


[HOME](#)
[History](#)
[NewsoftheIrish](#)
[Book Reviews  
& Book Forum](#)
[Search / Archive](#)
[Back to 10/96](#)
[Papers](#)
[Reference](#)
[About](#)
[Contact](#)

## Family demand apology from army over killing

(Margaret Canning, [Irish News](#))

The family of a father-of-two shot dead by the British army in north Belfast 35 years ago have today (Monday) called on the army to apologise for his killing.

Michael Hayes was 27 when he was shot around nine times in the upper body and legs by members of a Royal Marine patrol near his home in Spamount Street on October 1, 1972.

The soldiers claimed Mr Hayes, who was married with two sons, aged two and three, was a gunman but no residues were found on him to suggest he had been firing a weapon.

He was coming home from a night out at a social club to raise money for a minibus at Edmund Rice Christian Brothers School in Pim Street when he was shot. A postmortem examination said that he had a high concentration of alcohol in his blood.

The killing was investigated by the Royal Military Police but the director of public prosecutions recommended no further action to be taken.

His widow Rita received compensation of £25,000.

Mr Hayes's son Fra said the family had long looked for answers as to why he was killed.

"I met [then direct-rule minister] Angela Smith at the Wave Trauma Centre three years ago and she told me she would get me an apology but later I got a letter telling me she couldn't do anything," he said.

A spokesman for the British army said they would not comment on the case.

Eddie Connor, Mr Hayes's brother-in-law, who was with him at the social club on the evening of his death, recalled the confusion following the murder.

"There was a rumour going about that my other brother-in-law Paddy Murphy had been shot as his social club card was found in Mickey's pocket. Then we realised it was Mickey," Mr Connor said.

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"He was an innocent victim – just an ordinary guy who was married with a small family. He had bought a house in Spamount Street and was building up a home."

Mr Hayes was a dock labourer for the manager of the docks and a member of the docks committee of the Transport and General Workers' Union.

"The docks all stopped for his funeral and it was the biggest funeral which ever left New Lodge Road. He was very, very well respected and a hard worker," Mr Connor said.

He said a major from the Royal Marines visited Mr Hayes's mother on the Sunday evening after her son's death was confirmed.

"He came up the stairs and apologised to Mickey's mother. He put his arms around her and said he was really, really sorry for what happened.

"We thought it was only a matter of time before it came out that they had made a mistake, especially with the major coming to the house, which was unheard of.

"But after that, they said Mickey was a gunman – so you have to say to yourself, the powers that be closed ranks."

The family received papers from the Court Service from the inquest into Mr Hayes's death – Mr Connor said witness statements from the soldiers involved are faded and hard to read, in comparison to other papers.

"Sometimes I think about it as a still pond. When you throw a pebble into it, people see the initial splash but not the vibrations out of what happened," he said.

"It was hard watching the boys grow up but their mother did a fantastic job with her kids and she deserves credit for anything that's happened to them."

The family said they have "no faith" in the Historical Enquiries Team which is due to investigate Mr Hayes's murder.

"We want it investigated by someone independent, not a load of ex-RUC men," Mr Connor said.

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[BACK TO TOP](#)

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[About](#)

[Home](#)

[History](#)

[News of the Irish](#)

[Books](#)

[Bookstore](#)

[Contact](#)