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Local & National

'UVF collusion report must lead to inquiry for there to be justice'

Wednesday, January 17, 2007

By David Gordon

A damning collusion report by Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan is just five days away from publication.

But the campaigning father who instigated the probe has warned that his battle for justice will be far from over when the watchdog's findings are released.

Raymond McCord has alleged for years that the 1997 murder of his son Raymond Jnr was carried out on the orders of UVF man and police informer Mark Haddock.

He expects to be fully vindicated next Monday, when the Ombudsman's long-awaited report is unveiled at a Press conference in Belfast.

"My family are very grateful to Mrs O'Loan and her team for all they have done for us," he told the Belfast Telegraph.

"When I first spoke out about my son's murder, I was dismissed as a crank by some people.

"The Ombudsman's report will show that I was telling the truth. Next Monday will not be the end. It will be an important stage in the campaign to get justice for my son.

"I still believe people will end up in the dock for the murder. That's what this has all been about.

"I will also continue to push for a public inquiry. I expect next week to lead to more people supporting an inquiry."

Mr McCord said he has yet to see the Ombudsman's report, but is confident that it will be very hard-hitting.

"It will raise questions for the police, the British Government and the UVF. It will also help other families from both communities," he added.

The Ombudsman's investigation - codenamed Operation Ballast - was launched some five years ago.

The published version of the report will not include the names of police officers or informers.

The central questions expected to be addressed next week include:

- Just how many police informers operated within the north Belfast UVF?
- How long were they on the payroll, how much were they paid and exactly what were they paid for?
- How far up the police's chain of command did knowledge about Mark Haddock's activities go?
- Will any past police officers be recommended for prosecution?
- How will the Government respond to the Ombudsman's findings? Will it agree to a public inquiry, despite concerns about the rising costs of other inquiries?
- Will Mrs O'Loan's report have any impact on political developments in Northern Ireland? Unresolved issues over policing are at the heart of the current wrangles over the restoration of devolution.

An official finding of security force collusion with UVF murderers would certainly complicate the situation yet further.

Background to explosive revelations

NOVEMBER 1997: Raymond McCord, a 22-year-old ex-RAF man, is found beaten to death in Ballyduff quarry, Newtownabbey.

His father, Raymond Snr, subsequently alleges that the murder was carried out on the orders of a high-level police Special Branch informer within the north Belfast UVF.

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His claims attract sporadic media interest but are largely ignored elsewhere.

He is repeatedly warned by police about UVF threats to his life.

MAY 2002: Mr McCord reveals to the Belfast Telegraph that he has made a formal complaint to Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan, prompting an investigation.

"The UVF should not think they can scare me," he says. "I am not going to go away until this whole thing is solved and sorted.

"I believe that a whole can of worms will be opened when all of this comes out."

DECEMBER 2002: Pub doorman Trevor Gowdy is left in a critical condition after a hatchet and hammer assault in Monkstown, Newtownabbey.

AUGUST 2003: Prominent north Belfast UVF man Mark Haddock is named in court as a prime suspect in the Monkstown attack.

Haddock is being hunted by police, while Mr Gowdy is in a witness protection programme outside Northern Ireland.

The homes of a number of his relatives are attacked in a co-ordinated intimidation campaign that leads to questions being raised about the UVF ceasefire.

It is also revealed in court that an attempt was made to drive Mr Gowdy away in the boot of his own car during the assault.

He was told he would be left "in the same place as McCord".

A photograph of Mark Haddock is published in the Press for the first time on August 18, 2003, on the front page of the Belfast Telegraph.

He is arrested later that same day, after fleeing to north Wales.

OCTOBER 2005: Irish Labour Party leader Pat Rabbitte uses parliamentary privilege in the Dail to name Haddock as the central figure in the Police Ombudsman's ongoing McCord case investigation.

He also alleges that the senior loyalist was linked to a string of murders while working for Special Branch.

"The central allegation is that Haddock was not charged with any crime because he was an informer who had to be protected," the Dublin politician tells fellow TDs.

"He was able to act with impunity, while the police effectively colluded in his crimes."

JANUARY 2006: With his trial on the Gowdy assault charge delayed, Haddock is freed from prison on bail - despite a police warning that his release "would trigger violence".

MAY 2006: Haddock is left in a critical condition, after being gunned down in Newtownabbey. It is believed he had been lured there by former UVF associates.

The murder bid is widely viewed as proof that the UVF has finally accepted the truth of the informer allegations against him.

SEPTEMBER 2006: Haddock is found guilty of inflicting grievous bodily harm on Trevor Gowdy, but cleared of attempted murder.

NOVEMBER 2006: Haddock is sentenced to 10 years in jail for the Gowdy assault.

But he could walk free by the end of 2008, given his time in prison awaiting trial and the 50% remission policy.

The court proceedings in November reveal the loyalist had committed 54 previous offences, including serious assault, intimidation, drugs, rioting, arson and assault on police.

Raymond McCord Snr comments: "How could police keep him on as an informer for years with a record like that?"

"I couldn't believe the details when they were read out in court.

"This shows why we need a full public inquiry."

JANUARY 2006: Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan finalises her long-awaited report, ahead of publication on Monday, January 22.

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