

## *Warwick Antony Dorning (1954–2009)*

Dr Warwick Antony Dorning was tragically murdered on his farm *Adamshurst* on the Boston road outside Howick on the evening of 7 November 2009. He was shot and killed in cold blood by would-be robbers who then fled the scene. They were later apprehended, tried, found guilty and are now serving life sentences.

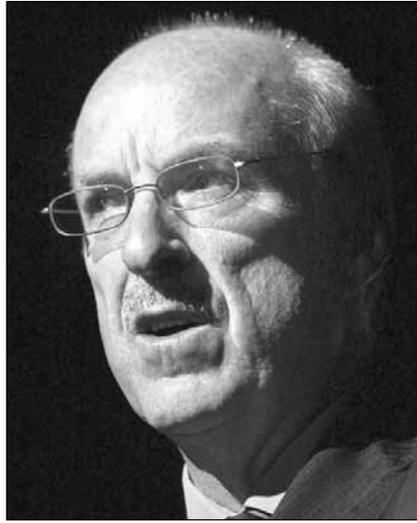
Dorning was born on 14 July 1954 in Kokstad, East Griqualand, a fourth generation member of the powerful and well-known Dorning family of East Griqualand pioneers, founded by his great-grandfather the patriarch John Dorning, who settled in East Griqualand in the 1880s. His grandfather, Arthur Dorning, was

a highly successful farmer and his father, Antony Dorning, a former head boy of Michaelhouse who had a distinguished war record as a pilot in the South African Air Force, was also a prominent farmer, sportsman, businessman and was also mayor of Kokstad.

Warwick Dorning was educated at Cordwalles and Michaelhouse before going to Rhodes University from 1972 to 1976, where he completed a BA(Hons) in history. He then went to Cambridge, where he read History and International Communications, graduating MA in 1978.

On his return to South Africa he (like all young white South African men at the time) was conscripted into the South African Defence Force. While there, this highly intelligent and educated man was soon commissioned and put to work as a military historian and archivist. During this time he registered for a PhD in Strategic Studies at the University of the Orange Free State and his thesis was supervised by Dr Niel Barnard, who ultimately became well known as the head of the South African Intelligence Service. Dorning's thesis remains a classified document but what can be revealed is that the work involved many visits to Angola during the border war and that he was close to the process which brought peace in Angola and the consequent settlement of the Namibian question.

Dorning left the SADF with the rank of Major in the air force at the end of 1987 and joined the then Natal Provincial Administration as a communications officer, rising rapidly to head the Communications Division. With the advent of the new South Africa in 1994 and the merger of



*Warwick Dorning*

Provincial, Homeland and Tri-cameral government departments into one KwaZulu-Natal government service he was promoted to Director and joined the personal staff of Provincial Minister of Local Government and Housing and later Minister of Finance Peter Miller where he served until 2000 as Communications head and media spokesman. So successful was this period of service that, at the insistence of the Director-General of the Treasury, he was moved to Treasury as General Manager, where his outstanding language skills were put to use in the drafting of documents and annual budgets. This was not a very happy stage in his career as he continually bumped his head against the transformation ceiling and much of his time had to be spent covering up for, or doing the work of, his less competent and experienced colleagues higher up the civil service ladder. He did manage, however, to get promotion to Chief Director in this time, a post third from the top in the civil service hierarchy. It can be indisputably stated

that he was Director-General material but history and politics made that impossible.

Dorning's final position as a public servant was as Chief of Staff in Premier Zweli Mkize's office after the latter's appointment as premier in April 2009. He served in this capacity until he took early retirement at the age of 55. In normal times he could have had a further 10 years of distinguished public service.

The writer knew Dorning as both a respected member of staff and colleague and as a friend. To quote the Premier of KZN, he was 'deeply committed to the principles of fairness,

honesty, integrity and justice'. His competence was indisputable, his commitment absolute, his intellect far above average, his skills and contributions enormous. He perfectly fitted the description 'a scholar and a gentleman'. In every sense he was a good man.

On retirement, Dorning was working to establish a viable indigenous plant nursery and farming operation on *Adamshurst*. He is survived by his wife Dawn, his widowed mother Denise (Noo) Dorning and his three sisters, Julia, Nicola and Angela.

PETER MILLER

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