

Wednesday, November 12 2008

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## Identification of remains in IRA probe 'will take weeks'

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By Tom Brady, Patrick Griffin and Jason O'Brien  
 Wednesday November 12 2008

Gardaí last night attributed the apparent breakthrough in the search for the body of IRA victim [Danny McIlhone](#) to persistent searching rather than fresh intelligence.

Senior officers disclosed last night that the find followed a renewed intensive search of the area that had been under way there since early September.

As a result of the discovery, the search area has been narrowed down from the initial nine acres to a small plot of boggy land on the side of a mountain at Ballynultagh, near Lacken village, in west [Wicklow](#).

DNA and other forensic tests are now being carried out on the part of a foot, a sock and a boot, which were discovered during the search last Saturday.

But gardaí admitted last night that it was impossible to determine at this stage how long it would take to establish whether the find was part of the remains of Mr McIlhone.

One officer said : "We expect it could take weeks rather than days. But in the meantime the search will continue and will now be more focused on a small area".

The searches are being co-ordinated by the [Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains](#) with the aid of specialist equipment and skilled advisers.

The commission has also been in regular contact with relevant groups including members of the Provisional republican movement, in relation to the likely location of the bodies of the "disappeared".

But gardaí made it clear last night that the breakthrough in the McIlhone search did not emanate from fresh information.

Mr McIlhone, who was then 21 years old, was abducted by the IRA in west Belfast in 1981 after it was alleged he had stolen some weapons that belonged to the terrorist organisation. He was then tortured and interrogated before being shot and buried in Wicklow.

Praying

Meanwhile, the victim's anguished family were last night hoping and praying that their agonising 27-year ordeal could finally be drawing to an end.

In a statement, the family confirmed that they were being kept informed of developments and appealed for privacy.

[Oliver McVeigh](#), whose brother Columba (17) has never been found after being kidnapped by the IRA in 1975, said the developments offered real hope for the McIlhone family.

He said : "It proves that people working on the ground can locate these remains and there is no reason why people, who have specific information about these bodies, cannot come forward and end the suffering of all the families involved."

[SDLP Assembly](#) member [Alex Attwood](#) said the latest find confirmed that serious questions had

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to be answered about the IRA's role in the abduction and deaths of the disappeared.

[Sinn Fein](#) president [Gerry Adams](#) claimed there was evidence that republicans continued to work diligently "on this important issue. I hope the McIlhone family will now get the closure they deserve".

The IRA did not accept responsibility for the abduction of Mr McIlhone until 1999, 18 years after his disappearance.

So far the bodies of only four of the nine "disappeared" have been located, despite extensive searches in various parts of the Republic.

- *Tom Brady, Patrick Griffin and Jason O'Brien*

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