

**This short story is reproduced from *Shaking Hands with Billy: The Private
Memoirs of Anthony Richard Turton***

Caramel and Red Eyes

© Anthony Richard Turton 2008

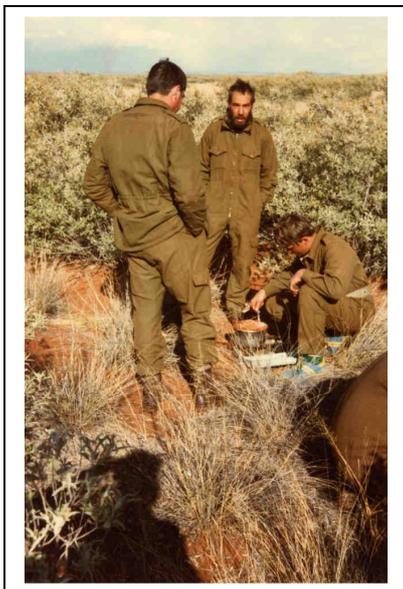
Small luxuries are never taken for granted while in the bush. And thus it was that Paul Roos, my gunner and a veteran of Operation Savannah, became famous for his insistence on living it up as best he could. Driven by a hamster-like compulsion to collect anything that could be vaguely useful one day, Paul had found a pressure-cooker in the rubble of a bombed-out house in southern Angola. Sensing that this would one day come in handy, Paul tossed the pressure cooker onto the Eland, in that space behind the ditching plates where anything without a specific home tended to be stored.

One day Paul made a big score. He managed to procure a whole carton of condensed milk from some unsuspecting RQMS rear-echelon-type. Convinced he could make caramel from this condensed milk by using the pressure cooker, Paul started to put the bits and pieces of the plan together. Each Eland had a two-burner petrol stove, which he set up inside a relatively intact house that he had decided to call “home”. Noting the absence of the normal safety valve, Paul persuaded an eager Tiffy to insert a self-tapping screw, in order to build up the required pressure (he later explained), with a promise of sharing the ensuing rewards.

Tossing the tins of condensed milk into the pressure cooker and closing the lid with the large self-tapping screw conspicuous by its tentative presence, Paul set the stove alight. Just as the pot was coming to the boil, a salvo of incoming rocket fire slammed into the area around the village. Russian Red Eye (Katushka) rockets were being launched against the SADF troops, so it had become time to make for the relative safety of the armoured vehicles.

After the cacophony of the attack came to an end and the troops were ordered to stand down, Paul rushed back to his occupied house to retrieve what by now must surely be a large haul of caramel. As he entered the room he was somewhat surprised at what greeted him. Caramel was dripping from the ceiling and running off the walls. It

seems that the pressure cooker had built up a healthy head of steam, and with nowhere left to go since the self-tapping screw had blocked the only passage present, had erupted in a mess of boiling water and caramel.



The image shows a typical operational scene in an armoured combat team where a meal is being prepared over a petrol cooker in the field. The meal being prepared is called *guru guru* because of the noise it makes when it is cooking. It is always prepared as a team affair and consists of anything that is available plus whatever has been brought from home (like spices). Everything is shared. Luxuries like caramel are thus highly prized, particularly after weeks out in the bush, living only off Rat Pack food.