

Bechuanaland's Aerial Pipeline: Intelligence and Counter Intelligence Operations against the South African Liberation Movements, 1960–1965

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Abstract

The road and rail pipelines operated by the liberation movements in Bechuanaland (Botswana) were known as the 'road to freedom'. An aerial pipeline enabled high value South African political refugees and freedom fighters to move through the Protectorate as fast as possible. A mini-airline called Bechuanaland Air Safaris, it was financed by Bechuanaland's government and a local millionaire businessman. Set up to support the needs of Britain's Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), this air bridge enabled close surveillance of potential security issues within Bechuanaland by the SIS, whilst simultaneously assisting organisations that would one day gain political power. This made it a key intelligence target for South Africa's security establishment, who penetrated this operation. Through surveillance and informants, notably Captain Herbert Bartaune, the company director and operator of Bechuanaland Air Safaris, they interdicted the activities of key personnel involved in liberation struggle operations. This paper examines this air bridge, some of its key personnel, surveillance operations by the South African Police, counter-intelligence actions by the British authorities connected to supporting this pipeline and its use by prominent leaders, including Joe Matthews, Nelson Mandela, Michael Dingake and Patrick Duncan.

Key words: Nelson Mandela; Michael Dingake; Patrick Duncan; Joe Matthews; Captain Herbert Bartaune; Bechuanaland Air Safaris; British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS); South African Police (SAP) Security Branch; African National Congress (ANC); Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC)

Around the time of the start of the armed struggle in South Africa in 1961, an 'aerial pipeline' was established in the then British Protectorate of Bechuanaland (Botswana). This pipeline was used by important personalities of the liberation struggle from South Africa and Bechuanaland to access assistance outside those countries' borders. The director and pilot

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of this aerial pipeline, Captain Herbert Bartaune, is fleetingly mentioned in the autobiographies of those who flew with him and in the literature on Botswana's pipeline as a sympathiser of South Africa's liberation struggle. Nelson Mandela and Michael Dingake mention only 'a pilot'.¹ Fish Keitseng, who played a key role in establishing various pipelines in Bechuanaland in the early 1960s, remembered Bartaune by name, describing him as a person who flew many people to safety.² Ronald Watts knew the pilot and re-established contact in 1990, the pilot having stayed with Watts during September 1960.³ Neil Parsons refers to him by name and describes him as the resident director of the air charter company connected to Britain's Secret Intelligence Service (SIS).⁴

However, this article demonstrates that embedded at the very core of this company were spies and informants who reported on the activities and whereabouts of the liberation struggle personnel, the very same people that this air bridge was meant to assist. It identifies Captain Bartaune, pilot and director of Bechuanaland Air Safaris, as a key operative. This paper uses resources such as Top Secret declassified British intelligence reports and a Department of Justice file in the South African National Archives.⁵ Both were unavailable at the time that many of the first struggle biographies and other works were produced in the early 1990s, and have not been consulted by other scholars who have written on the subject.

The file contents categorically prove this matter of spies in the aerial pipeline and has ramifications on our understanding of specific historic events – for example, those of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) in Basutoland, and the captures of Nelson Mandela and Michael Dingake, amongst others. These events and the broader geopolitical milieu in which they occurred consequently need to be reconsidered and refigured.

This paper will use the examples of three prominent persons who used the aerial pipeline, one of whom was seriously compromised as a result and two of whom were captured after exiting the pipeline. The first case is that of Patrick Duncan which demonstrates how Bartaune compromised Duncan and the PAC. The second is associated with Nelson Mandela's flights as part of his tour of the continent in 1962 and his return to Bechuanaland later that year, when Britain tried to circumvent South Africa's Security Branch. Within weeks of his return to South Africa, Mandela was captured. The third is that of Michael Dingake in 1965 and how South African agents linked to the pipeline enabled his kidnapping in Rhodesia and subsequent rendition by the SAP. The paper will also show that the shadowy figure of Bartaune is the common denominator for all three case studies. Before discussing these three cases, the article will outline the political context which led to the establishment of the

1. N. Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (London: Abacus, 1995), 344; M. Dingake, *Better to Die On One's Feet* (Cape Town: South African History Online, 2015), 102.
2. F. Keitseng, *Comrade Fish: Memories of a Motswana in the ANC Underground* (Gaborone: Pula Press, 1999), 55.
3. R. Watts, 'Memoirs of the Refugee "Pipeline": The Serowe Route, 1960–1961', *Botswana Notes and Records*, 29 (1997), 115.
4. N. Parsons, 'The Pipeline: Botswana's Reception of Refugees, 1956–68', *Social Dynamics*, 34, 1 (2008), 20–21.
5. National Archives of the United Kingdom (hereafter NAUK), FO 371/167528, South Africa: Export of Arms to South Africa: Smuggling and Gun-running Activities, 1963 (hereafter NAUK, FO 371/167528, South Africa: Export of Arms); National Archives of South Africa (hereafter NASA), JIC, Vol 62, Elsie Bartaune, 1939–1946.

pipeline, as well as provide previously unknown biographical information about Bartaune which is crucial to understanding his role in the pipeline.

The aerial pipeline⁶

With the banning of the African National Congress (ANC) and the PAC in 1960, numerous people from these organisations sought asylum and refuge in Britain's High Commission Territories of Bechuanaland, Basutoland and Swaziland. After the start of the armed struggle in South Africa in 1961, Bechuanaland became the preferred option as it enabled direct transit into Northern Rhodesia and Tanganyika and beyond.

Fish Keitseng was a defendant in the 1956 Treason Trial and deported to Bechuanaland in 1959. He settled in Lobatse and was in charge of the ANC in Bechuanaland. In late 1960 Joe Modise linked up with Keitseng and recruited him into the ANC underground network.⁷ Modise was one of MK's founders and participated in its first operations. He helped establish MK infrastructure in various regions, in particular Natal and the Eastern and Western Cape, spending two years working underground. He played a key role in sending recruits out of South Africa for military training before going into exile in 1963. Together with Keitseng they played a key role with the pipeline.⁸

The aerial pipeline was no ordinary pipeline, such the road and rail networks where the rank and file were taken by Keitseng by train to Francistown from where they then drove to Livingstone in Northern Rhodesia.⁹ It was the niche operation that moved key South African leaders, political refugees and freedom fighters through Bechuanaland to Tanganyika and Northern Rhodesia (and vice versa). The aim was to transit them by air as fast as possible to protect them from being kidnapped by agents of the apartheid regime. This was a constant danger. For example during March and April 1960 Deputy President Oliver Tambo narrowly avoided being abducted by South Africa's Security Branch.¹⁰

The air bridge ran from Lobatse via Kasane and, until Northern Rhodesia gained independence, then over-flew that territory to Mbeya, where refuelling took place before flying on to Dar es Salaam. The return trip followed the same route in reverse from Dar es Salaam. Called Bechuanaland Air Safaris, this mini-airline was established by Captain Herbert Bartaune as a charter company in 1961 and it linked Bechuanaland, Basutoland and Swaziland. Bartaune based himself as the company's resident director in

6. This section on the setting up of the aerial pipeline and its monitoring by various intelligence agencies is partly drawn from G. Benneyworth, 'Armed and Trained: Nelson Mandela's 1962 Military Mission as Commander in Chief of Umkhonto we Sizwe and Provenance for His Buried Makarov Pistol', *South African Historical Journal*, 63, 1 (2011), 81–84.
7. Keitseng, *Comrade Fish*, 49–51.
8. South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET), eds, *The Road to Democracy: South Africans Telling Their Stories*, Volume 1, 1950–1970 (Houghton: Mutloatse Arts Heritage Trust; Hollywood, CA: Tsehai, 2008), 20, fn 2.
9. Keitseng, *Comrade Fish*, 50.
10. J. Ramsay, 'Roots of Botswana Nationalist Politics (Part 21): MK, MI6 and the Pipeline', *Weekend Post*, 9 August 2015, http://www.weekendpost.co.bw/wp-column-details.php?col_id=183, accessed 9 November 2016.

Lobatse, with his wife Elsie Bartaune as company secretary.¹¹ Bartaune was the main pilot who flew refugees from Swaziland to Serowe, and in some cases from Serowe to Tanganyika.¹² His financiers were the Bechuanaland Protectorate government and Lobatse-based meat millionaire, one Cyril Hurwitz.¹³ Parsons wrote that Britain's Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) funded this enterprise and in essence the air bridge functioned as an SIS operation.¹⁴ The Resident Commissioner, Sir Peter Fawcus, who reported to the SIS, controlled the pipeline. Fawcus in turned used only his most trusted subordinates, that included the Lobatse based police Inspector John Sheppard, District Commissioner Brian Egner in Kasane and District Commissioner Philippus Steenkamp in Francistown. The designated point man for the aerial pipeline from MK's side was Fish Keitseng.

Overtly, the pipeline was a mini airline; yet, covertly, it informally linked agents of the SIS with elements of the ANC, including MK, and of the PAC. To circumvent the SAP, the SIS activated this aerial pipeline in 1961.¹⁵ Given the covert world of intelligence operations in Bechuanaland and the surrounding territories, it should be remembered that the security services of the Central African Federation and those of the Portuguese colonies also operated in the region.

For example, the Federal Intelligence and Security Bureau (FISB), the Central African Federation's intelligence structure, was headed by Bob de Quehen, MI5's former Central Africa Security Liaison Officer. In 1960 de Quehen described Colonel Prinsloo, the head of South Africa's Security Branch, as 'always a good friend of mine'.¹⁶ This statement occurred in the context of an invitation to de Quehen in 1960 to visit Pretoria and assist in the interrogation of 'hardcore Communists prominent in recent disturbances'.¹⁷ In August 1962 de Quehen learned that South Africa was going to establish a central intelligence and security organisation answerable directly to the Prime Minister. The FISB was promised access to long range South African intelligence and de Quehen arranged to hold monthly meetings with Brigadier Retief, who was responsible for creating this new organisation.¹⁸

Portuguese intelligence provided South Africa's Security Branch with surveillance reports about the movements of prominent South African communists traversing Portuguese territories.¹⁹ In 1961 Portuguese Naval Intelligence advised the SIS that Ghana was recruiting South Africans for political, military and sabotage training and also supplying funds to South African anti-government groups.²⁰ Consequently any person of interest to the FISB and Portuguese intelligence services would come in for attention and experience a hard time moving around undetected.

11. NAUK, FO 371/167528, South Africa: Export of Arms.

12. Watts, 'Memoirs', 105–119.

13. Parsons, 'The Pipeline', 21.

14. *Ibid.*, 20–21.

15. *Ibid.*

16. J. Sanders, *Apartheids Friends: The Rise and Fall of South Africa's Secret Service* (London: John Murray, 2006), 14.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*

19. NASA, BLM/Box 22, Vol. 2, File 442. Subject file: Secret. Communism. Reports. 8/6/1960 - 18/5/1961.

20. NAUK, DO 195, 2, Ghana's relations with the Union of SA, 29 July 1960–1962, marked 'secret'.

Given the profile of the pipeline passengers, who included the senior leadership of the ANC, the South African Communist Party (SACP), the PAC and possibly other liberation movements, this made it a key intelligence target for South Africa's security establishment. If they could infiltrate or penetrate the pipeline and recruit its personnel, it would be possible to interdict the various organisations and the activities of their key political activists. This is confirmed in a Bechuanaland Central Intelligence Committee (CIC) report, dated September 1960, which reflects that a SAP officer from the Mafeking Security Branch questioned Captain Bartaune in Lobatse about his recent airlift of Patrick Duncan (a member of the Liberal Party who joined the PAC in 1963) and Joe Matthews, a member of the ANC and SACP.²¹ On 11 October 1961 a Security Branch officer from Mafeking visited Andrew Rybicki, one of Bartaune's pilots. British records reflect that the consensus was that Rybicki was recruited as an informer.²² Rybicki's role was to forward information about refugee airlifts that he personally flew, some of which Joe Matthews organised.²³

As for Joe Matthews, the SIS had him under close surveillance. In 1960 Matthews left South Africa for Basutoland with the view of qualifying for a British passport after residing there for a year. This would give him freedom of movement, making him the link between those outside of South Africa and those inside the country.²⁴ As well as being a member of the ANC, Matthews had been active in the underground SACP since 1957 and was soon to become a member of its Central Committee in 1962.²⁵ He was a direct person of interest to the various security services and his activities were being closely monitored by the SIS, the Bechuanaland CIC and the SAP, as it was believed that Matthews was in charge of the ANC's pipeline.

The freedom of movement enabled by his British passport did not pass unnoticed. In 1962, British intelligence opened a file on Matthews. Classified Top Secret, its documents are marked UK Eyes Only, which means that Britain did not share this information with its strategic allies that made up the rest of the Five Eyes – the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Mandela's 1962 file was classified Secret, a security grading one level lower than Matthews, suggesting that at this point in time British intelligence considered Matthews more of a threat than Mandela.²⁶ None of Mandela's file contents are marked UK Eyes Only, meaning information could have been shared with Britain's strategic allies in the Five Eyes. In the case of Matthews, British intelligence tracked some of his overseas trips and attempted to identify his funding sources and payments made for air charter

21. NAUK, DO 157/9, Bechuanaland Central Intelligence Committee Reports, July 1960–October 1961.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.* Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu describes a similar incident also in 1961 which Ndlovu cites from the Botswana archives. It records that 'information from three different sources in Bechuanaland reported that between the 8 and 11 December 1961 two South African Police Special Branch agents were operating in the areas of Palapye and Serowe. When one of them was asked what the SAP special branch were doing in the protectorate, they replied that they "were going to arrest refugees". They were traveling in a Johannesburg registered car': Ndlovu, 'Heritage Routes', 502.

24. SADET, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa Volume 1 (1960–1970)* (Zebra Press, Cape Town, 2004, 22.

25. NAUK, DO 119/1229, Vincent Joe Matthews (VJ), 4 July 1962–4 October 1962.

26. NAUK, DO 119/1478, Nelson Mandela, 1962.

travel. In November 1960, they monitored him in Moscow, Prague, Tanganyika and the United Kingdom, amongst other destinations.²⁷

Captain Herbert Bartaune, Director of Bechuanaland Air Safaris

Captain Herbert Bartaune runs as a central thread linking the life stories of Patrick Duncan, Nelson Mandela and Michael Dingake to the aerial pipeline. Bartaune was the Director of the air charter company from its inception in 1961 until it was acquired by Bechuanaland National Airways on 1 October 1965. Over a period of approximately four years he flew numerous key people in and out of Bechuanaland and played a pivotal role in the pipeline as its central operator. Yet who was he? A closer focus on the life of the Captain has direct bearing on the surveillance, repression and counterinsurgency operations undertaken by the SIS and South African Security Branch against the liberation movement and its key personnel.

Herbert Bartaune was a German citizen who was born in German South West Africa in 1914 and died in Walvis Bay in 1993.²⁸ His wife Elsie Bartaune died in Walvis Bay in 2002.²⁹ Before the Second World War, Bartaune had been active in glider flying in South Africa and obtained his private and commercial pilot's licence. His exact activities during the war are difficult to trace, yet before the war he was actively involved in aircraft and glider research and experiments in Germany. In 1937 he became a member of the German Research Institute for Soaring (gliders and sailplanes), where he did much research on aircraft air brakes. The institute was located in the Wasserkuppe, the highest peak in the Rhön Mountains in the German state of Hesse. Between the First and Second World Wars great advances in gliding and sailplane developments took place on this mountain.³⁰ It is here that Bartaune specialised his flying skills which would later make him an aviator of choice for the pipeline.

Students from the Darmstadt University of Technology started flying from the Wasserkuppe as early as 1911, yet gliding came into its own after 1918 when the Treaty of Versailles restricted the production or use of powered aircraft in Germany. From 1920 onwards annual gliding competitions were held and in the 1920s the world's first glider pilot school was established at the Wasserkuppe. By 1930 the competition was an international event drawing pilots from all over Europe and the United States, and Bartaune from South West Africa.

Virtually every German aeronautical engineer and test pilot of note during the 1920s and 1930s spent time building, testing and flying aircraft at the Wasserkuppe, and this period saw advances in new technologies such as flying wings and rocket powered flights. During the Third Reich gliding activities were controlled by the state. As for the Hitler Youth pilots and their instructors, proficiency in gliding was used as the first step towards joining the

27. NAUK, DO 119/1229, Vincent Joe Matthews (VJ), 4 July 1962–4 October 1962.

28. A picture of Bartaune's gravestone is available at http://www.eggsa.org/library/main.php?g2_itemId=2537015, accessed 10 October 2016.

29. According to two Walvis Bay residents who remembered Bartaune, his final employment was with the fish oil depot in the harbour. According to one of them, Bartaune had at one point been Haile Selassie's personal pilot. A member of the local shooting club, Bartaune was an ardent gunsmith and built a few handguns for himself. He refused to speak Afrikaans. Conversation with two Walvis Bay residents, 7 May 2016. Both individuals asked to remain anonymous.

30. Deutsches Museum Flugwerft Schleissheim website. See, <http://www.deutsches-museum.de/en/flugwerft/exhibitions/sailplanes/>, accessed 8 March 2017.

Luftwaffe, something about which Bartaune later reminisced.³¹ During the war Bartaune served with the Luftwaffe as a pilot and reached the rank of *hauptmann* or captain.

After the war Bartaune continued gliding, this time with the gliding club of the British Fourth Armoured Brigade in Germany.³² Here he was the Chief of Aviation before returning to South Africa in 1946, where he continued his career as an aviator. In 1953, *Border Watch*, an Australian newspaper, reported that he resided in South West Africa and owned two small aircraft. On 25 July 1953 the paper reported that he was flying in Australia, undertaking research into rain-making experiments for the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, an Australian federal government agency responsible for scientific research in Australia. His method was based on injecting silver iodide into the exhaust pipe of a light aircraft and then releasing this into cloud formations. According to the article, Bartaune met all of his expenses for this project.³³

In September 1960 he resided in Bulawayo, worked for Air Carriers Bulawayo and regularly flew into Francistown and Maun. According to a telephonic interview by Watts with Bartaune in 1990, at the time aged 76 and retired in Walvis Bay, Bartaune said that in Bulawayo he 'made enemies because people thought he was a liberal'.³⁴ Bartaune flew all the Southern Rhodesian Prime Ministers including Lord Malvern, Garfield Todd and Ian Smith as well as Dag Hammarskjold, the Secretary General of the United Nations, before his fatal crash in September 1961. He considered himself a 'taxi driver' and said in 1990: 'taxi drivers don't ask the business of their clients.'³⁵

However, it was his activities and those of his wife during the Second World War that have a bearing on the pipeline. With the outbreak of the Second World War private pilots' licences in South Africa were suspended and a registered letter was sent by the Office of the Director of Civil Aviation in Pretoria to Bartaune informing him of this. It was returned undelivered to Civil Aviation, which then referred the matter to the Commissioner of Police, prompting a police investigation into his whereabouts. According to a file in the South African National Archives, the SAP established that Herbert Bartaune left Walvis Bay on 22 July 1937 for Germany, before the outbreak of the war.³⁶

Two documents in the file, dated 21 May 1946, refer to both Herbert Bartaune and his wife Elsie – then residing in Johannesburg – as being on the Official Card Index of Nazi Party members maintained by the German authorities and which was obtained by the Rein Commission during 1946. Other correspondence by the SAP in this file refers to them as 'enemy aliens'.³⁷

31. Bartaune was a member of the Swakopmund gliding club, where in 1968 he spoke of the Hitler Youth and of how glider flying prepared them for conversion as pilots in the Luftwaffe. He related that the Hitler Youth launched their gliders by a catapult system: Conversation with R. Swart, Kimberley, 8 March 2017. Mr Swart was also a member of the Swakopmund gliding club and remembered Bartaune and the discussions he had with him.

32. P. Ariane, H. Kuckuk, K. Pophanken and K. Schalipp, *Ein Jahrhundert Luft- und Raumfahrt in Bremen: Von den frühesten Flugversuchen zum Airbus und zur* (Falkenberg, Rotenburg Edition, 2015), 343.

33. 'More "Rain Makers" Here For Experiments', *Border Watch*, 25 July 1953.

34. Watts, 'Memoirs', 105–119.

35. *Ibid.*

36. NASA, JIC, Vol 62, Elsie Bartaune, 1939–1946.

37. *Ibid.*

In other words, both the director (Herbert Bartaune) and the company secretary (Elsie Bartaune) of Bechuanaland Air Safaris were former Nazi Party members and the South African authorities knew this at the time the pipeline was being set up. Given that the British were part of the Rein Commission in post-war Germany, they must have known this too. As former Nazi Party members, it is likely that the two central pipeline operators also harboured anti-communist sentiments with obvious bearings on the airlift passengers Herbert Bartaune transported.

Bartaune, Duncan and the PAC's uprising plans

Declassified British Foreign Office documents provide another insight into Bartaune and his role in undermining the PAC's plans for a general uprising in 1963 and again in 1964 staged from Basutoland. These documents also prove beyond doubt his role as a multiple intelligence services operative.

Following its banning in South Africa and the arrest of most of its leadership during the 1960 anti-pass campaign and the emergency, the PAC regrouped in Basutoland under the direction of a new Presidential Council.³⁸ They planned a national uprising in South Africa for 7–8 April 1963. This failed to materialise as a result of a series of raids on the PAC by the Basutoland police and the mass arrest of PAC activists by the SAP in South Africa.³⁹

Bartaune was connected to these security operations and the failure of the 1963 uprising through his espionage activities. On 21 April 1963, Bartaune wrote a report in Lobatse for the Bechuanaland Protectorate Special Branch which was then classified Top Secret. This report was forwarded from the Resident Commissioner in Mafeking to the Deputy High Commissioner in Cape Town. Its Top Secret covering note (Savingram) reads: 'I enclose report by Capt. H. Bartaune to [Bechuanaland's] Special Branch. I have no reason to doubt the veracity of this statement. I have not informed the Central Intelligence Committee of its contents.'⁴⁰ It was then forwarded together with a Top Secret dispatch on 3 May 1963 by the High Commission in Cape Town to the Colonial Office in London and also copied to the Foreign Office. Read together these documents provide clear evidence of just how penetrated the pipeline was and of Bartaune's role in establishing it, running it and compromising its passengers and their political organisations.⁴¹

J.A. Steward of the High Commission wrote that:

The Special Branch of the South African Police are known to use Bartaune, but this does not necessarily mean that he is altogether to be disbelieved and we propose to act on the assumption that though the report may well be accurate, it may also have gone to the South Africans and perhaps to C.I.A. as well as to ourselves.⁴²

The report details discussions that Bartaune had with Patrick Duncan, then a member of the PAC, during the evening of 12 April 1963 at Bartaune's residence after Duncan was flown in

38. See A. Lissoni, 'The PAC in Basutoland, c. 1962–1965', *South African Historical Journal*, 62, 1 (2010), 60–61.

39. *Ibid.*, 64.

40. NAUK, FO 371/167528, South Africa: Export of Arms.

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.* The term ourselves refers here to the SIS.

from Maseru by one of Bartaune's pilots. Duncan asked if Bartaune would transport arms and ammunition by air through Bechuanaland to Basutoland in return for attractive remuneration. Bartaune claimed that his first instinct was to decline, yet he decided to have the discussion as he may 'get more information from him'.⁴³ Duncan's plan was for Bartaune's aircraft to smuggle the weapons from lonely pans in the desert where Bartaune could arrange for aircraft refuelling depots. They would then at night overfly South Africa and either land or drop the cargo in Basutoland. Duncan suggested that should Bartaune not be prepared to do the flying, then he could at least aid foreign aircraft with secret refilling bases on these lonely pans. His thinking was to use the Dakota or similar aircraft for this purpose.

Duncan also told Bartaune that he felt that Basutoland would be an ideal base for an uprising against the Republic. Its central positioning and rugged mountainous areas would provide ideal hiding places for armed activity. Such a centre would be safe as South Africa would not dare to invade any High Commission Territory as this would constitute an act of war against the United Kingdom. Bartaune was not the only person Duncan spoke to about his idea, for example he mentioned this to Peter Brown and other Liberal Party members who visited him in 1962.⁴⁴

The weapons, Duncan told Bartaune, would come either from Egypt or Ghana, and not China or the Soviet Union. He was particularly seeking FN semi-automatic rifles. Funds would not come from behind the Iron Curtain and Duncan hinted to Bartaune that his backers might have been North American. This reference to the North America is interesting as two months later in June 1963 Duncan toured the USA with Nana Mahomo, a member of the national executive committee of the PAC and one of its chief representatives abroad after 1960. Duncan and Mahomo persuaded, on the basis of the PAC's anti-communist stance, the American Federation of Labour-Congress of Industrial Organizations to give money to the PAC.⁴⁵

Duncan outlined the plan to start an uprising on South African soil from bases in Basutoland which would force the Republic to counter measures. He explained it thus:

Once the fighting starts and Africans were shot at a larger scale, it would create a tremendous outcry in the rest of the world against South Africa, and this would force the United Nations forces to step in for reasons of world security. The whole thing would then develop more or less in the line of a second Congo.

Duncan stated that the aim was to outflank the communist element in South Africa as it had happened in the Congo, where he viewed the events of 1961 as a victory for the West which prevented the communist bloc getting a hold in Africa.⁴⁶ Shortly after this conversation, Bartaune reported the details of it to Mr Forrest, the Chief of Special Branch who, 'begged me to cooperate with them and make Mr Duncan believe that I was agreeable to his suggestions. I was asked to do everything in my power to get information on further details'.⁴⁷

On 14 April 1963 during a flight with Duncan from Kasane to Elizabethville, Bartaune suggested to Duncan how this gun-running operation could work. He said that the idea

43. *Ibid.*

44. C.J. Driver, Patrick Duncan: *South African and Pan-Africanist* (Oxford: James Carrey, 2000), 224.

45. See Lissoni, 'The PAC in Basutoland', 67.

46. NAUK, FO 371/167528, South Africa: Export of Arms.

47. *Ibid.*

of night flying and secret refuelling should be abandoned. The weapons should be dismantled into the smallest possible parts and concealed in used suitcases and travelling bags of various sizes. The flights should leave from Mbeya via Bechuanaland to Basutoland in broad daylight and the baggage accompanied by one or two passengers to deceive the authorities. Even though Zambia was soon to become independent, the country was to be avoided as European airport personnel could not necessarily be trusted. Lobatse was to be used as a refuelling point before flying on to Maseru or an airfield close to the proposed hiding place in Basutoland. Duncan suggested as a first delivery approximately 40 rifles with ammunition probably as a sort of pilot scheme.

Duncan offered 55 South African cents per mile against Bartaune's normal quota of 35 cents plus a personal danger bonus of R2000 per flight, to be paid in advance in South African bank notes. Duncan advised that he was then on his way to Europe to collect sufficient funds to purchase and transport the arms and that he intended to return in about three or four months' time. He would in all likelihood accompany Bartaune with the first consignment.

The reason Bartaune suggested open flights was:

To gain the full confidence of Mr Duncan because he was expecting my advice and knowledge in these technical matters. Secondly, such flights carried out quite openly and in day time, create less suspicion to the authorities and to the general public of every Southern African country concerned. Thirdly, it gives an easy opportunity for the BP [Bechuanaland Protectorate] Police authorities to intercept such a shipment here in Bechuanaland or, better still, watch it safely going through Basutoland so that the Basutoland Police can take over there, and get more information on the hiding places and on the rest of the organisation.⁴⁸

In his report for the Bechuanaland Protectorate Special Branch Bartaune claimed that he suggested to Duncan that:

The length of the supply line from Mbeya for instance, provides more opportunities to make certain whether the first shipment contains arms and ammunition. There is a possibility that on the first flight various kinds of hardware such as nails, bolts and stuff could be carried in order to test the reliability of this channel.⁴⁹

Did Bartaune think up these ideas all on his own? Is there evidence as to why Duncan could trust Bartaune? On balance the hypothesis is that this method of gun-running was given to Bartaune during his initial discussions with Bechuanaland's Special Branch so he could suggest it to Duncan. In effect Bartaune was working for the Special Branch and actively handling Duncan. As for Duncan trusting him, Bartaune reported the following:

In the past few years I have flown a number of political refugees and leaders of various factions. Although these flights were carried out completely legally with the international air navigation regulations, and with the full knowledge of, and consent of the appropriate authorities, these facts were hardly realised by those passengers, being hunted on one side of the border and assisted on the other side, which played a psychological part in their mental outlook. Over and above stands the fact that all passengers are treated and cared for to the best of my knowledge and ability, irrespective of race, social standing or political attitude, which instils confidence and trust. Mr. Duncan has flown

48. *Ibid.*

49. NAUK, FO 371/167528, South Africa: Export of Arms.

with me since several years.⁵⁰ Once, on a scheduled flight over Bechuanaland, I even possibly saved his life by swift action, when he by accident opened the door of the aircraft and was very nearly sucked out. My concern for him as for any other passenger must have given him the feeling of myself being a sympathiser with his political course.⁵¹

In other words, Bartaune not only had won the trust of the very same people who were being pursued by the South African authorities, he also broke it. From the documentary evidence it is clear that he was feeding information into at least three (Bechuanaland Special Branch, SIS and South African) and possibly four (CIA) intelligence systems about them. The possibility exists that he assisted the FISB as well.

The High Commissioner in Cape Town who forwarded Bartaune's report to London stated that they had corroborated from other sources that his information was accurate.

In his last days in Maseru, Patrick Duncan was in a very overwrought state and the substance of this report seems to us likely to be genuine. You may have seen amongst the documents taken to London recently by Captain Willoughby a map of the mountainous area in the south of Basutoland and in the adjoining Eastern Cape. This map Patrick Duncan left behind in a drawer in a friend's house in Southern Basutoland. Taken together with the location of Mr. Duncan's trading stores; his theory of a 'trigger' war and of United Nations involvement [all of which was confirmed by Ntloedibe].⁵² These details tend to corroborate Bartaune's report and are by no means out of keeping with Patrick Duncan's present declared position and known political and psychological attitudes.⁵³

This report by Britain's High Commissioner in Cape Town is linked to the neutralisation of the PAC in Basutoland. The SIS were aware that PAC supporters were entering Basutoland to register as political refugees in order to receive military training before infiltrating South Africa. Duncan had purchased two trading stores in the Quthing district to be used as military training grounds for PAC recruits.⁵⁴ These were the same stores referred to by the High Commissioner in Cape Town.⁵⁵

On 12 May 1963 Duncan and his two sons met their pilot at Maseru airport and were flown to Bechuanaland by Bechuanaland Air Safaris. The pilot is described in Duncan's biography as a white supremacist and former mercenary from the Congo.⁵⁶ On 4 June 1963, while Duncan was in the United Kingdom, the British authorities declared him a prohibited immigrant in the High Commission Territories.⁵⁷ All Duncan's plans hinged on him being based in Basutoland. The cause of this unexpected blow convinced Duncan that it resulted from pressure by the South African authorities who knew about his flight to Bechuanaland, yet allowed it on condition that he did not return.⁵⁸ On balance they did know of this flight and Duncan's

50. This distinction of several years is important in that this means that Bartaune flew Duncan before he established Bechuanaland Air Safaris. This would presumably have been in the Central African Federation and Belgian Congo.

51. NAUK, FO 371/167528, South Africa: Export of Arms.

52. Elias Ntloedibe, a founding member of the PAC.

53. NAUK, FO 371/167528, South Africa: Export of Arms.

54. *Ibid.*

55. NAUK, FO 371/167528, South Africa: Export of Arms.

56. Driver, *Patrick Duncan*, 226.

57. *Ibid.*, 227.

58. *Ibid.*

discussions with Bartaune around weapons smuggling. Bartaune passed this information on to the South Africans, as suggested in his report to Bechuanaland Special Branch.⁵⁹

On 21 August 1963, P.K. Leballo, the PAC's Acting President and head of the Presidential Council, left Basutoland by chartered aircraft for Salisbury from where he then boarded a second aircraft to Accra.⁶⁰ The chartered flight was from Bartaune's company. As British and South African intelligence driven operations closed down on the PAC network, its plans for a general uprising first in 1963 and then in 1964 were ultimately thwarted and its leadership forced out of Basutoland.

Nelson Mandela and the pipeline⁶¹

In 1962 Nelson Mandela travelled through Bechuanaland to Tanganyika as the first leg of his mission into Africa. Mandela linked up with Joe Matthews in Lobatse, before flying to Dar es Salaam. Bartaune's aircraft was chartered, the payment monitored by the SIS in Dar es Salaam.⁶² On 11 January 1962, Mandela arrived in Lobatse to find that his flight was delayed. He stayed with Fish Keitseng in Peleng village.⁶³ On 22 January 1963 Britain's High Commissioner in Cape Town reported that on 19 January 1962, Bartaune airlifted Mandela into the pipeline.⁶⁴ The High Commissioner reported that while Mandela stayed in Lobatse South Africa's Security Branch was unaware of Mandela's presence in Peleng (the Lobatse location where Keitseng lived) yet an informant had advised them of Mandela's flight details.⁶⁵ This is worth noting, as this informant could have been Bartaune given the information regarded flight details.

Nelson Mandela's return journey through Bechuanaland provides a glimpse into attempts by British intelligence to counter South African clandestine operations against Mandela once he was inside the protectorate. For part of Mandela's return trip, starting from Dar es Salaam, then Prime Minister Julius Nyerere provided a private plane to Mbeya in southern Tanganyika.⁶⁶ Fish Keitseng then travelled to Mbeya and met with Mandela and Oliver Tambo, taking with him three other people who needed to travel onwards. Keitseng recalled:

I took them and rented a charter from Bartaune, who had earlier flown Mandela to Tanganyika. He was a big chap who used to fly a lot of our people to safety. Others were also dealing with him. Once, when I was at our headquarters in Lusaka I found him discussing payments with [Tennyson] Makiwane. On this trip another pilot who worked for Bartaune flew. So many people were flying that Bartaune had bought an extra plane.⁶⁷

59. NAUK, FO 371/167528, South Africa: Export of Arms.

60. NAUK, CO 1048/521 Basutoland Intelligence Report, October 1963 and July 1964.

61. Mandela's use of the pipeline and return to South Africa is also described in Benneyworth, 'Armed and Trained', 84, 94–95.

62. NAUK, DO 119/1478, Nelson Mandela, 1962. Secret Telegram from High Commissioner to the Secretary of State for Colonies and the Resident Commissioner Bechuanaland, 22 January 1962.

63. *Ibid.*

64. Joe Matthews arrived the day before and flew out with Mandela.

65. NAUK, DO 119/1478, Nelson Mandela, 1962. Secret Telegram from High Commissioner to the Secretary of State for Colonies and the Resident Commissioner Bechuanaland, 22 January 1962.

66. Mandela, *Long Walk*, 364.

67. Keitseng, *Comrade Fish*, 55.

Keitseng told Mandela and Tambo that aside from informants, South African Security Branch were all over Lobatse. He suggested that that it would be safer to land in Kanye rather than Lobatse. After spending the night in Mbeya, they flew to Kanye, where the District Commissioner of Gaborone and a Bechuanaland Special Branch officer intercepted Mandela. They brushed aside Mandela's use of a false name and threatened his arrest if he incorrectly identified himself. The Special Branch officer stated that his instructions were to provide help and transportation.⁶⁸ Mandela replied, 'If you insist that I am Nelson Mandela and not David Motsamayi I will not challenge you'.⁶⁹ The Special Branch officer accompanied by the District Commissioner then drove Mandela and Keitseng to Lobatse where they rendezvoused with Joe Modise and Jonas Matlou.⁷⁰ Both were members of the MK team sent to collect Mandela.⁷¹ The Special Branch officer advised Mandela that the SAP were aware of his return and suggested that he leave the next day.⁷² Mandela decided otherwise and left that night for Liliesleaf farm in Rivonia, where he arrived the following day.

In just over a week after exiting the pipeline Mandela was captured. Were his movements reported by Bartaune and other informants embedded in the pipeline? Very likely given that they could recognise Mandela, having interacted with him before and having access to the passenger manifest and the timing and destination of his flight. The pilot whilst airborne would have radioed his route, position and timings to Bechuanaland air control. This signals traffic would have been monitored by the South African military and aviation authorities. Given that the SIS knew Bartaune was passing information to the SAP, this could explain the rerouting of his flight to Kanye. Within days the British were being challenged by the SAP about Mandela's passage through Bechuanaland. It was decided that elements of the pipeline were in jeopardy so Inspector John Sheppard and District Commissioner Brian Egner, two key British intelligence operators involved with the pipeline, were quickly transferred out of the Protectorate to prevent their potential kidnapping by the SAP.⁷³

Michael Dingake

Michael Dingake, a Bechuanaland national, joined the ANC in 1952 and served in various roles in the organisation's structures. He took part in all the campaigns of this period from the Defiance Campaign to the anti-pass campaign and the burning of passes after the Sharpeville massacre in 1960. Dingake went into hiding after the Rivonia raid and captures to lead the ANC underground. In 1964 he left South Africa and became the external contact with the underground machinery in Johannesburg.⁷⁴

68. T. Simpson, *Umkhonto We Sizwe the ANC's Armed Struggle* (Cape Town: Penguin Books, 2016), 54.

69. Mandela, *Long Walk*, 365.

70. Matlou had opened the ANC Office in Bechuanaland in 1961 before moving to Tanzania and then Algeria, where he helped to bring in South African youth for military training.

71. Mandela, *Long Walk*, 365.

72. *Ibid.*

73. Ramsay, 'Roots of Botswana Nationalist Politics'.

74. Dingake, *Better to Die*, 85.

His account of his 1965 capture in Rhodesia and subsequent rendition to South Africa in his new autobiography *Better to Die on One's Feet* offers another insight into the pipeline. When his written account is combined with information he shared during an interview with the author about this in 2015, a picture emerges of the hidden hand of South African intelligence in his capture through access to informants embedded in the pipeline.⁷⁵

Towards the close of 1965 Dingake visited the ANC office in Lusaka. For his return journey to Lobatse, the organisation chartered a plane to fly him and Duma Nokwe, the Secretary General of the ANC, who was scheduled to meet his wife who had just fled South Africa to Lobatse. For landing rights to be obtained, the Bechuanaland authorities required a passenger manifest together with all their passport details. It was presumed that there would be no difficulties given that Nokwe was not a prohibited person and Dingake's passport was in order.⁷⁶

However, a delay followed, which seemed unusual. The air charter company advised that they take off from Lusaka airport in anticipation of a positive response whilst they were airborne, as the company believed it would be impossible that a Bechuanaland citizen would be denied landing rights in their own country. Dingake recalled that, 'it was a very small aircraft, could seat about four' and that it was 'the two of us [himself and Nokwe] and the pilot'.⁷⁷

According to Dingake's account, they took off and the pilot kept in radio contact with the company offices. Whilst airborne they kept checking with the pilot what the status was and he kept replying 'no, not yet'.⁷⁸ Later when they asked the pilot where they were he advised that, much to their consternation they were about to land in Salisbury, Rhodesia, for which the pilot had been cleared by the Rhodesian authorities. Dingake and Nokwe told him to return immediately to Livingstone as 'Salisbury would not have been safe for either of us'.⁷⁹ Dingake remembers that 'He didn't argue, he turned back to Livingstone'.⁸⁰

On landing in Livingstone the company advised that their landing rights had been refused and Dingake could proceed to Bechuanaland by other means of transport. He was assured that he could take a train through Rhodesia without hindrance. Dingake wrote to the High Commissioner of Bechuanaland berating the authorities for not allowing a bona fide citizen to return to his home country. To his surprise, he received a prompt and very polite reply claiming misinformation about his identity. The politeness disarmed Dingake, and he set off by train.⁸¹

On 8 December 1965, he was captured inside the train at Figtree, Rhodesia, while carrying his Bechuanaland passport. Dingake's wife through her lawyer wrote to Seretse Khama to intervene, yet this letter was not handed to Khama in time by his personal secretary. As Dingake recalls, 'it seemed all the dice were inauspiciously stacked against me'.⁸²

75. Interview with M. Dingake by G. Benneyworth and O. Badsha, Gaborone, 19 November 2015.

76. Dingake, *Better to Die*, 102.

77. Interview with Dingake.

78. Dingake, *Better to Die*, 102.

79. *Ibid.*

80. Interview with Dingake.

81. Dingake, *Better to Die*, 103.

82. *Ibid.*

Dingake was detained for just over a month before being driven to Beit Bridge where he was handed over to South African Special Branch. The Rhodesian BSAP officer went through the motions of returning Dingake's passport. Lieutenant Dirker, a notorious Security Branch officer, snatched the passport from the Rhodesian officer's hand. When they drove through the border post into South Africa Dingake was forced to lie down on the back seat of the car with a gun to his head. There were no witnesses to his entering South Africa.⁸³ Detained and tortured, in 1966 Dingake was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment on Robben Island.

On 19 November 2015, during an interview with Michael Dingake in Gaborone, he was asked about the pilot who attempted to land him in Salisbury.

- Author: May I ask you about the pilot? I know that this is a long time ago, can you recall what his nationality was?
- Michael Dingake: I think he was British, I think he was British. Yet was he British? Anyway it was a funny sort of name. I'd better not commit myself to saying he was British.
- Author: Was the surname Bartaune?
- Michael Dingake: Ah! Yeah! That's right. That's right Yeah, that's right. That's the name. Yeah.⁸⁴

Dingake was very clear about this point during this discussion. At the mention of Bartaune's name he was decisive in his reply and in recognising the name. He literally clapped his hands together at the mention of the name. Bartaune was the pilot during this incident.

Conclusion

Bechuanaland Air Safaris was a key part of the various pipelines established in Bechuanaland to facilitate transport across that territory for the South African liberation movements. It connected Bechuanaland to Basutoland and Swaziland and was established by the SIS in partnership with Captain Herbert Bartaune. During its existence, many prominent leaders of the liberation movements flew with it and interacted with Bartaune. It appears that in certain instances, as that of Patrick Duncan, Bartaune won the trust of a number of people.

Yet his past suggests more about Bartaune. Aligning himself with the forces of Nazi-fascism, he served with the German armed forces in the Second World War and, along with his wife Elsie, he was a Nazi Party member. However, according to the British intelligence system he was, some time before the Rivonia raid, providing information to the SAP. British documents state that they assumed that the information in his report to the Bechuanaland Special Branch was also passed on to the SAP and possibly the CIA. Whether this means Bartaune passed it on to the CIA directly, or that the SAP passed this onto the CIA through their channels remains unknown.

As for Patrick Duncan and PAC activities in Basutoland, Bartaune compromised them to the British, South African and possibly US intelligence systems. Duncan's relationship with Bartaune reached back several years and, according to Bartaune, he had even saved Duncan's life on one occasion. Duncan trusted Bartaune and shared his plans for smuggling

83. *Ibid.*

84. Interview with Dingake.

weapons with the aviator. Yet, unbeknownst to Duncan, Bartaune had no hesitation in using this information against Duncan.

In the case of Nelson Mandela, Bartaune personally flew him from Lobatse to Tanganyika. Mandela's return to Kanye in one of Bartaune's aircraft resulted in diversions from the original route to Lobatse due to the risks involved as a result of increased South African surveillance around Lobatse. When landing at Kanye, Mandela was assisted by the District Commissioner of Gaborone and a British aligned security official to reach his rendezvous team for his journey back to South Africa. This in a way thwarted South African agents. However, very shortly thereafter Mandela was captured. It is known that the CIA assisted the South African Security Branch in his capture. If Bartaune at that stage was assisting the SAP, he may have played a role in the events leading up to his capture by reporting on his intended travels through Bechuanaland, prior to airlifting Mandela and Keitseng from Mbeya.

In the case of Michael Dingake, his capture in Rhodesia was part of an orchestrated plot between the South African and Rhodesian security services. According to Dingake, there was no apparent need to deny landing rights to a Botswana citizen with a valid passport, yet that is what happened. During this flight Bartaune attempted, for no apparent reason, to land his passengers in Salisbury, which would have resulted in Dingake's and possibly even Duma Nokwe's arrest. He would have literally delivered them to the Rhodesian security services. When they remonstrated, he returned to Zambia. Dingake was then forced to travel overland through Rhodesia, resulting in his capture by the BSAP, who then illegally handed him over to the SAP.

The penetration of the aerial pipeline by the apartheid regime has a bearing on our understanding of the events and personalities described in this paper. After Mandela's capture, key persons connected to the pipeline were transferred out of Bechuanaland. However, the pipeline continued functioning with Bartaune betraying Patrick Duncan and the PAC in 1963 and 1964 and up until Michael Dingake's capture in 1965. As the company was taken over by Bechuanaland National Airways in October/November 1965, Bartaune's role in Dingake's capture may have been one of his final acts of betrayal at that time. Information supplied to the intelligence and security services of various countries by Bartaune (and other informants) impacted negatively on the liberation movements. This was part of the apartheid state's surveillance, repression and counterinsurgency objectives, as the cases of Matthews, Duncan, Mandela and Dingake discussed in this article show.