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Bid to bring killers to justice 'moving closer' for families

By Barry McCaffrey

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'PROTECTED SPECIES': Leading loyalist Mark Haddock who was described in last year's Police Ombudsman report by Nuala O'Loan as being a "protected species" despite him being implicated in 16 murders, 10 attempted murders and 23 paramilitary-style shootings PICTURE: Pacemaker

Raymond McCord's 10-year battle to bring his son's killers to justice took a major step closer yesterday with two alleged Mount Vernon UVF members charged with murder.

For more than a decade the 54-year-old fought a lonely battle to expose the Mount Vernon UVF gang as being protected by Special Branch.

In January last year Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan dropped a political bombshell when she confirmed that Mark Haddock was a "protected species", despite being implicated in 16 murders, 10 attempted murders, 23 paramilitary-style shootings and beatings, drug-dealing, extortion, arson and intimidation.

The ombudsman found a "pattern of work by certain officers within Special Branch designed to ensure that Informant 1 [Haddock] and

his associates were protected from the law".

Efforts to protect Haddock included Special Branch babysitting him through police interviews in connection with the 1991 murder of Catholic man Peter McTasney.

Special Branch and a senior RUC officer were later found to have withheld Haddock's involvement in the murder from prosecution files.

In January 1993 Haddock was again babysat while being interviewed about the murder of Catholic taxi driver

Sharon McKenna.

Despite having previously admitted Ms McKenna's murder, he was released without charge and given £500 by Special Branch to go on holiday.

Haddock's handlers appeared reluctant to arrest him, even with evidence that he was preparing to commit murder.

In February 1994 police received information about a UVF murder plot. Haddock was spotted in the area.

However, no action was taken to arrest him and the following day Catholic man Sean McParland was shot dead. He later admitted his role in the murder and identified another police informer as the gunman. Neither agent was charged.

Both agents were promoted within the UVF as a result of the murder with police failing to arrest three other suspects due to "accommodation and manpower shortages".

In May 1994 Haddock was arrested after the murder of Catholic workmen Gary Convie and Eamon Fox.

The gunman was identified as having a goatee beard but when Haddock was arrested he was allowed to shave off his own goatee.

No identity parade was never held and Haddock walked free.

Less than a month later Haddock was one of two gunmen who shot dead Catholic taxi driver Gerald Brady in Carrickfergus.

Dame Nuala's inquiry found that both gunmen were police agents.

Again he escaped justice, despite admitting murdering UVF man Thomas Sheppard in March 1996.

In May 1997 police received information that Haddock and three others had beaten Protestant man John Harbinson to death.

Within hours Special Branch received evidence that Haddock's gang were hiding at a safe house in Co Down, but no attempt was made to pass the information on to CID or the fact that two of the main suspects were informers.

Forensic evidence was later destroyed as a "health hazard".

In October 2000 Special Branch stated that Haddock was "not currently involved in criminality" despite being the main suspect in the murders of UDA men Tommy English and David Greer.

Dame Nuala concluded that "the evidence clearly shows that Informant 1's behaviour, including alleged murder, was not challenged by

Special Branch and the activities of those who sought to bring him to justice were blocked repeatedly".

"Informant 1 would have been well aware of the level of protection which he was afforded."

Despite the overwhelming evidence against him it appeared that Haddock would again escape prosecution.

In 2006 he was separately jailed for 10 years for the assault of doorman Trevor Gowdy.

Earlier this summer he applied for a court order banning the media from reporting on his whereabouts when he is released next year.


It was last night speculated that the two north Belfast brothers who appeared in court yesterday may be about to give evidence against Haddock and other Mount Vernon gang members in exchange for reduced charges.

Welcoming yesterday's charges, Raymond McCord said: "I have to praise Chief Constable Sir Hugh Orde and Assistant Chief Constable Peter Sheridan.

"They said they'd ensure a proper investigation of what the Mount Vernon UVF were allowed to get away with and that's what they've done.

"I'm confident that more arrests will follow. I'm confident that the Protestant and Catholic families who suffered at the hands of this gang will finally get justice."

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