

15th May 2006

All of us at Rushmans were saddened by the tragic loss of Ben van Deventer a greatly respected colleague whose life was recently taken senselessly in his own home in South Africa. We had the great honour to work with Ben, a true professional a number of times in South Africa.

This was particularly shocking coming close on the heels of the tragic loss of Hans Lombard of Telkom SA, again senselessly killed in his own home. Hans was also a quiet, calm and extremely efficient and respected Major Event expert.

Dr. Ali Bacher gave a Tribute to Ben at his funeral in Johannesburg and has kindly allowed us to reproduce it here. He has most eloquently and accurately captured the essence of Ben.

South Africa has lost two of its very finest Major Event experts in a matter of months. Rushmans have lost two respected colleagues and friends. We will miss them both greatly. Our sympathies and condolences are extended to both families.

Nigel Rushman

**TRIBUTE TO BEN VAN DEVENTER
BY DR ALI BACHER**

South Africa, 6 May 2006

A year or two ago, Ben van Deventer handed me his CV. It didn't take long for me to read it. It consisted of one page of very basic information, an unbelievably modest account of his career. It bore no testimony to his very significant involvement in major global events that determined the future of this country.

But I knew differently, so I said to him, "Hey Ben, you're under-selling yourself here! This is not good enough, your best achievements are not even recorded."

Ben van Deventer was that kind of man. Modest and self-effacing, never one to seek the limelight, he went about his work in a quiet and methodical way. He was an unassuming man who achieved great things in his life, but he would be the very last person to talk about them.

Allow me today, therefore, to fill in some of the detail that you might not have found in Ben's CV.

He was first and foremost the most thorough professional. He dedicated his life to the safety and security of others and did so with a degree of expertise, professionalism and sensitivity that was truly amazing.

He was a policeman, yes – just as his father before him had been in the police force too – but Ben was much more than just an honest cop. He was a modern policeman who explored and mastered the growing benefits of IT and Communications and utilized the Intelligence Networks to devise highly effective new methods.

In his constant search for new knowledge, he received an honours degree from Stellenbosch University that enabled him to produce a standard of work that was acclaimed by all who had the privilege to associate with him.

He was, if I could put it this way, a very smart cop, and all of us who saw him in action will attest to that.

There are others in higher places who will attest to that, too.

For example, in his role as head of the Presidential VIP Protection Unit, Ben ensured that the first-ever meeting between Nelson Mandela and FW de Klerk went ahead without the slightest hitch.

Again, in having his finger on the pulse at the inaugurations of Presidents Mandela and Thabo Mbeki, Ben's immense attention to detail meant that nothing untoward was allowed to happen.

For the World Summit on Sustainable Development in August and September of 2002, Director Ben van Deventer was a key man who co-ordinated the security networks around that landmark event. It was attended by many heads of state and senior representatives of 200 governments worldwide. It attracted tens of thousands of foreign visitors and aroused interest among anti-globalisation activists who threatened to disrupt it.

They didn't stand a chance. With Ben and Andre Pruis at the controls, the safety and security arrangements worked like clockwork and the Summit was acclaimed as a highly successful global event.

It was during the course of the World Summit that Ben invited me and members of my ICC Cricket World Cup management team to join him on an inspection tour of the security set-up.

The main operations room was housed on an entire floor high in a building known as The Forum that is situated across the road from the Sandton Convention Centre in which the World Summit was taking place.

Now I am not a person who easily understands technology, but the high-tech surveillance machinery that I saw in operation was truly mind-blowing. I can still see the immense pride in Ben's face as he showed us around, demonstrated the equipment and introduced us to his colleagues and his staff. This was an operation of truly spectacular dimensions led by a truly remarkable man.

Ben then took us on a trip across the highway. There on the outskirts of Sandton he showed us the Remote Search Park where all supply vehicles and buses were thoroughly examined by every means, including X-rays and sniffer dogs, before they were allowed to enter the World Summit precinct.

Why Ben showed us all this was because he planned to replicate this entire security operation for the Cricket World Cup that was just a few months away. We went away that day knowing that we were in the best of hands.

In the aftermath of the tragic events of 9/11, security around the cricket tournament had become the highest priority on our agenda. Ben's quiet authority, and the evidence we had seen of his meticulous work, gave us a renewed confidence.

Thus, as you well know, the 2003 Cricket World Cup was completed without a single breach of security.

In a report tabled to Cabinet following that event it is recorded that the chief concern of potential foreign visitors before the World Cup was safety and security pertaining to the crime situation. But, and I quote, "due to the high levels of security and police deployment there were no reported incidents of crime in and around the tournament". Furthermore, and I continue to quote, "99 percent of foreign visitors said they would return to South Africa and recommend it as a desirable destination to others."

After the World Cup, we made a point to publicly acknowledge the immense role played by the South African Police Service, and today I would like to say on behalf of all of us who worked on that tournament, "Thank You, Ben!"

What of Ben van Deventer the man?

A warmer, more compassionate human being you will never meet. He was courteous, respectful and non-confrontational. He respected individual rights and liberties. He traversed his security involvement from the old regime to the new democracy, and accepted black majority rule with honesty, sincerity and commitment.

In his personal life, he was a loving and caring person. He met his new life partner, Cindy van Hees, while they were working together on the Cricket World Cup. It was obvious that their shared love and mutual respect enriched and emboldened their lives. Cindy, you can be proud of your Ben.

So why did I ask Ben to show me his CV?

Well, we had become genuine friends and after the World Cup he would often visit me at my home. He confessed that he was concerned about his advancement in the police service and that he faced an uncertain future.

I suggested to him that within the private security industry he would have a very important role to play to once again protect South Africans in all walks of life. He had so much to offer and, as it turned out, he decided to go that route.

He was later approached by the government of St Lucia in the West Indies to visit that island while their planning was taking place to host matches of the Cricket World Cup of 2007. They invited him to produce a report on safety and security pertaining to the island as a whole, and not just on the World Cup.

It was now clear that Ben had an international role to play and his report was favourably received by the St Lucia government and his input was described as outstanding.

How terribly ironic that a man who devoted his life to the safety and security of many thousands of people should be gunned down in his own home. When I was phoned in Cape Town last week with the news, I was absolutely shattered.

Here was a GOEIE, WARE SUID AFRIKANER who had so much to offer his country yet was suddenly cut down in the prime of his life.

When those who perpetrated this shocking crime are eventually apprehended, I would sincerely hope that they will somehow comprehend the terrible tragedy that they have brought on the Van Deventer Family in particular, and on this country as a whole.

Knowing everything that Ben stood for, I am sure that he would like me to deliver the following message today: that the insidious cancer of crime is threatening the very fibre of our nation. It does not discriminate against any race or ethnic group, neither against any gender or age group, it does not put any price on the value of human life, it is an evil that we do not comprehend and that we can never rationalise.

It is something that each and every one of us must fight in the most resolute fashion – just as Ben did – but it is incumbent on government to urgently seek out progressive new methods to ensure that the basic right to human life, as enshrined in our democratic constitution, is not violated in so senseless a way as is mirrored in our grieving today.