News

ST Mainbody, 11-Dec-2011-Page 1, Cyan ST Mainbody, 11-Dec-2011- Page 1, Magenta ST Mainbody, 11-Dec-2011-Page 1, Yellow ST Mainbody, 11-Dec-2011- Page 1, Black

N-2 JDCP



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INSIDE A SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE DEATH SQUAD

Today the Sunday Times lifts the lid on killings committed by an elite police unit

Special investigation by **STEPHAN HOFSTATTER, MZILIKAZI** WA AFRIKA and ROB ROSE

HE Sunday Times has uncovered evidence of an alleged "hit squad" operating in KwaZulu-Natal under the ultimate command of the province's Hawks boss, Major-General Johan Booysen. The Cato Manor organised crime unit in Durban has allegedly committed scores of assassinations, some in retaliation for suspected cop killings and others related to ongoing taxi wars.

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Police in KwaZulu-Natal, and the Cato Manor unit in particular, have been doing just that. Official figures from the

AND HAVE A BEER WITH YOUR MATES AFTERWARDS



Booysen was previously the provincial head of organised crime. Suspended police chief General Bheki Cele caused a stir among provincial top brass last

Police who examined death scene photographs said they appeared to be executions

year when he unexpectedly promoted Booysen to head the Hawks in KwaZulu-Natal, even though his unit had courted controversy through its disproportionately high kill rate of crime suspects

Cele has been blamed for fuelling the killings of taxi bosses by making inflammatory remarks. According to court papers filed by taxi bosses fearing assassination at the hands of the unit, Cele reportedly said, speaking at the funeral of a slain police taxi task team investigator Superintendent Zethembe Chonco: "If SAPS members cannot arrest suspects and they feel that their lives are threatened they must take them to the nearest mortuary.³

dependent Complaints Directorate (ICD) show in the past three years KwaZulu-Natal police killed 527 suspects during the commission of a suspected crime, an escape, an investigation or arrest — by far the high-est in South Africa. The Cato Manor organised crime unit accounted for 45 deaths.

The ICD confirmed this week that six members of the Cato Manor unit had been investigated, some of them for killing suspects.

Captains Mossie Mostert, Eugene van Tonder and Anton Lokum and the late Warrant Officer Rakesh Maharaj are among those being investigated. None of them could be interviewed by the Sunday Times this week, according to police spokesman Colonel Jay Naicker. The Sunday Times has, during an investigation that began last year, obtained testimony and copious evidence from dozens of people about the killings, including hundreds of death scene photographs and expert ballistics reports.

who entered my home";

ricated claims of a shoot-out;

• Four suspected cop killers

massacred together on a mat-

tress in a house in Inanda on

• ATM bombing suspect

celebration;

April 13 2009; and

Three senior police officials, a pathologist and a ballistics expert who examined the images concluded that they appeared to have been executions. None would be named.

The Sunday Times has also interviewed several taxi industry bosses who claim to be assassination targets of the unit, and witnesses of at least two killings who refuse to make sworn statements to the ICD because they feared they would be killed. Suspicious police killings

linked to the unit include: • KwaMaphumulo taxi boss Bongani Mkhize, killed on February 3 2009 on Umgeni road after Lebogang Ranyali killed on he took out an interdict in a bid March 27 2009 in Pinetown. to prevent police killing him; In an interview with the Sun-

• KwaMaphumulo taxi boss day Times this week, Booysen Lindelani Buthelezi, whose wife denied any knowledge of a hit squad. "I would strongly dissays he was "executed by police agree with you. Their lives were • Sandile Kinglock and Musa at stake, they defended them-Qwabe, both suspects in the selves in a shoot-out," he said. murder of a Durban lawyer, He said it was unfair to brand killed by police on September 14 the unit a hit squad because of 2009 in two separate incidents; its high kill rate of suspects, • KwaMaphumulo taxi boss given the high number of violent Magojela Ndimande and his criminals arrested by members. bodyguard Sibusiso Tembe, "Cato Manor only investigates killed on the N3 highway at Mermurder, armed robbery, ATM rivale on September 16 2008. bombing, serial killing and se-Witnesses say the police fabrious rape cases," he said. "They made 437 arrests in the last two • Five robbery suspects shot years. The facts are, they do on the N3 near Camperdown on arrest very violent people.' Last month Colonel Navin January 21 2009, which police followed with a drink-fuelled

Madhoe — an officer in the

killing suspects, Booysen said 'The Cato Manor squad is the new Vlakplaas ... something the government should be very worried about'

tained the photographs.

provincial procurement office there was nothing wrong with charged with trying to bribe police enjoying "social events". Booysen with R2-million to drop The Camperdown images a R60-million corruption case show close-ups of three of the gave the Hawks boss a memory suspects shot in the head. stick, hard drive and two CDs "That's troubling. With head containing hundreds of phoshots you want to look closely tographs showing what appear for evidence that suggests exto be gruesome killings of susecution," said a senior patholpects at the hands of the police. ogist. "You would expect [many] The images included several more body and limb shots." post-kill celebrations of mem-This was confirmed by the bers of the Cato Manor unit. In

ballistics expert and two senior an affidavit, Madhoe says Booypolice officials, who said head sen asked him to get the CDs as shots of fleeing suspects were they contained "incriminating "highly unusual" The experts all referred to

evidence of serious crimes in a unit under his direct command". images of weapons in several of The Sunday Times has obthe killings, including those of Qwabe, Ranyali, Buthelezi and Asked if he believed it was Mkhize, as "highly suspicious". callous to hold a party after They cited unusually clean guns in pools of blood and improbable positioning of suspects' firearms.

of the SAPS forensic science

new Vlakplaas, they operate in In court papers ballistics exthe same style," he told the Sunpert Kobus Steyl — a former member of the ballistics section day Times this week, referring to the apartheid-era unit led by

laboratory with 19 years' experience - concluded in two of the cases that "the shooting of the suspects, as alleged by the police, is questionable in regard to the self-defence scenario". Although questions were put to individual members of the Cato Manor unit about their role in the killings, police spokesman

mission of inquiry to probe the

Eugene de Kock that assassi

"The Cato Manor squad is the

Cato Manor "death squad".

"no objection to something like [an official probe] — it may prove once and for all that the Naicker said the policemen "cannot speak" as the ICD investigations "have not been fipicture created about Cato nalised [and] we don't want to Manor is totally wrong' compromise [them]". "You weren't there. I wasn't In September, the South

there. Let's allow these cases to African Communist Party's be investigated by the ICD and provincial leader, Themba let the prosecuting authority Mthembu, issued a public resdeal with it in the appropriate olution calling on the governway," he said. ment to launch a judicial com-

- investigations@sundaytimes.co.za

nated opponents of the National

"We strongly believe that the

Party government in the 1980s.

duty of the police is to inves-

tigate and arrest suspects. But

this unit has been killing more

suspects than putting them be-

Booysen said he would have

hind bars.

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ST Mainbody, 11-Dec-2011-Page 4, Cyan ST Mainbody, 11-Dec-2011- Page 4, Magenta ST Mainbody, 11-Dec-2011-Page 4, Yellow ST Mainbody, 11-Dec-2011- Page 4, Black

> N-1 JDCP Sunday Times | December 11 2011

Iside the police hit squads of KwaZulu-Natal Iside the police

No lights, no warnings, just a barrage of rifle fire, and a taxi boss and his bodyguard were dead at the hands of rogue cops

4 | NEWS

N the morning of December 16 2008, taxi boss Magojela Ndimande and his bodyguard Sibusiso Tembe were travelling in his silver Hyundai Tucson SUV near the Merrivale offramp on KwaZulu-Natal's N3 when all hell broke loose

Ndimande was a member of the KwaMaphumulo Taxi Association, whose members had been accused of ambushing and killing the police's taxi task team investigator, Superintendent Zethembe Chonco, in August 2008.

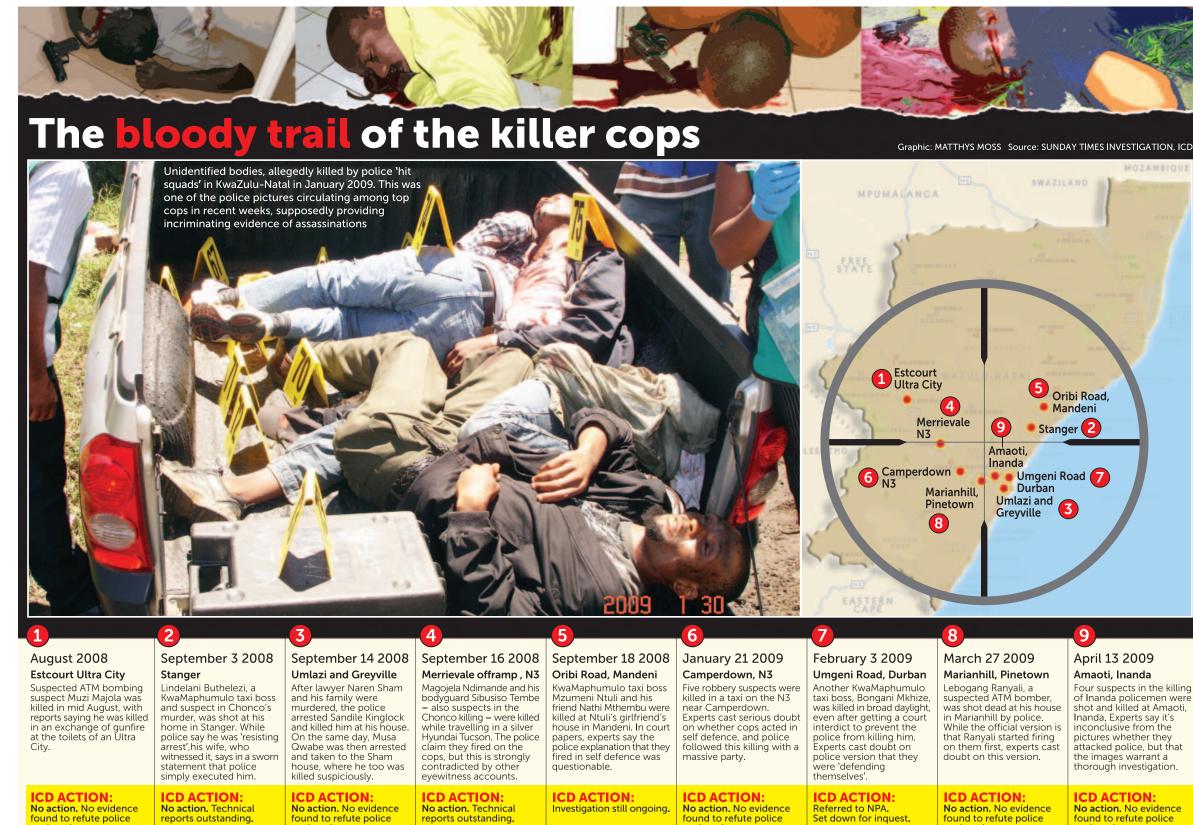
That day, Ndimande and Tembe would join the growing list of Chonco murder suspects shot dead by the infamous Cato Manor organised crime unit, ultimately commanded by Major-General Johan Booysen, who is also the head of the Hawks in KwaZulu-Natal.

A metallic silver BMW allegedly driven by Cato Manor officers in plain clothes drew up alongside them and, without any notifying lights or loud-hailer warnings, unleashed a barrage of assault-rifle fire on the SUV.

The BMW came to a screeching halt in front of the Hyundai, and a gold metallic Toyota Corolla pulled up behind it, blocking it.

Several members of the Cato Manor unit jumped out of the BMW and Corolla, and pumped a few more rounds into the Hvundai.

Then one of the policemen calmly discharged a pistol into the bushes, apparently to make it appear as if there had been a shoot-out. Another cop smas



driver's window of the Hyundai with his rifle butt, evidently to make it look like shots had also been fired out of the vehicle, not just into it.

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They were unmarked cars, unmarked clothes, no warning, no flashing lights, said one witness. "There was very definitely no shoot-out — the only bullets went in from outside," said another. "There was no shoot-out. The okes pulled up alongside the Hyundai and just executed them.'

explanation.

Ndimande and Tembe now dead, the police calmly put on their police jackets and, a few seconds later, a convoy of marked police vans arrived. Minutes later, Booysen himself landed in a police chopper to congratulate his team on a job well done.

This is the version of events related to the Sunday Times by witnesses too terrified to go to the police or even the Independent Complaints Directorate (ICD). "If they can execute people in broad daylight like that, what would they do to us?" one asked.

Without their story, the official statement from the police — accepted by the ICD — is all that stands on the record.

The official SAPS version presents a completely different picture.

In a statement, Booysen says "police vehicles employing their sirens and appropriate flashing lights attempted to stop them, [but] they resisted and shot at police. The police returned fire, and [Ndimande and Tembe] were killed."

The image of Booysen landing victoriously on the scene was plastered all over newspapers the next day under the headline, "PAYBACK — Cops gun down this man and are told: Well done!'

One newspaper reported that police appeared to be heeding the call of then KZN safety MEC and now suspended police commissioner Bheki Cele to "defend themselves and shoot hard at criminals"

The ICD, the body tasked with investigating police abuses, says only that "a full investigation was done" into whether police had acted improperly — but admits that, three years later, "technical reports are still outstanding'

Ndimande wasn't the only person suspected of being involved in Chonco's killing who ended up dead

Five other suspects were also killed by the police in murky circumstances which witnesses have described as cold-blooded murder.

One of those, taxi boss Lindelani Buthelezi, was

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drivers

screeched to a halt. One of the Cato Manor policemen, whose name was mentioned to the men.

this in broad daylight?" This was also heard and

Special reports by STEPHAN HOFSTATTER, MZILIKAZI WA AFRIKA and ROB ROSE

accosted at his house in Stanger in September 2008 by eight policemen, according to court papers. His wife, Thandeka Sokhulu, described in two sworn statements how police assaulted her, threw a blanket over her head and then shot her unarmed husband for "resisting arrest"

explanation.

"I am steadfast in my belief that my husband was executed by police who entered my house that night, and will not be swayed by anything to the contrary, she says in a sworn affidavit.

This bloody trail of corpses rattled Bongani Mkhize, another KwaMaphumulo taxi boss, to the extent that he took the bizarre step of going to court in 2008 to obtain an interdict to prevent the police from killing him.

In his affidavits, Mkhize said he was "reliably informed by certain members of the SAPS who are close to the investigating team that the policy being adopted is to kill or eliminate all [people] suspected of involvement in the murder of Chonco".

Booysen responded, saying Mkhize had "no reason to be afraid", as "it is not the intention of the police to kill anyone"

On November 14 2008, Judge David Ntshangase gave an order preventing the police from "unlawfully lling, injuring, threatening [or] harassing" him. Unfortunately for Mkhize, it didn't help.

A few days later, he was leaving his girlfriend's house one morning when he noticed that his Toyota was being followed by the Cato Manor unit. They cornered him in Durban's busy Umgeni Road and, according to witnesses, began shooting into the car. One member of the police unit, according to

witnesses who spoke to Sunday Times, stepped out of his car, walked calmly to the window of Mkhize's car and fired into the vehicle, finishing him off.

Another witness, who captured images of Mkhize's alleged assassination by police with his cellphone, was assaulted by angry officers after they realised that they had been caught on camera. The cellphone with all the evidence was smashed on the ground, in full view of other witnesses

At that moment, the metallic silver BMW — the same one that had been at Ndimande's killing -Sunday Times, leapt out and began screaming at the

"Are you stupid," he yelled. "Why are you doing witnessed by several uniformed police at the scene.

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explanation.

Then one of the policemen calmly discharged a pistol into the bushes, apparently to make it appear as if there had been a shoot-out. Another cop smashed the driver's window of the Hyundai with his rifle butt, evidently to make it look like shots had also been fired out of the vehicle, not just into it. 'There was no shoot-out. The okes pulled up alongside the Hyundai and just executed them'

explanation.

explanation.

Major-General Johan Booysen, head of the Hawks in KZN, on the right in the picture, arrived by police helicopter at the scene of one of the killings

These are just two of the seven bloodcurdling cases investigated by the Sunday Times — killings which often took place in broad daylight, all committed by this elite KwaZulu-Natal police unit based in Cato Manor

The others include:

• Five robbery suspects shot dead in their minibus near Camperdown on the N3;

• An ATM bombing suspect shot dead in a Durban service station toilet:

• Another ATM bombing suspect killed at his home in Pinetown:

PLEASE SEE

• Two men suspected of slitting the throats of prominent Durban lawyer Naren Sham and his family, who were shot dead on the same day during two separate pointing-out incidents — which involve suspects going to the scene with police; and • A taxi boss and his friend shot dead at a house in

Mandeni. In all of these cases, seasoned senior policemen, as well as ballistics and pathology experts — speaking to the Sunday Times on strict condition of anonymity raise serious doubts about the official versions of events.



While the ICD was established to probe these kinds of alleged police abuses, question marks hang over whether it has the capacity or will to do any serious investigation.

In many cases, postmortem examination results have yet to be submitted — even years after the event. And when they have been done, experts are not convinced of their thoroughness.

In Ndimande's case, for example, forensic expert Jacobus Steyl's report concluded that, contrary to police claims, "there is no indication that shots were fired through closed [car] windows from the inside to the outside

Despite the ICD claim of a full investigation, Steyl's reports say the ICD had not even done basic ballistic tests, suggesting that rogue cops know they have nothing to fear from the ICD.

At least on the Mkhize case, the ICD forwarded its findings to the public prosecutor, and a formal inquest will now be held.

In an interview with the Sunday Times, Booysen denied that this unit under his control conducted a series of "hits" in revenge for cop killings, and urged witnesses to come forward

"That's why we have legal processes," he said. 'Let's allow these cases to be investigated by the ICD and presented to the prosecuting authority.

But the witnesses who spoke to the Sunday Times are petrified of coming forward, lest they, too, end up being taken out on a quiet road while "resisting arrest". — investigations@sundaytimes.co.za



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ST Mainbody, 11-Dec-2011-Page 5, Cyan ST Mainbody, 11-Dec-2011- Page 5, Magenta ST Mainbody, 11-Dec-2011-Page 5, Yellow ST Mainbody, 11-Dec-2011- Page 5, Black

Sunday Times | December 11 2011

WHO KILL WITH A GRIN

Cop says bribe charge is bid to shut him up over KZN hit squads

OLONEL Navin Madhoe — who was arrested on charges of offering a R2-million bribe to Hawks provincial head Major-General Johan Booysen claims the real reason for the action against him was that he tried to blow the whistle on the alleged police hit squad operating in KwaZulu-Natal. In an affidavit filed during his bail application, which is in the possession of the Sunday Times, Madhoe claims that Booysen contacted him and "requested a

meeting" on August 25. He states: "I was informed by General Booysen to obtain certain compact discs containing incriminating evidence of serious crimes in a unit under his direct command.

"This, he informed me, was damaging for him as the discs contained direct evidence of serious and violent crimes of his members and could lead to widespread criminal prosecutions.

The Sunday Times was told the discs contained hundreds of photographs of people who were allegedly killed by police officers in the province.

Most of the killings were allegedly committed by members of the Cato Manor organised crime unit. Witnesses claim some of the people were executed by unit members and crime scenes were doctored.

Photographs seen by the Sunday Times show members of the Cato Manor unit celebrating with a braai after some of the shootings.

Madhoe adds in his affidavit that he obtained "this information ... and handed the first batch of compact discs to General Boovsen personally"

"We had approximately eight meetings at various times and laces at his instance to obtain

lish if he too had copies of the said discs, which I did." Madhoe says his action "in this regard was duly recorded and certain select police officers and intelligence were well

aware of my action". In an interview with the Sunday Times on Friday, Booysen acknowledged that he received two discs, a memory stick and a hard-drive from Madhoe with photographs. Booysen denied that Madhoe had used the photos to try to

of stolen goods.

them

Photographs seen by the **Sunday Times** show members of the Cato Manor unit celebrating with

a braai after some of the shootings

blackmail him into squashing a

R60-million corruption case against Madhoe and business-

The Hawks are investigating

Madhoe and Panday for their

alleged role in a police accom-

modation tender scam at a time

when Madhoe was a senior sup-

They are also accused of try-

ing to bribe Booysen to backdate

an investigation report into the

Panday and Madhoe are out

With regard to the slew of

on bail of R100 000 and R40 000

crime scene pictures, Booysen

said: "I was never blackmailed

but I was shown and handed the

ply chain management officer.

man Toshan Panday.

scam.

respectively.

photographs.'

"I can tell you the photographs were stolen from police," he said. "Anybody in possession of them, is in possession

But he could not explain why a charge of theft or possession of stolen goods in connection with the photos was not added to Madhoe's charge sheet when he was arrested. Booysen claims Madhoe had

initiated the meetings between

But Madhoe claims police are trying to cover up the Cato Manor squad because the discs and computer hard-drive were not handed in as evidence when he was arrested in September. He said: "I was arrested under the ruse of this alleged bribery attempt to falsely implicate the provincial commissioner and Panday

Panday is also accused of bankrolling a birthday party for Brigadier Lucas Ngobeni, the husband of the provincial commissioner Lieutenant-General Mmamonnye Ngobeni. The birthday party, attended

by 40 guests, was held at The Dish restaurant on May 29 2010. A local DJ who entertained the guests was also allegedly

paid by Panday. Booysen said the Internal Complaints Directorate (ICD) was investigating some of the killings linked to the photographs he ob-tained from Madhoe.

"The photos are the subjects of investigations by the ICD and the Hawks," he said.

ICD spokesman Moses Dlamini confirmed that the directorate, which deals with complaints against the police, was investigating members of the Durban organised crime unit. investigations@sundaytimes.co.za

COMMENT ON THIS:

WHO IS JOHAN BOOYSEN? IT has taken Major-General Johan Booysen 35 years to rise to his position as head of the Hawks in KwaZulu-Natal. He joined the police in 1976 with suspended police chief can ask anyone in the building." Natal "a safer place". the year in which the Soweto Bheki Cele, saying he barely knew Booysen was recently lauded the man and had been to the

for having turned down a R2million bribe. But, as the story opposite shows, there was much more to the tale.

When he was appointed to head the province's Hawks in 2010, the father of three told

Yet, weeks before taxi boss Bongani Mkhize was gunned down by cops in an apparent hit. it was Booysen who said in an affidavit that Mkhize had nothing to fear from the police. The Independent Complaints

In interviews with the Sunday Times, Booysen denied all knowledge of police "hits". saying he "sits in this office" most days".

But it was Boovsen who flew There he apparently

congratulated officers of the

GHOULISH GLEE: Members of the Cato Manor organised crime unit in a good mood after shooting two suspects at a homestead in KwaZulu-Natal in 2008, while someone, who appears to be a family member of the deceased, weeps. Experts shown images of the dead suspects said their deaths warranted investigation

atrocities committed by the South African Police. His career advancement has been aided by training courses, including by the FBI in the US

police chief's house only once and that was on official business. Booysen said Cele played no part in his promotion, even

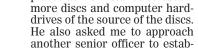
though he would have had to annrove the annointment Police University

Directorate confirmed this wee

but that the complaint had been withdrawn.

by police helicopter to the scene of the killing of Magojela Ndimande.

riots drew attention to the



tellus@sundaytimes.co.za He suggested the Sunday or SMS us at **33971** Times could be open to proswww.timeslive.co.za ecution for having the pictures.

Booysen is at pains to denv reports of a close relationship

and the China

"He doesn't even come into my office," Booysen said. "You iournalists he wanted to leave a legacy of having made KwaZulu-

that Boovsen has also been investigated for "intimidation", Cato Manor unit for shooting dead a suspected cop-killer.



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