

## The tragedy of German Jesuits working in Chinhoyi Diocese during Zimbabwe's war of Liberation

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### **Abstract**

*The Catholic Church emerged out of the liberation war in 1980 as battered, numbed and depleted by the deportation of several of its rural clergy and the murders of its missionaries, nuns and lay people working in parishes which were located in the main theatres of the war. The Catholic church was accused by the Rhodesian government of being riddled with communism yet at the same time missionaries were brutalized by armed guerrilla assailants. The paper studies the experiences of some of the missions in the then Sinioa Prefecture (now Chinhoyi Diocese). The missions under study are St. Albert's, Kangaire, St Rupert's, St Boniface and St Paul's. It begins with the history of Jesuits in Zimbabwe, the establishment of the missions and then goes on to explain circumstances surrounding the misfortune of these missions. The escalation of the war saw St Ruperts, Kangaire and St Albert's closing between 1978 and 1979. At St Ruperts, the two German missionaries present were killed and a German priest was murdered at Kangaire. St Boniface mission lost its African catechist and closed as well.*

**Keywords:** Jesuits, Diocese, Prefecture, outstation

### **Introduction**

The major objective of this study is to establish the impact of the liberation war on the missionary work of Jesuits who were working in the Diocese then. It also highlights how the war affected institutions which the Jesuits had established or intended to. Above all, it captures memories of those who knew or worked with Jesuit missionaries during these uneasy years.

Before going further, it is crucial to understand how Jesuits from Europe became established in this part of Africa.

The coming of Jesuits into the area between the Limpopo to the South and Zambezi to the North has a long history. A Portuguese priest Father Goncalo da Silveira is remembered as the first Jesuit to have set his foot in what is now Zimbabwe. He came to the Mutapa State in 1562 and successfully baptized the Mutapa himself. However, his actions aroused a lot of suspicions from Muslims and traditionalists at the Mutapa court. In about March 1562, he was murdered and his body was thrown into Musengezi river.(Beach:1985,23). His death marked the end of the first attempt to introduce Catholicism in the country. It was not until over the next 300 years that another unsuccessful venture was made again by the Jesuits to bring the church into Zimbabwe but only to succeed with the establishment of colonial rule

According to Randolph (1985,4), the General Council of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith had noted in their meeting on 10 February 1879 that nothing was being done to spread the gospel in the Southern part of Africa. They resolved to set up a new mission which was entrusted to the north of Limpopo. They were 4 Belgians, two Germans, two Englishmen, two Italians and Liechtenstein. The other 5 continued to the North of the country while another 6 went to Matebeland. Randolph further highlights that those who remained in Matebeland failed to get any converts. Lobengula, the king was opposed to the new religion. In fact, these early missionaries failed to evangelize to the country. Most of them succumbed to malaria. Owing to this failure, the Jesuits were to return in the company of the colonizing Pioneer Column in which Father Prestage, a British Jesuit, was the chaplain. These early missionaries, especially the Father Richartz, a German Jesuit who was superior of Chishawasha mission and Father Prestage, were highly supportive of the colonial administration. Both celebrated the demise of the Ndebele kingdom in 1894 and the BSAC defeat of both the Shona and the Ndebele in the 1896-7 war. In part this alliance has been used to explain unjustified action against missionaries working in rural areas during the liberation war in Zimbabwe.

The German Jesuits assumed a separate responsibility for their own mission territory in the Sinoia district in 1894. This was a difficult region, until then, only lightly touched by christianity. They worked on it until it was declared an Apostolic Prefecture in 1974 and a diocese in 1984. When the mission was set, there was only one mission station namely Marymount. It had started in 1949 in the extreme north east of the country (Hippler: 2006, 12). To date the diocese has extensively expanded. It has 18 parishes namely Marymount, Corpus Christi, Mhangura, St Albert's, Karoi, Banket, Chitsungo, Guruve, Alaska, Mt Darwin, Mutorashanga, Kutama, Kizito, Kariba, Muzarabani and St Peter's. Some of these missions have hospitals, primary and secondary schools and a host of other projects running. According to Fr Walter, in terms of development, parishes such as St Albert's, St Rupert's and St Boniface should have been far much developed had anticipated development projects initiated by the German Jesuits not been disturbed by the war of Liberation.

1966 is the official year in which the war of liberation began with the Battle of Sinoia. All the seven ZANU guerrillas who were involved perished. The following year, ZAPU guerrillas were involved in running battles with Rhodesian forces in Wankie Game Reserve and then Sipolilo but again like ZANU guerrillas, they lost (Martin and Johnson: 1981, 9-10). Therefore, the period 1967-72 was generally used for mobilization, caching weapons and training guerrillas. The war resumed in December 1972 with the attack on Altena farm which was owned by a white Rhodesian Front Party politician. The resumption of the war in 1972 touched on the doorsteps of Catholic Missions of the Sinoia prefecture. When I asked Mr. Gasva who was a catechist during the war about the year when the war began, he pointed to 1972 not because he was informed about the attack on Altena farm but because he had been seeing guerrillas around Kangaire Mision since the beginning of that year. Similarly, Fr Lawrence von Walter could remember that the mission was first affected by the war with the attack of Altena farm while he was teaching at St Albert's Mission Secondary School.

Catholic missions located to the North East of the country experienced the war earlier than those to the North West. In part, the explanation is

that operations of ZANLA guerrillas were extensively felt in the North East from the very early 1970s. Therefore, missions such as St Albert's, Kangaire, Marymount and Chitsungo have long history of war and interaction with ZANLA guerrillas. On the other hand, Catholic Missions to the Northwest of the country record their experiences at the hands of ZIPRA guerrillas with effect from 1978. Clearly this indicates a delayed penetration of the area supposedly because ZIPRA guerrillas were faced with the daunting task of crossing the Zambezi River and then negotiating their way past the well-guarded game reserves before finally permeating the Tonga and Kore-Kore communities. Generally, by 1977, almost all Catholic rural missions were under serious threats from both guerrillas and security forces. This then explains the harassments, intimidation, murders and closure of various mission stations in the diocese

### **Methodology**

The research relied heavily on oral interviews with two German Jesuits, four wartime catechists, eleven ordinary parishioners and all those I could get hold of as long as they had first hand information. Crucial information was also obtained from the National Archives of Zimbabwe's newspaper section. All this information was analyzed against data already in published sources for reasons of authentication and precision. This paper relied heavily on oral history which is defined as the first hand recollections of people interviewed by a historian (Tosh: 2006, 311).

The paper is a departure from the standard historiography which presents historical information only from the point of view of leaders and great names of history chronicling their words and deeds. In fact, the study also captures the lives and views of common people who were often not considered or referred to by historians who studied the effect of the liberation war on missions. Therefore the paper does not discuss the deportation of either Fr Dieter Scholz or Bishop Lamont for the same reasons, but obviously incorporates views of Jesuits who worked in rural parishes. To start with, the murdered missionaries were not really great men in the political sense. Rather it was only their murders which sent shockwaves across the African

and the white community. In addition, the ordinary rural folk I interviewed saw the unfolding of the war on mission stations around Chinhoyi Diocese from a totally different perspective to the Jesuits themselves who had a global understanding of the war. The study is confined to those mission stations in Chinhoyi so as to have an in-depth appreciation of the effect of the war on Jesuit missionary work in only one diocese.

### **The Early Years of the War on St Albert's Mission**

St Albert's was planned and begun by Fr. Mushalek who applied for a mission in November 1958, but authorization came in 1961 when pegging commenced in February 1962. By August 1962, Br Lisson who was to be murdered at St Rupert's arrived. Fr. Richert again martyred at St. Ruperts, became superior of the mission in 1964 . (Hippler:2006, 21-22). When the war resumed in 1972, the mission had a hospital, a boarding primary and secondary school, a convent for LCBL sisters, priests and brother's houses in addition to numerous outstations. Most of the teaching staff then were German Jesuits.

I relied heavily on Fr Lawrence von Walter, one catechist and published sources that I could lay hands on for information on the impact of the war on the mission. St. Albert's fell under ZANLA's Nehanda sector. It had become the centre of German Jesuits in Zimbabwe. The church itself had been built by 1973 and by the same year, it had 34 outstations (MacLaughlin: 1996, 72-73). It appears that lay workers at the mission were heavily politicized in favor of ZANU. Sister Janice McLaughlin gives the example of Eric Muswere who had worked at St Albert's since 1968. He had the responsibility of calling political meetings, helping to transport and cache arms and ammunition just a stone's throw from the mission itself. Towards the end of 1972, he had hosted a gathering of guerrillas at his house on mission property where a goat was roasted for the event (MacLaughlin, 1996, 73). Such was the politics going around and within the mission but without the knowledge of 11 Jesuits working at St Alberts. Therefore the 1973 unsuccessful abduction of students happened in a community which knew that all was not well in the country.

According to Fr Walter, St Albert's was surrounded by white commercial farmers who were not comfortable with having a mission secondary school in their midst. Thus immediately after the attack on Altena and Whistle Field farms, the army and the surrounding farmers suspected the German Jesuits of training guerrillas. Thus Augustine Kanyamura and Erick Muswere who worked for the mission were arrested. The later languished for 4 years in prison. Fr Walter pointed out that to a variety of reasons for the arrest. First Jesuits were bringing secondary education which farmers suspected would create rebellious elements likely to join guerrilla ranks. Secondly, the white community in the mission compound was freely interacting with Africans something which was unwelcome in Rhodesian racist circles. In addition, the educated Africans from the mission were most likely to resist exploitation on white commercial farms. Thus the 1973 abductions intensified animosity between the mission and surrounding white farmers. Suspicions that the Jesuits could have been supporting guerrillas were not completely unfounded though Father von Walter denied heavily such an association. For example, prior to the brutal massacres at Musami Mission on 7 February 1977, the Special Branch monitored the missionaries and had intercepted a letter from an English dentist (most probably Fr Nigel Johnson SJ who was the only dentist at the mission then), explaining to his correspondent why he supported the guerrilla cause (Ellert: 1993, 153). Therefore, both Zanla and Zanu might have been justified in denying responsibility for the murders of missionaries.

Fr. Lawrence von Walter remembers that at one time in early 1973, he came face to face with heavily armed men in the school yard as he was attempting to bring order before lights could be switched off around 10pm. One of the guerrillas had a rocket launcher. Behind them were about a dozen frightened students. At first, there was silence before he began shouting at the guerrillas who started cocking their guns as if preparing to shoot him. Sanity eventually prevailed at the intervention of one teacher who saved the situation telling guerrillas that Reverend Father thought that they (guerrillas) were Rhodesian forces or Selous Scouts. Together,

they went into classrooms which were deserted. Students were nowhere to be found. The school principal Father Fuhge couldn't get an explanation for that. Fr. Lawrence von Walter wanted to go with the abducted students who had been collected before he bumped into this group but he was refused by his own superior at the mission on fears that he would be killed thereby giving Jesuits the daunting task of locating his body. Fr von Walter and his colleagues walked to report the abduction incident to the police. It led to a military follow-up which almost saw all the students returning in less than a fortnight.

The 1973 incident meant that the Jesuits overnight become guerrillas' targets. By reporting on the presence of guerrillas to the police, freedom fighters saw them as associates of the racist minority regime. At the same time, that guerrillas had been within mission premises was a confirmation to surrounding white farmers that the mission was a melting pot for troublemakers. Failure to report would have created more problems from parents eager to know the whereabouts of their children. To add to the Jesuits ordeal, a ZANU radio broadcast from Zambia beamed that a meeting had been held at the school where all students had voted to go to Mozambique for military training. Although this was in contrast to what had transpired in practice, to the not-so educated white farming community, such was enough evidence that the Jesuits were subversive elements.

For two months, St Albert's was virtually a military base. It had been turned into an interrogation centre. When the Jesuits threatened to go public, Security forces reluctantly moved out. Relationships with the surrounding white farming community continued to deteriorate. According to McLaughlin the setting up of interrogating centers as early as 1973 was the beginning of the Protected Villages [PVs] concept. Although the mission had security challenges to contend with, it hobbled on until 1979 when it had to close permanently.

### **Stories of 3 Jesuits Martyrs**

It is the stories of these 3 Jesuits in 1978 to which interviewees, both clergy and lay, had crucial information to provide. To begin with, a description is made on who these men were, circumstances surrounding their deaths and the outcome of their murders to the communities they served. Fr Richert was born on 10 May 1930 in Tannsee, then in East Germany. He grew up in Danzig and after finishing school in 1948, he entered the Jesuit Noviate at Pullah near Munich where he studied Philosophy. He did theology at Heythrop College near Oxford in England. He was ordained a priest on 31 July 1959. By 1962, he was at St Alberts. He started at this mission until he met his death in 1978 alongside Br Lisson.(Karl-Ferdinand Schmidt:2000,52).

On the other hand, Br Lisson came from Upper Silesia which later became part of Germany. He was born in August 1909 but in 1926, he had already qualified as a journeyman. He came to Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in 1935 in the company of 3 other Jesuits, one priest and two other brothers (Thamm: 2000, 71-72). Before he was shot dead in 1978, he had worked extensively in the country. He served at the following mission stations: Triashill- up to 1948, Musami to 1958 before a transfer to Chishawasha, then Marymount and St Alberts. He was transferred to St Rupert's in 1972 where he stayed until he met his death.

Fr Gerhard Peiper who was killed on boxing day in 1978 was a young Berliner born in 1940. He was ordained a priest in 1970. He was at St Alberts when Altena was attacked by guerillas in 1972 ( Wemter: 2000, 86). As the war intensified, he was transferred to Kangaire Mission near Mt. Darwin where he stayed. In all the 3 murder cases, the last has had less controversy as the assailants are remembered to be ZANLA guerrillas while in Makonde, other interviewees alleged Selous Scouts as forces behind the two missionaries.

From all the interviewees, the 3 missionaries who were killed in 1978



were serving their communities well. One Mr. Dakwa indicated that Fr Richert was very kind to the people of Makonde. It was reported that whenever he was approached, for example with a complaint that someone was unwell, he quickly abandoned whatever he was doing in order to drive the sick person to hospital. As if that was not enough, sometimes he went to the extent of paying bride wealth for some poor members of the church in a bid to enable them a church wedding which in-laws might have been unwilling to grant until some reasonable bride wealth had been paid. If such was the way people of Makonde remembered him it takes a lot of persuasion to convince one that the same people could have been indirectly responsible for his tragedy.

Another retired mission helper who preferred the name Mr X only remembered that Fr Richert managed several schools in Makonde most of which were closed following his death. Therefore it is not doubtful that indeed Fr Richert was a pivot to rural development of the district. However, very little could be recalled of Brother Lisson largely because the nature of his work afforded him little chance of interacting at great length with locals. He spent most of his time in the mission workshop or out fixing pumps and attending to any maintenance in and around the mission. One interviewee remembered him from a negative perspective. He forwards that it was to Br Lisson that the assailants first came demanding money upon which the former indicated that it was kept by Fr Richert. According to this informant therefore, Br Lisson sold out his colleague. However, such is less likely because all interviewees both clergy and lay show that the killers got to Fr Richert first while Brother Lisson was in the garage fixing the mission lorry.

Fr Thamm (2000,71-72) pointed out that Fr Richert had written some letters concerning his experiences in Makonde. These along with others of his letters had been published in German. The only information in English concerns the way he saw the war as it unfolded. Earlier when he heard about the battle of Sinoia, he wrote that it was very far away from

Mupfure in Magonde. However, by March 1977 as the war intensified, he continued to stay on but wrote that:

It really cannot be denied that the situation is becoming more and more and more tense every week... Police and army are always astonished when they see me travelling 'unconcerned' through the country, and also at night. Every other white person only travels through my area with a heavily armed escort.

Attributes which Fr Pieper are almost the same as Fr. Richert according to Mhazi a catechist who worked with him during the war. He was kind and gentle and serving all his outstations at Kangaire very well. Unlike Fr Richert, he spoke Shona. He knew very well that death was starring him although he stayed on. Sister Murasiranwa as quoted by Fr Wemter (2000, 87) remembers that once he remarked that; 'When I am killed, Kanagaire will close. Furthermore, on the eve of Christmas, he again remarked, 'let's hope they don't kill me before I have said the Christmas masses'. His death was caused by ill-informed guerrillas. According to one catechist, Father Pieper was killed because one lay worker in the mission workshop had stolen some items including diesel from the mission garage. Realizing that the information had been received by the priest in-charge (Fr Pieper), the lay worker was sure that he would lose his job, something he was not ready for. As a result he misrepresented Fr Pieper to ZANLA combatants who also failed to verify the allegations resulting in the death of the priest. This evidence contradicts findings of Sister Janice McLaughlin (1996,101) that a group of guerrillas had visited the mission a few days back telling him not to hold Christmas services (masses) as it was too dangerous for the people. This according to J. Mclaughlin, Fr Pieper died because he refused to listen, instead he ordered his catechist to call people for mass though nobody turned up. Accordingly therefore, such allegations are a reflection of the failure to acknowledge some events taking place on mission grounds alongside the effects they had. After all, who would deny that Father was bad if the information was provided by one worked right in the mission. The details to prove

that Pieper's death was caused by his own worker will also come to light in the analysis of how his death impacted on the mission.

On the other hand, while it is difficult to say outright who was behind the deaths of the Makonde Jesuit missionaries, oral informants' localized information make the whole incident more understandable. The killers to start with were described as so arrogant and reckless that they even went on to kill a baboon called Suzi which Fr Richert kept on mission property. The only reason given for shooting it was that they wanted a rope which was tied to its neck (*Mfundisi*, 30 August 2010). That kind of behavior especially in addition to threatening and attempting to unveil nuns was usually rare among guerrillas who often depended on mission hospitals manned by these nuns. Allegations that it was Zipra fighters were justified on the grounds that soon afterwards, they began to operate in the area. However such acts could also be perpetuated by the Rhodesian Selous Scouts. For example, days before the gruesome murders at Musami, the area surrounding the mission had been 'frozen' on instructions from security force headquarters. Ellert (1993.155) points out that the day before the killings a group of armed men had been seen jumping from a truck some 25kms from Musami. *Mujibas* later reported of a new group of guerrillas to the resident ZANLA section who expressed surprise. The new group soon disappeared after the murder of missionaries. Bearing in mind that none of my informants had misgivings about these missionaries, it might as well be appropriate to accuse the Rhodesians of the St Rupert's Mission murders. Partly they might have been intending to fuel hatred to Zanla group which had been in the area prior to the murders ( Choto, 29 August 2010).

### **Local Consequences of the Tragedies**

Grand consequences of the tragedies on mission stations manned by German Jesuits received widespread condemnation from the press and fellow members of the society. St Ruperts and Kangaire were destroyed by local people while the closure of St Albert's led to its destruction by local commercial white farmers. St Alberts' had no Jesuit missionary killed

though their efforts and energy was destroyed. Following the deaths of the two Jesuits at St Ruperts in Magonde, locals descended on the mission. According to Mr and Mrs Shumba, people thought that whites were departing forever so it was time for "*jambanja*" or chaos. You had to grab whatever one could lay hands on (Mr and Mrs Shumba: 30 November 2010). By the same version, it was deemed that these properties no longer had an owner since the whites who were the owners had left. The saying therefore meant that while Africans did not regard the white catholic priest in their midst as a "murungu" but as father or 'baba' in vernacular, such a relationship could change overnight.

According to one informant who preferred the name Gombero, one lay worker was heavily involved in the looting of the church property at St Rupert's. As a result of this acts by the time the war ended, he had already migrated back to his original home area where he continues to work for the church. He could not return to Makonde because church members were demanding that he returns all he had taken purportedly for safekeeping. Another man heavily involved in the looting of church property during the war is still working for the mission hospital which he stripped and the community is not quite happy about it.

According to Mr Gombero, people collected all they could lay hands on in wake of missionaries' deaths. These included pupils' trunks, window frames, doors, roofing sheets, fences, beds, and mattresses. Gombero further pointed that Sister Rufaro resisted leaving the hospital despite it having been closed. Fr Helmut Rector in charge of the prefecture had to collect her by force. After the war, locals were encouraged to return what they had taken. Not sure about what would happen to them, Mr Zvidza added that the majority chose to throw mission property into the nearby Mupfure River rather than risk being arrested. Such therefore was the end of the Jesuit investment. As was usual with most missions, the school re-opened at independence and so did the hospital.

In the case Kangaire, one of the main interviewees Gasva was quick to point out that following the murder of Fr Pieper, the mission was looted

by non-members. Presenting the church community as populated with 'holy' people who were less likely to strip the mission is indicative of a man who wants to serve the image of his own church which he has served as a catechist from 1971. The mission closed never to re-open even with the end of the war. It reverted to being an outstation of Marymount. Mr Gasva noted that major items such as tractors were taken by the sellout and his friend. In a great way, the death of Fr Pieper discredited the image of the ZANLA group operating in the area. For that misdeed, the whole group was withdrawn by its leadership. However, before leaving, they were involved in a running battle with Security Force Auxiliaries [SFAs] an irregular military unit belonging to Bishop Muzorewa. The battle took place at the alleged sellout's home. ZANLA guerrillas were attempting to take the man who had sold out Fr Pieper for 'trial' while SFAs quickly decided to protect him as one of theirs. According to Mr Gasva, in the end, the alleged sellout fled to Kwekwe where he eventually died in the late 1980s. The guerrilla who had shot Fr Pieper survived the war but had become mentally deranged by independence. He too has since died.

Another phenomenon almost found everywhere where missions were destroyed is that of those who tried to strip the church off its roof suddenly falling, getting dangerously injured and abandoning the attempt. According to Mr Mhazi that is what served the Kangaire church. Strangely, almost the same story crops up in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Chegato where one man attempting to strip it off its roof fell and well badly injured. This served the church building from complete destruction. (Bhebe: 1999,208-210) I want to think that these are statements which were and are still meant to instill fear into those who might dare interfering with the church properties. It is also an indication of deep fear of 'holy' things among the Christian folk.

One interviewee named Jazire remarked that that the closure of missions meant very difficult times for ordinary people. In the case of Makonde, the whole district was left without a single hospital. People therefore had nowhere to receive medical attention. For the Kangaire community, a

development they had eagerly received of having a mission in their midst was quickly destroyed. Both cases of St Ruperts and Magonde reflect active involvement of locals in destroying the church which had been set courtesy of German Jesuits. The same fate also befell St Martin primary school under in Chundu under St Paul's parish in Karoi. According to Lina Simakani, the community was ordered to destroy the school by Zipra combatants because going to school was not compatible with the war effort. Within a day all the asbestos sheets had been removed. She added that although the church building was left, it was used by Rhodesian soldiers to keep dead bodies to be taken to Karoi. When I visited the area, I found out that the school did not re-open because Jesuits gave up the project.

At St Bonifce Mission Zipra guerrillas are remembered for refusing parishioners from attending church services. According to Mubazangi, their threats were so real that Fr 'Tiri' (Thiel) and later Fr 'Zingani' (Zinkann) both of them Jesuits abandoned the mission station. By 1978 this biggest catholic mission station in Hurungwe had virtually closed except for one resident catechist Mr Berebvende. Owing to his attempts to keep the church running he was shot dead allegedly by Zipra guerrillas. Unlike other missions St Boniface was not looted because of the heavy presence of Guard Forces and Security Force Auxiliaries based at the nearby township. In addition Zipra guerrillas did not have strong support hence the closure of the mission did not draw support of the local people.

Unlike the above, St Albert's was destroyed by a different stock of locals. These were of white stock and saw the school as a training ground for future guerrillas. When I talked to Fr Walter he thought that relations with guerrillas deteriorated from the time the school had accepted Rhodesians military protection. That protection was also at the instigation of the local white farming community who held the missionaries suspect. To guerrillas, the mission was a military target. In June 1979 and October the same year, it was attacked. The last attack was concentrated for 5 hours according to Mr Gasva. Consequently, the mission closed.

Neighbouring white farmers who harboured their own differences with the Jesuit community ransacked the mission and robbed it of its building material. They auctioned some of the material in Harare. According to Fr Lawrence Von Walter, the mission was only re-opened in 1984 at the insistence of the then Zimbabwean Prime Minister, Robert Mugabe, who personally officiated the re-opening.

### **Wider Perspectives of the Murders.**

In most cases where Catholic missionaries or other non-catholic missionaries were killed, the assassins were always presented as 'terrorists' belonging either to Zipra or Zanla. At the same time, guerrilla or nationalist leaders often blamed Seolus Scouts who often masqueraded as guerrillas in a bid to commit heinous acts which would discredit guerrillas. By presenting either Zanla or Zipra as a communist organization and by extension atheist, they advanced the argument to convince their readership of the evils of communist guerrillas who always went on rampage to murder 'innocent' missionaries. To the Rhodesian community it meant that 'Marxists' would do away with christianity altogether if they were to come to power. It is against the background that this section reviews the reaction of the Rhodesian community to the murderers as presented in the Rhodesian press.

To start with, the Jesuit community itself made cautious statements in reaction to the murderers. To me, it appears that if they were to condemn guerrillas whose presence was being felt throughout the countryside where guerrillas operated, the likely result was abandonment of all rural missions and above all, a difficult relationship should a guerrilla government should it come to power. Fr Ulbrich (The Rhodesian Herald, 29 June 1978) who was the Jesuit superior commented that the two missionaries who were murdered at St Ruperts' were extremely dedicated to their work, they had made their mission their home and he could not understand why they were killed. At the same time he accused Zipra guerrillas (whom he called terrorists) of being responsible.

Moreover, widespread presence of the guerrillas in and around the mission area was enough evidence to put the cause of the murders to the Zipra doorstep.

Except for a very few, one of them being Mr Dakwa, there was no indication that that the killings at St Rupert's were the works of Selous Scouts. Residents of Makonde pointed out that it was Zipra guerrillas. Moreover, there was no attempt by Zipra guerrillas to deny these charges. According to a Rhodesian military communiqué, the missionaries and the murderers had spoken to each other in Sindebele and to the mission staff in corrupted versions of Shona at around 16:45 before murdering the missionaries and looting money. (Rhodesian Herald, 29 June 1978). In most cases, it was again Zipra guerrillas who spoke Ndebele or corrupted Shona because they largely came from Ndebele-speaking areas of the country. Of course this ought to be taken with caution because Selous Scouts too could do the same and at times effectively used 'tamed' guerrillas. While it might not be very correct in the spirit of national reconciliation to disgrace those who fought to liberate the country, Zipra guerrillas who fought in the North West are remembered for looting or robbing shops, buses and missions even if where they had not been provoked. For that I find it difficult to challenge the African community belief that Zipra guerrillas killed the Jesuits at St Rupert's. Fr W. Thamm is still unsure about the identity of the murderers. On one hand, he advances that the missionaries were killed because they were whites, hence enemies of the country. Added to that, they had to be eliminated because they had good relationships with the African local community meaning that it was probably Selous Scouts behind the murders so as to discredit guerrillas. Lastly, he charges that the fighters were indoctrinated with Marxist ideas and racial hatreds which means that he was obviously referring to guerrillas.

In December 1978, the Herald once more attributed the murders of Fr Pieper at Kangaire to Zanla guerrillas (terrorists). Since the group had



been drinking beer around the mission before committing the murders, they were somehow known to the community and this has already been proved. The Herald (29 December 1980) referred to the murderers as Zanla terror gang. The priest was killed on the flimsy excuse that he did not provide higher education to the locals. The Rhodesians and the Kangaire community knew who the murderers were. However, only the Kangaire villagers know why Fr Pieper was killed, what happened to the murderers and to the group of guerrillas who were behind the murders. At the next mission namely Marymount, where Fr Karl Steffens was resident as a priest in charge, it is claimed by Fr Zvarevashe that he survived the war because he served the community well. He highlighted that sometimes he would physically fight security forces who tortured villagers. He is renowned for having rescued villagers in PVs and also burying alone some villagers killed by any of the forces should locals become hesitant to do so. Thus when time for him to be murdered came, he was informed on time and managed to escape.

### **Conclusion**

This presentation has shown that that all the German Jesuits working in rural parishes were compelled to abandon their missions despite good working relations with their parishioners who thus often excused themselves from having anything to do with the murder of missionaries. However, the Rhodesians used each murder as an opportunity to point fingers at either of the guerrilla movements. The research has found out that generally the tragedies at various mission station manned by the German Jesuits were a serious drawback to projects which they had started. The research has also shown the precariousness of German Jesuits working deep in sometimes inaccessible rural areas. Those who survived largely depended on excellent working relations with locals who kept them informed. By the same community and government support the majority of the missions re-opened at independence.

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