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Communication 'muddle' blamed for Omagh bomb

powered

Confusion among spy agencies led to carnage

by

 **CUSACK**
Sunday December 23 2007

Confusion and a lack of communication between intelligence agencies, including the FBI, Britain's MI5 and the Garda and RUC special branches, lay behind the failure to break up the Real IRA and stop the Omagh bomb.

Last Thursday's acquittal of Sean Hoey means that no one is serving any term of imprisonment for the worst atrocity of the Troubles in the North.

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IAN O'DOHERTY ISPY



Republican whingers -- the Queen's not your problem

Honestly, the things some people get upset about. The latest example of petty-mindedness from our Republican friends comes with the howls of outrage which have greeted the proposed visit to our shores by Ugly Betty herself, the Queen of England.

SEANAN MOLONY POLITICS



The Sunday Independent has learned new details of the "muddle" over intelligence gathering prior to the bomb being planted and in the subsequent investigation to find out who was responsible and to bring them to justice.

The Garda Special Branch had successfully infiltrated the Real IRA, led by the former Provisional IRA "quartermaster" Micky McKeivitt and had thwarted five major bomb attacks prior to August 1998, including one attempt to cause carnage at the Grand National at Aintree earlier that year.

The garda's agent was Paddy Dixon, a Dublin car thief who was supplying stolen cars and four-wheel drive vehicles to transport explosives and bombs. Dixon's information led gardai to a premises in Kilcock, Co Kildare, where explosives were being mixed prior to being moved to Dundalk and across the Border into south Armagh where the bombs were completed.

By 1998 the Real IRA had perfected and tested a "fuel-air" bomb which the Provisional IRA had developed just before its final ceasefire in 1997. The bomb consists of two separate explosive devices, the first small explosion vapourising containers of diesel into a large cloud and the second incendiary device exploding immediately afterwards to ignite the cloud of fuel. All of the victims, including the 31 dead and 250 people injured, in the Omagh explosion suffered burns.

What happened in the intelligence operations prior to Omagh remains shrouded in secrecy but it is known that by 1998, the British intelligence agency, MI5, had placed a former FBI informant, David Rupert, close to the leadership of the Real IRA.

Rupert's testimony subsequently led to the conviction of Micky McKeivitt on a charge of directing terrorism in 2003 and his sentence of 20 years' imprisonment, which was upheld on appeal in December 2005. McKeivitt was not, however, charged in connection with Omagh.

The only other person to be charged in connection with the Omagh bomb was Colm Murphy, from Dundalk, who had his conviction overturned and is appealing to the Supreme Court a decision to order a retrial.

It is believed Rupert did not have prior knowledge about the August 1998 attack on Omagh, although testimony during McKeivitt's trial revealed that there had been a prior plan to bomb the town in April that year which was called off. By the summer of 1998 the Real IRA successfully tested its new fuel air bomb on an isolated hillside in the Cooley Peninsula; then, two weeks before Omagh, detonated its new bomb in the centre of Banbridge, Co Down. Police were still desperately clearing the centre of Banbridge when the bomb exploded, saving multiple lives.

The warning telephoned from a kiosk in south Armagh about the bomb in Omagh was wrong and actually had the effect of directing people from the intended target, outside the Court House, into the path of the bomb in Market Street. It was this murderous recklessness combined with the deadly effect of the new bomb that created so much human devastation.

Questions over the intelligence failures have arisen from claims by two figures whose integrity has been called into question.

The British Army agent "Kevin Fulton", real name Peter Feeley, claimed that he met one of the Real IRA bomb makers in the days before the Omagh bombing and said that he was covered in dust from having been grinding commercial fertiliser in the manufacture of a bomb and that he passed this information on to his handlers.

Fulton's claims have, however, been shown to be dubious and he has created a career for himself of claiming to be the highest placed agent in the Real IRA and previously the Provisional IRA.

The other information has come from former Garda Detective Sergeant John White who was at the centre of the illegal activities in Donegal that led to the establishment of the Morris tribunal. White, though acquitted of criminal charges, was found by the Morris tribunal to have planted a shotgun in a Travellers halting site

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• **Put us out of our misery Bertie -- give us all a break**

THE only person who can stop this dreadful drip, drip of revelation, a political version of Chinese water torture for every citizen, is the Taoiseach himself.

MARY KENNY OPINION



• **Only lawyers divorced from reality support clean breaks**

Some of the most strangely cordial relationships occur between couples who have separated and divorced -- and, after a few years' non-communication and healing -- have returned to a mellow friendship. Indeed, some ex-spouses get along so well, as friends, you wonder why they split up in the first place.

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at Burnfoot in 1997. He was also found to have used the informer, Bernard Conlon, to concoct evidence against the McBreartys. White's activities also embroiled other innocent gardai who suffered dismissal from the force as a result.

Prior to the Omagh bombing, it was John White who had recruited and helped successfully use information from car thief Paddy Dixon to prevent explosives moving north from Kilcock.

By summer 1998, the continuing garda successes had led the Real IRA to change its operations and the explosives used in Omagh were almost certainly manufactured in south Armagh before being moved to a farm in Co Monaghan for final assembly.

John White claimed that Paddy Dixon told him just prior to the bombing that the Real IRA had ordered him to steal a Vauxhall Cavalier -- the same car used to transport the bomb to Omagh.

However, there are no Vauxhall dealerships in the Republic and Dixon was unable to steal a similar German-made Opel Ascona. At the time Dixon was addicted to heroin and was ill and unable to carry out the order. White claimed that he passed the information on.

The Vauxhall used in the bombing was stolen by two other car thieves living in Dundalk from outside a house in Carrickmacross, Co Monaghan on the night of August 13, 1998.

With no convictions for murder arising from the case, it is now up to the bereaved families to pursue their civil action against five men, including Hoey, who are alleged in the civil proceedings to be the key conspirators in Omagh.

- *JIM CUSACK*

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