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Pattern of work by certain officers in Special Branch protected Haddock gang: report

Monday, January 22, 2007

By David Gordon

The Police Ombudsman today painted a devastating picture of a serial killer gang being shielded from justice by the forces of law and order.

Nuala O'Loan's report linked the man she calls "Informant 1" - Mark Haddock - and his Mount Vernon UVF associates to at least 10 murders.

It revealed that intelligence recorded in police files also connected them to a string of other crimes including attempted murder, drug dealing, extortion and a bomb attack in the Republic.

The Ombudsman concluded that there had been collusion between these paramilitary killers and "certain officers" within the police's Special Branch.

This involved a "pattern of work" by the officers to protect Haddock and his cohorts from the law.

There were also instances when Special Branch sheltered their UVF informers from detectives who were investigating their crimes, Mrs O'Loan stated.

Today's published report did not include names of informants or officers accused of collusion.

The codename "Informant 1" is used throughout for the loyalist known to be Haddock.

The Police Ombudsman cited information held in the police's own files, which graded intelligence about the Mount Vernon UVF's activities as "reliable and probably true".

This included their involvement in these 10 murders:

- Raymond McCord Jnr, found beaten to death in Ballyduff quarry in November 1997. Mrs O'Loan stated that information held by the police and "corroborated from other sources" indicated that Haddock had ordered this killing, while behind bars, and that it was carried out by another man who was on leave from prison at the time.

The Ombudsman said there were "a number of failures" in the police's murder investigation which "significantly reduced" the prospect of a successful prosecution.

These included a failure to seize a suspect's clothing from prisons and the destruction of exhibits, including a car believed to have been used by the killers.

But no evidence was found that police knew what was going to happen to Mr McCord, or that they could have alerted him to the danger.

- Peter McTasney, shot dead in Bawnmore, north Belfast in February 1991. The murder weapon was also used in an attempted murder which Haddock told police about and which he was believed to have been involved in himself.

Haddock was arrested and interviewed a total of 19 times, with his own handlers conducting the main questioning.

One handler told the Ombudsman's investigators that they "babysat" him through the interviews and that notes were completed which did not reflect what had happened in the questioning.

Haddock was released without charge, but two men were convicted.

The Ombudsman's report said Special Branch, with the agreement of a Deputy Assistant Chief Constable, did not disclose the involvement of a police agent in its report on the case to the Director of Public

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Prosecutions.

- Sharon McKenna, shot dead in the Shore Road area of Belfast in January 1993.

Haddock was a leading suspect in this case. Retired detectives Johnston Brown and Trevor McIlwrath have both stated that the loyalist told them he had been one of the gunmen.

He was arrested, held for six days and questioned 37 times. Some of the interviews were conducted by his handlers.

An officer who was present told the Ombudsman's investigators that he "felt like a gooseberry" sitting in on the interviews.

Haddock's monthly retainer from the police was subsequently increased from £100 to £160, despite him being a main suspect.

- Sean McParland, died from injuries sustained in a February 1994 shooting. Police Ombudsman investigators have seen information that Haddock named another police informant as having carried out the murder, and that he admitted involvement himself. There were also indications that Haddock was involved in a related aborted murder bid on the previous day.
- Gary Convie and Eamon Fox, Catholic building workers shot dead as they worked on a building site in Tiger's Bay in May 1994.

The gunman was described as having a goatee beard. The Ombudsman's report said Haddock when arrested had a goatee beard but was allowed to shave it off in custody. No identity parade was held and he was released without charge.

- Gerard Brady, shot dead in June 1994. Today's report said police had intelligence linking "Informant 1" and another police informer to this murder. Ballistic tests also linked the murder weapon to Haddock and other informers.
- William Harbinson, beaten to death in Mount Vernon estate in May 1997.

The Ombudsman's office found that Special Branch had "a significant amount" of "high-grade intelligence" about the four main suspects for this murder, including Informant 1. This information was not passed on to the detectives investigating the murder, today's report stated. There was also information that the murderers had fled to the Co Down seaside village of Ballyhalbert after the killing. This was also not passed on by Special Branch and forensic opportunities were lost, Mrs O'Loan said.

- Thomas Sheppard, shot dead by the UVF in Ballymena in March 1996, ironically for being an informer.
- Thomas English, a former senior figure in the UDA's political wing, shot dead by the UVF in October 2000 during a loyalist feud. Police Ombudsman investigators have seen information linking Haddock to the Sheppard and English murders.

In addition to these 10 murders, "less significant and reliable" intelligence connects the Mount Vernon loyalists to five further killings, the report said.

Intelligence classed as "reliable and probably true" links Haddock and his associates to 10 attempted murders, 10 "punishment" shootings, 13 "punishment" attacks and a bomb attack on a Monaghan Sinn Fein office.

Intelligence that linked police informers - including Haddock - to the Monaghan attack was not passed to the Garda.

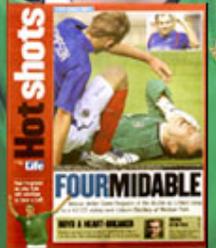
Intelligence reports also implicated Haddock in 17 instances of drug dealing across an area covering Belfast and Larne.

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