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Unlocking South Africa's Military Archives

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Introduction

And it was terrible ... I couldn't believe that her body could survive it all.

Trudie Grobler, intern psychologist at No. 1 Military Hospital on observing an aversion therapy session where a woman was subjected to such severe shocks that her shoes flew off her feet¹

The mantra no doubt found throughout this publication is that the apartheid era was characterised by censorship and secrecy, particularly in the areas of defence and security. Despite laudatory objectives, the South African Medical Services (SAMS) of the South African Defence Force (SADF) carried its fair share of secrets and abuses. Although the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) unlocked some of these secrets, the truth revealed was miniscule in relation to what remains unknown. Despite consistent claims that thousands of documents have been destroyed or lost, many still exist, but are difficult to access in the archival maze in which they are buried.

In the same year that the Promotion of Access to Information Act No. 2 of 2000 (PAIA) came into being, the South African History Archive (SAHA) board approved the repositioning of SAHA as a human rights archive dedicated to documenting and contributing to the continuing struggle for justice in South Africa.² In 2001 SAHA and Gay and Lesbian Archive, an independent SAHA special project, embarked on a project to proactively seek records and build on research already published on gays in the military by requesting access via PAIA to documents held by the Department of Defence (DOD). The project, because of funding availability, had two distinct periods: the first resulted in a report published in 2003, and the second in a report still to be published at time of writing.

In the first phase of this project, SAHA secured finding aids in the form of filing

systems, lists and other information from the DOD archives that would help facilitate requests. Although seeking to uncover more information on gays in the military was central to the project, the work was by no means confined to this.

Gays in the military: Background

It became clear that the practice of psychiatry in the SADF was closely wedded to the preoccupation of the military authorities with eliminating patterns of behaviour that did not confirm to SADF discipline and the apartheid war effort.³


Reports of the mental abuse of conscripts first surfaced in an article entitled 'The abuse of psychiatry in the SADF' in *War Resister*,⁴ published in the 1980s by the London-based Committee on South African War Resistance. The article reveals information about the psychiatry ward at the No. 1 Military Hospital in Pretoria, where the then head of psychiatry was Dr Aubrey Levin. Although it explains that there were some genuinely disturbed people in the ward, a percentage of them were so-called drug users or gay. War resisters were also seen by the SADF as being disturbed. The article includes information on Greefswald, a notorious SADF drug rehabilitation camp in the then northern Transvaal, which Levin was purported to run.

The article devotes a section to the treatment of gays who were admitted to the hospital. It says that under Levin's regime, homosexuality was regarded as an aberration, and gays were subjected to electro-convulsive aversion therapy, a behavioural therapy supposedly used to correct their deviance. *Behavioral Psychology History* states that:

This therapy is essentially the opposite of desensitisation therapy. The object of aversion therapy is for the patient to dislike a stimulus that is currently perceived by the patient often as 'pleasurable' in some aspect. Aversion therapy is traditionally used for smoking cessation, alcoholism, gambling, obesity and sexual deviation. Stimuli associated with the behaviour to adjust/remove are paired with unpleasant/painful stimuli such as an electric shock or nausea brought about by administering emetic drugs.⁵

Accusations of this nature arose again in submissions to the health sector hearings⁶ of the TRC concerning ethical issues and human rights abuses in the psychiatric services of the SADF.⁷ Levin, working in Canada at the time, was summoned to appear at the hearings to answer accusations about unethical treatment of members of the SADF. In a response directed to the TRC in June 1997, Levin confirmed that he practised and advocated aversion therapy in the SADF, but defended his actions by saying that 'aversive therapy was an established form of behavioural therapy much in vogue in the 1960s and early 1970s, used at the time in the treatment of patients who could not accept their homosexuality'.⁸ The TRC, however, did not have an opportunity to question Levin further. Levin received the letter from the commission containing the allegations three or four days before the

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Aug-22-00 03:20am From-COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS & SURGEONS 5082440000 T-204 P 01/17 F-850



TO: Dr Gerald Rosner FROM: COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS OF SASKATCHEWAN.
CBC - Winnipeg 211 - 4TH AVENUE SOUTH
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FAX: (204) 788-3643 DATE: Aug 22/00

NUMBER OF PAGES (INCLUDING COVER PAGE) 17

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(SENDER)

ORIGINAL TO FOLLOW YES NO

*This is a previous resume,
the one upon which his
licence was based.*

CV - Aubrey Levin

2001 22 199 15: 04

Figure 1. Cover letter of fax transmittal of the CV of DR Aubrey Levin, the SADF doctor responsible for SADF's controversial Aversion Project.

hearing was scheduled to take place. In his written response, he argued that it would be impossible for him to 'drop everything, find large amounts of money for travel and legal expenses, instruct counsel, prepare a rebuttal, obtain documents and be able to attend the hearing'. Although the health sector hearing took place, Levin did not appear before the TRC.

The South African Medical Services of the SADF did, however, appear before the TRC; the input was disappointing. General Knobel, surgeon general of the SADF from 1988 and the then surgeon general of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF),⁹ delivered a presentation that set out to show SAMS in a very positive light, emphasising its reconstitution into a medical corps serving the defence force in a new South Africa. Very little of his presentation addressed the failures and racism of the past.¹⁰ This prompted the chair of the hearing, Dr Wendy Orr, to say: 'General Knobel, I am sorry to interrupt you but we are very pressed for time, so could I please ask you to sum up within the next few minutes so that we can move into questions, because we do have many of those'.¹¹ When Knobel finally did conclude, another panel member, Dr Ramashala, said:

Sir, we have to face our past, and this submission has to address the past, in particular the past abuses. The omission at the centre of this submission is the complete silence around the war in which the SADF was involved. We are told by you, and through your submission, of policies, structures, achievements and the war is mentioned almost tangentially now and then.¹²

In defending the submission, Knobel said he had expected to get a set of questions that SAMS would be required to answer at the hearing, but that these questions were only received at lunchtime that day. He therefore asked for time to prepare answers. Among these questions were some relating to homosexuality:

- What was the SADF's policy with respect to sexual orientations, specifically homosexuality?
- Did SAMS play any role in the deployment or implementation of this policy, that is, did it contest or support this policy?
- Was SAMS' Director of Psychology involved in treating homosexuals?
- What methods were used: for example, was aversion therapy used etc?¹³

The final TRC report, in its section on the health sector hearing, was highly critical of SAMS. It held SAMS responsible for putting health workers in the position where strategic needs were given priority over the health of the patients treated by military medical personnel, and where, as a result, it was almost impossible to uphold international ethical and professional standards.¹⁴ The report also confirms that the panel at the hearing felt that SAMS was evasive and that it made no attempt to consider the possible involvement

of health professionals in human rights abuses, either through acts of commission or omission: 'The quality of the SAMS responses to the very extensive and probing list of questions posed at the hearing merely entrenched this perception.'¹⁵

The TRC's findings on SAMS did not include a specific reference to the treatment of homosexuals in the SADF. However, they did say that SAMS failed to provide adequate mental health support for SADF members, particularly conscripts exposed to violence.¹⁶ The TRC also found that:

The Department of Health, the SADF and the South African Police and Prisons failed to provide adequate training, support and ethical guidance to those health professionals in their employ, who were working in environments in which there was a conflict of interest between employer and patient. The interests of the patient/client were thus frequently subjugated to those of the state.¹⁷

After the TRC: The aVersion Project

In 1999, *The aVersion Project: Human Rights Abuses of Gays and Lesbians in the SADF by Health Workers during the Apartheid Era* was published by a consortium of organisations.¹⁸ The research recorded in this publication took over where the TRC left off: it sought to investigate and document alleged abuses experienced by those serving in the SADF between 1960 and 1991 because they were or were perceived to be homosexual or to have same-sex partners. Research was conducted by interviewing survivors of medical abuse and their families or friends, as well as other individuals who could cast light on particular aspects of the research. The project also examined the institutional context, including explicit and implicit policies within both the military and health professions, that allowed abuses by health professionals to occur.

Although many practitioners considered aversion therapy to be an authentic means to change a person's behaviour, it was always questionable as a treatment. The rather dry definition of aversion therapy provided above does not convey the pain and degradation experienced by patients who underwent it. An extract from an interview detailed in the aVersion Project report illustrates this:

I found the therapy itself terribly painful, very disorientating.

How did it make you feel?

Oh complete depression. Ja, very down. It wasn't like I now suddenly found I'd turned into some hetero pussy hunter or something. I was actually just completely freaked out ... and confused. It certainly didn't do much for my impulses of attraction for other boys, of which there were plenty of handsome specimens running around 1 Mil.¹⁹

Regarding practice in the treatment of homosexuality, King, Smith and Bartlett conclude:

Only a small minority believed that current practice denied people distressed by their homosexuality an effective means to change their sexual orientation. Our data shows how assumptions about public morality and professional authority can lead to the medicalisation of human differences and the infringement of human rights.²⁰



Figure 2. Still from Gerald Kraak's 2003 film *Property of the State: Gay Men in the Apartheid Military*.

The right of access to information was included in both the Interim Constitution and the 1996 final Constitution, but the enabling legislation was only enacted in 2001. Any right of access would have to be invoked in terms of the Constitution and was likely to encounter challenge.

The aVersion Project report did include SADF policy directive no. HSAW/1/13/82, which instructed staff during recruitment to identify those with behavioural problems and ensure they were not admitted to the permanent force. Evidence of whether or not aversion therapy was official policy within the SADF, however, was not established. Access to records would not only clarify whether or not medical personnel conducting therapy of this nature were acting within or outside that policy, but would also reveal complaints against SADF medical personnel in connection with discrimination or other human rights abuses.

Although a number of records were open at the DOD archives, the majority of them are still classified. Requests through PAIA would provide impetus for declassification and the release of records previously unseen.

Where to start?: Using PAIA

The various filing systems in use in the DOD archives, as well as numerous lists of records held by both the military and military intelligence secured by SAHA at the start of the

The aVersion Project was holistic and thorough. The personal accounts in the report of the project confirmed the electric shock and drug treatment doled out in Ward 22 of No. 1 Military Hospital, as reported in *War Resister*.²¹ However, PAIA was not available to the researchers of the project or the TRC had they wanted to access more documentation from the DOD archives. The

project²² were consulted to gain an insight into what records were available and how best to word requests. Dr Aubrey Levin practised psychiatry at 1 Military Hospital during the period 1969–74: this period was perceived as being pivotal to the research. As mentioned earlier, the search was not confined to the issue of gays in the military, and research was extended from the 1960s into the 1980s. Records related to the SAHA archives²³ would also be requested in the hope that more information on this period of our history would be revealed. These included records relating to a number of NGOs, such as those involved in opposing the system and in conscientious objection. Lists of overarching collections were requested, including of heads of the army, the minister of defence, the surgeon general and the chaplain general, and from these lists files were requested for perusal.

Department of Defence archives

During apartheid, South Africa was a highly militarised society.²⁴ Militarisation reached its peak in the 1980s under President P.W. Botha, who was previously minister of defence in the National Party government. The use of extreme repression and censorship was inevitable, given the scenario of a minority government attempting to hold onto power in the face of a vast majority bent on liberation. The government controlled the flow of information, and those attempting to assert their right to know were labelled unpatriotic and the enemy.

DOD records date from 1912, when the Union Defence Force (UDF) was established. The archival records for the period 1912–69, which reflect the main business activities of all the components of the UDF and the SADF, are automatically available. The operational records relate to the First and Second World Wars, the Berlin Airlift and the Korean War, as well as military exercises and mobilisation during internal uprisings such as the industrial strikes of 1914 and 1922, the 1914–15 rebellion, and the unrest in the 1950s and 1960s.²⁵ The archives also hold the non-current records of the present-day DOD, including those of the SANDF.

Although the DOD archives, in particular the archives relating to the two World Wars, have been accessible to the public in the past, the notion of allowing citizens access to military documents of any description would have been abhorrent to the apartheid regime. Given this history, it was pleasing to note the willingness of the military to implement PAIA and to cooperate with organisations such as SAHA. Nevertheless, despite being staffed in the main by long-serving members with appropriate qualifications, the lack of streamlined and computer-based systems for access led to considerable delays. Harris and Pickover relevantly note: ‘Traditional paper-based systems tend to be poorly resourced, managed by junior officials with little status and subject to high turnover rates, and imperfectly connected — if at all — to parallel or related electronic systems.’²⁶ As a result, the staff often lament that there is no money to improve efficiency and access. Given the breadth and density of the documentation retained at the archives, it is difficult to see

how a digital environment could be implemented without considerable financial outlay.

PAIA requests

To ensure the requests encompassed what we were looking for, they were generally couched fairly broadly. This led to both positive and negative results. Requests were made, for example, for 'all SADF records of 1 Military Hospital Psychiatric Ward — period 1970 to 1990', and 'all SADF records relating to policy on homosexuality and to treatment of homosexuality'. The former were sought in an attempt to find records of patients who had been treated for 'sexual deviance', homosexuality and other alleged abuses that had surfaced regarding the mental treatment of members of the SADF. With the broad request on the policy and treatment of homosexuality, we were hoping to find other policy documents that would confirm the attitude apparent in SADF policy directive no. HSAW/1/13/82, which was already in the public domain. There was also the possibility that these documents would implicate policy makers in discrimination against and treatment of homosexuals or even young, sensitive men who did not fit the army's stereotype.

The requests were submitted in batches and assessed by the staff at the DOD archives in terms of the right of access and the need for declassification.²⁷ This takes considerable time, as staff at the archives have differing security status, and not all documentation is accessible to all staff; requests are therefore rarely responded to within the time periods prescribed by PAIA. Nevertheless, once a record has been declassified, future access by other requesters is a given.²⁸

The first batch of requests was made in 2001 and the next followed in 2002. This constituted some 26 requests in all, including some nine requests for personal files. As time went by, framing of requests and a better understanding of the system made it possible to be more targeted in our search. Unless the requester knows the exact file he/she is looking for, a request may generate lists of records to be perused, and boxes of possibly relevant records for identification and request. Gaining access to indexes of specific bodies of files, such as surgeon general, chaplain general and minister of defence files, assisted in formulating more specific requests, but also, unfortunately, transferred the burden of finding pertinent information to the researcher. Whether or not this saves costs in terms of paying the archives for the search is questionable. It does, however, provide an opportunity to closely examine records and uncover valuable documentation that may otherwise have been overlooked. Another financial saving is that one requests perusal only until one locates something of relevance, which is then copied and paid for.²⁹

By the time the first Gays in the Apartheid Military project report was produced in 2003, thousands of records had been perused, but the search was by no means exhausted. In addition, because of long delays by the DOD archives, records were still outstanding from the requests made in 2002. Days were spent at the DOD archives perusing lists of

chaplain general files, as well as those of the surgeon general that had to be declassified.³⁰ Possible sources of information were identified and lists of requests submitted.

It became clear early on in our efforts that the DOD archives were working with limited resources and that there would be a degree of discretion in terms of the turn-around time frames stipulated by PAIA.³¹ Regular meetings between SAHA and the staff at the DOD archives to discuss progress on all requests were helpful. At each meeting, DOD tabled a list of requests and the progress being made on each. If archives staff felt they needed further information to find a record, they were able to articulate this before declaring that the records could not be found. Senior staff were always present and, whether true or not, this tended to make us believe that they were treating the requests with the necessary commitment, despite the passing of time. While still in excess of the allowable extensions of time contained in section 26 of PAIA, it was necessary to concede to long delays to enable searches through large numbers of records; compliance with the original period would have unreasonably interfered with the activities of the public body concerned and may have resulted in raising of the exemption that allows a body to refuse access if it would result in an unreasonable diversion of resources.³² DOD was also on a learning curve. All-encompassing requests such as 'all records relating to the treatment of homosexuality' would obviously take more time than a request for a specific file.

In retrospect, the records retrieved as a result of these early requests were limited, insofar as SADF policy on homosexuality, Dr Levin and aversion therapy were concerned. This is particularly so, given the number of hours spent perusing lists and records. A request related to the surgeon general records during this period hoped to turn up further policy documents similar to the policy memos of the 1980s, but none came to light at this point.³³ More success was achieved with records pertaining to the drug rehabilitation facility Greefswald. As a result of SAHA's first request seeking files on the camp in 2001,³⁴ lists were provided for perusal and records were identified and requested. Access was refused to five of them. This suggests that the more knowledgeable the researcher is regarding the filing systems, the better the chances are for success. PAIA is undoubtedly a powerful tool for digging deep, but does have its limitations. Military intelligence had to be involved in the declassification process and it is here that a large backlog exists; acceptance of a place in the queue with other requesters plays havoc with the legal requirements of stipulated times for dealing with requests and determining whether an internal appeal should be submitted.

In terms of expanding our project to other anti-apartheid records related to conscientious objectors, the Black Sash and the Institute for a Democratic Alternative in South Africa/Idasa, a certain degree of success was achieved. A substantial body of records on the SADF and conscientious objection came to light.³⁵ Due to the volume of files, not all were copied and archived at SAHA; however, they have been declassified and are available to the public at the DOD archives.³⁶

Unnecessary masking

Redaction of information was not common in early requests; access was often simply refused. This could have been due to a number of factors, including that the concept of transparency and openness was new for bureaucrats and that PAIA was a relatively new piece of legislation. However, with pressure from requesters, including through litigation, the realisation that a document *could* be released with certain information masked led to releases with redactions from 2003. This was also problematic.

In 2005, after several years of waiting, the records of Minister of Defence P.W. Botha became available.³⁷ SAHA had requested perusal of these files in the hope of locating records relevant to the project objective of gaining additional information on policies regarding homosexuals and on whether the minister himself had sanctioned or was aware of the psychiatric treatment of members of the SADF. However, instead of providing inspection of the records, thousands of pages were copied and released.³⁸ The copying came about as a result of what the DOD archives saw as a need to mask all third-party names; in order to provide us with the records, they had to be copied to be masked. This had significant consequences.

Firstly, SAHA was charged for the copying, a cost researchers who are merely seeking perusal of the records ordinarily do not incur. Secondly, although DOD archives retained both the original *unmasked* documentation and the masked declassified documentation, a subsequent researcher wishing to peruse the records would be confronted with the masked copies without knowing what had been redacted. Of real concern, however, was the basis of the masking. Although SAHA appreciates the need to protect the privacy of individuals, the bulk of the masking was inappropriate, and at times appeared arbitrary and careless. For example:

- The names of people writing letters in an organisational or institutional capacity were masked. For example, the name of the author of a letter from the Civil Rights League that queried how the board that considers conscientious objection applications was set up was masked, as was the name of the official to whom the letter was addressed.
- The name of an official on a letter from parents wanting to know about the circumstances of their son's injury was masked.
- A letter from the attorney representing the Jehovah's Witnesses has all details concerning the attorney blanked out, although the advocate is mentioned by name.
- Names of people in correspondence with National Party officials, members of Parliament, and provinces and municipalities are masked, although they are writing and receiving correspondence in their official capacities.

Section 34(2) of PAIA states, among other things, that access to a document may not

be refused on the grounds of unreasonable disclosure of personal information insofar as the information is in the public domain, is about a person who could not reasonably expect the information to be private, or relates to the position or functions of an official of a public body.³⁹ Where the exception applies, masking of the name may be appropriate if the individual does not consent to the document's disclosure or he/she cannot be located. However, where the exception to the exemption applies, masking should not be undertaken. In the instances raised above, one or more of these exceptions to the privacy exemption could have applied.

The excessive masking was raised subsequently with the DOD archives, the staff of which were apologetic and explained that due to limited resources, an inexperienced contractor had been employed to undertake the masking; it would be reconsidered. Obligations in terms of PAIA are not seen as a budget priority, and personnel are often contracted on a temporary basis. As a result, a lack of consistency in executing severance obligations is evident.

Box 5.1: The Black Sash

Records released about the anti-apartheid organisation known as the Black Sash⁴⁰ mainly cover the period 1985–87. They give insight into how anti-apartheid organisations were infiltrated. The sheet covering the information provided from a meeting, for example, has the source's name excised. This was presumably the name of the agent who infiltrated the group.

Mundane general circulars, such as those for the morning market, were obviously valuable, as they provided telephone numbers of some of the more active members.

Individuals talking at meetings also appear to be protected — masked, possibly to protect them or to prevent anyone isolating the name of the informer — although more prominent members, e.g. then office bearer Sheena Duncan, are not masked. Documentation comes from all regions, except the then province of Natal.

The gaps in the sequence of the documents suggest that some of the documentation was considered too sensitive to be included. Because of limited resources and the fact that the Black Sash was not the central focus of the research, these gaps were not challenged.

The released records

Policies regarding homosexuality

On policy and homosexuality, one of the earliest records SAHA received, dated 5 March 1979, is located within the minutes of the Defence Command Council (DCC) and is entitled 'Item 14 (confidential) — treatment of homosexuals in the SADF'. It states that, after

discussion, DCC approved:

- disciplinary action against offenders; and
- the handling of matters internally rather than through the civil courts.

The subtext of this record is an implicit instruction to punish homosexual members of the SADF for their sexual orientation. It also suggests that there was a strong possibility of human rights abuses that had the tacit approval of DCC.

The major discovery at this point consisted of policy directives on homosexuality, dated about a decade after Levin conducted aversion therapy.⁴¹ They were replicas of policy directive no. HSAW/1/13/82, referred to above; it would seem that each year the same memo was revised and circulated. These memorandums, labelled 'discipline/immorality/homosexuality (onsedelikheid)' and circulated among senior commanding officers, dealt with how homosexuals (or suspected homosexuals) should be handled on enlisting. They illustrate quite clearly that homosexuality was seen by those in authority as an obscenity. The reasons proffered for dealing with it as a disciplinary matter included that it could damage the name of the army, undermine discipline and expose certain leaders to extortion. The documents are clear that recruiting officers were to discourage candidates for the permanent force from joining where there were grounds for suspicion that such a candidate was homosexual. Further, existing members were to be discouraged from these practices, and those under suspicion were to be under constant supervision.

Access to incident reports

Access to files regarding injuries were sought to see whether any reports or complaints had been made that related to aversion therapy.⁴² Nothing relevant emerged from this track either, because most of the records reflect injuries incurred in service in the field or in motor vehicle accidents. Recruitment files and records relating to exemptions and postponements, as well as administration complaints and irregularities, were accessed for similar reasons. None of the files perused indicated that an exemption had been sought due to a complaint made about the aversion programme.⁴³ Files relating to pensions were also accessed to see if documentation could be located that might have been expunged from Levin's personal file. Some of these records provide interesting insight into how apartheid resulted in different criteria for the different race groups and in the establishment of separate departments. However, we were unable to locate information relating to aversion therapy practised by Levin, or to any information that would reveal the experiences of servicemen.

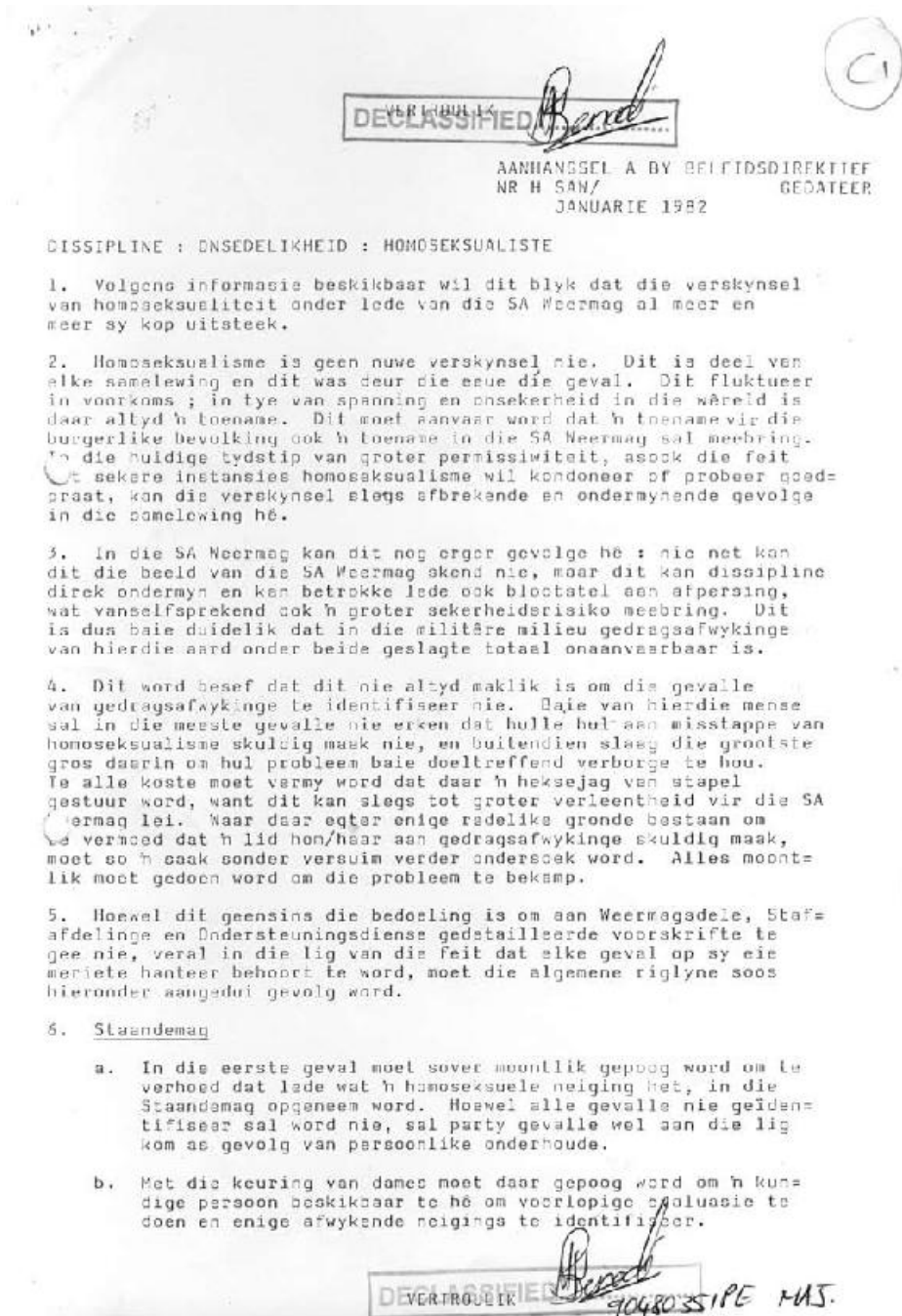


Figure 3. SADF correspondence from 1982 entitled *Discipline : Promiscuity : Homosexuality* suggesting ways in which testing can be undertaken on potential soldiers to identify and weed out homosexuals.

GG/106/19/16/1

Telefoon : 21-3611
 Bylyk : 36
 Tel. nammes : SURGEN

SAGD Hoofkwartier
 Privaatstrak X202
 Pretoria
 0001

DECLASSIFIED

Julie 1981 /

Hoof van die SA Weermag (HSP)

GEDRAGSAFWYKINGS BY NDP'S/S MAG LEDE

1. U skrywe HSP/DPA/106/19/16/1 van 27 Mei het betrekking.
2. Homoseksualisme is deel van elke samelewing en dit was deur die eeue die geval. Selfs in die Bybel word daarvan melding gemaak. In die SA Weermag is dit geen nuwe verskynsel wat nou eers sy kop uitsteek nie. Ook is deur ondersoekers getoon dit fluktuëer in voorkoms. In tye van spanning en ondekerheid in die wêreld is daar altyd 'n toename. Dit moet aanvaar word dat 'n toename vir die burgerlike bevolking ook 'n toename in die SAW sal meebring.
3. Of daar duidelik 'n toename in gevalle is, kan moeilik bepaal word. Daar is geen vorige statistiek waarna verwys kan word nie. Om die persentasie gevalle te probeer bepaal sal ook nie veel waarde hê nie, want hierdie mense sal in die meeste gevalle dit nie erken nie en buitendien slaag die grootste gros homoseksualiste daarin om hulle probleem baie doeltreffend verborge te hou. Uit informasie tot die SAGD se beskikking wil dit nie voorkom of daar wel 'n buitengewone toename in die SAW is nie.
4. Die SA Weermag is in breë verband 'n weergawe van die Suid Afrikaanse volk. Dit geld ook wat betref die voorkoms van homoseksualisme en lesbinsme, hoewel ook in die algemeen gesê kan word dat die SA Weermag minder aantreklik is vir homoseksualiste as dit ook waar dat die instruktors- en verpleegberoep baie aantreklik is vir lesbiërs. Baie van hierdie lesbiese dames lewer uitstekende diens en is dikwels uitstaande in hulle vakindings, veral wat sport en instruksie aanbetref. Ook beskik baie van hulle oor sterk leierskapeienskappe.
5. Alhoewel hierdie afwykings nie goedgepraat mag word nie, moet dit aanvaar word dat sulke gevalle wel in die SA Weermag sal voorkom. Baie van hierdie gevalle sal waarskynlik ook geen probleme veroorsaak nie en nie onder aandag kom nie.
6. Daar sal egter die gevalle wees wat probleme gaan veroorsaak en wie se gedrag en optredes onaanvaarbaar en 'n verleentheid vir die SAW sal wees. Teen sodaniges moet streng dissiplinêre stappe geneem word. In die Suid-Afrikaanse strafreg word daar onderskeid gemaak tussen homoseksualisme en lesbianisme. Eg is strafbaar en lg nie. Dit word voorgestel dat beide afwykings oor dieselfde kam geskeer en strafbare oortredings gemaak word tov die RvD. Vertoë moet ook aan die Dept Justisie gerig word vir soortgelyke aksie op die strafreg gebied.
7. Opsommenderwys dus die volgende :
 - a. 'n Formele ondersoek gaan geen doel dien nie. Die resultaat sal onbetroubaar wees en kan slegs verleentheid vir die SAW veroorsaak.
 - b. Dit moet aanvaar word dat sodanige gevalle in die SAW sal voorkom, dog ten alle koste moet 'n heksejag vermy word.

...../2

DECLASSIFIED

9080351PE MAJ.

Greefswald

Volume 47 of *War Resister* describes Greefswald thus:

In the 1970s and early 1980s habitual users — or people who were unfortunate enough to be caught more than once — were sent to Greefswald, a farm in the Northern Transvaal⁴⁴ Conditions were particularly brutal. The idea was to isolate and keep the inmates perpetually on the go and through strenuous exercise exhaust them to keep their minds off drugs.⁴⁵

Access was gained to three substantial files on the drug rehabilitation facility that was named as Levin's project in volume 47 of *War Resister*. SAHA was initially given access to 'Greefswald Works Committee GG521/3/5/2/2 Jan–Nov 1977', but this file was returned at the request of DOD archives. An internal appeal was submitted, but was turned down in terms of section 34(1).⁴⁶ Aside from the records in the file that included names of individual conscripts and that could easily have been severed, access should not have been refused. It is apparent that, as this was one of the early PAIA requests, SAHA were overly cautious in terms of interpretation of the Act. SAHA did not have the resources to litigate this request. The file may be released today subject to severance of names of conscripts or permanent members of the force.⁴⁷

An early Greefswald file,⁴⁸ numbered 3MH/104/10/14/1/1, consists mainly of combat company reports. Included in these reports are addendums listing the regular visitors to the facility. Although Colonel Aubrey Levin's visits are only recorded from November 1971, there is a reference to him in the body of an earlier report that leads one to the presumption that he had visited the facility at an earlier date. Apart from being recorded as a visitor in almost all the addendums from November 1971 onwards, in many of the actual reports, reference is made to him and often to his team. Levin is generally the only person mentioned by name, confirming that he was central to the project. The research for Levin's dissertation⁴⁹ was done while Levin was at 1 Military Hospital; in his dissertation he confirms that the programme was not his brainchild,⁵⁰ and states that Cocky Cockcroft, the surgeon general at the time, directed the establishment of the programme through a multidisciplinary team of which Levin was a member.

Another common denominator in these reports is the high number of servicemen booking in sick. At one point, a report notes that 'although it is not yet a matter of concern, there do appear to be too many ill servicemen'.⁵¹ In another it is blatantly stated that the number is too high. This tends to offer weight to the allegations in volume 47 of *War Resister* that conditions were particularly brutal. Also included is a song obviously written by one of the conscripts. It reveals how they were treated and how they disliked the camp:

You pushed us around
and expect no backchat

But let us tell you now
it won't always be like that
You brass ain't gonna count hereafter

You make us run
you teach us to hate
I think you are
creating your fate

Box 5.2: Individual service records

With a view to finding other conscripts who suffered human rights abuses during their national service (outside of those whose experiences were included in the aVersion Project report), an advertisement was placed in the media (a gay publication and a mainstream publication) offering to assist ex-conscripts and service personnel who had suffered human rights abuses in the SADF to acquire their service records using PAIA. A handful of men responded; only one of these declared his sexual orientation as homosexual.

In terms of the procedure, the servicemen would give SAHA permission to access their files, which we would then request. SAHA would treat these files as confidential and pass them on to the applicant without perusing them. One applicant was not keen for the file to be given to SAHA, and his file was sent directly to him. Another said he burnt the contents after reading it.

One applicant's file appears to be completely missing from the archives, while at least two others believe that critical information is missing. Although we seem to have reached the end of the road in terms of the missing file, we have not given up entirely. The applicant's history suggests that this is one file that might embarrass SAMS because of the treatment he received.

One of the requesters was a permanent member of the navy for 15 years, when his security clearance was suddenly taken away from him. He believes he lost the clearance because of his homosexuality. Hoping to resolve this mystery, his personnel files were accessed. SAHA has not had access to his records, as they are in his possession, but he says it provides very little insight into the removal of his security clearance. However, the ex-navy member does say that there is one record that suggests that there was an anti-gay movement in the SADF at that time.⁵²

Of course, another explanation lies in the ongoing idea that homosexuals who were still fighting for acceptance in the broader society, never mind the security forces, feared being found out and exposed. They were therefore more vulnerable to blackmail. This is confirmed in 1980s policy documents and South Africa's bible on security matters, the Minimum Information Security Standards. Regulations have hardly changed since the 1980s, when they were at their most vigorous. At that time, sexual

orientation was a specific issue, apparently, because gays and lesbians were more susceptible to blackmail. Although the document has been updated and it currently does not specifically mention gender orientation, it does not rule it out either. Section 2.2 of the guidelines with respect to security vetting for determining a person's security clearance states: 'Aspects such as gender, religion, race and political affiliation do not serve as criteria in the consideration of a security clearance, but actions and aspects adversely affecting the person's vulnerability to blackmail or bribery or subversion and his (sic) loyalty to the State or the institution do'.⁵³

Policy advocated the rejection of homosexuals from the permanent force, but the attitude was different with regard to conscripts. A related SADF memo says that it is obvious that a conscript cannot be dismissed or allowed to use his homosexuality to duck service.⁵⁴

P.W. Botha files

The P.W. Botha files turned up some fascinating records, particularly the file labelled 'Advice, tip-offs and inventions'.⁵⁵ This is an extraordinary file consisting of correspondence between P.W. Botha as minister of defence and 'patriotic' South Africans, some proudly stating that they are new immigrants. The correspondents offer new inventions, strategies, books, support and, in one case, congratulations to the National Party for its recent election win. Some of the inventions offered come complete with drawings. One contributor suggests that wild indigenous birds where 'terrorists are suspected to be operating be trapped and minute radio transmitters be implanted into them'.⁵⁶ Some of the ideas were passed on to the Armaments Board and the Committee for Inventions, Patents and Armaments. Unfortunately, because of the masking, it is not always possible to connect the response with the correct correspondent.

Another insight into the apartheid mindset comes from a record in an injuries and claims file.⁵⁷ Correspondence consists of complaints received regarding injuries and deaths and the surgeon general's responses. One complaint includes a letter from a parent whose son had died in an accident in a military vehicle. In the letter, the parent complains that the vehicle was driven by a 'coloured'. In his response, the minister states that he is not sure what all this has to do with apartheid, because coloureds are used in the army and were used before he was minister. He does, however, go out of his way to reassure the parent that there is no mixing with the whites, and that coloureds are not used in positions of authority, but in ordinary positions such as drivers of vehicles. He points out that it is much more difficult managing a large army than people realise.

Records relating to an incident involving assaults of new trainees by 'so-called old boys' are important in that they confirm anecdotal information of this nature.⁵⁸ The perpetrators were brought to court and newspaper cuttings plus letters from the public expressing concern are contained in the file. There is also a response from the minister to a parent

worried about his son serving in the army.

Apart from a single and unrelated reference to Colonel Levin, in terms of the search for information on the use of aversion therapy, nothing was revealed.⁵⁹

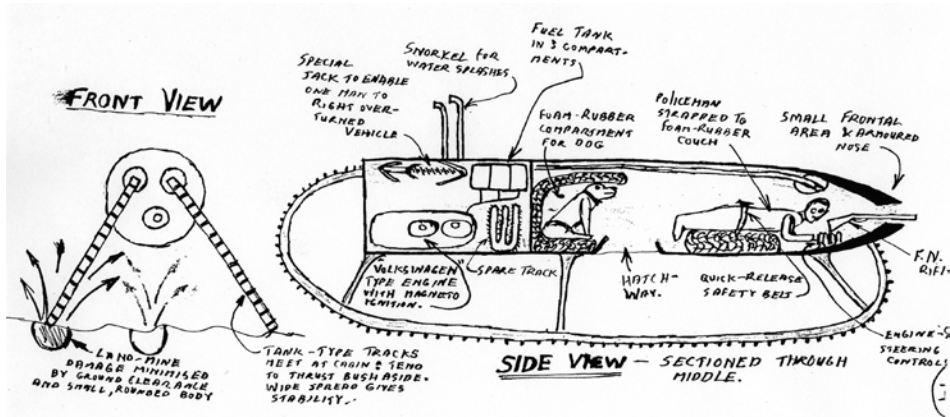
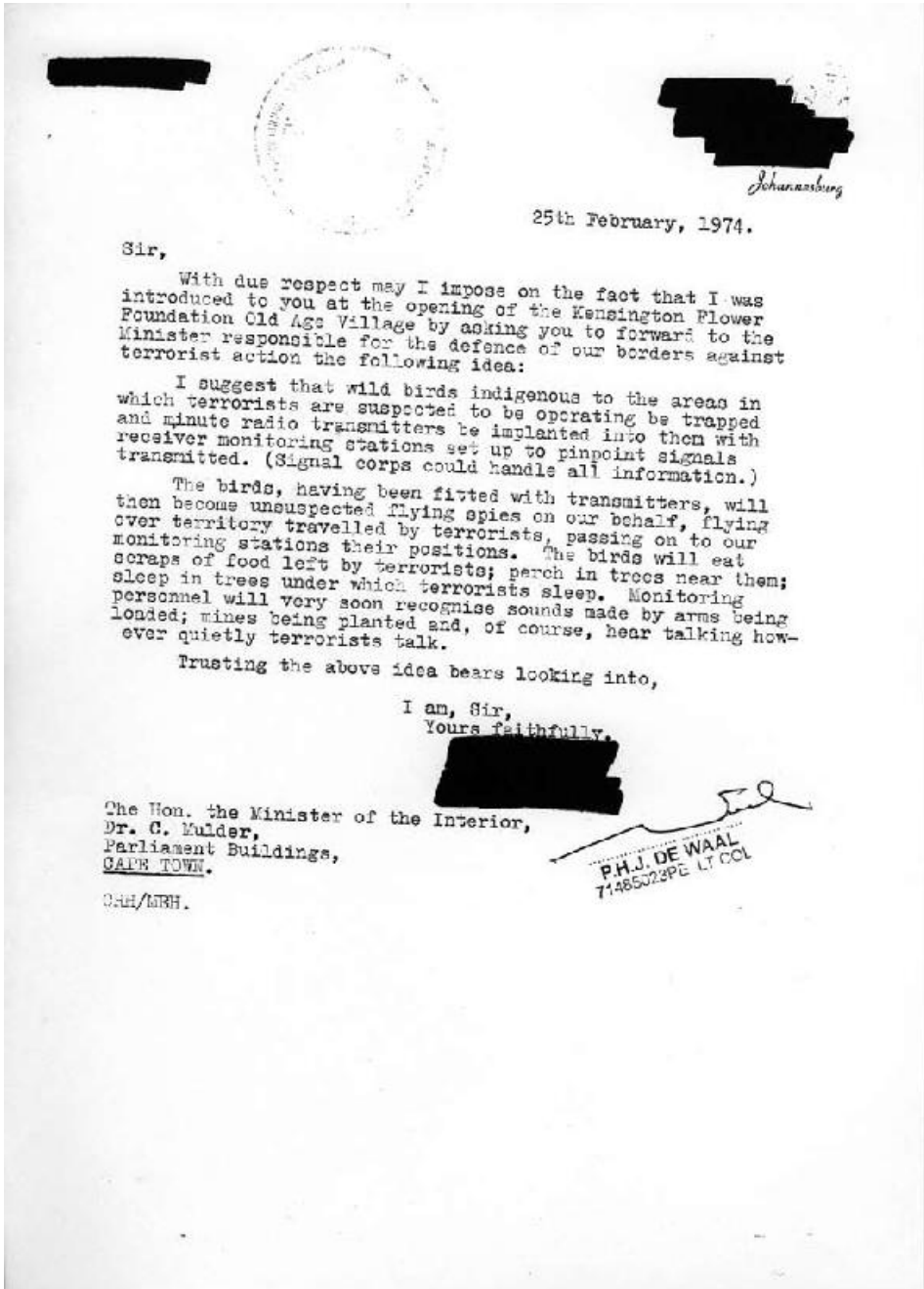


Figure 5. From the file *Advice, tip-offs and inventions*, an illustration of an anti-terrorist vehicle submitted to PW Botha, then Minister of Defence by a concerned member of the public indicative of the apartheid mindset.

Chaplains general files

Chaplains general were pivotal in the ethos and ideology of the apartheid forces.⁶⁰ They were seen as the link between the commanders and the conscripts or permanent members of the force.⁶¹ The homosexual policy directives of the 1980s were also directed at the chaplains general. The chaplains general files were requested in the hope that earlier more explicit policy directives, particularly during the time that Levin practised aversion therapy, would be located. In January 2006 most of the chaplains general files identified in November 2004 were declassified and released.⁶² Getting a handle on the manner in which the army chaplain service was run is quite difficult. Peter Moll's interviews with army chaplains for his thesis were helpful and revealing.⁶³

The chaplains general files exposed the vast gap between liberation theology and the chaplaincy. Correspondence from the head of the army (including a document from military intelligence) warns against Bishop Tutu⁶⁴ and keeps the chaplain general informed of the anti-apartheid activities of the churches.⁶⁵ The importance of the N.G. Kerk (Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerk — NGK — the Dutch Reformed Church) also becomes evident. One record⁶⁶ suggests that the SADF was ensuring that chaplains in the Durban area were investigated and appointed through the NGK or other Afrikaans-speaking churches.⁶⁷ The files also contained records relating to applications and approvals of chaplains' security clearances. One record is a query from a chaplain who had been working for two years when his security clearance was taken away from him. No response was recorded.



Sir,

With due respect may I impose on the fact that I was introduced to you at the opening of the Kensington Flower Foundation Old Age Village by asking you to forward to the Minister responsible for the defence of our borders against terrorist action the following idea:

I suggest that wild birds indigenous to the areas in which terrorists are suspected to be operating be trapped and minute radio transmitters be implanted into them with receiver monitoring stations set up to pinpoint signals transmitted. (Signal corps could handle all information.)

The birds, having been fitted with transmitters, will then become unsuspected flying spies on our behalf, flying over territory travelled by terrorists, passing on to our monitoring stations their positions. The birds will eat scraps of food left by terrorists; perch in trees near them; sleep in trees under which terrorists sleep. Monitoring personnel will very soon recognise sounds made by arms being loaded; mines being planted and, of course, hear talking however quietly terrorists talk.

Trusting the above idea bears looking into,

I am, Sir,
Yours faithfully,

The Hon. the Minister of the Interior,
Dr. C. Mulder,
Parliament Buildings,
CAPE TOWN.

CHH/MSH.

P.H.J. DE WAAL
71485023PE LT COL

Figure 4. From the file *Advice, tip-offs and inventions*, an example of unnecessary, random classification of submission to the Department of Defence by amateur militarist in 1974. This document had to be declassified in order to be released in terms of PAIA from the Department of Defence's documentation centre.

Box 5.3: Conscientious objection

The DOD conscientious objection files are rich in content. Documentation is found in many different files, and there is a degree of duplication. The individual conscientious objector files provide insight into the young white South African that stood up against the system and into how their efforts over the years changed the laws and contributed to the dismantling of apartheid.

A collection of files relating to the Gleeson Committee (mandated to investigate conscientious objection in 1991), contain a report on a workshop conducted by the Centre for Intergroup Studies on Alternatives to National Service (1989). In the report, Justice J.W. Edeling, chair of the Board for Religious Objection, traces the history of conscientious objection back to 1957, although it seems that his service and the establishment of the board goes back to the amendments to the Defence Act in 1983.

The files trace the changes in the approach of the apartheid government to conscription and community service and contain submissions from churches and NGOs on the Defence Amendment Act in 1985. They also contain policy documents on postponements and exemptions. The applications and arguments of various religious objectors are a feature of the files.

The records on the London-based Committee on South African War Resistance give an insight into how the South African government kept track of war resistance outside the country.⁶⁸ They show that this group was watched very closely by the apartheid regime and had willing informants. A meeting addressed by Laurie Nathan from the End Conscription Campaign was reported on by an unnamed person in attendance who was also a guest of the South African government.

One file⁶⁹ is a mine of information on how Jehovah's Witnesses were treated and what they endured in detention barracks. Personal testimony to this effect is included. The lengthy response from the detention barracks staff is also in the file.

A degree of success: Defence Personnel Advisory Committee files

The Defence Personnel Advisory Committee⁷⁰ files contained something of what we were looking for. A number of records reflect the policy dilemmas facing the conservative officials and suggest the evolution of later policy documents.

A letter from the surgeon general dated 13 June 1977⁷¹ to the head of personnel referred to previous correspondence from the head of staff intelligence (hoof staf inligting — HSI) in which the need for policy regarding homosexuals in the investigation and selection of personnel was discussed.⁷² The letter referred to a paragraph in the minutes of

the Defence Personnel Advisory Committee in which HSI asked if there was a position on the issue. It needed to be discussed, HSI said, because of its serious implications and the need for a directive to come from the right committee. The surgeon general responded by stating that homosexuality was a legally punishable crime⁷³ and consequently was not accepted as an illness. Exceptional cases, where physical or psychological deviation could be determined, should, said the surgeon general, be handled on merit, and conscripts declared unfit for military service. The surgeon general noted that they were not in a position to draft policy. The matter was then taken up by the Defence Personnel Advisory Committee and the response noted in the minutes of 29 June 1977.⁷⁴ The chairperson of the committee referred firstly to earlier steps in this regard where homosexuals were dismissed and national service men had seized the opportunity to dodge service. A proposal that homosexuals be treated in the same way as Jehovah's Witnesses was also rejected, because of the security risk.⁷⁵ The committee therefore resolved to accept what the surgeon general had put forward: the practice of homosexuality was a crime and a member of the SADF found guilty as a result was to be dealt with accordingly; that in exceptional circumstances when physical and psychological deviations were noted, these servicemen were to be exempted from military service; and that civilians found guilty of this crime or similar deviations were to be summarily dismissed.

This documentation dated 1977 would suggest, as do many of the policy documents accessed on homosexuality, that the SADF did not officially sanction conversion therapy of any nature. The 1979 document, located within the minutes of the DCC referred to earlier, reflects a more hardened approach. It encourages 'disciplinary action against offenders' through its own channels.⁷⁶ Was aversion therapy part of this punishment? Did the powers that be turn a blind eye to this blatant discrimination against and condemnation of homosexuality? This is not clear.

Thousands of pages later

Has the exercise of digging for information in DOD archives' files accessed via PAIA been successful? On the implementation of PAIA, the Gays in the Apartheid Military project encountered many of the same problems already recorded in this publication. The DOD archives' lack of resources and budgetary constraints have contributed to long delays between requests and access. When PAIA was in the making, other countries with access to information legislation in place warned of the delays that would be encountered as more researchers sought access to records. This has certainly been the case in terms of the DOD archives and offers good reason for proactive declassifying. It has also shown that accessing information can be a costly affair. Unless more detail is known about the record and consequently a more precise request is drafted, the requester could be faced with a hefty bill for searches conducted by the body being queried. PAIA regulations state that a fee will be charged for each hour 'reasonably required for search and preparation'.

Fortunately, the interpretation of the word 'reasonably' provides grounds for a challenge if costs appear excessive. Challenging refusals is also problematic. Once taken on internal appeal, funding is needed to take a failed request to court. Judging whether or not litigation is worth the time and effort is difficult. Without sight of the record, one can never be sure whether the content is worth the effort.

With specific regard to the DOD archives, more resources (human and equipment) are needed to improve access and shorten turnover times. Declassification is time-consuming, making a strong basis for allocation of more resources to undertake the processing of requests and proactive declassification. It would also be of tremendous advantage to researchers if the DOD archives had a more comprehensive website. The fact that the *PAIA Manual* is on the DOD website is to be applauded; however, without information concerning file plans and records previously declassified, the requester is in little position to assist the DOD by drafting specific requests.

In terms of the objective of unravelling more about aversion therapy and gays in the military, success has been limited. This is partly due to the nature of PAIA, as well as the organisation of the archives. The project will, however, continue to be a work in progress. There are still avenues that can be pursued; many more documents can be requested from the DOD and the TRC archives through the Department of Justice. Other institutional archives may also hold records that offer further insights. These will certainly confirm some of what we already know and perhaps take us a little further; however, there are no guarantees, given the random nature of the process of finding records.

From another perspective, the requests have unlocked many records that would have remained classified had these requests not been lodged. Many of the documents released through the course of this project have revealed a history of the SADF that has not been told, and, more specifically, a history of those who through conscientious objection and other methods fought an inhumane system. Often, it has been the simplest documentation that has exposed the absurdity of apartheid, the ambivalence of the responses of officials when ordinary white South Africans egged them on in their racism, and the iron fist that sought to keep a majority powerless.