

to irwin manoim

copy: anton harber

from steve askin, 27 may 1987

harare fone 723518, tlx 2587 ipszw

latest weekly mail just rched me and i'm deeply mystified and disturbed by errors inserted into the story i sent u last week on two bombings here. some dangerous inaccuracies with no source in my copy were added to the story. this is especially bewildering to me as i have greatest admiration for your paper's treatment of most stories.

i know how pressed u are this close to deadline, but must urgently request correction acknowledging the main errors in this week's issue with some indication that they were inserted in the editing process. this essential for your paper's credibility with readers in zimbabwe - and to my credibility w/news sources. in this case, the errors are also dangerous to some people and organizations involved.

errors are especially worrisome as i headed my tlx w/request that 'on this sensitive story' you check w/me on any edits that might change meaning or drop qualifiers. and it follows a strange error in the previous issue which i called to your attention - and urged you to correct in print: a story of mine from lusaka misdatelined 'harare.'

i'm sending u a full list of the mistakes, big and small, but can condense the list as a brief proposed correction memo for publication, or, if u wish, i wd be happy to rephrase my list of errors as a letter to the editor - worded gently, politely, and with emphasis on my respect for your normally fine reporting and editing - which u cd simply run in letters column with acknowledgement of your regret for the mistakes. call me tonight, and i'll tlx the letter to u early tommorrow morning. (i've marked with three bells (㊦㊦㊦) the paragraphs which list errors clearly requiring correction in print.)

wd also appreciate a tlx soonest explaining what went wrong.

~~the~~ the most serious error is in the lede paragraph where a subeditor somehow invented an 'anc cemetery.' no such place exists, neither in harare, nor in the copy i sent you.

~~2nd~~ 2nd graph: there was no damage to the anc office. as my story said. the block was knocked from an unfinished perimeter wall, not the building itself. it was not an especially 'new office,' as my story indicated the anc moved there ater the last attack a year ago. i sd that the projectiles 'possibly' exploded in mid-air. there is no basis for yr changing this to a certainty.

~~4th~~ 4th graph: the old anc office was attacked in 1986. My copy had that right and even specified the date: may 19.

5th graph: in my story, the statement that the office was guarded round the clock was specifically attributed to mugabe as i had no way of knowing that on my own, nor of verifying it.

~~another~~ another serious problem is posed by yr omission of 'pacific news service' credit. as i explained by fone and in my tlx, this was a pns story which i was sending u early as u wd otherwise not get it in time from san francisco. my agreement w/them requires that they be credited if i send an early copy of a pns story to another outlet.

finally, while i understand the need to cut for space, ill-chosen omissions in this case also distorted the story. it's unfortunate that the weekly mail also dropped each of my repeated references to the dead woman's own involvement in zimbabwe's liberation struggle, and to the zimbabwean involvement - which was predominant - in her funeral.