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Stakeknife quizzed on shootings

(Martin Breen, News of the World)

IRA superspy Stakeknife has sensationally been arrested for questioning over his alleged role in up to 16 murders.

Freddie Scappaticci, 61, was arrested and detained by Stevens Inquiry officers in London over allegations that he ran a campaign of murder while being paid hundreds of thousands of pounds by security agents.

The veteran republican is now set to face further questioning by the PSNI and may face charges as a result of the probe into the 16 shootings, details of which are revealed for the first time today.

Documents officially released to the *News of the World* by the Stevens Inquiry exclusively reveal the exact number of murders that he has been linked to while working as the number one British agent inside the Provisional IRA.

The probe could reveal details of the most shocking case of collusion so far. An inquiry spokesman said: "The Stevens Inquiry looked at 16 cases where there were allegations of collusion between the Army agent Stakeknife and the security forces.

"These matters have now been handed back to the Historical Enquiries Team of the PSNI and are the subject of criminal investigations. The agent, known as Stakeknife, was arrested by the Stevens Inquiry team.

"The activities and allegations surrounding Stakeknife are of great public interest, especially in Northern Ireland. This is due to the allegations of collusion between paramilitaries and security forces."

The revelations were made after this newspaper passed a series of requests under the Freedom of Information Act to the Stevens Inquiry. This is the first confirmation that Stakeknife, the jewel in the crown for British intelligence, has been arrested and flies in the face of persistent reports that the Ministry of Defence successfully blocked the Stevens Inquiry from quizzing him.

The documents also reveal that Stakeknife could be questioned

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again by the PSNI's cold cases team and face charges connected to 16 murders.

Until now Lord Stevens, who heads the inquiry, has always refused to discuss the Stakeknife case in public or reveal whether he has ever quizzed him. The inquiry would not release the names of the 16 victims, but our sources have named several of them. The victims, some of whom were police agents murdered to protect Stakeknife from being exposed, included Tony McKiernan, Catherine and Gerard Mahon, Aidan Starrs, Tom Oliver, Johnny Dignam and Gregory Burns.

Running the IRA's "nutting squad" – the internal security squad which interrogated suspected informers – Stakeknife worked as an agent for the British government for 25 years until he was exposed in 2003. Mainly handled by the Army's secretive Force Research Unit (FRU), he is believed to have earned £80,000 a year.

A former FRU member last night told the *News of the World* that Stakeknife may have walked away as an agent in 2003 with a package worth £2million.

"As well as annual and bonus payments, most of which would have been kept in a secret bank account, he would have received some sort of severance package when his cover was blown. From my experience he would have made around £2million."

Scappaticci last year obtained an injunction preventing the media from revealing his whereabouts. The *News of the World* can reveal that he was not in Italy or Tenerife as speculated elsewhere.

The injunction also prevented the publication of photos of him taken on or after May 11, 2003 but the photo we publish today was taken on May 10. Scappaticci has consistently denied being Stakeknife despite several sources, including his former handlers, naming him as the spy.

He lost all credibility when audio tapes emerged of him speaking to reporters from UTV's Cook Report about the IRA and its leaders.

In the tapes he accused Sinn Féin's Martin McGuinness of involvement in the murder of IRA informer Frank Hegarty – a claim the Mid-Ulster MP denies.

Scappaticci later admitted he was the source for the ITV team, but still denied being a British agent. He said: "I will be staying in Ireland, I'm telling you that, I'm staying in Ireland, but where I don't know yet. It's too early to say."





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Now the PSNI's cold cases unit, the Historical Enquiries Team (HET), is looking at quizzing Scappaticci as it examines the 16 murders handed over from Stevens although sources say his questioning will not take place in Northern Ireland.

A PSNI source said: "There is no hiding place now for agents who were involved in murder. If they are found to have broken the law they no longer have the protection they may once have believe they were afforded."

March 8, 2007

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