

Security branch were a law unto themselves, says Soweto detective

By ROBERT BRAND

The police's security branch were "a law unto themselves" and excluded the rest of the police force from their operations, a Soweto detective told the Truth and Reconciliation Commission yesterday.

And leftovers from the old police force who could not adapt to a democratic dispensation in South Africa should leave the force because they sullied the names of their colleagues, Det Insp Gregory Beck said.

Beck was testifying about an ambush in Soweto in 1988 during which he was seriously wounded by unknown attackers. He was then a sergeant in the uniform branch, and was on a crime prevention patrol with four colleagues when they were attacked with automatic weapons shortly after midnight.

Beck was hit by automatic rifle

fire several times in the right thigh and spent a year in hospital. He is now in the detective branch in Soweto.

Beck told the commission he knew little of the "dirty tricks" perpetrated by the police during the 1980s.

"These things were done by the security branch. They excluded other parts of the police from their work. They were a law unto themselves."

Beck said when reports about security police "dirty tricks" started to surface during the 1990s he revised his opinion of the liberation movements and their struggle.

"Before 1990 we ordinary policemen did not know anything about these covert operations. I can see the point of the liberation movements now. They wanted to bring about what we are experiencing now in the new SA. We are all liberated. I bear no grudges."

Mother describes harassment by police, threats by 'Zim Zim' school activists

By HELEN GRANGE

The mother of student activist Sicelo Dhlomo, who was gunned down in Soweto in January 1988 at the age of 18, told the Truth and Reconciliation Commission how she tried to protect her "harassed child" from the police and members of the "Zim-Zims", a reference to the Azanian Students' Movement.

Sylvia Dhlomo-Jele said her son, who was a member of the Soweto Students' Congress and a volunteer worker for the Detainees' Parents Support Committee, had been on the run from the police until one day he failed to collect the food he had arranged with the family to be cooked for him.

She received a call from him and asked immediately: "Are you all right?" He had not answered and that was the last she had heard from him until the police

came to the house with her son's pocket book.

"I could sense it. He was gone. The body was under a tree. I knew they had killed him. The police took me to where he was lying and he was full of blood on the head ... My child had told me to expect this and be strong ... but I experienced great pain," she said.

Dhlomo-Jele said members of an organisation she only knew to be called the "Zim-Zims" were also looking for Sicelo at the time of his death. They had previously petrol-bombed her house, she said.

She said a "child" at Sicelo's school had "had a gun and was threatening" Sicelo before his death. She knew the name of this person but did not want to tell the commission because she feared for her safety.

Dhlomo appeared in 1985 in the CBS documentary *Children of Apartheid*.