

THE VAAL RIOTS

Before the evening of 2 September 1984 there had been incidents of violence in the Vaal but these could not be described as the rumblings of a volcano about to erupt. They were isolated incidents.

On 20 August 1984 children had stoned buses in Vuga and were stopped from doing so in Vergenoeg by Maria Mokati. This was in Sharpeville.

On 29 August 1984 the public meeting of councillors in Bophelong was disrupted and councillors were threatened and stoned.

On the Vaal riots we had a plethora of witnesses. Much of the evidence was conflicting. In this respect regard should be had to our assessment of their credibility set out in annexure Z to this judgment.

The situation in the Vaal can only be understood when matters are viewed in their chronological sequence.

The evening and night of 2 September 1984 were uneventful in Sebokeng and Evaton but not elsewhere. In Boipatong obstructions were erected in the streets that evening and later that night and at 6h00 on 3 September 80% of the roads in the township were blocked. Warrant officer Terblanche got the impression that the population were afraid. Something was about to happen.

At 19h30 on the evening of 2 September motorists were attacked with stones on the Golden Highway passing Bophelong. The police who went to investigate found in Bophelong numerous obstructions in the streets consisting of burning tyres, motor wrecks, overturned ash-bins and a tree that had been cut down and put across the main street. At these obstructions the police were attacked with stones by a group of 50 to 100 people shouting slogans like Viva ANC, Viva Mandela and cursing the police, calling them dogs. Before the arrival of the police a house had been attacked and the liquor store of the Development Board had been broken into and looted. When the dog squad of the police were attacked by between 50 and 200 people an attacker was killed with a rubber bullet in self-defence. Between 21h00 and 22h00 smoke was seen in the direction of the shopping centre. There was a fire at the beerhall and the community hall. A road-block was erected in front of the administrative offices on the bus route and these were set on fire at approximately 22h30. Later that night a house was attacked with stones and on the way there a police vehicle broke down and its occupants were attacked by a mob of 300 to 400 near

the community hall shouting 'Viva Oliver Tambo, Viva Mandela, honde gee pad uit die gebied' . The attack was repulsed by tear-smoke and rubber bullets. Throughout the night sporadic attacks with stones on the police continued.

In Sharpeville at dusk on the evening of 2 September the house of councillor Dlamini was attacked with stones. Later that evening obstructions were placed in the streets consisting of ash-bins, burning tyres, car wrecks and road-signs. There was a lot of stone-throwing that night consisting of attacks by groups of youths on the police. At 1h00 the house of a security policeman and his vehicle were set alight and at approximately 4h00 Schlebush found road-blocks in the road on both sides of Mafuba's liquor store and also at Vuga liquor store. Both were on the bus route and belonged to the Administration Board. Schlebush was attacked with stones at Mafuba's.

The riots started in Sebokeng at 6h00. They commenced with attacks on councillor Ceasar Motjeane's house and the stoning of buses and police vehicles mainly at bus stops. Shortly after 6h00 tear-gas was fired near Molantoa garage (the BP garage) on the main road in zone 12 and smoke was seen in zones 12, 13 and elsewhere.

Already at 5h00 Joshua Raboroko who lives in zone 3 thought that the stay-away would be a success as there were only a few buses.

Before 7h00 the police had fired tear-smoke near the administrative buildings in zone 13 and at 7h00 youths started building obstructions on both sides of the bus terminus on the P.88 main road. Shortly afterwards there was a sudden unforeseen attack by a mob of 200 to 300 on Van Deventer and the administrative offices and workshop in zone 13. His vehicle was petrolbombed and an attempt was made to set the administrative offices alight. At 7h30 the house of councillor Mahlatsi, the mayor of Lekoa, was attacked by a mob and he had to flee for his life.

Boulders were put in the road at two spots near the BP garage and suddenly at 8h00 sharp youths who were building barricades attacked the police and the buses at the bus terminus called Fowler. At the same time Mrs. Nkhiwane heard a big noise at Masenkeng bus terminus and Motsoeneng found that the administrative offices had been set alight and the liquor store looted in zone 7. Bus transport had come to a standstill and bus passengers returned home.

At 8h30 a white bakkie was aflame inside the premises of the liquor store in zone 12 and the police were attacked by a mob of 500 to 700 near that store. The attack was led by persons wearing yellow T-shirts.

Joshua Raboroko, the reporter, testified that at 8h45 he found obstructions across the whole of the tarmac on Wessels Mota Road between the T-junction and zone 12 before the BP garage. There were stones, bricks, dust-bins and ash. Between the BP garage and zone 11 he found approximately five buses standing empty with broken windows on the side of the road. The police were firing tear-gas at houses behind which the attackers were dodging. At approximately 9h00 he saw a column of smoke rising from the Administration Board's offices in zone 13 clearly visible from the northern side of zone 11. The bottle-store in zone 13 had been looted. Between 9h30 and 9h45 two shopping complexes of zone 13 were set alight.

At 7h15 on 3 September Masenya, whose evidence was not disputed on this point, left his house in zone 7 for the Deep Knowledge school in zone 14. On the way there and back he saw that the shopping centre of zone 14 was on fire, that in the open veld near zone 13 the police were dispersing groups by hitting them, that big stones had been placed on the tarmac of the Johannesburg/Vereeniging highway, that in zone 13 the main roads had been obstructed, which was also the position in zones 11, 12 and 7. The shops in zone 11 were being looted and the bottle-store was on fire. All this he saw before or at approximately 9h00.

The reverend Mahlatsi who was part of the march saw COSAS members who were in the procession erecting obstructions in the road. At the time of the march Rina Mokoena saw obstructions on the main road.

Before 9h00 councillor Nkhiwane's house was burnt down in zone 7 and just after 9h00 the house of councillor Tshabalala in zone 12 was attacked. The beerhall was looted.

At 9h30 brigadier Viljoen received a stream of regular reports of attacks on police vehicles, liquor stores, houses of councillors and businesses of councillors. The conditions worsened to such an extent that he had to take the decision to use sharp ammunition in Sebokeng at 9h46. That is also the time when councillor Ceasar Motjeane was killed by a mob.

At 10h00 councillor Buthelezi's house was on fire and councillor Mohajane's house was under attack. The administrative offices in zone 12 were aflame.

Between 10h00 and 11h00 a mob moved from zone 7 to the administrative offices in Evaton which it set alight after attacking it with stones.

This pattern continued throughout the morning and afternoon. Police patrols were under continuous attack and in these attacks UDF and AZAPO T-shirts were prominent. Throughout the afternoon reinforcements of the police arrived and eventually at 23h00 all was quiet.

In Sharpeville armed mobs were seen at 6h00 and shortly afterwards sudden and heavy attacks on buses and the police commenced. The lives of the police were endangered. Seiso Street was blocked with motor wrecks and other material. Side streets were also blocked. The police were stoned by mobs shouting slogans, some 500 to 600 strong. Brigadier Viljoen ordered the withdrawal of the buses.

At 7h00 councillor Sekobane's house was burnt out as well as his station-wagon. A little later an attack on councillor Dlamini was repulsed.

Between 8h00 and 9h00 the houses of councillor Mofokeng and constable Radebe were attacked and at 9h00 the house, vehicle and person of councillor Dlamini were set on fire. The police who attempted to help were attacked by a mob of 300 to 400 strong shouting ANC slogans with leaders clad in UDF and COSAS T-shirts. The beerhall was burnt down. Shortly afterwards constable Radebe's house was again attacked. There were regular attacks on police, liquor stores, the

houses of councillors and their businesses in Sharpeville after that. At 9h46 the decision was taken to use sharp ammunition and thereafter the conditions in Sharpeville flattened off. General riots and stone-throwing continued lasting the whole day.

In Boipatong the opening round was an attack on a bus near the community hall. Its windows were broken. This happened at 7h00. The police started dispersing people. Thereafter a police vehicle was stoned on the square and an attack on councillor Mpondo's house followed. Thereafter the beerhall came under attack and then the house of councillor Nzunga.

Before 10h00 the windows of the community hall had been smashed in and by 11h00 a shop in the industrial area was aflame. When the police arrived approximately 150 looters re-formed, armed with sticks and stones and attacked the police. After 11h00 it was found that the house of a councillor who was also a member of the security police had been burnt down. Thereafter there were intermittent attacks on police patrols throughout the day in Boipatong.

In Bophelong where the previous night there had been such feverish activity the attacks tapered off on 3 September. The police were still using tear-gas at 9h00 and at 10h00 it was found that the windows of the offices of the Administration Board had been smashed. Just after 11h00 the house of councillor Mgcina was attacked.

We have already mentioned the attack on the administrative offices of Evaton by a mob coming from zone 7. A placard Asinamali was carried. This mob was joined by a smaller one from Evaton. In Evaton, Adams Road was obstructed with concrete blocks, rocks, tyres and security gates torn from shops. The police were attacked with stones and bottles by mobs shouting Viva ANC, Viva UDF, Viva Mandela, Viva Tambo. The leaders wore UDF and COSAS T-shirts, incited the crowds and threw stones. A leader wearing a UDF T-shirt was shot. The beerhall was set on fire and the mob of approximately 1 500 was very aggressive. After 11h00 the house of councillor Diphoko and the beerhall were attacked by a mob of 2 000 armed with stones, kieries, knives and assegais. Councillor Diphoko was seriously injured. The crowd shouted Viva Mandela, COSAS, UDF, ANC and cursed the police as dogs and shouted that the police should be killed. The leaders wore UDF and COSAS T-shirts.

That afternoon road obstructions were found throughout Evaton and the police were attacked with petrolbombs. An attacker was shot dead.

Councillor Diphoko's house and shop were again under attack by a mob of 600 to 700 armed with stones, ash-bin lids and sharp irons. Sharp ammunition was used.

Later that afternoon Quality Stores, an Indian shop, was set alight and looters had to be dispersed. The same happened at Evaton liquor store. Late that night Fundulwazi school's administration block in Evaton was set alight.

On 4 September 1984 there were a few incidents in Sharpeville, Boipatong and Bophelong consisting of the plundering of burnt shops and the stoning of police action in connection therewith. The roads were still blocked and there were intermittent attacks. In Sebokeng there was a high incidence of incidents in the morning and throughout that day.

During the following days the rioters' behaviour generally tapered off, the police were in control and isolated incidents still occurred. There was still a high level of intimidation according to

brigadier Viljoen which consisted of youths being forced to stone buses on pain of having their houses burnt down.

The above is a short review of the start of the Vaal riots. In their wake, ultimately, they left many persons dead, amongst them four councillors. The others fled from their homes. In September 1984 damage to the tune of nine-and-a-half million Rand was caused through arson in the Vaal Triangle. Of 230 buildings damaged only a few were not public buildings or the property of councillors or ex-councillors. Exh AAS.1.

Brigadier Viljoen who had vast experience of riot control and who had been in charge in Soweto during the 1976 riots stated that in his opinion the riots in the Vaal Triangle had been organised. He based this opinion on the fact that specific targets had been attacked being councillors and their houses, policemen and their houses, liquor stores of the Development Board, beerhalls of the Development Board, the businesses of councillors and buildings of the Administration Board. Further it was significant that the crowd had been determined in their action, specific targets had been attacked twice, for example Dlamini, Radebe and Diphoko. To this one can add the houses of Ceasar Motjeane and Mofokeng. He stated that these riots differed from those of Soweto in 1976 where anything in the way of the mob had been attacked. Here there were smaller groups and barricades had been

erected on the night of 2 September in Bophelong, Boipatong and Sharpeville.

Whereas in Soweto nearly all businesses had been destroyed, in the Vaal Triangle that had not been the case. The targets had been selected and an exception were the two Indian shops which had been attacked. In Soweto the children had started a march which had been spontaneously joined by others as they passed from one school to the other on their way to the Orlando stadium. It had been stopped by the police, Hector Petersen had been shot and the crowd dispersed. Thereupon the rampage followed. In the Vaal Triangle road-blocks had been erected the previous night whereas in Soweto that had happened only after the riots started.

Early in the morning of 3 September there had been no indications of a stay-away and march. Small groups of people had been waiting for buses and boarding them. There were only approximately 11 landrovers patrolling the whole of Lekoa supplemented by the dog squad, two hippos and three ton trucks. It is very improbable that these would start dispersing small groups of people on their way to work.

Brigadier Viljoen emphasised that the leaders and instigators of the various mobs of rioters often wore UDF and COSAS T-shirts. In Bophelong for example a leader wearing a UDF T-shirt was particularly ferocious. He threw a half-brick at the police using an ash-bin lid

as a shield. In Sharpeville and Sebokeng UDF and AZAPO T-shirts were prominent and in Evaton COSAS T-shirts as well. In fact captain Keyter wondered where they got the nice new clean shirts from, referring to the yellow T-shirts worn by the attackers.

Brigadier Viljoen emphasised that all streets were blockaded, not only the bus routes. This indicates an intention on the part of the rioters to preclude the police from taking preventive action in the case of attacks on public buildings and the shops and houses of councillors.

It should be remembered that at Boipatong the UDF shirts were not the leaders and only in two out of twenty groups were UDF shirts worn.

What was significant to warrant officer Bruyns was that as soon as the attack was on the way the leaders wearing the UDF T-shirts would melt into the crowd and disappear. This was characteristic of all the action.

What is further significant is that at Sebokeng at the bus terminus there was no stone-throwing at the watching police. The youths built obstructions in the road from 7h00. Suddenly at 8h00 the police and the buses were attacked from two sides without warning and without reason. The youths were armed with ash-bin lids to ward off the rubber bullets.

This evidence of concerted and well timed action is supported by major Crous who manned a spotter aircraft. He stated that at approximately 8h00 the situation in the Vaal exploded.

S Maile testified that the mob which attacked councillor Dlamini on 3 September between 7h30 and 8h30 brought stones and half-bricks along and were looking for his house as they were not from the neighbourhood. They also had petrol in a bucket.

The witness ic.25 testified that on the morning of the attack on councillor Diphoko a bakkie had brought stones and off-loaded them in front of his premises. The mob came running to his premises with the leader saying that they would plunder and kill. Most of those were not from the neighbourhood.

To this can be added the evidence of Rina Mokoena who testified that she met Edith Lethlaka in zone 11 after the march and that the latter told her that they had finished burning the beerhall in zone 11 and were going to zone 3. One can further add to this the evidence of McCamel who testified that Sotsu and Esau Raditsela told him on 7 September 1984 in the office of Frank Chikane that they (referring to the VCA) started the riots.

For the reasons set out above we agree with the view of brigadier Viljoen that the riots in the Vaal Triangle were not spontaneous but were organised. We find that this was a well-planned and effectively executed operation to paralyse public transport, attack and set arson to the buildings of the Black local authority and Administration Board and to intimidate and even kill the councillors and effect their resignation. The aim was to obliterate the Lekoa town council.

We reject the theory of counsel for the defence that the riots started spontaneously in Bophelong, then spread to Sharpeville and later to Sebokeng, exacerbated by police behaviour. There is no credible evidence to support it.

DELMAS TREASON TRIAL 1985-1989

PUBLISHER:

Publisher:- Historical Papers, The University of the Witwatersrand

Location:- Johannesburg

©2009

LEGAL NOTICES:

Copyright Notice: All materials on the Historical Papers website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Disclaimer and Terms of Use: Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

People using these records relating to the archives of Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, are reminded that such records sometimes contain material which is uncorroborated, inaccurate, distorted or untrue. While these digital records are true facsimiles of paper documents and the information contained herein is obtained from sources believed to be accurate and reliable, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand has not independently verified their content. Consequently, the University is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the website or any related information on third party websites accessible from this website.

DOCUMENT DETAILS:

Document ID:- **AK2117-K2117-L12-9**

Document Title:- **Vaal Riots 877-891**