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News

Agents given 'free reign to murder'

Police died to protect spies: Ex-RUC officer

Sunday, August 05, 2007

By Stephen Breen

This is the ex-RUC man who last night claimed Special Branch officers ignored the murderous exploits of their agents - to gain favour and promotion.

Former officer Laurence Templeton - who received praise from Sir Hugh Orde for his "exemplary" service over three decades - broke his silence to allege that a small minority of officers brought shame to the force by allowing terrorist killers a free reign.

The 50-year-old - whose career included three years in Special Branch - spoke exclusively to Sunday Life in a bid to help the relatives of loved ones murdered by loyalist and republican informers.

In an explosive interview, the ex-officer claimed that:

- ? Special Branch officers competed against each other to see who ran the best agent;
- ? Some officers were "seduced" by power;
- ? High-level informants were known as the "protected species", and;
- ? Policemen were sacrificed to protect republican spies.

Said the ex-cop: "The vast majority of handlers ran their agents both professionally and morally - but there were officers who were only concerned about which agent was perceived as the best.

"Their careers were more important to them than arresting people for murder. Promotion was paramount.

"They sat on intelligence about certain murders in order to move up the ladder - they were seduced by power. As a result of my experience in the force and of what I have seen and heard, I have no doubt there were officers who were complicit in murder.

"There is a tendency for this society to bury its head in the sand and pretend it never happened - but I, along with many other officers, know that it did happen. I was fully aware of a mass of intelligence on a wide range of individuals but couldn't understand why this information was never acted upon.

"I also firmly believe that decent policemen were allowed to die to protect certain informants."

He added: "The public are not shocked at terrorists killing people, but they should be appalled when the state colludes with those very same people.

"If police officers had been told during their training they would only be investigating certain murders then I'm sure, like me, they would've walked out. I personally would like to know why certain murders were not selected for investigation and who made these decisions.

"It's only when those questions are answered will we get to a clear picture of who was actually running things in Northern Ireland at that time.

"Senior officers in Special Branch and CID, in my opinion, became nodding dogs and lost touch with the reality of day to day policing. These people were controlled by top police and MI5.

"I personally knew of one senior officer who knew he wouldn't get a result over the McCord murder because Haddock was untouchable. I believe, in the end, it was Haddock who was actually running his handlers."

The former police officer also believes that Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan's investigation into the murder of Raymond McCord Jnr could have gone further, adding: "I believe it could have been even stronger.

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"But I was appalled by the significant number of high-ranking ex-officers who refused to assist O'Loan even as witnesses.

"I am not tarnishing all officers and I can't understand how certain people are still in denial about what went on. I realise it may be difficult for some people to come forward at this stage of their lives, but it's never too late.

"The real heroes of the conflict are the vast majority of officers who helped save people's lives on a daily basis and those who continue to serve, both uniform and CID."

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