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'Take back the George Cross'

Andersonstown News

Damian McCarney

25/01/2007

An anti-collusion group has called on former Chief Constable Ronnie Flanagan to be stripped of his knighthood and for the RUC to have their George Cross revoked in light of this week's explosive revelations in the Police Ombudsman's Report.

Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan's office examined the handling of UVF informers in Mount Vernon from 1991 to 2003, during which period Mr Flanagan was head of Special Branch and then Chief Constable.

He received his knighthood in 1996, and three years later the RUC were awarded the George Cross after the Patten Report called for their replacement with a new police service.

On presenting the award to the RUC the queen of England said: "I admire your determination to maintain the rule of law, and to provide a police service for all the people during some of the most difficult times in the history of this province."

Robert McClenaghan of An Fhírinne insists that the revelations of the Ombudsman's report further undermine the queen's remarks, and called for the RUC to be stripped of the medal.

"The RUC should lose their George Cross and Ronnie Flanagan, on whose watch these dreadful events happened, should have his knighthood revoked as well.

"This is a damning indictment of RUC culture and policy at the highest level. Nuala O'Loan stated that up to 40 senior members of the RUC and some still in the PSNI refused to cooperate with her enquiries, so for the RUC to have been awarded the George Cross shows the rank hypocrisy of the British state," said Mr McClenaghan.

The final chapter of Mr Flanagan's police career in the North was mired in controversy after another Ombudsman's office report criticised the investigation into the Omagh bombing in 1998, and recommended that an outside officer take over the investigations.

At the time Mr Flanagan remarked that if the findings of the report were proved true, "I would not only resign, I would publicly commit suicide." Soon after, the Policing Board did appoint an outside officer.

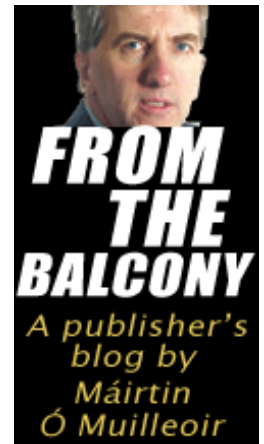
Mr McClenaghan was outraged over the Director of Public Prosecutions refusal to pursue prosecutions against those involved in colluding with the UVF and called for the Irish government to act on the matter.

"It is again another example of the state protecting its own. The evidence is there. It is damning and irrefutable, yet these people are allowed, because they simply resigned from the RUC, to avoid prosecution.

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"This would never happen anywhere else in the civilised world.
"If this had happened in Manchester, Tony Blair would have resigned.
"The question now is what are the Irish government going to do about the murder of Irish citizens as a result of collusion? One of the cases which Nuala O'Loan examined was the attempted bombing of the Sinn Féin office in Monaghan by UVF leader and Special Branch informer Mark Haddock, which proves that not only was collusion cross community, but it was cross border," said Mr McClenaghan.

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