russian supplied terrorists," and melodramatic images of the

\* A war magazine with stories by and advertisements for mercenaries.

\*\* I tried to follow the Angolan border war from the States for several years. There were SWAPO flyers, Venter's pieces, and precious little else. even remotely objective.

South African boys protecting "Die vaderland."

"I like the nature and the fresh air," answered a white soldier when asked what he felt about being in the Permanent Force. Venter himself supplied the closing line, "As long as communist imperialism fuels the conflict of despair, there will be war." I don't think he intended his words to be taken this way, but "conflict of despair" is a very accurate description of just what that war is all about. I doubt many SWAPO guerrillas chose to take up arms because of the joie de vivre of being black in southern Africa.

Venter plagiarized scenes, obvious camera angles, and even the music used in Francis Ford Coppola's film about Vietnam, "Apocalypse Now." There was footage of an "actual" attack where the cameraman was only a few feet behind a group of soldiers who jumped out of a helicopter and fired wildly at the bushes. Some of the soldiers watching the show laughed and shook their heads.

The assistant manager of the hotel was a former Rhodesian. When he was a young soldier in the then Rhodesian Army, he told me he had killed two guerrillas, and Venter had flown in to interview him. Apparently there was some status to having a confirmed enemy "kill" (as opposed to when civilians were killed). However, this man found Venter's attempt to glorify the event repugnant. The former Rhodesian also doubted the credibility of Venter's work, citing and explaining how a number of much publicized recent "combat" photographs were clearly staged. "That (television) footage is rubbish," said the fellow, who preferred not to be named. "And what's more, he was thrown out of Rhodesia for being such a pain in the neck to the Army."

Apparently, Venter is seen as a military fanatic by some soldiers and journalists. Several of my SADF acquaintances were disgusted by how heavy-handed the propaganda was in the film, and how preposterous some of the scenes were. Yet, they were close to what was being reported on and could point out inconsistencies and errors. When I spoke to people back down in the Republic (South Africa proper), they had found nothing wrong with the film.

The line between journalism and fiction can be extremely thin, however in this film, its second part, and several subsequent South African TV productions the SABTV (South African Broadcasting Television Station) need never have worried about stepping over the line. Their documentaries, while often engaging and entertaining, were never even near the journalism side.

After the program I walked part of the way back to the Army camp with Michael. It seemed like he wanted to talk some more. Fortunately the circumstances were just right.

In South West Africa, even near a town, there is something almost tangible about the feeling of spaciousness. Somehow, even though there are lights nearby, knowing there is more open land out there than men will ever figure out what to do with is very liberating.

To the east is the expansive veldt of Hereroland Oos, and then the thousands of square miles of sparsely populated Botswana. That's a lot of land, and knowing it makes you feel like you are in some kind of void. Or perhaps just small and insignificant.

Michael wanted to balance some of Rick's criticism of the military, and South Africa

in general. He explained that both he and Rick were from Durban, a city some say still behaves like a British colony. Michael's criticism of English South Africans was that they are fence sitters. They take pot shots at the government and then don't get seriously involved when they could. They talk about a need to change the system before things get out of control, and then they still hold British passports. I asked him how being a lawyer, he could defend the laws that allowed for detention without trial, and the virtual condoning of political intimidation. He hesitated a bit, but answered that he thought that with terrorists and threats like that something had to be done. He didn't know if it was right, but what were the alternatives?

We let the conversation end there, shook hands and arranged to meet again sometime later in the week.

The next day I interviewed one of the more colorful characters of South West Africa/Namibia; Hans Smith, publisher, editor, staff writer and photographer for the Windhoek Observer. This man is unique not just for all the hats he wears at the Observer, but because he has managed to create a weekly newspaper that in comparison with the rest of the South African press, prints just about anything it wants to.

The good aspects of the paper are somewhat offset by its manner of presenting the news. There are two inch headlines every week whether the news is of an alleged Army massacre, or an ordinary but public business deal. It is the only publication in all of South Africa and SWA/Namibia to be allowed to publish the pictures of bare breasted white women.

So, it has a photo of a nude on the back page every week. It

also publishes all of the gossip and unethical or simply scandalous behaviour of local politicians and influential businessmen; usually in thinly veiled references to the man's position in the community. It's exposes are in the form of straight forward articles, altered photo's with facetious captions, and a column titled: "THE PEOPLE HEAR (PLEASE NOTE THEY DO NOT SAY) THAT."

Below are two typical selections from the column.



**WINDHOEK**  
**OBSERVER**

**(THE PEOPLE HEAR (PLEASE NOTE THEY DO NOT SAY) THAT:**

- Car A1171T of the Territorial Traffic Force moved up and down Valley Road in Eros on Thursday and it soon became evident that the Traffic Inspector behind the wheel was not inspecting streets, roadsigns or looking for traffic offenders; he was after a different kettle of fish, and soon approached a female, standing at the gate of one of the premises;
- He approached her and the conversation, or should one rather say what the Inspector had to offer would make very interesting copy for the Chief of the Department of Transport.
- A fascinating conversation took place in an office

- A certain South African conglomerate, which operates in SWA, and which has, as its policy that all monies taken in at the various branches have to be forwarded to South Africa within hours, has asked its headquarters in Windhoek, who tipped the Observer as to this practice;
- A senior Civil Servant had to stay home for two days after consulting his doctor, because in a moment of folly he tried to kiss a young typist. Being a netball player, she jerked up her knee and landed him a blow in the crotch;
- Mr Henry van Biljon, wellknown Windhoek attorney, is in a position to retire at the age of 43 years on account of the Ds. Putter case against the Windhoek Observer;

Its serious articles are often somewhat garbled or incomplete, but they are some of the few published words I have seen that directly criticize both the South West African political scene, and the leaders of South Africa.

I asked Mr. Smith how he managed to publish a paper that is openly critical of the Pretoria government, as well as flagrantly defies the Morality Act by printing pictures of nude white women. (Note: all of the photo magazines in the republic have to place stars over the nipples of white women, but not of black women. The Observer doesn't use stars at all.) He explained that there have been many covert attempts to shut him down, which have included attempts to intimidate advertisers into dropping their ads in the Observer, and attempts to keep him from obtaining bank loans. When asked if he personally had ever been threatened he refused to comment.

However, there are no overt efforts by the South Africa Government to ban him or shut down the paper. Smith explained that because there has been continuous international attention focused on Windhoek, the South Africans want to be able to point to his paper as an example of the free press they allow in South West Africa/Namibia.

Smith and his Windhoek Observer manage to publish sensitive material the South African papers never even refer to. It is surely the only paper here that includes pieces critical of the South African Defense Force. One never sees that down in the Republic. What was startling though, was his claim that for all of the exposes he prints about the SADF, he has written only about ten percent of what he knows. If he included more he said he would be out of business

for sure, regardless of what the outside world thought.

In closing I asked him his opinion of South Africa's premier war correspondent Al Venter. Smith's expression turned to disgust and he said curtly, "No comment."

My request for an interview had been on such short notice that Smith had only been able to give me forty-five minutes. So, after the interview was finished, I spent some time in the Observer's office reading through back issues. The paper is about two years old, which attests to the tenacity of Smith and his small staff. It also has managed to keep its bite and its advertisers while trying to survive.

I asked a dozen or so people I met in Windhoek for their opinion of Hans Smith, and most thought that "Mad Hans" was a fanatic. However, they called him that affectionately, and all praised the paper—usually while chuckling and shaking their heads.

My next interview had taken a few days to arrange. It was to be with the chief of military intelligence for the entire SWA/Namibian operational area. The procedure for visiting this part of the SADF headquarters was a bit more involved than when I wanted to drop in on my acquaintances in the legal section.

Besides the usual form to fill out about who you are, and who you want to see, there was a visitor's plastic I.D. to be worn on the lapel, and an escort to be tolerated at your side.

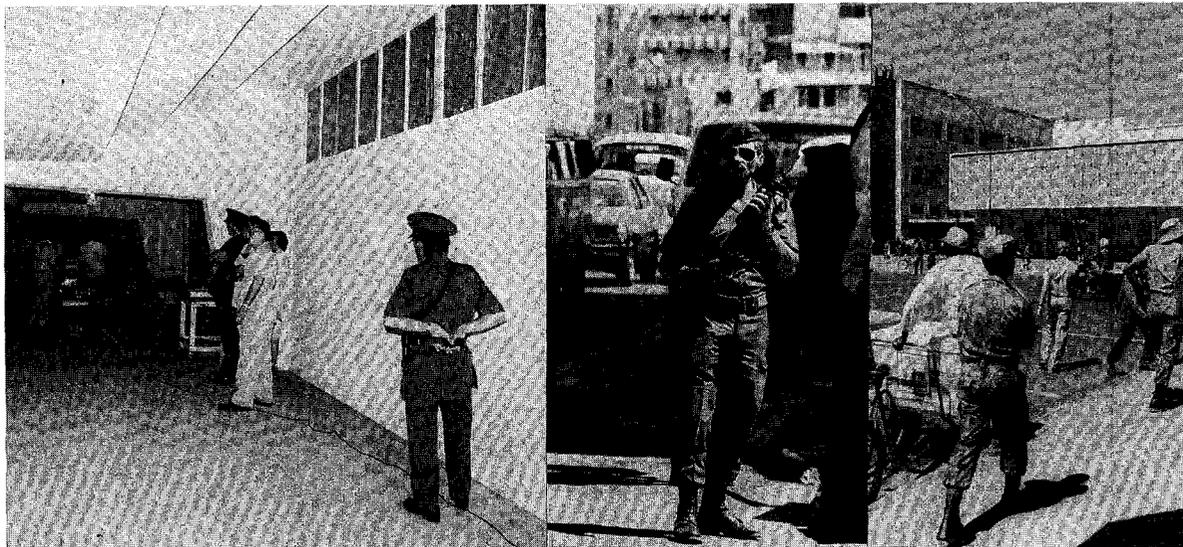
When I thought about it though, I remembered that you have to go through almost as much just to make an overseas call from the Johannesburg Post Office.

Some white South Africans are so afraid of the "Total Onslaught," which is the ruling Nationalist Party term that refers to the perceived threat South Africa faces from blacks on all sides— including the inside. So, even at the Post Office, you have to wait for an escort before you are allowed up to the eighth floor international exchange. You are never left alone while waiting for your call, and you can't leave until there is a postal employee (usually bored looking Afrikaner) available to take you back to the elevator. Personally, I always felt kind of sorry for them. Those poor people at the Post Office don't hardly get a chance to get any work done, what with all that hopping up and down to escort potential terrorists to the phone.

Getting back to Windhoek... I was shown into an office with numerous maps mounted on sliding boards. All of them were covered except for one which I recognized as the same I had been shown in the law office. The For-General-Consumption, "where inna namea sam am I? tactical map of South West Africa slash Namibia." (Personal aside: Can you imagine being a North Eastern United States/American from New York? Would make for awfully tedious introductions. I think that's why the Contact Group is taking so long to work things out up here. Even their name is too long; Western Five Contact Group for SWA/Namibia.)

The Chief of Military Intelligence was a colonel who asked me not to publish his name for security reasons. Colonel Name-Omitted-At-His-Request.

So, after I had reached my interviewee, well, you know who, I promptly asked him if I could tape our conversation. I was politely asked not to tape the



Polite local police; young SADF soldier; feared Border Police interview.

So, after doing all of this work to arrange an interview of this importance I asked if I might take notes. I was politely asked not to take notes although there might be a few things he might not mind me writing down. Thank you. Would the Colonel like me to close my eyes as well?

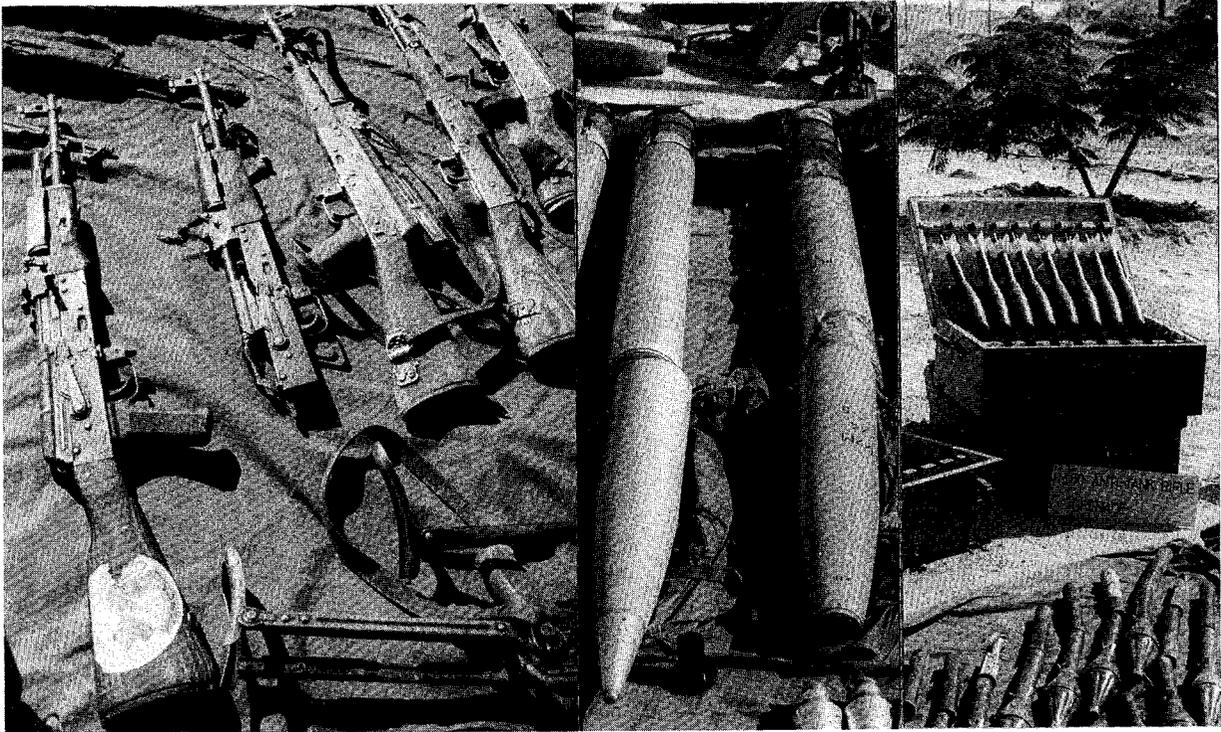
Colonel B (for blank, although no reflection on him) then proceeded to give me a well organized, exhaustive hour and a half briefing on the current military situation in SWA/Namibia. It included more maps and even colored charts projected on the wall that reduced the war to workable numbers and lines. I had had enough of the facts and figures by the time we got to the colored charts, but when I tried to move on to my own questions, he said, "just let me show you these graphs."

I finally did get to ask him a few of the questions I had prepared for what I thought was going to be an interview of him, not a briefing of me.

I told him that because I

was researching Bophuthatswana, I wanted to know whether or not the new "independent state's" proximity to Botswana would create the same sort of border difficulties as in SWA/Namibia? Colonel B didn't think Bophuthatswana would have an insurgent movement like up in SWA. He was not specific and only spoke of the differences in terrain as being the major defense against guerrillas in those areas. In light of his reticence towards speaking about a border conflict outside of SWA/Namibia and particularly in Bophuthatswana, I think I should include some possible reasons for his response.

The SADF has managed to contain the guerrilla war in SWA/Namibia largely because the conflict has been kept within known land boundaries. Even there, Colonel B admitted they don't have enough troops to constantly cover the entire border and they must depend heavily on their ability to transport troops quickly to trouble spots. Therefore, the prospect of having to seriously defend South Africa's long borders



Weapons captured from SWAPO by South Africa (l.to r.) AK-47 rifles; 122MM rockets; and American grenades with Russian writing on crates.

with Botswana is unpleasant at best, an impossible nightmare at worst. Even though South Africa maintains a peaceful relationship with Botswana, some of the possible insurgent threat comes from a situation which neither South Africa nor Botswana (if it wanted to) could control easily.

That is, quite simply, the existence of the majority of Batswana (Tswana people) in Bophuthatswana. The Tswana are the indiginous people of Botswana who find themselves in three different countries (Botswana, South Africa, and Bophuthatswana) because of the arbitrary demarcation of land by colonial powers. If the current peaceful state of relations were somehow to break down between Botswana and South Africa, or even Bophuthatswana and South Africa, there already exists one of the most critical elements in favor of insurgents. This is an historical bond between all of the peoples on the different sides of the

borders. This would be a major asset for any guerrillas intent on capturing the popular support of the local population. This situation could easily offset to some extent the logistics and terrain difficulties facing a guerrilla organization.

I asked the colonel, as I had of the law officers, if he felt this sort of warfare was producing a discernable sense of frustration in the troops. By this time we had been together for almost two hours and he finally began to relax a bit. (Although he had ordered coffee for both of us he had let his get cold rather than interrupt the flow of his lecture. I appreciated his professionalism, but I had wished he had drunk his coffee and taken the edge off of our meeting. He finally did drink it cold.)

He admitted it was a frustrating sort of war, and there were some psychological

problems resulting from it. He emphasized there was nothing on a large scale.

In his briefing he had made a special point of how SWAPO was fighting mostly a political war, now. Most of the acts of violence outside of laying landmines, was directed at individuals as a form of political persuasion. After Operation Protea in late 1981 (a South African attack into Angola that the SADF claimed "broke SWAPO's back" by the capture of reputedly large quantities of

the credibility of SADF news releases are all the more suspect in the wake of Operation Protea's coverage.

I asked the colonel if he thought South Africa could win such a war as this, with no front lines, and no tangible measurements of success? He answered that South Africa could win militarily (although the war hasn't been "won" in seventeen years of conflict), but that they could never win politically. I found this admission astounding, and realized that he must not have



Incredibly harsh and jagged terrain surrounding Windhoek; the frequent result of several years of drought

food and materiel), the number of contacts dropped off significantly.

It should be noted that large numbers of tanks and trucks were captured and declared to have belonged to SWAPO. However, South Africa admitted having had heavy contact with Angolan forces, but never attributed any of the capture materiel to them. The public relations support Pretoria managed to gain for it's "Total Onslaught" predictions must have been considerable. However, the credibility of the

remembered what he had said to me at the beginning of the briefing about SWAPO fighting a mostly political war.

The other less tangible, though no less revealing admission came at the end of our talk. I was telling him something about my family. I mentioned I had three uncles who fought in Vietnam, and one had been a Cobra pilot. (A Cobra is a helicopter gunship that has no room for passengers or even cargo. During the Vietnam war it carried only machine-guns, cannons, and

rockets to be used against people.) The colonel's eyes lit up and one of the only smiles of the entire interview came to his face. "We certainly wouldn't mind if you wanted to send us a few Cobras."

In the context of the briefing, where South Africa's military self-sufficiency in arms was touted by the colonel ("the arms embargo actually worked for us because we now produce all of what we need"), I found is response incongruous. (Maybe

could see he had thought about the topic since the last time we had talked. Because he was a lawyer, he felt he should be able to offer a coherent argument in favor of South Africa's laws and the need to defend them militarily. Michael was a sensitive, religious, and honest person, and you could see the conflict in his face as we talked.

After breakfast we decided to meet later in the day, mainly because I had never seen a



Herero women selling dolls in Windhoek; two Namibian mothers showing great interest in those things they're not supposed to like.

something akin to: We're all doing quite well out here in the rain. Actually we invented a very effective waterproofing for our clothes. What's that again? Did you say you've got some...umbrellas?!!)

One of the last days I spent in Windhoek I met my young SADF officer acquaintance Michael for breakfast and we talked again about the morality of some of South Africa's laws.

It was an issue that bothered him deeply. Although he couldn't put his hand on a truly defensible response, I

cricket match. So, in the afternoon we got together and went to see Rick umpire a local game. I suppose I had to learn about cricket at some point, but within a half an hour I was completely bored. Fortunately Michael was no great sports spectator either, so we took a walk around the other fields and adjoining stadium.

There some men setting up a PA system in the stadium, and when we climbed the bleachers to talk with them we found they were preparing for a political rally. They were very friendly and explained that it was an HNP (Hersigte Nasionale Party)

but the the biggest attraction would be Eugene TerreBlanche leader of the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging. (The AWB is a militant Afrikaner organisation that vows to "resist with violence" any attempts to draw "coloured" people into the government.") I asked if the rally was for both black and white people, and the men cheerfully assured me it was just for white people. "Oh good," I said and Michael and I continued with our walk.

We walked along the fence by the edge of the field and unsuccessfully looked for an exit. When we realized we couldn't get out that way we



to respond. Adding to this, the fact that the men looked like they wanted to hit us, and appeared so terribly angry, Michael became completely flustered.

I told the older man that if he had anything to say to us to speak English, because I was an American. He told me "shut up and stay out of this," in English, and returned to his tirade at Michael. I could understand enough of the Afrikaans and gestures so that I knew he thought we had been "casing" the stadium. I could also tell he was a classic "hothead" because he asked the same questions over and over again. It was as if he couldn't manage being angry and



Terre'Blanche on left, bored compatriot on right; political fervor in Windhoek, signs for a DTA meeting with Dirk Mudge

turned around and were met by two very angry looking white men. We hadn't seen them before and they surprised us. One of them was in his fifties, had a tense, craggly face, and the other was probably our age and huge.

The older man immediately began asking Michael questions in Afrikaans. Michael, who was not in uniform, and who by his own admission doesn't speak Afrikaans very well tried to respond to him. However, the older man fired the questions at him so fast there was no time

thinking of new questions at the same time.

While the old man kept at Michael, who was looking more and more beleaguered, the big fellow looked me up and down. He looked like it was a bit of an effort to try and stay angry looking for so long without any real reason. So I smiled at him. (Do you remember the toothy grin and little wave Charlie Chaplin always gave right before the roof or whatever would come crashing in on him?) Well..., that day was my lucky one and believe it or not the guy actually softened

a bit. I wouldn't go so far as to say he smiled back, but I know a basically nice guy when I see one. Personally, I think the big fellow thought the old man was making a fool out of himself. Unfortunately, Michael was in the position to be that objective, and when they finally let us go he was shaking.

Michael was genuinely upset by the experience and said, "they have no right to do that." Sure, even I knew that if he had remembered he was an army officer, and in the legal branch also, he could have told the two goons what they could do with their questions. However, for him to have had this experience so soon after our discussion that morning was something too good to be true. (In all fairness to Michael though, we were alone in that stadium, and that one man was big.)

When we got back to the cricket field and told Rick of our experience he laughed with delight and none to gently jeered at Michael, "see! See what they can do if they want? How does it feel, huh? Not too great, huh?"

I didn't think Michael deserved any more abuse, so I gave him a ride back to camp. I returned to the motel to get ready for the evening's meeting with one of the only black journalists in SWA/Namibia.

I had met Uapi (pron:Wap-pwe) at the press club earlier in the week. He stuck out because he was the only black face in there, and he immediately stuck in my mind because he was incredibly friendly. The funny thing was he later confessed he had thought I was somebody else he knew. (Yes, even some of us are as bad as they are in telling who we are in the midst of them.)

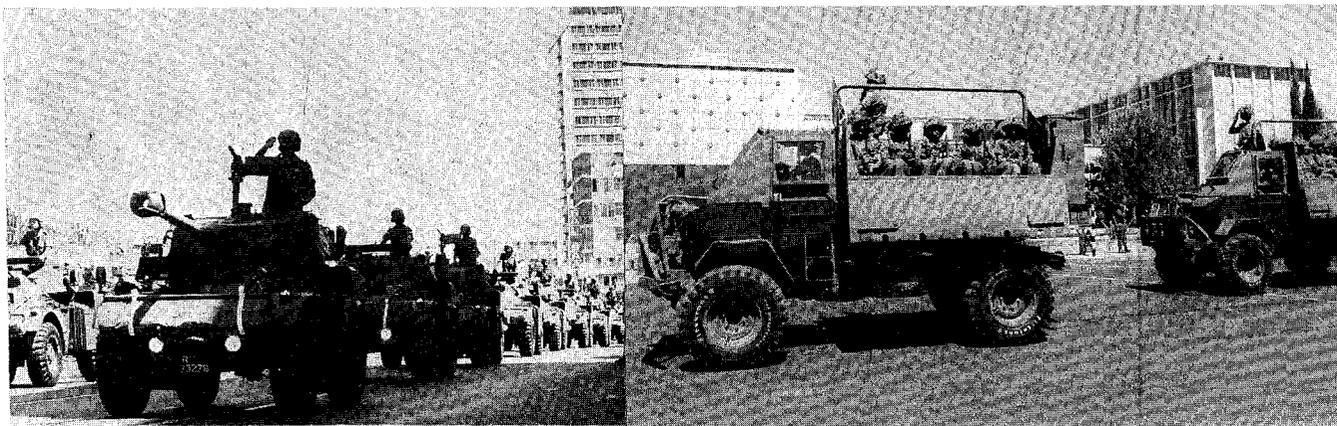
We met for a drink at the Kalahari Sands Hotel, and much to my delight he brought his wife. I say delight because visible in that one black couple was the epitome of the struggles and growing pains of an emerging, modern Africa.

Uapi was an intellectual. He was very well educated, and had been a political prisoner in Zaire when he had gone to study there. He was very well informed on world affairs, and in my opinion, appeared to be one of Namibia's future black leaders.

His wife was almost ten years his junior and according to Uapi, just a plain village girl. I could certainly believe that. I have never seen anybody so painfully shy and dependent on her husband, and yet so charming in her own right. The two of them together were both contradictory and complimentary; he so urbane and she so sheltered. What was beautiful though, was how immediately and totally he could switch from cool, analytical Uapi the radio journalist to Uapi the amazingly sensitive Namibian husband, communicating as much by gesture as word.

We talked for a few hours and then I excused myself to go to the HNP rally back at the stadium. Uapi wouldn't believe I was going there. Apparently the HNP and particularly Terre' Blanche's Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging are equivalent to the Ku Klux Klan, American Nazi Party and Hell's Angels rolled into one. Terre'Blanche actually has a motorcycle gang that accompanies him to rallies down in the Republic. (I had checked already and found out they hadn't driven all the way up to Windhoek for this rally.)

Uapi was really worried about me and offered to lend me a pistol to protect myself. "I wouldn't go in there without a gun, Kendal," he said with great concern in his voice. "Those people are crazy."



My visit to Windhoek coincided with the SADF's parading of its first completely multi-racial military unit. Whites, "coloureds," and blacks were trained together for the first time. It should be noted that most of the nonwhites were from SWA/Namibia, not the Republic. The high unemployment is considered a strong factor in the appearance of nonwhites in the SADF.

I thanked him and declined the offer with the explanation that I thought I would probably be quite outgunned anyway. I'd depend on the old silver tongue if trouble arose. Aren't I brave?

I drove to the floodlit stadium and parked as far away from the entrance as I could. (Well, no point being cavalier about it either.) I was wearing a jacket and tie and carrying a camerabag. I hoped I would appear of as indeterminate a race as I had to the technicians that afternoon. I flashed my ICWA I.D. card at the policeman at the gate and asked as disinterestedly as I could manage where the press table was located. He pointed down the hallway running underneath the concrete grandstand. "Turn left at the opening, the press tables are right in front." As I walked down the brightly lit hallway I saw only a few more policemen and the people operating the PA system and taperecorders.

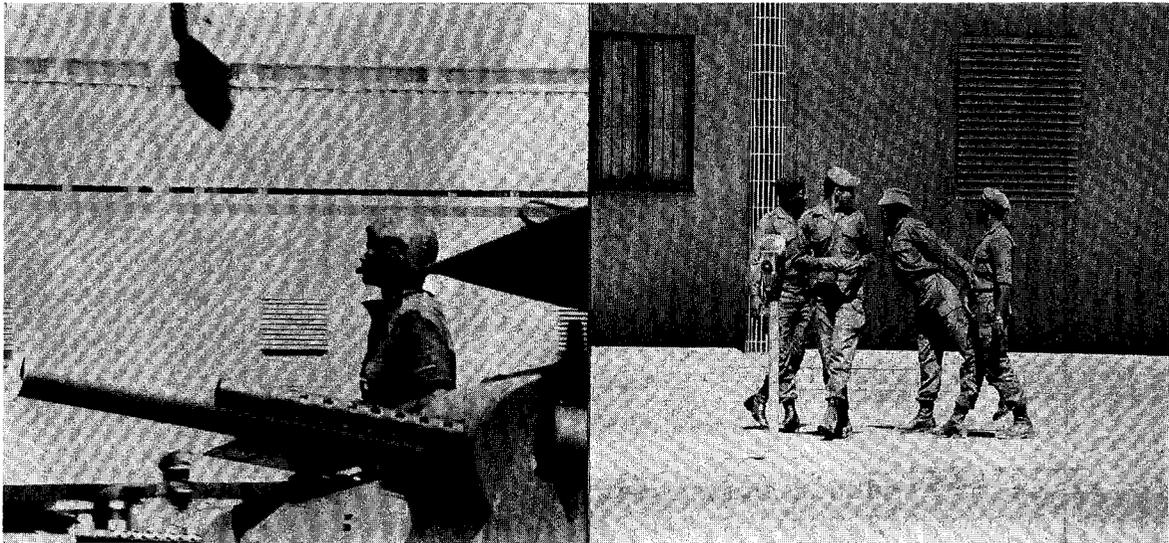
I turned left at the opening, walked out to the tables set on the playing

field, and then felt the strange sensation that I was being watched. When I turned around there were approximately a thousand white people in the stands above me looking directly at the person arriving in the middle of their rally.

The speakers' podium was on the bottom step of the stands. Eugene Terre'Blanche was speaking at the time, or ranting and raving like a mad dog to be precise, but I still managed to capture the attention of his audience for my entrance.

It was an uncomfortable few moments to be sure. But, I pulled out my notebook and began writing. This of course, was mere nervous gesture seeing how Terre'Blanche was speaking in Afrikaans. However, I thought it looked good and it gave me a reason to stare at my hands.

I couldn't understand what Terre'Blanche was saying except for Swart (black) and Jood (Jew) which he said often before banging his fist on the podium. A white reporter for the South African Press Association (SAPA) leaned over to me and said, "you don't know what you're missing." I said, "I can guess," and she smiled and



The parade was taken seriously by the participants; black vets

shook her head sadly. Afrikaans sounds very German to the untrained ear (mine). So, listening to this man shout, scream, whisper, and bellow, while at the same time shaking his head, pounding his fists, and pointing in all directions, I couldn't help thinking of those films of Hitler they used to show us in high school. This man was totally beserk.

I left Windhoek a day later. On the trip back to Johannesburg only two things of interest occurred. I picked up a wounded "coloured" soldier who was hitch-hiking, and I was refused service in a restaurant for the first time because I was "coloured."

The "coloured" soldier was in one of the all "coloured" battalions on Operation Protea up in Angola. He had been eating dinner when he was shot through the arm. He made a point of telling me it was a big bullet, from an AK-47, and of peeling back the bandages so I could see the wound. He also told me that his unit had suffered fifteen killed and "many more" wounded. The South African press had

declared that only fifteen SADF soldiers had died during the entire operation, which had involved quite a few more men than one battalion.

My first encounter with strict apartheid was in a small town still in the Cape Province. I walked into what we would call a corner store but which is referred to as a cafe here in South Africa. The store carried mostly dry goods, but it did have a few gritty looking tables in one corner. Since there was no one sitting at any of them I went up to the counter and asked if they were serving at the tables. A tall white man who had been working on something that had left his hands black with grease came out and said, "that depends."

"Depends on what?" I asked.

He looked at my face carefully and then asked, "are you coloured?"

I took out my passport and slammed it on the counter. "I'm American," I said and smiled.

He looked at my passport and said something I still don't understand, "No, you've been to Bophuthatswana. You can't eat in here. But I can

sell you take-aways."

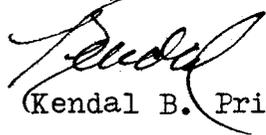
"Is that the law here, or is that your personal decision? I asked, now grinning because this was my first encounter of this sort and it was actually kind of funny.

"My decision," he said, looking a little puzzled at the pleasure I seemed to be getting from this.

I said, "Oh, okay," and offered him my hand. He looked at the grease on his hand and then looked at mine as if he expected me to pull it away. But when I continued to leave it extended towards him he finally smiled awkwardly and shook my hand. I felt a little bit bad as I left because I had been laughing very much at him, and not with him.

Then I walked down the street and into another cafe where I was served a nice lunch before heading off to Johannesburg again.

Sincerely,



(Kendal B. Price

THE STAR MAY 6, 1982

## Army bid to reduce soldier road toll

With road crashes killing far more national servicemen than the bush war, the army has launched a stringent road safety campaign.

Last year 116 servicemen died in road crashes while 29 were killed in action, the Minister of Defence, General Malan, announced in Parliament earlier this year.

Seven servicemen were killed on the roads last weekend. Latest victim was a national serviceman who was run down on the Ben Schoeman Highway at about 7 pm yesterday. His body was found next to the highway near the Germiston turn-off. It is believed he was hitchhiking. Halfway House police later arrested a man who is expected to appear in court tomorrow. The name of the serviceman cannot be released as his next-of-kin have not yet been informed.

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