

The murder fields of Marikana. The cold murder fields of Marikana.

Greg Marinovich, 30 August, Daily Maverick

<http://dailymaverick.co.za/article/2012-08-30-the-murder-fields-of-marikana-the-cold-murder-fields-of-marikana>

Some of the miners killed in the 16 August massacre at Marikana appear to have been shot at close range or crushed by police vehicles. They were not caught in a fusillade of gunfire from police defending themselves, as the official account would have it. GREG MARINOVICH spent two weeks trying to understand what really happened. What he found was profoundly disturbing.

Of the 34 miners killed at Marikana, no more than a dozen of the dead were captured in news footage shot at the scene. The majority of those who died, according to surviving strikers and researchers, were killed beyond the view of cameras at a nondescript collection of boulders some 300 metres behind Wonderkop.

On one of these rocks, encompassed closely on all sides by solid granite boulders, is the letter 'N', the 14th letter of the alphabet. Here, N represents the 14th body of a striking miner to be found by a police forensics team in this isolated place. These letters are used by forensics to detail where the corpses lay.

There is a thick spread of blood deep into the dry soil, showing that N was shot and killed on the spot. There is no trail of blood leading to where N died – the blood saturates one spot only, indicating no further movement. (It would have been outside of the scope of the human body to crawl here bleeding so profusely.)

Approaching N from all possible angles, observing the local geography, it is clear that to shoot N, the shooter would have to be close. Very close, in fact, almost within touching distance. (After having spent days here at the bloody massacre site, it does not take too much imagination for me to believe that N might have begged for his life on that winter afternoon.)



Photo: At sites like 'N', all four sides are hemmed in by rock. (Greg Marinovich)

And on the deadly Thursday afternoon, N's murderer could only have been a policeman. I say murderer because there is not a single report on an injured policeman from the day. I say murderer because there seems to have been no attempt to uphold our citizens' right to life and fair recourse to justice. It is hard to imagine that N would have resisted being taken into custody when thus cornered. There is no chance of escape out of a ring of police. Other letters denote equally morbid scenarios. J and H died alongside each other. They, too, had no route of escape and had to have been shot at close range.



Photo: J and H died alongside each other. (Greg Marinovich)

Other letters mark the rocks nearby. A bloody handprint stains a vertical rock surface where someone tried to support themselves standing up; many other rocks are splattered with blood as miners died on the afternoon of 16 August.



Photo: A bloody handprint stains a vertical rock surface. (Greg Marinovich)

None of these events were witnessed by media or captured on camera. They were only reported on as component parts in the sum of the greater tragedy.

One of the striking miners caught up in the mayhem, let's call him "Themba", though his name is known to the Daily Maverick, recalled what he saw once he escaped the killing fields around Wonderkop.

"Most people then called for us to get off the mountain, and as we were coming down, the shooting began. Most people who were shot near the kraal were trying to get into the settlement; the blood we saw is theirs. We ran in the other direction, as it was impossible now to make it through the bullets.

"We ran until we got to the meeting spot and watched the incidents at the koppie. Two helicopters landed; soldiers and police surrounded the area. We never saw anyone coming out of the koppie."

The soldiers he refers to were, in fact, part of the police task team dressed in camouflage uniforms, brought to the scene in a brown military vehicle. Asked about this, Themba said he believed people were hiding at the koppie, and police went in and killed them.

In the days after the shooting, Themba visited friends at the nearby mine hospital.

"Most people who are in hospital were shot at the back. The ones I saw in hospital had clear signs of being run over by the Nyalas," he said. "I never got to go to the mortuary, but most people who went there told me that they couldn't recognise the faces of the dead (they were so damaged by either bullets or from being driven over)."

It is becoming clear to this reporter that heavily armed police hunted down and killed the miners in cold blood. A minority were killed in the filmed event where police claim they acted in self-defence. The rest was murder on a massive scale.

Peter Alexander, chair in Social Change and professor of Sociology at the University of Johannesburg, and two researchers interviewed witnesses in the days after the massacre. Researcher Botsong Mmope spoke to a miner, Tsepo, on Monday 20 August. Tsepo (not his real name) witnessed some of the events that occurred off camera.

“Tsepo said many people had been killed at the small koppie and it had never been covered (by the media). He agreed to take us to the small koppie, because that is where many, many people died,” Mmope said.

After the shooting began, Tsepo said, he was among many who ran towards the small koppie. As the police chased them, someone among them said, “Let us lie down, comrades, they will not shoot us then.”

“At that time, there were bullets coming from a helicopter above them. Tsepo then lay down. A number of fellow strikers also lay down. He says he watched Nyalas driving over the prostrate, living miners,” Mmope said. “Other miners ran to the koppie, and that was where they were shot by police and the army** with machine guns.”

*(** Several witnesses and speakers at the miners' gathering referring to the army, or amajoni, actually refer to a police task team unit in camouflage uniforms and carrying R5 semi-automatic files on the day. – GM)*

When the firing finally ceased, Tsepo managed to escape across the veld to the north.

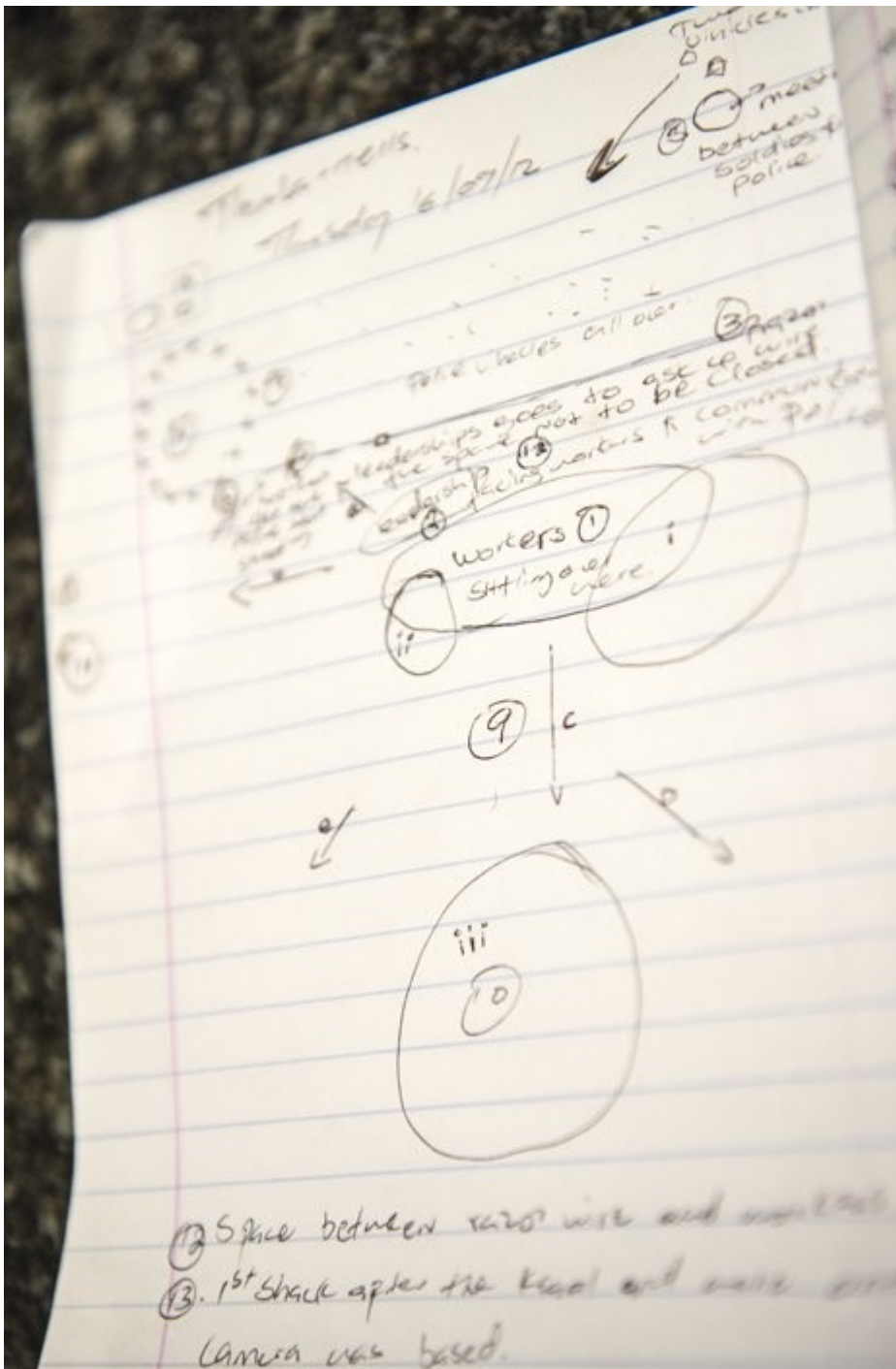


Photo: A map drawn by an eyewitness and a researcher shows the spatial context of the events of August 16, and also the sequence of them. Nkanini, Marikana, North West Province, South Africa, 27 August 2012. (Greg Marinovich)

It took several days for police to release the number of those killed. The number 34 surprised most of us. With only about a dozen bodies recorded by the media, where exactly had the remaining miners been killed, and how did they die?

Most journalists and others did not interrogate this properly. The violence of the deaths we could see, again and again, was enough to contend with. The police certainly did not mention what happened outside of the view of the cameras.

The toll of 112 mineworkers (34 dead and 78 wounded) at Marikana is one of those few bitter moments in our bloody history that has been captured by the unblinking eye of the lens. Several lenses, in fact, and from various viewpoints.

This has allowed the actions and reactions of both the strikers and the police to be scrutinised in ways that undocumented tragedies can never be. Therefore, while the motives and rationale of both parties will never be completely clear, their deeds are quite apparent.

Thus developed a dominant narrative within the public discourse. The facts have been fed by the police, various state entities and by the media that the strikers provoked their own deaths by charging and shooting at the forces of law and order. Indeed, the various images and footage can be read to support this claim.

The contrary view is that the striking miners were trying to escape police rubber bullets and tear gas when they ran at the heavily armed police task team (our version of SWAT). The result was the horrific images of a dozen or so men gunned down in a fusillade of automatic fire.

From the outside the jumble of granite at Small Koppie, the weathered remains of a prehistoric hill, it would appear that nothing more brutal than the felling of the straggly indigenous trees for firewood occurred here.

Once within the outer perimeter, narrow passages between the weathered bushveld rocks lead into dead ends. Scattered piles of human faeces and toilet paper mark the area as the communal toilet for those in the miners' shack community without pit toilets. It is inside here, hidden from casual view, that the rocks bear the yellow letters methodically sprayed on by the forensic team to denote where they found the miners' bodies. The letter N appears to take the death toll at this site to 14. Some of the other letters are difficult to discern, especially where they were sprayed on the dry grass and sand.

The yellow letters speak as if they are the voices of the dead. The position of the letters, denoting the remains of once sweating, panting, cursing, pleading men, tell a story of policemen hunting men like beasts. They tell of tens of murders at close range, in places hidden from the plain sight.

N, for example, died in a narrow redoubt surrounded on four sides by solid rock. His killer could not have been further than two meters from him – the geography forbids any other possibility. Why did this happen?

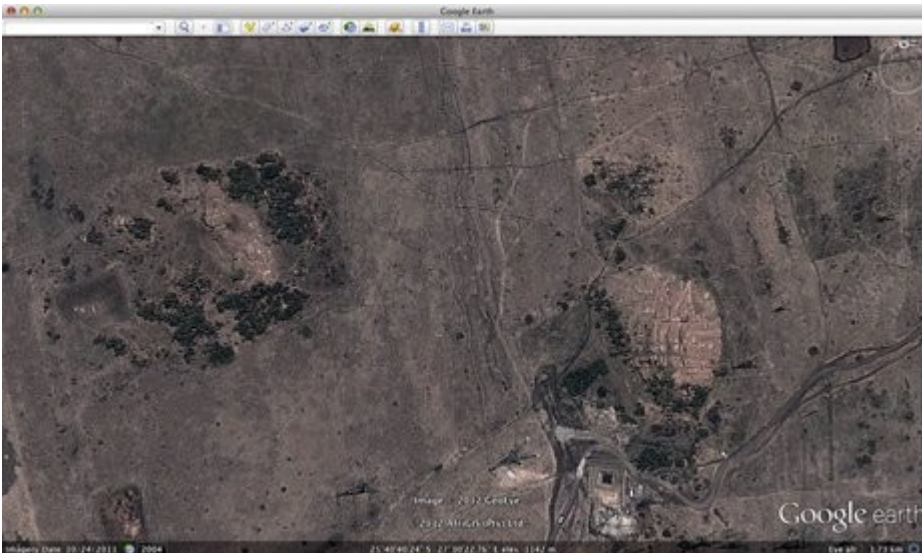


Photo: A satellite view of Wonderkop, the lighter coloured semi-circle to the lower right, and the Small Koppie, which is the more spread out feature to the left. The informal settlement of Nkaneng is to the far right. (Google Earth.)

Let us look back at the events of Monday, 13 August, three days prior to these events. Themba, a second-generation miner from the Eastern Cape, was present then too. He was part of a group of some 30 strikers who were delegated to cross the veld that separated them from another Lonmin platinum mine, Karee.

It was at Karee mine that other rock drill operators led a wildcat strike to demand better wages. The National Union of Mineworkers did not support them, and management took a tough line. The strike was unsuccessful, with many of the strikers losing their jobs. The Marikana miners figured there were many miners there still angry enough to join them on Wonderkop.

The Marikana strikers never reached their fellow workers; instead, mine security turned them back and told them to return by a route different from the one they had come by. On this road, they met a contingent of police. Themba said there were some 10 Nyalas and one or two police trucks or vans. The police barred their way and told them to lay down their weapons. The workers refused, saying they needed the pangas to cut wood, as they lived in the bush, and more honestly, that they were needed to defend themselves.

The Friday before, they said, three of their number had been killed by people wearing red NUM T-shirts. The police line parted and they were allowed to continue, but once they were about 10 metres past, the police opened fire on them. The miners turned and took on the police. It was here, he said, that they killed two policemen and injured another. The police killed two miners and injured a third severely, from helicopter gunfire, Themba said. The miners carried the wounded man back to Wonderkop, where he was taken to hospital in a car. His fate is unknown.

Police spokesman Captain Dennis Adriao, when asked about the incident by telephone, said public order policing officers were attacked by miners, who hacked the two policemen to death and critically injured another. He said eight people had been arrested until then for that incident and for the 10 deaths prior to 16 August. "Two are in custody in hospital who were injured in the attack on the police."

The police version of how this event took place is quite different from that of Themba, but what is clear is that the police had already arrested people for the murders committed thus far.

Why, then, the urgency to confront those among the thousands camped on Wonderkop in the days leading up to the massacre on 16 August?

But let us, in this article, not get too distracted by this obvious question, and return to the events of 16 August itself.

The South African Government Information website still carries this statement, dated from the day of the Marikana massacre:

“Following extensive and unsuccessful negotiations by SAPS members to disarm and disperse a heavily armed group of illegal gatherers at a hilltop close to Lonmin Mine, near Rustenburg in the North West Province, the South African Police Service was viciously attacked by the group, using a variety of weapons, including firearms. The Police, in order to protect their own lives and in self-defence, were forced to engage the group with force. This resulted in several individuals being fatally wounded, and others injured.”

This police statement clearly states that the police acted in self-defence, despite the fact that not a single policeman suffered any injury on 16 August.

And as we discussed earlier, it is possible to interpret what happened in the filmed events as an over-reaction by the police to a threat. What happened afterwards, 400 metres away at Small Koppie, is quite different. That police armoured vehicles drove over prostrate miners cannot be described as self-defence or as any kind of public order policing.

The geography of those yellow spray painted letters tells a chilling and damning story and lends greater credence to what the strikers have been saying.

One miner, on the morning after the massacre, told Daily Maverick that, “When one of our miners passed a Nyala, there was a homeboy of his from the Eastern Cape inside, and he told him that today was D-day, that they were to come and shoot. He said there was a paper signed allowing them to shoot us.”

The language reportedly used by the policeman is strikingly similar to that used by Adriaio early on 16 August, and quoted on [MineWeb](#): “We have tried over a number of days to negotiate with the leaders and with the gathering here at the mine, our objective is to get the people to surrender their weapons and to disperse peacefully.” “Today is D-day in terms of if they don't comply then we will have to act ... we will have to take steps,” he said.

A little later he commented: “Today is unfortunately D-day,” police spokesman Dennis Adriaio [said](#). “It is an illegal gathering. We've tried to negotiate and we'll try again, but if that fails, we'll obviously have to go to a tactical phase.”

Speaking to the possible intention of the police, let us look at how the deployed police were armed. The weapons used by the majority of the more than 400 police on the scene were R5 (a licensed replica of the Israeli Galil SAR) or LM5 assault rifles, designed for infantry and tactical police use. These weapons cannot fire rubber bullets. The police were clearly deployed in a military manner – to take lives, not to deflect possible riotous behaviour.

The death of their comrades three days previously set the stage for the police, who have been increasingly accused of brutality, torture and death in detention, to exact their revenge. What is unclear is how high up the chain of command this desire went. There has been police obfuscation and selective silence in a democratic society where the police are, theoretically, accountable to the citizenry, as well as to our elected representatives. We live in a country where people are assumed innocent until proven guilty; where summary executions are not within the police's discretion.

Let us be under no illusion. The striking miners are no angels. They can be as violent as anyone else in our society. And in an inflamed setting such as at Marikana, probably more so. They are angry, disempowered, feel cheated and want more than a subsistence wage. Whatever the merits of their argument, and the crimes of some individuals among them, more than 3,000 people gathering at Wanderkop did not merit being vulnerable to summary and entirely arbitrary execution at the hands of a paramilitary police unit. In light of this, we could look at the events of 16 August as the murder of 34 and the attempted murder of a further 78 who survived despite the police's apparent intention to kill them.

Back at the rocks the locals dubbed Small Koppie, a wild pear flowers among the debris of the carnage and human excrement; a place of horror that has until now remained terra incognita to the public. It could also be the place where the Constitution of South Africa has been dealt a mortal blow.

Note: We have put these questions to the police and they state that they are unable to comment on, or give further detail regarding, to what happened at and around Small Koppie 13 August. We are awaiting comment from the IPID.