

CITIZEN ALERT ZA

Church Street Bomb - 20th May 1983...a blast from the past

Background Information: Church Street Bomb – 20th of May 1983

By Kobus on May 20, 2008

The Police investigation of the bomb explosion in Church Street West, PRETORIA, on the 20th of May 1983 at 16:28, brought the following facts to light:

The bodywork of the vehicle in which the bomb had exploded, had totally disintegrated. The engine number had been scoured off. By means of the chassis number found amongst the rubble, the vehicle could be identified as a cream-coloured 1982 model Colt Galant. It had been stolen on the 19th of June 1982 from the premises of Mr V.A. Sabattier at number 5, Sixth Avenue, Edenvale. Amongst the rubble a piece of the vehicle's number plate was also discovered. The registration number started with "SD".

·As a result of the explosion, 19 people died – 17 men (8 black, 9 white) and 2 women.

Considerable damage occurred to buildings and vehicles in Church Street West between Bosman and Schubart Streets. The damage amounted to approximately R4 000 000 in the terms of 1983.

Evidence was obtained that a cream-coloured Colt Galant with a "SD" registration number had been brought to the home of Bakayi Ezekiel Maseko at Block J 2824, Mamelodi on 20 May 1983 at about 11:00 by a certain Freddi Butana Shongwe of Block B388, Mamelodi. Shongwe asked a certain Jerry Shabangu whether the origin of a vehicle could still be ascertained after the engine number had been removed. He showed the cream-coloured Colt Galant to Shabangu where it had been hidden behind Maseko's home. Shongwe mentioned to Shabangu that the vehicle would be used for a "great undertaking", without saying what this "undertaking"

would entail. Maseko's wife, Anna, saw Maseko and Shongwe removing the engine number with an electrical sander.

At about 15:50, Shongwe hurriedly left in the Colt Galant, with Maseko following him with the latter's Kombi. They were in such a rush that they left the electrical sander outside the home where they had been working with it.

From the 20th of May 1983, Shongwe and Maseko did not return home, and their families started looking for them.

On the 28th of May 1983, Maseko's Kombi was found behind the Poyntons Building in Schubart Street, Pretoria. The vehicle was not locked. Inside the vehicle, a jacket of Shongwe which he had been wearing on the 20th of May 1983 was found, as well as a paper bag, containing a portable radio. After the vehicle and its contents had been removed, the families started suspecting that Maseko and Shongwe might have been amongst the victims of the explosion. Maseko's body was subsequently identified at the Government Morgue. His body had been found on the northern side of Church Street, right opposite the place where the bomb had exploded.

After the explosion on the 20th of May 1983, several body parts were found scattered all over the scene of the explosion. On the 13th of June 1983 the feet of this person was identified by his mother as being those of Freddie Shongwe. Shongwe's wife also identified a piece of trousers and a belt found at the scene, as items belonging to Shongwe. From the dispersal and parts found on the wreckage, it could be deduced that Shongwe had been inside the vehicle at the time of the explosion.

According to evidence given by a witness who had been sitting in her car in front of the Nedpark Building in Church Street West, Pretoria, on the 20th of May 1983, a cream-coloured Colt Galant had parked in front of her. Immediately after the vehicle had come to a standstill, the explosion followed.

On the 7th of July 1983, Anna Maseko handed the electrical sander, as well as the portable radio, to the investigators. Upon examination it was found

that the portable radio discovered in Maseko's Kombi, had been fitted with a remote control. Experts found this remote control to be fully functional. It was also able to detonate explosives from a distance. According to the experts, the frequency at which the remote control had been set, is extremely sensitive and could have been activated by other factors coming within the range of the control unit.

In Maseko's clothes in his home, cash to the value of R3 000 was found. Anna Maseko could not find any explanation for the origin of this money. She had used some of the money for funeral costs.

Shongwe and Maseko had previous convictions for "housebreaking and safe robberies".

On several occasions, Shongwe and Maseko accompanied each other to Swaziland. Shongwe sometimes visited Swaziland as often as twice per month. Evidence was found that Shongwe had been seen at the homes of well-known members of the African National Congress (ANC) in Swaziland. Shongwe is a cousin of a trained ANC member, Johannes Mnisi. According to information received, Shongwe and Maseko had had contact with Mnisi in Swaziland. It was also established that Shongwe had last visited Swaziland from 16 to 17 May 1983.

During the activities of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), amnesty for the Church Street Bomb was granted to Aboobaker Ismail, former head of Umkhonto we Sizwe's unit for special operations, and Johannes Mnisi. In spite of the fact that the ANC in the past had already acknowledged that the actions of its military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), "at all times had been subject to the political leadership of the ANC", no member of the ANC's NEC of that time ever applied for amnesty for the Church Street Bomb.