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Ombudsman investigators request Scappaticci files from the PSNI

25 February 2007 By Colm Heatley

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So far, the PSNI has co-operated with the Ombudsman's requests. The Ombudsman was contacted last month by Irene Dignam, whose son, Johnny, was shot dead by the IRA as an informer.

Mrs Dignam asked the Ombudsman to investigate what role, if any, Scappaticci, played in the murder of her son and two other men, shot dead in July 1992 by the IRA's internal security unit, of which Scappaticci was a senior member.

After the murder, a tape of one of the victims being interrogated by his IRA captors, surfaced. Scappaticci is alleged to have been conducting the interrogation on the tape.

The Ombudsman has been asked to investigate whether Scappaticci told his British handlers about the fate of the three men, Johnny Dignam, Aidan Starrs and Gregory Burns, and whether they were sacrificed to protect Scappaticci.

All three had been missing for some days before they were killed by the IRA, and left in south Armagh.

Sources close to the Ombudsman said requests for the security forces to hand over confidential files relating to Scappaticci and his handlers had already been made and agreed to.

It is understood that, because of the gravity of the allegations, the Police Ombudsman will be able to proceed with the investigation, despite the murders having taken place more than 12 months ago.

Any probe into Scappaticci's role as an informer could prove deeply embarrassing for the British government, which ran the west Belfast republican as an agent for two decades.

Dignam said she had met investigators from the Ombudsman's office in recent days.

"I am very confident that, after all this time, we are starting to move forward in the investigation and may finally uncover the truth about what happened to my son," said Dignam.

Almost 15 years after the triple killing, no arrests have been made. Scappaticci was 'outed' as an informer in 2003. The west Belfast builder, who was one of the most senior members of the IRA's internal security unit, responsible for uncovering informers, denied the allegations.

However, some months later a tape recording of Scappaticci talking to undercover BBC reporters, and offering damning information on senior republicans, was made public. Scappaticci fled Ireland shortly afterwards.

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