

Operation Malawi 1986

Chapter 3



Left: Dr. Johan Kriek & Dr. Peter Rodgers loading darts. Right: Dr. Kriek with an immobilized Sable.

The animals now had to be darted and transported from the quarantine station in Lilongwe to the airport.

Roan antelope, Sable antelope and Lichtenstein Hartebeest bulls were darted. Each animal had to be physically loaded onto a trailer. The trailer was used to take the animals to the truck, where they had to be reloaded onto the truck. The trailer proved to work very well until an adult Roan cow buckled and destroyed all the rims with its sheer mass. The animals then had to be carried all the way to the trucks. This led to a huge loss of time. The animals were loaded on the truck and their horns tied to overhead beams, in order to keep their heads up, to prevent bloating.



Left: Trailer used to move animals to the trucks, assistance provided by Dr. Otto Kriek. Right: Sable antelope in a pallet with horns tied to keep the heads up.

This operation had to be carefully coordinated to avoid losses and injury to the animals. Animals had to be turned from side to side every 30 minutes to prevent circulation being cut off to the limbs. Someone had to keep an eye on the animals while the darting exercise continued.

Once all the animals were loaded, the trucks drove them to the airport where the Hercules C-130 cargo plane was waiting. Customs clearance had to be obtained before loading commenced as this could've wasted valuable time, which could've led to mortalities. Dr. Kriek used cattle trucks to transport the animals due to unavailability of game transport

trucks in Malawi at that time (These trucks had to be disinfected with washing soda before loading quarantined animals into them).



Left: Transport truck nr. 2 being driven around on the airport apron while waiting for the other truck's animals to be offloaded into the plane, this was done to keep the airflow going and the animals cool. Right: Truck's animals being transferred into the plane.

Once all the animals were loaded, the loadmaster inspected and secured the pallets. Engines and air conditioner were running to cool down the animals. The valuable cargo was now ready to be airlifted.



Loadmaster securing the pallets.



Dr. Johan Kriek (Left) & Dr. Peter Rodgers (Right) - Checking the animals.

The animals had to be checked throughout the flight. Everyone got a huge scare when the Lichtenstein tried to climb out of the pallets as the plane took off. They quickly tranquilized them again and the problem was solved. The animals had to be sedated throughout the flight and the ears plugged with cotton wool to decrease the noise levels.



Some members of the crew taking a break while enroute from Malawi to South Africa. From left: Basil Sapucci (With his bandaged arm from a horn poke by a Lichtenstein Hartebeest), Dr. Otto Kriek, Johan Lategan (Helicopter pilot) & Dr. Peter Rodgers.

The last stretch of this trip was now at hand. The team was looking forward to the arrival at Pietersburg - South Africa. The trucks were organized to be at Pietersburg airport at exactly the right time. The next challenge was to transport the animals immediately from the airport to the quarantine station in Pietersburg, in order to prevent overheating which could result in losses. Pietersburg quarantine station would be the port of entry into South Africa as well as the point of sale and distribution.