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Terror probe reveals police link to killings

Internal investigation connects RUC Special Branch to 14 more murders

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- [Henry McDonald](#), Ireland editor
[The Observer](#), Sunday March 23 2008
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An independent police team investigating a web of collusion between loyalist terrorists and RUC Special Branch officers has discovered the gang carried out a further 14 murders, bringing the total to 31.

An internal Northern Ireland Policing Board report, written by its human rights observers and obtained by The Observer, recommends re-interviewing all the Special Branch officers who handled agents inside the Ulster Volunteer Force's Mount Vernon unit in North Belfast.

A father of one of the Mount Vernon gang's victims has said the report and the work of the special investigation team convinced him that the day was drawing nearer when rogue police officers would be in the dock.

The police unit in charge of reinvestigating up to 31 murders carried out by state agents in the north of the city is the Complex Inquiries Team, part of the Historical Enquiry Team, the body set up to re-examine unsolved murders during the Troubles. The CIT contains no officers who are serving or have served in either the RUC or the PSNI.

Their inquiry focuses on the role of Special Branch agent and UVF assassin Mark Haddock whose gang was initially accused of carrying out 17 murders and 14 attempted murders over a 10-year period. Haddock's work as a state agent was exposed during a damning Northern Ireland Police Ombudsman report into collusion last year. Raymond McCord Sr, the father of one of Haddock's victims, fought a decade-long campaign to expose his son's killers.

The CIT has now uncovered fresh intelligence linking Haddock and other police informers to a further 14 killings in Northern Ireland, according to the internal Policing Board report, written by its human rights advisers Keir Starmer QC and Jane Gordon. The report notes there is now a 'thorough investigation' into the North Belfast and Newtonabbey informant network. They recommend that 'all Special Branch handlers and controllers responsible for those informants' be re-interviewed. The report also states that the CIT team will re-interview Haddock, who is currently in prison.

'Any indication of criminal behaviour by serving or returned officers' must be referred back to the new Police Ombudsman Al Hutchinson, the report's authors said.

Starmer and Gordon noted that the CIT team will report back to the Public Prosecution Service, the Ombudsman, PSNI Chief Constable Sir Hugh Orde and the Criminal Cases Review Commission. Starmer and Gordon's report confirms that the CIT is now looking into 31 murders connected to the Mount Vernon UVF gang, which for more than a decade was riddled with police agents.






According to the report, all the murder cases connected to that gang were referred to CID officers but none resulted in prosecution. However, Starmer and Gordon noted that 'the PSNI indicated its intention that HET will now review the decisions made in relation to those cases'.

Last night McCord Sr said the Policing Board's internal report vindicated his argument that Special Branch officers had colluded with their UVF informants. He said the time was getting closer when officers who had broke the law by allowing their agents to commit crimes up to and including murder were brought before the courts. He also challenged the Democratic Unionist Party to accept there was collusion between Special Branch officers and the Mount Vernon UVF unit.

'That report has been accepted by the Policing Board, of which the DUP are members. I have every confidence that the HET will bring these killers to justice, if not now, then in the future and that includes those who colluded with them in the police. The DUP needs to take its head out of the sand and accept some police officers colluded with the UVF,' he said.

The Policing Board report also revealed that the PSNI has appointed a new unit of prison intelligence officers to liaise with the Northern Ireland Prison Service. They will share information on inmates and any intelligence that originates from jails in Northern Ireland.

The initiative came after criticism in the Ombudsman's report of 'divergent accounts' between the PSNI and the Prison Service regarding the second-in-command of the Mount Vernon UVF. The PSNI claimed it was not allowed to search this man's Maze prison cell to recover his clothes after he had been on home leave from jail on the weekend of Raymond McCord Jr's murder.

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