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David McKittrick: Ten years on, and nobody has been brought to justice

Friday, 15 August 2008

No one has been found guilty of the murder of the 29 people who died in the Omagh bomb attack 10 years ago.

Everyone one knows who is responsible. But knowing has not been enough. As so often in Troubles-related cases, intelligence has not been translated into evidence that will stand up in court and secure convictions.

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A decade of legal proceedings in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic has led to two major figures in the Real IRA being put behind bars. But the others involved have so far escaped prison, and police now concede that, after 10 years, it is highly unlikely anyone will be convicted of the murders.

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Nonetheless, a civil case is being pursued through the Belfast courts against five leading republicans by some Omagh families who are pursuing millions of pounds in damages. The families hope that civil proceedings may make more headway, since the standard of proof required is less rigorous.

The five men named include two Real IRA leaders who are already behind bars.

The most prominent of these is Michael McKevitt who, even before Omagh, was widely regarded as the Real IRA's chief-of-staff. A former Provisional IRA boss, McKevitt, who is in his late 50s, broke away to found the Real IRA to oppose the peace process. He is married to Bernadette Sands-McKevitt, the sister of Bobby Sands, the IRA hunger striker Bobby Sands.

In court appearances he looked nothing like a terrorist chieftain, instead resembling an old-fashioned bank manager – bald and bespectacled, sporting a blue blazer with silver buttons and a respectable tie.

He also appears to have been a seriously inept terrorist leader. While in the Provisional IRA, he had been an effective backroom boy, with a talent for acquiring guns and hiding them. But as leader of his own group he was clearly way out of his depth.

One witness at his trial testified that McKevitt had been "horribly upset" by the Omagh bomb, which he claimed had been left at the wrong location. He was given a 20-year prison sentence for terrorism charges – unrelated to Omagh.

A second individual in the civil case is Liam Campbell, McKevitt's second-in-command. Campbell, a father of two who lived just two metres south of the border in Co Louth, was convicted of Real IRA membership and given an eight-year sentence.

Police who raided his home found disposable face masks, walkie-talkies, a CB radio, six aerials, insulating tape, £2,000 cash and other material. They also discovered an underground bunker beneath a built-in wardrobe. Under questioning he offered few explanations.

The only person jailed specifically in connection with the Omagh bomb was Colm Murphy, a South Armagh building contractor and publican who received a 14-year sentence for conspiring to cause an explosion in August 1998, the date of the bombing. He recently had his conviction quashed and faces a retrial in the autumn.

The only person directly accused of the killings was another South Armagh man, Sean Hoey, an electrician who faced 29 charges of murder and 27 other offences. Last December he was acquitted on all counts.

Two others have also been implicated in the attack. One, Seamus Daly, was confronted by reporters from the BBC's Panorama programme who presented him with evidence that his mobile had been located in the Omagh area at about the time the bomb car was parked.

The fifth man named in the civil case, Seamus McKenna, has been described by his ex-wife during the civil case as a drunk. She told the court that during their marriage "he wasn't involved in anything. All he ever really was was a drunkard".

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 just imagine if these people were in government?

thats exactly what the families across ni have to face with similiar terrorists sitting at stormont....

disgusting and an affrontery to civil society

Posted by stephen | 15.08.08, 13:59 GMT

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