

British implicated in Belfast murders

Sunday, February 11, 2007 - By Colm Heatley

A former Ulster Volunteer Force man alleged that he and British military handlers organised and took part in a gun attack that left six Catholic men dead.

The attack took place in Belfast, in 1974, during a period in which he claimed to be working with British military intelligence. The man, who uses the pseudonym John Black, said he was one of a team of four gunmen who opened fire on civilians in the New Lodge area of North Belfast on February 3, 1973.

Six unarmed men from the New Lodge area were killed during the 45 minute attack.

The six killed were Jim Sloan, Jim McCann, Tony Campbell, John Loughran, Brendan Maguire and Ambrose Hardy. Black said that a member of the British Army's Force Research Unit (FRU) led his three-man UVF team that night and told loyalists to be on stand-by for the attack.

Black, who served two prison sentences for UVF activities and is in ill health after a stroke three years ago, said he would stand over his claims in a public forum.

The families of the victims said the claims opened the possibility of legal action against the British government.

The deaths were the subject of a community-based public inquiry in 2002. It was led by an international panel including human-rights lawyer Gareth Peirce and American lawyer Ed Lynch. The inquiry found evidence of British army collusion in the night's events.

The inquiry dismissed the British government's official version of events, which said the deaths were the result of a gun battle with the IRA. Black told The Sunday Business Post that his FRU handler, 'Mike', phoned him on the day of the shootings. "He rang and told me that something was planned for that night, and our role in it was to create the impression that the New Lodge was under attack from loyalists," Black said.

"Later I listened with him to the military radio until a code came over it, which was the cue for us to start shooting. Me and two other UVF men were positioned in an entry close to Edlingham Street, beside the New Lodge and Mike was in charge. The four of us fired shots for around 15minutes, then we went to a different point at Edlingham Street where regular British soldiers were firing into the area.

"We stood with them and Mike fired shots from there." Black said that the attack was designed to draw the local IRA into a gun battle with the British troops, who were using a new night vision telescope, known as a 'star-scope'. Spokesman for the families John Loughran said he was hopeful that Black's claims could help "uncover the truth".

"It is the families' view that these killings were sanctioned at the highest political levels in Whitehall," he said. "Now that this has been acknowledged by someone involved in the murky underworld of British military intelligence, this must be considered as new evidence. This is the basis for a new investigation into the killings of six innocent men."

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