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Coroner to reopen RUC mine death case

By Barry McCaffrey

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THE family of a Catholic RUC man who was killed alongside two colleagues in an IRA landmine explosion spoke of their surprise last night that the north's top coroner intended to reinvestigate



events surrounding the deaths.

It is understood that the development came after Northern Ireland's most senior coroner John Leckey revealed that new evidence had been uncovered in top secret police files.

Father-of-three Sean Quinn (37) was killed alongside RUC colleagues Allan McCloy (34) and Paul Hamilton (26) when their police car was blown up by a 1,000lb IRA landmine near Lurgan in October 1982.

It later emerged that the explosives used in the bomb that killed the policemen had been hidden in a hayshed that had been under Special Branch surveillance.

Mark Thompson, a spokesman for Relatives for Justice, outside the Coroners court in Belfast, called on the chief constable to

release the Stalker and Sampson reports
Ordinary police officers had been banned from entering the area where the explosives were hidden but on the night of their deaths the three officers had been allowed by Special Branch to respond to a hoax robbery call.

Within weeks of their deaths five republicans and a Catholic teenager were killed in controversial circumstances in a series of incidents in which security forces were accused of operating a 'shoot-to-kill' policy.

Deputy Chief Constable John Stalker of Greater Manchester Police was brought in to investigate the killings but within months was removed from the inquiry amid claims of an MI5 cover-up.

For the past 20 years the families of the six men have been engaged in one of the longest legal battles in northern history to discover the full facts behind the shootings.

However, coroner John Leckey caused surprise yesterday when he unexpectedly announced that he now intended to reopen the

inquests into the policemen's deaths.

The coroner said that "additional and new evidence" and significant information relating to the policemen's murders had emerged from Mr Stalker's secret report, which had not been available when the original inquests were held in 1983.

Mr Leckey would not reveal the nature of the evidence uncovered in the Stalker report but his comments have

already led to speculation as to whether or not the attack on the officers could have been prevented.

The coroner said he would ask the attorney general to let him reopen the case.

Last night Sean Quinn's brother Luke said his family had not been made aware of the coroner's plans to reinvestigate the events surrounding his brother's murder.

"The first I saw about it was on the news," he said.

Responding to speculation that his brother's death could have potentially been prevented, Mr Quinn said:

"There was a lot of talk about it at the time but we will wait to see what happens next."

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