



Recovered debris was often a tangle of twisted plate and spaghetti wire

(DCA)

The initial contract with Eastport was extended by a further 20 workday period after a month-long halt in operations. It was during the extended contract period that the cockpit voice recorder was located within the debris field. On 6 January 1989, South African Minister of Transport Affairs Mr Eli Louw announced in Cape Town that '... the optimism in connection of the recovery of the recorders has been rewarded... the CVR was located...' and added: 'This is a major achievement in the field of aircraft accident investigation. The Minister extends his congratulations to the search team for this remarkable achievement.'

#### THE GORILLA AND THE FIRST CLASS CHAIR

The press release with its announcement of the recovery of the cockpit voice recorder gave no hint of the dramatic moments aboard the *Stena Workhorse* on 5 January when Frik Corneelsen (Senior Accident Investigator, SAA) caught a brief glimpse of the CVR, retraced the sluggish remote operated vehicle to the position and saw his prize find gently grasped in the manipulator arms. To him the find of the CVR was reward enough for months of agonising search and speculation: the CVR, he hoped, would hold the key to the mystery of the *Helderberg's* plummet into the ocean:

I have to tell of the weeks before the night the CVR was located.

Some weeks before the ship's wet rations had started drying up and we were all anxious for something to wet the throat. The crew came up with the idea of a pineapple home brew which we fermented in an empty can down in the engine room. We thought we'd use it for a Christmas toast but fortunately the land-based crew sent along some South African wine for the Christmas table. We called the can of home brew our 'nagapie' (bushbaby) but as it got more and more distilled it earned the respectful title of 'gorilla'.

On January 5th we celebrated the birthday of one of the divers and considered it opportune enough a moment to unleash the 'gorilla'.

I fortunately only had a small sip of the monster and did not suffer the consequences as some of the others showed by day's light. At midnight on the morning of the 6th, bleary-eyed I went on duty in the ROV control room along with Guy Lucas an Assistant Investigator and Harry Lombard a photographer. We were faced with the one frustrating challenge after the other.

The ship could not hold station and the ROV kept on being dragged backwards. Clouds of dust obscured all in sight on the sea bed. In the backwards dragging the ROV passed an object appearing to be an APU exhaust duct which was logged in the log book at 08:40.

I requested Eastport to turn the ROV towards the ship for more productive surveying and in the turn I saw the CVR lying in the background. I promptly called for the ROV to return to the site of the APU exhaust duct where the CVR's position was confirmed and it was retrieved.

The CVR was located at 09:00 and retrieved to the safety of the mothership some five hours later.

The pre-determined code word for the CVR was 'a first class chair' and that was the message which Frik Corneelsen radio telephoned to DCA Head Office in Pretoria. The response from Pretoria was that no first class chair should have been found in the search area — and only then did the truth find its mark!