

22nd March, 1982.

R E P O R T

Late NEIL HUDSON AGGETT

MARITAL STATE: Single.

DATE OF BIRTH: 6.10.1953.

DATE OF DEATH: 5. 2.1982.

CHURCH: Anglican

OCCUPATION: Medical Practitioner.  
Trade Union Official.

Dr. Aggett was kept under detention by the S. A. Police in terms of Article 6 of the Act on Terrorism (Act 83/1967) from 27.11.1981 until his death on 5. 2.1982. Interrogation commenced 15.12.1981.

REFERRED: Mr. W. Lane of  
Bell, Dewar and Hall.

OPINION SOUGHT: Possible Psychiatric factors  
which may have predisposed to  
suicide.

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## SOURCES:

## Interviews:

Ms. L. Dean	9. 3.1982.
Miss B. A. King	9. 3.1982.
Mrs. E. J. Burger (Sister)	9. 3.1982.
Mrs. J. N. Aggett (Mother)	16.3.1982.
Mr. J. A. Aggett (Father)	16.3.1982.

Letters written by Late Dr. Aggett.

A journal since 1972.

Letter - Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, Cape Town. 11. 3.1982.

Documents - statements and official records including two copies of statements made by the late Dr. Aggett whilst in detention.

Post mortem reports.

## REFERENCES:

TWO SYNDROMES OF SUICIDE, Ovenstone and Kreitman,  
Brit. J. of Psych. (1974) 124, 336 - 345.

SUICIDE IN PRISON, D.O. Topp, Brit. J. Psych. (1979) 134,  
24 - 27

## PERSONAL HISTORY:

Born on 6.10.1953 at Nanyuki, Kenya. Pregnancy and labour were normal. He was a normal easy child to rear. He was not overindulged.

Schooling commenced in 1958 at the local school. He was a weekly boarder. He enjoyed school.

1959. Government Primary School at Nyere as a boarder. He did well and enjoyed school.

PERSONAL HISTORY (contd.)

1963. Parents left Kenya for South Africa. Michael (the eldest) was a boarder at Kingswood College, Grahamstown. Neil joined him there as a boarder starting in the Primary School. In 1965 he moved to the Senior school. He adjusted well and achieved above average academically and extramurally.

1970. Matriculated 1st Class with distinction in Mathematics.

1971-1977. Medical student, University of Cape Town. Qualified end of 1976.

Record: "..... he made steady progress throughout his Medical studies which he completed in even time, obtaining above average grades in the process. There is no note whatsoever to indicate that Dr. Aggett had any psychological problem during the time he was a Medical student".  
(Dean of the Faculty of Medicine)

1972. Grant from Anglo-American Co. rendered him materially independent of his family.

At about this time a difference between Neil and his father occurred. Mr. Aggett objected to long hair, beard and jeans which he was unable to accept. They became distant. Latterly there was an increasing closeness.

At the end of 1974 - hitch hiked through Rhodesia and Botswana.  
December 1975: England and Continent.

1977. Internship - Umtata Hospital }  
                  - Tembisa Hospital } six months each.

## PERSONAL HISTORY (contd.)

Thereafter he worked at Baragwanath Hospital. Since the period at Tembisa Hospital he became increasingly aware of the problems of the underprivileged. His interest and participation increased. At the time of his death his main activities were related to Trade Union Concern with the purpose of the betterment of the lot of the workers. His source of income was derived from part-time duties (mostly night) at Baragwanath Hospital.

## FAMILY HISTORY:

FATHER: Aged 69. Retired farmer. Very strong minded, very definite, conventional and straight. A loving man who loved his children who were his main concern. Neil didn't feel free to discuss with him because of their differences. Inclined to be short tempered.

MOTHER: Aged 64. A very kind devoted person. Her children were her main concern.

## SIBLINGS:

1. MICHAEL. Aged 35. Married. Doctor. Very religious. Working in Nazereth, Israel in a missionary hospital. Similar to Neil in ardour but more conventional and controlled. Gives his opinion after having thought about it. Strict with his children. Belongs to the Assemblies of G-d. In his youth Neil hero worshipped him. They were well disposed to each other.
2. JILL. Aged 32. Married. Very outgoing person. She likes people and friends around her. Sensitive, warm hearted and generous. Has a bit of her father's temper.

## FAMILY HISTORY (contd.)

## 3. NEIL.

As described by:

(i) MOTHER: He had a sense of humour. He had an impish, friendly grin. He was a very sincere, quiet, determined person. A will of steel. He did what he wanted but only what he thought was right.

(ii) FATHER: He was a very determined, very affectionate, easy child. He got more determined as he got older.

"He and I had a difference about hair and beard when he was at University. I thought it was wrong hygienically. I was against the hippie image. I didn't like young fellows wearing beards. He was at University and got a scholarship. I suppose he felt independent. We had no florid quarrel. We made it up. We wrote to each other."

(iii) JILL: He was quiet and deep thinking. He was similar to Michael. Michael had religious commitments, Neil's were humanitarian. He was a very gentle, pulsating, warm, caring person.

HOME: As described by:

(i) MOTHER: "We lived in Kenya. Idyllic. We lived on a farm. It was a wonderful life and climate. Very happy."

## FAMILY HISTORY (contd.)

"The Mau-Mau were rampant when Neil was born. We were all afraid. 1960 the fear abated. He used to come home for holidays. He joined groups of the Methodist Church. He was a self reliant and independent little man. He wasn't fragile. He was tough. He was sensitive in that he was poetic and musical."

(ii) FATHER: "It was a happy, coherent, loving home. We are Christian observing."

(iii) JILL: "As children when at boarding school it was a special place for which we longed. Parents were very caring about us and concerned about our progress. We are a middle class, ordinary people."

(iv) NEIL: Abstract from letter to mother:

"I am forever grateful for the amazing childhood you gave us and the calm confidence of the warm family environment in which we grew up in."

He went on to say "I admire Dad's strength and independence and his belief in himself, even though I do not agree with his values."

## PAST ILLNESSES:

Allergy. He coughed as a child.

Fractured leg at 9 months of age.

Tonsils and adenoids removed.

Fell off a motor bike - uninjured.

No nervous illness, or disturbances of consciousness.

No familial nervous illness.

HABITS:

He smoked and drank in moderation.

He did not take drugs.

INTERESTS:

He was a worker. As a student he did stints of nursing, ambulance driving and as a night watch.

His major interest was the welfare of his fellow man.

He was an avid reader, wrote poetry, prose and was fond of music.

He had an enquiring mind and liked travelling.

WAY OF LIFE AND RELATIONSHIP WITH PEOPLE:

"I just liked Neil. He had a simple unpretentious side. He always had time for you. When he spoke to you he made you feel special." He was an ascetic.

At times he could be light hearted and enjoyed a drink and dancing into the early hours.

(Lesley Dean)

"I found him easy to talk to. He never made you feel like a moron ..... He was a patient good teacher. Very kind. He made you feel that he was interested in you and that he was a caring person."

He lived in squalid conditions. "There was no bath in the building. He was not self indulgent. He'd have a bath in a tub. He had pleasure in being ordinary and poor. It was his romantic side. He liked going to work with working people in the bus."

(Miss B. King)

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RE: LIZ FLOYD - MEDICAL PRACTITIONER:

She and Neil met while he was doing duty as a male nurse. They loved each other and lived together.

They separated for a while. She was resentful of affairs he'd had with other women. They became reconciled and were close until the time of his arrest.

A copy of an affidavit signed "N. H. AGGETT 4. 2.82" in which certain allegations were made was read.

On 5. 2.1982 Dr. Aggett was found hanging dead in his cell.

D I S C U S S I O N

From the various sources it emerges that Dr. Aggett was a gifted young man, resourceful, self reliant and conditioned to rigorous circumstance. He was a dedicated idealist who practised what he believed. He was a non-aggressive (physically) person.

At the time of his arrest he was healthy physically and mentally.

D. O. TOPP, Brit. J. Psych. (1979) 134, p.24-27.

SUICIDE IN PRISON:

"SUMMARY: Records of 186 suicides among male prisoners in England between 1958 and 1971 emphasize the differences between the prison population and the population at large. The suicide rate may well be three times greater. The records show that sentence of more than 18 months' duration, whether anticipated or actually received, is associated with a greater risk of suicide than shorter sentence, and that suicide is most likely to be committed during the first few weeks in custody."

OVENSTONE AND KREITMAN, Brit. J. of Psych. (1974) 124, P.336-345.

TWO SYNDROMES OF SUICIDE:

"SUMMARY: A sample of 106 suicides diagnosed in accordance with defined criteria were dichotomized into 50 (the P group) who had a history of parasuicide ('attempted suicide') and 56 who had not (the NP group).

The P group was composed of sociopaths, drug addicts and alcoholics, known to psychiatrists but largely refractory to psychiatric treatment, with long histories of instability, and living in situations of chronic personal and social disorganization; debt and a criminal record were not uncommon. They committed suicide by using drugs, intimated their intent beforehand, and carried out the act while others were in the vicinity."

## DISCUSSION (contd.)

## OVENSTONE AND KREITMAN, TWO SYNDROMES OF SUICIDE (contd.)

"The NP group comprised relatively more stable personalities with shorter periods of instability, whose suicide resulted from failure to adapt to an acute stress situation, particularly loss of a loved person. They committed the act while alone, used lethal methods of coal gas poisoning and self-injury, and did not intimate their intention beforehand.

It is suggested there are two syndromes of suicide, characterizing different persons.

The implications for preventive action and for epidemiological studies are briefly reviewed."

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C O N C L U S I O N S

In considering death by suicide in detention the following must be taken into account:

- the greater hazard of suicide occurring in prison than when at large
- that in terms of Ovenstone and Kreitman Dr. Aggett was of the 'NP' group (Stable personality)
- events occurring whilst in detention.

*Zelman Wolf.*

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