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Tuesday, September 16, 2008

Families seek Omagh intelligence records

GERRY MORIARTY, Northern Editor

LAWYERS REPRESENTING relatives of the Omagh bomb victims are to press Britain's special security intelligence monitoring agency GCHQ to release all information it had about the Real IRA group that carried out the bombing.

The legal representatives of the victims currently involved in a civil case against those allegedly implicated in the bombing are to contact GCHQ and MI5 following last night's BBC *Panorama* investigation about the August 15th, 1998 bombing.

The group of victims' families, who are taking a case against five men including alleged Real IRA members Michael McKeivitt and Liam Campbell, want previously withheld or restricted information reportedly in the hands of GCHQ and other intelligence bodies such as MI5 to be made available to their civil case.

The programme, *Omagh: What the Police Were Never Told*, reported that GCHQ intercepted mobile phone calls by the bombers on the day of the attack which killed 29 people, including a woman pregnant with twins.

The programme makers claimed that the bombers were tracked through their mobile phones as they made their way from the Republic to Omagh. *Panorama* said its findings raised questions as to whether the bombing could have been prevented.

Panorama claimed that this information was withheld from police investigating the bombing. This resulted in detectives being forced to spend more than nine months sifting through almost 6.5 million phone calls which GCHQ already had in its possession, according to the programme.

The programme reported that RUC detectives were given nothing until 3½ weeks after the bombing, and even then all they were given was a list of names. "They were never told that GCHQ were on to the bombers, and the full extent of GCHQ's intercept intelligence was withheld from them," according to *Panorama*.

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One source told *Panorama* that GCHQ sent details of the conversations to Northern Ireland within six hours of the bombing.

But RUC assistant chief constable at the time of the bombing Raymond White told the programme his former colleagues in police special branch "categorically" denied this.

Although under law the intelligence gathered through GCHQ intercepts cannot be used as evidence in a criminal case, lawyers for the victims taking the civil case are holding a press conference in Belfast this morning arguing that this information can be used in the civil case, which is resuming today at Belfast law courts.

Michael Gallagher, whose son Aidan was killed in the bombing, said intelligence with GCHQ and possibly with other bodies could "go a long way" to identifying who carried out the attack and how they carried it out.

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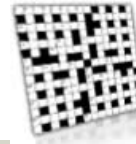


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