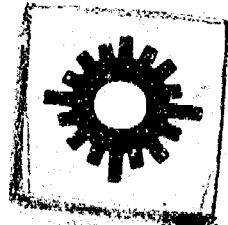


INSTITUUT VIR EIETDSE GESKIEDENIS

Die Universiteit van die Oranje-Vrystaat



Bron nr.
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Onderwerp nr.
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THE CITIZEN

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astated. Several of the injured were inside the building.

The size of the device has still to be determined, but initial estimates, based on the extent of damage, put it at between 30 and 40 kg of high explosives. It was the biggest blast to hit a platteland town.

It has not been determined whether the bomb was set off by remote control, or by electronic or other timing device.

Reports suggesting the two Black men killed were the possible perpetrators have been discounted. "Had anyone been in the car when the bomb went off there would be little or nothing left of their bodies," an authoritative police source said.

The car carrying the bomb was only reported stolen yesterday morning. Apart from the Natal Building Society, Protea Furnishers and a doctor's consulting rooms were badly damaged. Damage was also caused to other shops, particularly plate glass windows for a distance of up to 200m from the site of the explosion. Eighteen motor vehicles were wrecked or damaged. At least three caught fire and were gutted.

The car carrying the bomb was parked at the corner next to the building society. The force of blast shunted the wreckage about 40 m forward into the rear of a parked car, causing considerable damage.

A vehicle parked behind the car bomb was thrown into the middle of the intersection and caught fire.

Cordoned

The area surrounding

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the blast was cordoned off by the police and army for a distance of two blocks, while police explosives experts hunted through the debris which was carefully packed into plastic bags.

One of the heroes of the blast was Mr Leon Clem, an employee of the Old Mutual. He was sitting in an office with two colleagues fronting onto the NBS when the blast went off. Realising immediately what had occurred, Mr Clem ran out into the street.

"There were flames and dense black smoke. I saw a Black man on the pavement, but he ap-

peared dead. Under the debris, next to the NBS offices was another Black who also looked dead."

"There was continual screaming from inside the building. I went in. You could not see much, the place was filled with dense black smoke.

"At the back, under the debris, there was a lady, I think she was a teller, who was injured and lying there. With the help of one of the NBS men — I think he was a manager or accountant — we dragged her free. The NBS man gave her first aid.

"There was more screaming from upstairs. We went up and found another injured woman," he said.

"By that time the police and emergency services had arrived, and there was nothing more we could do," he said.

His two colleagues, Mr Gordon van der Spuy and Mr Eitner Ronquest, said they "hit the deck" when the blast knocked out the plate glass window in the office.

Fire

"I looked up and just saw a ball of fire coming

out of the NBS building," said Mr Ronquest. "It was just like a huge wind-storm, blowing glass. It was chaos."

Mr Van der Spuy, who suffered slight cuts to his back from flying glass and whose jacket, hanging on a chair, was cut by shards of glass, said: "I must praise the emergency services — the police, the ambulance and the firemen, who were here within four minutes and took control."

"I knew what had happened when I looked out and saw a huge pall of smoke and some cars on fire," he said.

Constable Ockert Jonker (22), one of the victims, can count himself luckier than most. It was the second terrorist bomb blast he has survived. In 1984 he received an injury to his back in Swapo attack on a post office in Odangwa.

Speaking from his hospital bed yesterday — he was treated for "at least nine deep gasies" — Const Jonker said he had just dropped his wife off at work and had gone into the Philips Cafe to buy cigarettes.

"I was chatting to the owner when there was an almighty blast. I realised immediately what had happened and ran out —

through where the window used to be.

"People everywhere were screaming." He said because of the dense black smoke it was difficult to see what was going on — "although I did see the body of a Black man lying in front of the NBS."

Parked

He said his car, which was parked in front of the cafe, had its windows blown out and suffered further damage from flying debris.

"I experienced one bomb before in South West, and missed another by five minutes. So this is my third experience of a bombing.

"The police were fantastic," said Const Jonker. "They were there in minutes."

The cafe owner, Mr Louis Ladeira (29), said he was talking to Const Jonker when the telephone rang. "My brother, Johnnie, answered it and said it was for me.

"I was a couple of steps away from the phone when the blast occurred. At first I did not know what had happened, but when I went outside I realised it was a bomb.

"I couldn't see much. My face was covered in blood," said Mr Ladeira, who sustained lacerations to the face and chest.

Johnny Ladeira (18), said: "I was at the phone waiting for Louis to take the call when there was a huge explosion. "I didn't know what it was. I thought it was something inside the shop. It was only when I got outside that I knew what it was." Mr Jonny Ladeira sustained cuts to the face and leg in the blast.

Cuts

Receiver of Revenue employee, Mr Jan Verheem (36), who suffered cuts to the head, said: "I had just started work when there was a huge explosion. We're just thankful to be alive.

"It was terrible. There were shards of glass flying everywhere. The instant it went off I knew it was a bomb. I was hit on the back of the head by one of the pieces of glass."

Mr G N Prinsloo, co-partner in Elite Estate Agency which is directly opposite the blast site, missed the explosion by 15 minutes. His desk, which was smashed to

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THE CITIZEN

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pieces by the blast, stands right in front of a window at the agency. "I was late for work. If

I had been at my desk at the time of the explosion I would not have had a chance.

One of Mr Prinsloo's employees, Mrs E D Pinkham, was admitted to the Witbank Hospital shortly after the explosion.

An employee of Piet Booyens Properties, which is on the opposite side of the street from where the explosion occurred, was also taken to the hospital shortly after the blast.

Mrs Myra Booyens, wife of the owner, said yesterday she did not want to divulge the name of the young woman who had been injured, other than saying "she had sustained cut wounds to her face and had been treated for terrible shock following the blast".

There were only a few staff members at the Standard Bank branch, close to the scene of the explosion, at the time of the blast.

According to the bank manager, Mr F J N Matthee, they heard a terrific explosion followed by an enormous shock which broke one of the bank's windows.

After the blast the staff members were evacuated to the offices of Civil Defence, which is situated in the municipal building behind the bank.

Bank

According to Mr Matthee the bank has an arrangement with Civil Defence that its personnel be taken there in case of an emergency.

The bank, which usually opens at 9 am, only

opened at 11 am yesterday.

An employee of USA Man's Shop, diagonally opposite the blast site, was inside at the entrance when the explosion occurred.

"I was busy in the shop when I suddenly heard a terrific blast. Looking up I saw a huge flame opposite the street where a brown car had been standing," Mr Shokkit Hadjad said.

Mr Hadjad said he "got such a fright" that he left the shop and ran around the building to a nearby shop where he stayed until the police came to evacuate and cordon off the area.

Category

Yesterday's blast in Witbank could fall into the category of ANC terrorist attacks classed as "indiscriminate".

About 40 metres down from where the car bomb was parked is the building housing the Witbank CID, which is considered the possible target.

The remaining 13 injured in the Witbank Hospital, all women — one of whom belongs to the police force — declined to be interviewed.

By late last night police had not released the names of the 13 remaining injured—all women. The most seriously injured of whom — a Black — had her foot blown off just above the ankle.

The dead men's names were given as Jacob Samuel Matsubu, of Lynville township, Witbank, and an employee of Highveld Security, Elias Msina, also from the Witbank area.

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