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Steve Biko while in police custody 1977
charcoal on paper 1997 150 cm x 122 cm
by Amos Miller 1997

given and shipped to the Constitutional Court of South Africa on April 6, 2021

Constitutional Court Building
1 Hospital Street
Constitution Hill
Braamfontein
2017
South Africa

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Amos Miller



In South Africa, Confessions to a Dark Era's Worst Killings

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ison cell here told a public inquest at there had been no beatings or torture. They said Mr. Biko was injured when he "went berserk" and threw himself against a wall.

The men are Daantjie Siebert, Gidon Niewoudt, Harold Shyman, Ruan Marx and Johann Beneke. Some of these men have also admitted being involved in some of the other killings, their lawyer said.

The men range in age from 40 to 60. Several are retired, while some are given medical discharges for work-related stress.

Mr. van de Merwe said that most of his clients had come forward because "quite honestly, there was a lot of evidence building up."

Others, he said, had volunteered information that was not about to be recovered in the spirit of reconciliation.

He appealed for understanding for the men, saying they had families and in many cases had no idea what they had been doing as members of the African's ruthless security forces and were now having difficulty accepting the news.

But some of the relatives of the victims who attended the news conference today scoffed at Mr. van der Merwe's pleas.

"Were they thinking about my husband's family when they killed him?" said Nomonde Calata, whose husband, Fort Calata, was killed along with Matthew Goniwe. "They are watching him all the time and lived with me and they could see I was very much expecting a child when they took him away. Were they thinking of us?"

Ironically, the Truth Commission's first successes in solving the mysteries of the past are in cases where many of the victim's relatives have vehemently opposed the work of the commission.

Mr. Biko's family, for instance, is among those who went to court trying to stop the proceedings. The family wants to see Mr. Biko's killers



Associated Press



Reuters

Lawyers for the Biko family argued that the commission was unconstitutional because its powers to grant amnesties denied the victims the right to have disputes settled in court. The country's highest court, however, ruled in favor of the commission.

Commission officials said many of the amnesty applications they had received involving the 10 prominent activists were contradictory, contained yawning gaps and implicated still other people who had not yet come forward. They refused to give any details at all about the Biko killings.

Mr. Boraine said

But in the case of Mr. Goniwe, who disappeared in 1975 along with three other activists in Port Elizabeth, commission officials said some details could be disclosed. A yearlong inquest in 1994 failed to identify any of the culprits in the case or to explain exactly what had happened to Mr. Goniwe, Mr. Calata, Sparrow Mkhomo and Sicele Mhlatuli.

The commissioner said the four, who became known as the Cradock Four, were apparently abducted as they were traveling between Port Elizabeth and Cradock in Cape Province. From there they were taken into the

Five white former South African police officers have acknowledged their roles in the killings of anti-apartheid activists in the 1970's and 80's: Two of the officers, Capt. Daantjie Siebert, left, and Maj. Harold Shyman, leaving an inquest in 1977 after denying killing Steve Biko. Mr. Biko, above, died of a brain hemorrhage at age 30 while in police custody in 1977.

Two others were beaten with an iron implement, then stabbed to make it appear as if their deaths were violent killings. Their bodies were then burnt.

The commission also gave some details about the death of three other activists who became known as the Pebco Three. The men, Sipho Charles Hahle, Qagawuli Godolozzi and Champion Galela disappeared in 1985. He was well known that they had been abducted from the Port Elizabeth airport after the security police had lured them there with the promise of meeting a potential donor. But further details were unknown.

were taken to an abandoned police station and after being interrogated they were given coffee laced with sleeping tablets. Each one was shot by a different policeman and then the bodies were placed on a pyre and burnt. This took four to six hours. The remains were then placed in plastic bags and disposed of in a river.

Two other activists, Siphiwe Mtimkulu and Topsy Madaka, apparently got similar treatment in 1982, although police officials maintained the two had left the country. Mr. Mtimkulu, a student leader, had been held in detention for five months in 1981 after participating in a demonstration. In prison, he had been poisoned with substance used for killing rats.

Home barely two weeks and still wearing slippers and using a cane, he was abducted with his friend. After they were drugged, shot and then reduced to ashes on a wood pyre, the police took their car to the Lesotho border to create the impression that they had left the country, the commission said.

Steve Biko was 30 years old when he died, but he had already developed a significant following. A passionate and eloquent speaker, he argued that blacks had to stop feeling inferior to whites. They had to see beauty and value in their own ways and they had to make their own future without depending on whites.

In death, he became an icon of the international campaign against white rule and inspired a successful movie, "Cry Freedom."

Evidence at the inquest showed that Mr. Biko had died from the head injury over a period of several days. In addition, to the brain damage there were other injuries as well. Although medically examined several times, there was no evidence he received any medical treatment in the days before his death.

On September 11, naked and shackled, he was transferred 700 miles to Pretoria where he was dumped without identification outside the emergency room of a hospi-