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Local & National

McCartney witness: IRA gave me clearance to talk to police

Friday, May 30, 2008

By Ashleigh McDonald

A witness giving evidence in the trial of murdered father-of-two Robert McCartney has revealed he decided to "tell the truth" to police after being given "clearance" from the IRA.

Ed Gowdy (40), from the Short Strand area of Belfast, also revealed he "can't remember 90%" of what happened the evening his friend was killed.

He told Belfast Crown Court he had been socialising with a group of men, including Mr McCartney and Brendan Devine, in Magennis' bar on January 30 2005.

Following a brawl inside the bar during which Mr Devine had his throat cut, the row spilled onto the street and Mr McCartney was beaten and stabbed. He was found lying in a pool of blood at nearby Cromac Street and despite being rushed to hospital, he died the following morning.

Terence Davison (51) has been charged with the murder and with causing an affray. Two other men — James McCormick (47) and 39-year old Joseph Fitzpatrick — have also been charged with affray, while Fitzpatrick faces an additional charge of assaulting Mr Gowdy. All three accused deny the charges.

Under cross-examination by defence barrister Patrick Lyttle QC, who is representing Fitzpatrick, Mr Gowdy was asked about inconsistencies and varying versions of events he gave to police about the circumstances leading to the murder.

Mr Gowdy revealed he was initially reluctant to provide information due to what he believed was paramilitary involvement.

He told the court that following the killing, IRA members called to his house on several occasions to discuss what he had seen and what he would be telling police. He said: "As soon as I got clearance from the IRA, I made a statement to police."

The statement in question — which was not the first statement he provided — was made in March 05 and was, he claimed, "the truth".

During cross-examination by McCormick's barrister Eilish McDermott QC he admitted that due to his alcohol intake on January 30 — over 10 pints of cider — he couldn't remember 90% of what happened.

The 10% he could remember placed all three defendants in a crowd which he claimed was armed with sticks and bottles, included IRA members and which followed Mr McCartney and Mr Devine down Market Street.

He was also asked about an interview he gave to The Mirror in the wake of his friend's murder.

He told a reporter that when the fight broke out in Magennis', both he and Mr McCartney tried to get a badly wounded Mr Devine out of the premises.

Ms McDermott pointed out various inconsistencies between what he told police, what he told the newspaper and the evidence he had given in the trial about what happened in the bar.

She accused Mr Gowdy of exaggerating his role in the brawl, telling him "you wanted to make yourself out to be the hero of the hour".

Denying this, Mr Gowdy said: "I was told to tell the truth in court, the Daily Mirror is a totally different thing."

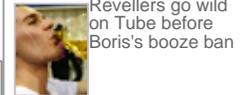
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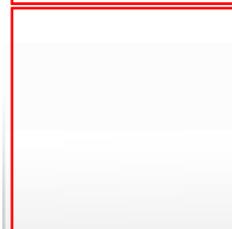
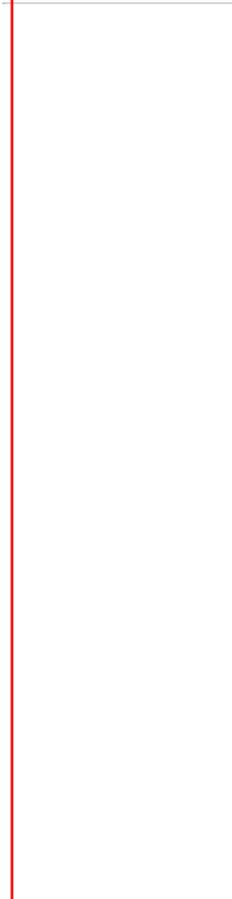
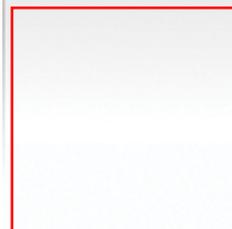
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