

## Apartheid under Threat

IN THE DIRTY GAME of international espionage, the tool that gave one agency the edge over the rest was their technical ability. Van den Bergh spent massive amounts of money to ensure that BOSS had the most sophisticated technical equipment in the world. Having the finest radio, surveillance and counter-surveillance devices in the correct places gave BOSS the edge over many of its competitors. To properly install and train his staff, technical experts from Israel were secretly brought into the country. Van den Bergh was intent on having listening devices placed in every quarter where friend and foe operated.

“There’s nothing closer to the truth,” he told his subordinates, “than straight from the horse’s mouth.” Of course he added his favourite line, “And remember, knowledge *is* power!”

The first fully-fledged radio spy station was erected on a hill outside Pretoria. The second was erected on the site occupied by Sharp and his two colleagues.

In an incident labelled “Spies in the Sky”, it was discovered that BOSS agents had recruited and trained cabin crew employed by SAA. BOSS agents studied daily passenger lists supplied to them by sources within SAA. On local but especially international flights, the trained SAA staff placed listening devices in secret hiding places above the seats of identified passengers. In that way the conversations of political “suspects” were recorded. The tape cassettes were then placed in diplomatic bags and handed to BOSS agents at the various destinations. The media ripped into the State body and accused them of violating the basic human rights of their targets.

“My agents are experts in their fields,” Van den Bergh countered. “They have but one aim and that is the protection of the State and its citizens. We should all be exceptionally proud of these courageous men and women and their efforts.”

In February 1974 in Cape Town, Prime Minister Vorster conceded that the conventional methods being used to combat negative foreign opinion towards South Africa were no longer effective. He gave official approval to Mulder, Rhodie and Diederichs to make use of covert action to wage an all-out psychological assault on that same front. Where Van den Bergh was not directly involved, he had to be kept up to date on the projects and developments. Not

one accustomed to fighting with words, the head of BOSS was only too pleased to leave the task in Rhoodie's capable hands.

It rained heavily the night Sharp travelled to Lanseria Airport outside Johannesburg. The small twin-engine plane landed on time and he met the two foreigners as they alighted. Each carried an army-style bag and a medium-size steel trunk. The men were not the type to make small talk and they travelled in silence. The heavy clouds overhead caused their destination to be darker than usual. Sharp parked the vehicle and led the way to the water's edge. It was muddy and slippery underfoot. They reached the jetty where a lone figure huddled under a black umbrella, waiting patiently. The greeting from the old man was not acknowledged. The single engine kicked into life and the vessel drew away from the land.

When Sharp introduced the foreigners to his two partners in the house, only nicknames or aliases were used. The visitors were shown to a room where they dropped their bags and steel trunks. The smell of a meal brought the five men together in the sparse dining room. At the table the foreigners came straight to the point. They said the training for which they had been summoned would take about a week. On the fifth day, under the guidance of the foreigners, Sharp and his colleagues assembled two units. They would be dispatched by the foreigners once they were back in Europe.

After the departure of the two experts the three BOSS agents waited patiently for news from afar. Days later, in February 1974, a parcel arrived in Botswana. The package, posted in Geneva, was addressed to Abraham Tiro, an ANC exile. He was killed when the letter bomb exploded in his face. Twelve days later Joel Dube, a representative of the ANC in Zambia was killed in a similar letter bomb explosion. To celebrate the success, Van den Bergh travelled to the secret BOSS location. The hooded old man known as the "Ferryman" and his vessel was on time.

"Give me about two hours," Van den Bergh said when they reached the opposite jetty.

"I'll be waiting," the retired agent replied.

In anticipation of the tall man's visit, Sharp and his partners had prepared a larger than usual fire. They greeted the head of BOSS with a double brandy and coke.

"Congratulations on a job well done," Van den Bergh said as he lifted his glass.

The three agents enthusiastically lifted their ever-full glasses.

"Should we send Hain another surprise package?" Sharp asked.

“Only if you want to mess up his secretary’s hairdo,” Van den Bergh said.  
“I doubt he opens letters or parcels anymore.”

The three assassins enjoyed the line and there was easy laughter all around.

“On a serious note,” the head of BOSS said, “besides eliminating the enemy, you are sending a strong message to countries that support the ANC. Keep up the good work!”