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BAR BOMBINGS WERE INDISCRIMINATE ATTACKS, TRC TOLD

The bombing of two Durban beachfront pubs thirteen years ago was nothing but an indiscriminate attack that fell beyond the parameters of African National Congress policy and any conventions of war, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was told on Wednesday. This was said by Tony Richards, who is representing the victims of the attacks and their families, when he rebutted evidence presented by four former members of MK (Umkhonto weSizwe - the former armed wing of the ANC) at TRC amnesty hearings in Durban. The incident, added Richards, was a desire on the part of bomber Robert McBride to take revenge for what the former SA Defence Force did to the civilian populations inside and beyond the country's borders during the anti-apartheid struggle. Richards told the TRC amnesty committee McBride had not done a diligent reconnaissance of his targets and that, in spite of his heel-digging assertion that security personnel frequented the pubs, there were none on that fateful day (June 14, 1986). "There was not a good enough concentration of security personnel to warrant such an attack - if there were any, they were by far outnumbered by innocent civilians who came there looking for a good time," charged Richards. Although the incident quickly became known as the Magoos bar bombing, the adjoining Why Not bar bore the brunt of the 80-kilogram car bomb blast which killed three women and injured 73 other people. The committee,

sitting at the Durban Christian Centre, learnt that at least three other special operations members were involved in the bombing and at least five other sabotage operations. Lt Col Lester Dumakude, Lt Col Ernest Pule and Brig Johannes Mnisi, who played "small but vital roles", appeared on Wednesday for amnesty for their involvement. The man who held the keys to the unit's armoury, Pule, supplied McBride with enough explosives to construct a powerful car bomb while they were in Botswana in 1986. "I did not know there was a planned car bomb," said Pule. "We operated on a need to know to basis." The colonel added that Rashid (the alias in exile of the unit's commander - Maj Gen Aboobaker Ismail) had the prerogative about planned operations. The roles played by Dumakude, who succeeded Ismail as the unit's head in 1987, and Mnisi were those of courier and supplier of money to operatives, the committee heard. McBride confirmed that he would have the chance to rebut Richard's charges when he presents his amnesty plea on Thursday, after the TRC decided on Wednesday to hear the "peripheral" roles of the unit's support staff. The success rate of McBride, who ended up heading his own sub-unit, was attributed to Greta Apelgren (now Zarhah Narkedien). "The presence of a lady enabled him to slip and out of the country with ease," said Pule. "As a couple they did not raise any suspicion." The hearings resume on Thursday with McBride presenting the reasons for selecting certain targets.