

18 Years for Limpet Mine Blast

End Street, Johannesburg. Number 120, where the 26-storey Nedbank City Building houses the South African Defence Force's medical corps.

At about 2-00 pm on 28 May 1985, an ANC member known as Caswell, together with a cleaner employed by the SADF, placed a limpet mine on the first floor of the building.

Shortly before the mine was set to explode, a private attached to the medical corps found it in a shoe box, near the building's first-floor staircase. But Captain Heather Cullis of the SADF medical corps ignored the private's claim 'because he tended to fabricate a lot. When Corporal Morebisi, a black serviceman, told us it was a bomb, we started evacuating people from the building'.

Security policeman Charles Zeelie, an explosives expert, was alerted by radio. But on his way to Nedbank Centre East, he took a wrong turn, arriving just before 3-00 pm. As he reached the building, the limpet mine exploded, causing damage of over R500 000.

Almost one year later, Isaac Thulane Mabaso (24), a cleaner employed by the SADF, was sentenced to 18 years imprisonment for his part in the blast.

Born in Newcastle in 1963, Mabaso started his standard eight education in 1978. But at the end of that year he failed his examinations. Because his family could not afford to send him back to school, he began seeking employment. With few jobs available in Newcastle, he travelled to Johannesburg, staying with his father in the Jeppe hostel. Because he was not legally resident in Johannesburg, he worked as a 'casual', earning very low wages.

By 1981, Mabaso had started work as a cleaner for the SADF, based at Witwatersrand Command.

Mabaso first met Caswell in 1980, when they both worked at the Poseidon Restaurant in Johannesburg - Caswell as a cook, Mabaso as a dish-washer. When Caswell left his job late in 1980, Mabaso did not expect to see him again.

But towards the end of April 1985, he met up with Caswell and three friends in Noord Street. They all went drinking together, Caswell paying for a number of rounds at a Johannesburg hotel.

When Caswell and his group discovered

that Mabaso had access to End Street Nedbank Centre, by virtue of his SADF identity card, he revealed that they intended placing a limpet mine in the building. Caswell explained that he and his friends were ANC members, fighting to improve the situation of black people. Mabaso agreed to help Caswell gain access to the Nedbank building.

Over the next few weeks, Caswell met up with Mabaso on a number of occasions. Often driving a BMW motor car, he seemed a generous person, buying rounds of drinks, and lending the accused small amounts of money. On one occasion, Caswell offered to 'boost' Mabaso's finances. Mabaso gratefully accepted, suggesting a loan of R20. The next day, when Mabaso met Caswell, R250 was given to him, and he was asked to accompany the group to End Street.

On 28 May 1985, Caswell drove his ANC colleagues and Mabaso to the Nedbank Centre in End Street. When they arrived, Caswell removed the limpet mine from the car boot, and asked Mabaso to accompany him. John, one of the others in the car, was armed with a gun, and took the steering wheel in preparation for Caswell and Mabaso's return.

Mabaso escorted Caswell into the building, using his SADF identity card. They began climbing up the fire escape. At the fire exit on the first floor, Caswell told Mabaso to take a shoe box, in which the limpet mine was hidden, out of its plastic bag. Caswell set the timing device of the limpet, and Mabaso placed the box next to a door.

A number of people were injured in the resultant blast. According to Lizette Scheepers, who was running down the stairs at the time, 'Cement and bricks fell on us. I lost consciousness. When I came to, my right shoulder was dislocated, my body had scratches all over and there were cuts on my head. I still do not have the full use of my arm'.

Captain Heather Cullis, the senior nursing sister in charge of the medical corps that day, had both ear-drums pierced by the blast. Her shrapnel wounds needed 15 stitches, and her eyesight and hearing were permanently impaired.

The next day, the ANC's Addis Ababa office in Ethiopia acknowledged that the

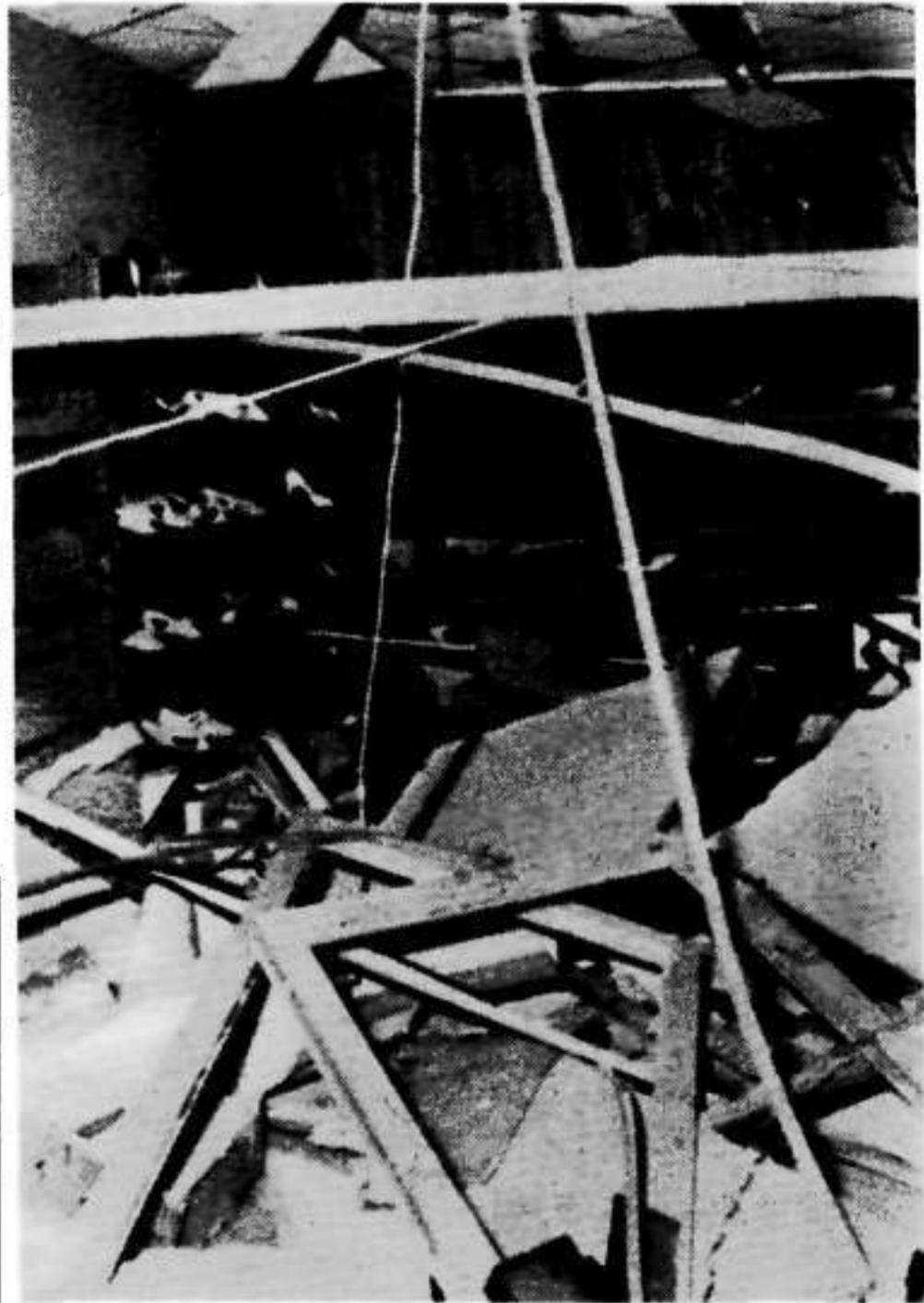
attack had been planned and carried out by Umkhonto we Sizwe guerillas. An ANC spokesman said that the attack was 'part of a general escalation of the liberation war. These attacks, together with the uprisings presently engulfing the whole country are a concrete manifestation of our people's determination to rid ourselves of the racist regime', said the spokesman. 'No amount of reforms or adjustments to apartheid can turn our revolution back'.

Mabaso was detained by security police at the beginning of August. When he appeared in the Rand Supreme Court on 28 April 1986, he pleaded guilty to a charge of terrorism. In mitigation of sentence he told presiding judge McCreath that he had been worried that people might be killed in the blast, but that Caswell assured him the bomb was timed to go off late at night. But this evidence was rejected by the judge.

The state prosecutor argued that Mabaso was used as cover by Caswell and his group, making it possible for them to plant the bomb. This was by no means a minor role, according to the state, and called for a sentence of life imprisonment.

Defence advocate Eric Dane disagreed, arguing that the court had to consider how the accused had become involved. He was not an ANC member, neither had he undergone military training. Clearly, argued the defence, Mabaso was influenced by Caswell, an older, more sophisticated and experienced person.

In sentencing Mabaso to 18 years imprisonment, Justice McCreath said that if anyone had been killed in the blast, he would have considered passing the



Damage caused by the bomb blast

death sentence on the accused. 'Mabaso abused his position as an SADF employee. He allowed his identity card and his own presence to be used to enable the crime to be committed', said the judge.

On being sentenced to 18 years imprisonment, Mabaso smiled in relief, saying it was two years less than he had expected.

Subversion Charge Follows Kagiso Meeting

Five Kagiso residents face charges of subversion following a 16 June meeting held in 1985.

The accused, who also face an alternative charge of public violence, are:

Daniel Moname
Isaac Genu
Kenneth Mlabulane
Lucky Masetla
Joseph Korasi
Albert Khenyile.

Subversion is an offence created by the Internal Security Act of 1982. Its terms are very broad, and in this trial,

the state alleges that the accused are responsible for a series of actions which followed the 16 June meeting.

According to the state, the accused intended to

- * overthrow or endanger state authority;
- * achieve constitutional, political, industrial, social or economic change;
- * force the government not to act in a certain way;
- * force the general public to act in a certain way by demoralising them.

With intention, claims the state, the accused caused general dislocation in

Kagiso; interfered with the supply and distribution of food and commodities; prevented people from assisting in the maintenance of law and order; endangered the free movement of traffic; and created feelings of hostility between various population groups.

The state's case is that the accused arranged and attended a meeting held at the Kagiso Methodist Church on 16 June 1985. This meeting led to acts of arson, public violence, and the damaging of buildings and property belonging to Kagiso town councillors. In addition, claims the prosecution, the meeting led to a confrontation with the members of the police, and the disturbance of peace and tranquility.

After the meeting, a group carrying sticks, bottles and stones marched through the streets of Kagiso singing freedom songs, and shouting slogans. The state claims the accused participated in the march.

Initially they marched on town councillor Msabeni Goodman Mabaso's shop, setting it on fire, stoning and plundering it.

They then moved on to a shop belonging to Kagiso's 'mayor', Lesaoana Eduard Moeketsi, attacking it with stones and then burning it.

Moeketsi's car was also damaged in this incident when it was hit by stones thrown by marchers.

Participants in the march also stoned and set fire to the house of 'deputy-mayor' Anthony Zulu.

Finally, the crowd stoned one or more buses belonging to United Greyhound.

The maximum penalty for subversion is 20 years imprisonment. However, if a court rules that an accused should have foreseen that violence could have been a reasonable possibility, the maximum sentence is increased to 25 years.

The accused were initially detained by security police towards the end of August 1985, and held under section 29 of the Internal Security Act. When they appeared in court, they were all released on bail of R500.

The trial is due to begin in the middle of July.

In Brief

Johannes Soudeni Mahlangu (27)

Mxolisi Bright Gebashe (28)

Two alleged ANC guerilla fighters face 13 charges of terrorism, membership of the ANC, unlawful possession of arms, ammunition and explosives, robbery with aggravating circumstances, and attempted murder.

According to the charge sheet, Mahlangu comes from Mamelodi, and Gebashe from Soweto.

The state claims that both accused joined the ANC and underwent military training in East Germany, Angola, Russia and Zambia. Gebashe, it is alleged, left South Africa in 1977, while Mahlangu followed in 1979.

They allegedly returned to South Africa with false identity books. From their Northern Transvaal area of operation they plotted acts of violence, and recruited others to support the ANC's cause.

They also allegedly attempted to gather information for the ANC, and identify targets for sabotage. As part of their ANC activities, they allegedly purchased two motor cars with ANC funds to transport weapons.

During the period April-December 1985, the prosecution alleges that they were in possession of two 9 mm Makarov pistols, 16 rounds of 9 mm ammunition, two F1 defensive handgrenades and one RGD5 offensive grenade. These weapons were stored near the Northern Transvaal area of Kwaggafontein.

On 22 November, claims the prosecution, Mahlangu and Gebashe robbed the Mohlala Bottlestore, near Dennilton, of R875. In doing this, they allegedly threatened the bottlestore owner and his wife with firearms, and in the process wounded Moses Mohlala. They are also alleged to have made an attempt on the life of David Chali during the bottlestore robbery.

Finally, alleges the state, when a Captain RF Maritz attempted to arrest the accused near Kwaggafontein, Mahlangu tried to murder him.

The trial is due to begin in the Pretoria regional court on 21 July 1986.