

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

**Rat Pack Interlude**

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When living on Rat Pack's, it became common practice to throw away large portions of perfectly good but uneaten food. One day I became aware of a hospital in Ongiva, staffed by the most amazingly dedicated nurses and doctors, who were used to working with very little. I arranged for the soldiers to place their unused Rat Pack food into a few boxes. We loaded those boxes onto the Eland, behind the ditching plates. With permission from the Squadron Commander, my vehicle rode point and as we passed the hospital on a patrol, he stopped the whole combat team. Setting up defensive positions, we were protected as we exited from the turret of the Eland. Grabbing boxes in both hands, my gunner and I delivered the food to the nurses in the hospital. I shall never forget the moment. We unplugged our curly cords from the battle comms box and left our helmets and chest-pieces intact. I recall the clack-clack sound of the chest piece chaffing against the buttons of the fire-proof tank suits as we marched up the pathway in the small garden leading to the hospital. All around us was a sea of silent but dignified faces of civilians injured in the conflict. With a noble nod of Matronly authority, she accepted the boxes, which we placed on the ground in front of her feet. Saluting her smartly we turned away, marching to the Eland where we jumped into the turret, reconnected the curly cord from the battle comms box to the chest piece and the moment was over. With a whine of four-wheel-drive gears, I put a 90 HE up the spout in anticipation of possible ambush and reported on my battle comms, "HE Action loaded"; to which the gunner replied, "HE Action, set – firing switch off".



**This photo was taken at Ongiva, which was the SADF forward operational base in Angola after Operation Protea. The hospital referred to in this story was in the main town, a short distance from this airfield. We were thus separated from the local civilian population for security reasons. A squadron of SAAF helicopters is about to take off to insert a company of Parabats into their operational positions as stopper groups, tasked to prevent fleeing combatants from escaping a combat team's focussed action.**