

WITBANK CAR BOMB, OCTOBER 1988

AP NEWS

Car Bomb Kills Two Black Men, Injures 42 Others

October 24, 1988

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (AP) _ A car bomb exploded today outside a shopping center in the coal-mining town of Witbank, killing two men and injuring 42 people, police said.

Capt. Ruben Bloomberg, a police spokesman, said the explosion occurred at 8:14 a.m. in the parking lot of a shopping center in downtown Witbank, about 60 miles east of Johannesburg.

Windows in nearby buildings were shattered by the blast, and about 16 cars were damaged.

Bloomberg initially said a man and a woman were killed. He later said both victims were black men. He said the injured included 23 whites and 19 blacks, including a woman who lost her left foot.

Bombings and hand-grenade attacks have occurred in South Africa at a rate of more than one a day since early September. Police say most of the attacks are part of an intimidation campaign waged by the outlawed African National Congress guerrilla movement to disrupt nationwide municipal elections scheduled for Wednesday.

The ANC, which is fighting to end white rule, has said it seeks to undermine the elections but has neither claimed nor denied responsibility for specific bombings.

Police said today that doctors operated on a suspected ANC guerrilla who was arrested Saturday while allegedly carrying a limpet mine toward a ceremony presided over by Law and Order Minister Adriaan Vlok.

The suspect, who has not been identified, complained of dizziness after his arrest and later underwent an operation at Cape Town's Groote Schuur Hospital for a brain hemorrhage, police said.

An investigation into the reasons for the man's hospitalization was being conducted, police said.

The man was arrested shortly after Vlok arrived to open a new police station in Crossroads, a shantytown that the government tried several times to destroy before making it a legal township.

South Africa's 26 million blacks have no vote in national affairs. The country's 5 million whites control the economy and maintain separate districts, schools and health services.

<https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/witbank/1witjoub.htm>

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

SUBMISSIONS - QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

DATE: 5TH JUNE 1997

NAME: MISS MARTHA H E JOUBERT

HELD AT: WITBANK

CASE: JB0157

DAY 1

MR MALAN: Just for the sake of the audience we unfortunately do not have interpretation services from Afrikaans to the other languages available to-day, therefore Mrs Joubert, being Afrikaans speaking will be allowed to give her evidence in Afrikaans. And I will put the follow-up questions in Afrikaans. I'm pretty sure that she will be able to follow questions through medium English but she would be free to speak her own language, as will be the choice of all other witnesses coming to us to-day.

Before we start I would also like to just publicly thank the Foundation for Equality before the Law who assisted us greatly through the last fifteen months in accessing potential victims of Gross Human Rights Violations, especially what was perceived to be from the old South Africa and the participation of people from the old order in this process of finding Gross Human Rights Violations, getting to findings as to who were victims or not has made a great contribution I believe to national unity in order to allow us in a sense to frame the past as one of victims of a conflict where there were also perpetrators who caused the violations. Looking at it in a different paradigm from simply the old confrontational dimension of the Liberation versus the System I think we are learning largely that we also now have a situation where we acknowledge that we have victims from all sides of that conflict and we have found perpetrators in all sides to the conflict and if we can start identifying with each other, on the basis of all of us being victims and all of us also associated in some way or another, with perpetrators. Not to take a judgmental view on it, not even to look at it in terms of specific moral positions but just finding each for the sake of reconciliation and national unity in the future.

There will of course be a number of other issues that we will have to discuss and decide on but the fact that the Foundation for Equality before the Law has assisted us greatly at their own expense in bringing forward witnesses from the so called old order, is something that we as a Commission, especially in this Province, really appreciate.

(TRANSLATION NOT ACCEPTABLE, TRANSCRIBER'S OWN TRANSLATION)

Mrs Joubert, I take it, is it Mrs, as I don't have it on record. Is it Miss? Excuse me. We don't have on record whether you are married or not. I would also like to thank you personally for coming. It gives us the opportunity to obtain first hand information from people who were involved therein. Our duties in the first place involve finding out whether there indeed were Gross Human Rights Violations committed and only thereafter to find out if there were any specific victims as a result of these violations of the past. I would appreciate if you could tell

us, in your own word of your experience with regard to what Doctor Randera said as a background to this. When you are finished we probably will have some follow-up questions to put to you. You may remain seated and tell your story to us by using the microphone.

MISS JOUBERT: On the 25th of October 1988, I was employed by Jet Stores. It was about twenty past eight in the morning when I heard a loud explosion outside. Suddenly the roof above us collapsed. We didn't at first know what had happened. Somebody said that it was a bomb. Some of the people were busy in the store upstairs. One of the ladies was on the stairs, on her way to the store and a cupboard fell on top of her. People downstairs did not get hurt but lots of us were severely shocked. This is basically what happened.

MR MALAN: Can you tell us what your experience of this was? What went through your mind at the time?

MISS JOUBERT: At that moment I didn't know exactly what was happening, I just stood still and I couldn't move. When they told us that it was a bomb, I remained calm and helped some of the people who could not remain calm, by taking them through the door but after that the shock was too severe.

MR MALAN: When you talk about the shock, what can you say about it to-day?

MISS JOUBERT: I would say that it did affect my life. I don't really want to think about it but sometimes when I do, I still get affected because I remember the explosion.

MR MALAN: Do you have any information as to how this happened.

MISS JOUBERT: No, I don't have any information. I only heard that it happened in one of the buildings somewhere. People from the offices as well as the police were also there. They came to tell us about this.

MR MALAN: Was it the N.B.S. building?

MISS JOUBERT: Yes, that's correct.

MR MALAN: Did you ever hear whether the matter was followed up? Did anyone get arrested? Were there any rumours in the town or people talking about it?

MISS JOUBERT: No, there weren't any such rumours.

MR MALAN: Where do you think the bomb came from or did it just get there by itself?

MISS JOUBERT: What we heard was that it was planted in a car. It was a motor car bomb. Someone put the bomb in a motor car.

MR MALAN: I would very much like to come back to the time of the incident because it's important to investigate the background of the incident as well as the time thereof. One of the specific instructions of the law which we have is to look at the motives of the responsible people of these incidents and also at the perceptions. In other words the perceptions of people when it comes to bomb explosions. Therefore we want to find out what the proper understanding of the people were when such things happened. When people were talking about it, did they not say anything as to who was responsible? I'd like to find out the thoughts of the people in general. Don't be afraid to speak, just relax and tell us the facts.

MISS JOUBERT: The time that the bomb exploded was the time that most people were going to work early in the morning. Some people were already at work. I cannot say who planted the bomb.

MR MALAN: You never thought what connection there was and who possibly could have done it or who possibly would do it or what their motives would have been?

MISS JOUBERT: No.

MR MALAN: Really not? This was not the first bomb explosion here was it or was it according to your knowledge?

MISS JOUBERT: Yes, this was the first one I knew of.

MR MALAN: We also have a witness, I think her name is Mrs Harmse, on our Agenda for to-day but I don't know if she is here yet. Yes, Mrs Beryl Harmse. Do you know her from anywhere? She has given us a statement in which she refers to a bomb which also exploded in the morning but on New Year's day, 1988. You have no knowledge of this?

MISS JOUBERT: No, I don't.

MR MALAN: To the best of your knowledge the only bomb which exploded in Witbank is the one to which you refer.

MISS JOUBERT: Yes.

MR MALAN: And you yourself, you say that you try not to think about it. Do you personally have any after effects of this incident? Does it still worry you?

MISS JOUBERT: Yes.

MR MALAN: Have you made peace with the fact that this happened? Aren't you angry with anyone?

MISS JOUBERT: No, I'm not angry with anybody.

MR MALAN: Thank you very much for sharing your experience with us. I'll hand you back to our Chairperson. Some of my other colleagues may have further questions but you are still welcome to answer in Afrikaans. Thank you.

MISS MKHIZE: Thank you Mr Chair, maybe I'll ask Wynand to ask on my behalf. I just wanted to check one small thing. I see here that - maybe you can put your headphones on. In your statement you say that you get frightened by loud noises.

DR RANDERA: Can you hear that?

MISS JOUBERT: No, it's not working.

DR RANDERA: Just try it again.

TRANSLATOR: Excuse me, we can only translate from Afrikaans to English and not from English to Afrikaans.

DR RANDERA: Sorry, our apologies.

MR MALAN: My colleague, Commissioner Miss Hlengiwe Mkhize has asked whether I can question you on her behalf. Did you ever any clinical treatment? Did you ever receive any treatment from a Psychologist or a Psychiatrist to help you overcome the shock that you experience?

MISS JOUBERT: From the scene of the incident I went to hospital but after that I didn't receive any Psychological help.

MR MALAN: Why did you go to hospital?

MISS JOUBERT: They took all of us there to be treated for shock. It was mostly for the shock that we went.

MR MALAN: You never stayed in hospital overnight did you?

MISS JOUBERT: No.

MR MALAN: If the Chairperson will allow it, I'd like to follow up with one more question. In your statement you say that you received notification to attend a court case as a witness but that this was not followed up?

MISS JOUBERT: Yes, I did receive notification just after the incident when I was still working at Jet Stores. They said they will let us know when and where we must go but they never contacted us again.

MR MALAN: They didn't serve any official documentation on you, such as a Subpoena or a Summons?

MISS JOUBERT: No.

MR MALAN: They also never informed as to who was being accused of the bombing?

MISS JOUBERT: No, they never said.

MR MALAN: To the best of your knowledge, was it a criminal case? Was somebody implicated in connection with the bomb explosion?

MISS JOUBERT: Yes.

MR MALAN: You never followed it up nor did you hear anything more thereafter?

MISS JOUBERT: No, they said they would contact us again and they didn't.

MR MALAN: Thank you very much. What made you decide to actually come and speak to us to-day?

MISS JOUBERT: I already made a statement to Mr Killian and he suggested that I should come to the Truth Commission and speak again.

MR MALAN: Just for information, Mr Killian is one of the investigators in our office. Fanie Killian, I take it? How did you get to hear about him?

MISS JOUBERT: He contacted me. How he contacted me I wouldn't know. He contacted me by telephone.

MR MALAN: So he must have got your name somewhere?

MISS JOUBERT: Yes.

MR MALAN: Thank you very much.

DR RANDERA: Ma'am can I just ask a couple of questions from the Chair? My Afrikaans is not so good so I apologize. You when talking to Mr Malan that besides the shops and offices that there were in this building, there were also the offices of some detectives. Is that right?

MISS JOUBERT: Yes.

DR RANDERA: Was that quite a big structure for the police in the area?

MISS JOUBERT: No.

DR RANDERA: My second question is, according to our document a young man was killed subsequent to the bombing and the report that was released was that he may have been responsible for the placing of the bomb in the bank. The one that you have been talking about. Do you remember anything about that?

MISS JOUBERT: Yes, I only heard from one of the ladies that worked at the N.B.S. who was killed but I didn't hear of the man. May I read it somewhere but not that I can remember.

DR RANDERA: So as far as you are aware, there was no enquiry into the bombing?

MISS JOUBERT: No.

DR RANDERA: Thank you. Are there any other questions from the panel?

Miss Joubert thank you very very much for coming here to-day and sharing your experiences with us. As you heard from my opening remarks there were a couple of people killed as well as many others who were physically injured and we're thankful that although you still carry the scars of that morning's incident, that you didn't actually suffer any more harm than what you've told us to-day already. We thank you very much for coming and sharing your experiences with us.



REUTERS

<https://reuters.screenocean.com/record/860524>

SOUTH AFRICA: TWO DIE AS HUGE CAR BOMB DEVASTATES SHOPPING CENTRE

- Story Text: Two people were killed when a massive car bomb exploded outside a shopping centre in the mining town of Witbank, 145 kilometres (90 miles) east of Johannesburg, on Monday. Police said they were a black man and woman who were in the car park outside the OK shopping centre when the bomb went off. At least 40 others were injured by flying shrapnel and glass. A black woman lost a foot and two pregnant white women were also among the injured.

The explosion in the biggest since the ANC (African National Congress) launched a campaign of violence aimed at disrupting local elections to be held on Wednesday. The ANC has denounced the elections and branded black candidates as collaborators of apartheid. The ANC says its campaign is aimed at security targets, but car bombs and limpet mines have exploded around bus terminals, rugby stadiums and other civilian areas such as shopping centres in white areas.

Witbank is in the heartland of right-wing conservatism. On Wednesday it is expected to swing away from President P W Botha's relatively liberal policies towards the white supremacist pro-apartheid Conservative Party. It's thought the bombing will strengthen support for them. The Witbank blast is the 19th bomb attack in October. No one immediately claimed responsibility.

On Saturday a suspected guerrilla was arrested carrying a fully armed limpet mine 150 metres from where law and order minister Adrican Vlok was due to open a police station at the Crossroads squatter camp near Cape Town. The suspect was later taken to hospital for an operation on a brain haemorrhage. The circumstances leading up to his admission to hospital were being investigated. Vlok said he wanted to assure voters that they could go to the polls in complete safety on Wednesday.

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Activist's body exhumed

27 June 2011 - 08:36 By SIPHO MASONDO



CLOSURE: Kavita Chibba, with a red sweater, and Lache Roussow exhume the body of Xolile Sam, a slain member of Umkhonto weSizwe, the ANC's former military wing, at Vosloorus Cemetery in Ekurhuleni yesterday Picture: HALDEN KROG

"I have been waiting for this day for the past 23 years, and from today going forward this chapter will be closed," said widow Thandi Shongwe yesterday.

Shongwe watched as the body of her husband, Umkhonto weSizwe operative Xolile Sam, was exhumed by the National Prosecuting Authority's missing persons task team at Vosloorus Cemetery.

Sam, who also used the aliases Valdez Mbatha and Thabang, was born in New Brighton, Port Elizabeth. He was killed during a raid of his house in Vosloorus by members of the notorious Vlakplaas death squad, police special task force and Witbank and Germiston security police in November 1988.

His killing followed the explosion of a car bomb that Sam and colleagues had planted outside the Witbank security police offices in October 1988. Three people died in the blast.

Speaking at the exhumation ceremony, Shongwe said: "This chapter will now be closed. I don't want any sympathy from anyone. We were involved in the struggle. All I want to say to other women out there who are still waiting for their loved ones is that they must have patience, their day will come."

During the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings five Vlakplaas members - Eugene de Kock, Willie Nortje, Johan Tait, Sakkie Bosch and Leon Flores - applied for and received amnesty for their involvement in Sam's death.

Shongwe, who had met De Kock at the hearings, said: "I had requested a one-on-one with him and he told me that they had handed [Sam's body] over to a local undertaker. I was very fortunate. He allowed me all the space and he gave me all the correct information. I had no reason not to forgive him because he was probably the only who spoke the truth in that squad."

Phillip Nyalunga, also a former MK operative, hailed Sam as a "brave man" with whom he had worked on many operations.

"We entered South Africa from Angola in 1986. We recruited other comrades to join our unit. Valdez's last operation was the Witbank one. Unfortunately, someone was arrested there and that's why the police came for us."

Sam joined Umkhonto we Sizwe and underwent military training in Angola. In 1980, he was recruited into the ranks of MK's special operations unit and took part in a number of operations inside the country.

Sam's young brother, Afrika, who together with other family members came all the way from Port Elizabeth to witness the exhumation, said: "When he left he was looking for solutions to make South Africa what it is today. He was hoping to come back. Unfortunately, he was killed."

Sam's remains will be reburied next to his late parents' graves in Port Elizabeth.

The NPA's Madeleine Fullard said the remains would be taken for forensic investigation for verification.

"Maybe DNA tests will be necessary. It is our responsibility to make sure the family gets the right remains."

The process, Fullard said, could take up to six months. Thereafter the remains would be handed over to the family for reburial.

Sam is the 69th of 500 unaccounted for victims to have been exhumed by the NPA.

<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1988-07-31-mn-10869-story.html>

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