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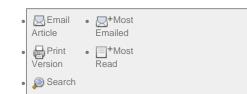
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Omagh bomber grinned at me, key eye-witness tells High Court

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Thursday, April 10, 2008

ADVERTISEMENT One of the Omagh bombers "grinned"

at a woman as he abandoned a car bomb about six feet away, a court heard yesterday.

In a statement read out during day three of a landmark civil action at Belfast High Court, Elizabeth Buchannan, said she "caught eye contact" with one of the men as he walked away from the maroon Vauxhall Cavalier that exploded causing the single worst atrocity of the Troubles.

Twenty-nine people including a woman pregnant with twins, were killed and 200 others injured by the 500lb blast on August 15, 1998.

Families of some of those killed are suing five men they believe were behind the attack in the first civil action of its kind.

Michael McKevitt, Seamus Daly, Seamus McKenna, Liam Campbell and Colm Murphy all deny any part in

In a statement read by Brett Lockhart QC, Mrs Buchannan said the man who was a passenger in the maroon Cavalier appeared "calm and relaxed" as he walked away from the vehicle packed with explosives.

She described him as a "good looking man" in his 20s, about 6ft with short dark neat hair, a long face and a clear complexion.

She had been in Omagh and was parked outside SD Kells shop and had an unobstructed view of the men who left the bomb about six feet away.

The driver, who crossed in front of her, was said to be in his mid 20s, slightly heavy build, about 5ft 9ins tall and with dirty fair neat hair. He was clean shaven, had sallow skin, a natural tan and a "serious expression" as he looked down Market Street.

She said both men seemed to be in a hurry, appeared "very neat" and looked like soldiers.

Mrs Buchannan left Omagh about half an hour before the bomb exploded.

One of Northern Ireland's top forensic scientists was called to give evidence yesterday.

Dennis McAuley, a lead forensic scientist of 32 years experience told the court that forensic teams sifted through 13 skips and 28 bins and assorted bags of debris from the explosion and recovered parts of the

About 180 fragments of shrapnel such as metal, plastic, wood, wire glass and stone were recovered from 60 injured people. Much of this came from the car which was blown to pieces and embedded in the people closest, it was claimed

He also said the 'Coupatan' timing devices used to detonate the Omagh bomb were used to cause at least 15 other explosions in Northern Ireland in 1998.

Also in the witness box, police sergeant, Robert Leonard, said a bogus company with an address and bank account in Dundalk placed a one-off order for 480 Coupatan timers.

The long-awaited civil case is being presided over by Mr Justice Morgan and may take eight weeks to

It is expected that lawyers acting on behalf of the families may make an application to hear evidence from more Gardai officers when they transfer proceedings to Dublin.

At hearing.

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