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Rookies to the rescue

YOUNG POLICEMEN TELL OF BID TO CAPURE VOORTREKKER HOOGTE ROCKET ATTACK GANG

By DAVID NIEDRIE

TWO young policemen only 18 months out of police college yesterday told of their bid to foil the escape of seven highly trained guerrillas who had just launched a rocket attack on Voortrekkerhoogte military base in Pretoria.

The policemen, both aged only 20, told how, while stumbling through the veld just metres from the site of the rocket attack, they came under automatic AK-47 rifle fire from one of the seven guerrillas — all members of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the military wing of the banned African National Congress.

Sergeant Hennie Pieterse and Constable Johann Otto, were speaking at a special press briefing organised at police headquarters in Pretoria yesterday.

At the briefing police also gave details for the first time of the massive, five-day hunt through the moun-

tainous Elliot area in the Eastern Cape that ended in the death of the last two members of another five-man Umkhonto unit apparently responsible for sabotage attacks in Durban and East London.

The Pretoria attack late on Wednesday night when four rockets were fired on Voortrekkerhoogte, the "heart" of South Africa's military machine, from Pretoria's Indian township, Laudium, 4,5 km away — sparked the biggest combined military-police manhunt in the city's history.

At yesterday's Press briefing, Sergeant Pieterse and Constable Otto told how, after answering a radio call about "heavy shooting" in Laudium, they had unknowingly come on to the scene of the rocket attack.

In the pitch dark, the two walked into the veld towards the source of the shooting, but were unable to find it and were about to return to their van when a burst of automatic fire screamed over their heads.

They threw themselves to the ground until the

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1. Middre
- David
2. Voortrekker
- hoogte
3. Stedelike
- Terrorisme
4. Nuropyle
5. Manvalle
6. Polisie
7. Pershoof
- sies
8. ANC
- 9.
- 10.

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firing was over, then ran towards its source. Still unable to find anything, they returned to their van, and then towards another source of shots identified by Laudium residents.

There they found 17-year-old Zahed Patel, wounded twice in the arm by one of the guerrillas in an attempt to hijack the Patel's car.

Told that the guerrillas had retired to a nearby patch of veld, the two young policemen ordered the dozens of onlookers back indoors, and, after arranging a private car to take Zahed to hospital, went off in pursuit. Unable to find a trace of the gunmen, Sgt Pieterse radioed for help.

A dog handler and his tracker dog were on the scene in minutes and sniffed out an AK-47 magazine containing a number of live rounds.

Police then returned to the scene of the original shooting, and the dog sniffed out the rocket launcher.

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