

The 'Gugulethu Seven'

Around 07h30 on 3 March 1986, seven young men were shot dead at the corner of Gugulethu's NY 1 and NY 111 and in an adjoining field. They were Mr Mandla Simon Mxinwa (23) [CT00700], Mr Zanisile Zenith MJobo (21) [CT00116], Mr Zola Alfred Swelani (22), Mr Godfrey Jabulani Miya [CT00818], Mr Christopher Piet (23) [CT00100], Mr Themba Mlifi (30), and Mr Zabonke John Konile [CT00108, CT03054]. All seven were shot in the head, in addition to numerous other gunshot wounds. Police officers at the scene were Warrant Officers Barnard and McMaster, Majors Johan Kleyn, Dolf Odendal and Stephanus Brits, Captain Charles Brazzelle, Sergeants John Sterrenberg, Andre Grobbellar and Riaan Bellingan, and Constable Thapelo Mbelo.

The police claimed that the deceased were known terrorists who had been killed during a legitimate anti-terrorist operation. Security forces had allegedly acted pre-emptively to prevent these terrorists from attacking a police bus ferrying senior policeman to the nearby Gugulethu Police Station that morning.

The 'Gugulethu Seven' were the subject of an inquest in 1986, a trial in 1987 and a re-opened inquest in 1989. Forensic pathologist Dr David Klatzow seriously challenged the evidence of the police, demonstrating unequivocally that the victims were shot at very close range. In the case of Mr Mandla Simon Mxinwa, Klatzow's evidence was that shotgun cartridge wads were found inside the skull of the deceased, indicating that he had been shot at point-blank range. The medico-legal post mortems stated further all the deceased sustained multiple and extensive gunshot wounds; Mr Christopher 'Rasta' Piet sustained twelve bullet wounds in the head. The outcome of both inquests was a finding by the Wynberg magistrate, Mr Hoffmann, that the seven men had died during a legitimate anti-terrorist operation.

Cape Times journalists Tony Weaver and Chris Bateman published an eyewitness account indicating that the police had shot the victims at close range and that police had shot a man as he was attempting to give himself up. Further eyewitnesses reported seeing a white man shooting a man in the head while he was lying motionless on the ground. Weaver was charged with printing untruths about actions of the SAP and was acquitted. These accounts, together with Dr Klatzow's evidence and allegations by the parents of the deceased that weapons had been planted on the victims, provided the first serious counterpoint to the official version. The post mortem photographs, photographs of the deceased as found at the scene, photographs of Sergeant Sterrenberg