

PRETORIA May 8 - SAPA

MK UNIT SLEPT IN POLICE STATION BEFORE SASOL ATTACK: TRC HEARS

Members of an Mkhonto we Sizwe unit slept at a police station in Secunda while planning an attack on the Sasol 2 fuel installation in May 1980, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission heard on Friday.

A member of the unit that carried out the attack, Sipho Matthews Thobela, 42, told the TRC's amnesty committee in Pretoria that he was the commander of a unit sent by MK commander Joe Slovo to attack Sasol 2.

He said while conducting reconnaissance at Sasol 2, the members of the unit told the staff they were seeking employment at the plant. They were allowed to sleep in the Sasol 2 hostel and at times in the Secunda police station.

"The police were very kind to us," he said, adding the unit later returned on May 31, 1980, and set off limpet mines in the plant, creating a massive blaze. He said the attack was planned to coincide with Republic Day and was hailed as a great success by Slovo and other MK commanders.

Thobela is applying for amnesty for his part in the attack on Sasol 2. His application for amnesty has been added to those of ten other MK members who applying for amnesty for a campaign of bombings conducted by the African National Congress in the country in the 1980s.

Thobela said his unit fled the country after the raid and they returned to Swaziland. He said he was injured in January the following year during a raid on the Motala area in Mozambique.

Thobela claims the attack was carried out by mercenaries and not by the SA Defence Force as was claimed at the time.

He said the attackers spoke in English accents and blackened their faces. They wore swastika insignia.

They killed ANC cadres and cut off their ears, which he said was usual practice for mercenaries who used the ears to claim their bounty.

Thobela said he was sent to hospital for months and later transferred to the former East Germany to recover. He said this ended his career as a combat operative.

He is presently employed in the SA National Defence Force.

The hearing continues on Monday next week.

