

Collusion in the South Armagh / Mid Ulster Area in the mid-1970's

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In 1998 the Pat Finucane Centre was approached by the families of three men who were killed in a Loyalist gun and bomb attack on Donnelly's Bar, Silverbridge on 19 December 1975. These families were seeking closure. In order to do so, they needed to know how much truth there was to rumours that have circulated in their area that collusion was suspected between Loyalist paramilitaries and members of the security forces in the attack in which they had lost their loved ones.

Preliminary research pointed to the likelihood that there had indeed been collusion with members of the UVF in this case. Subsequently, a former RUC officer from the area approached the centre and his views about the allegations were heard. Furthermore, a Chief Superintendent currently serving at RUC headquarters agreed to a meeting with representatives of the PFC and members of the Silverbridge families.

This meeting proved to be very significant. The Chief Superintendent was the investigating officer in the aftermath of the attack. The officer openly believed there had been collusion in the case - he stated that the perpetrators included one RUC Reservist and two UDR men, and the rest were Loyalist paramilitaries from the Portadown area. He stated that the families were unlikely to get justice in terms of prosecutions at this stage. He said that a truth commission along the lines of that in South Africa might be necessary.

The RUC officer also made the suggestion that the families should seek to meet with the team currently carrying out the inquiry in the south into the cases of Dublin-Monaghan, Kay's Tavern, and Seamus Ludlow. This suggestion emanated from the officer's belief that a specific group consisting of both RUC and UDR personnel, as well as Loyalist paramilitaries, had been operating in this area at that particular time. He believed that 'permutations' of this same group were involved in the attacks in Silverbridge,

Dublin-Monaghan, Kay's Tavern in Dundalk, the murder of two GAA supporters at Tullyvallen and the Reavey Brothers, and other murders.

This was clearly a significant assertion for a serving member of the RUC to make. The PFC therefore decided to follow up the claim that permutations of the same gang were involved in attacks throughout the area, on both sides of the border. A decision was made that the numerous attacks this gang is believed to have been involved in needed to be both verified and linked together in a clear manner. A mapping exercise was therefore undertaken.

Cases were linked together through a variety of links. These included: if they were allegedly carried out by members of the gang identified; if the same weapons had been used in different attacks; if the RUC or locals had linked the attacks at the time; or if an attack was bore the same characteristics as other attacks.

The result, so far, is that 32 attacks have been identified as having been carried out by permutations of the one gang. This represents 87 people murdered, and hundreds of people injured. There have been no prosecutions in 20 of these cases. The actions of this gang, consisting of members of the UVF, and both former and serving members of the UDR and the RUC, highlight the prevalence of collusion in operation in the area during this period.

Clearly, the attack on Donnelly's Bar was part of a much bigger picture than we had anticipated. The research results we have come up with left us in a position where we felt it was the obligation of the PFC to inform the families of the victims of these attacks about the research we are conducting.

As a result we contacted relatives of those who died in a number of the attacks and invited them to a conference on Saturday October 14 in Crossmaglen. Many difficulties remain in contacting those affected and this process continues. The idea behind the conference was to present the information we had gathered to the families. Firstly, it would provide an opportunity for them to meet other families who had lost loved ones in similar circumstances, and where the truth regarding their death had never officially been acknowledged. Secondly, for the purposes of verification the PFC wanted to gather any information they may have surrounding the death of their loved one. We have found that this is a very constructive way to gather information relating to the attack and the subsequent investigation due to local knowledge the family has had access to over the years.

Finally, we believed that every person at the conference had a valid opinion about what should happen in the future regarding these cases. Obviously, this had extended into a much larger issue since our initial work on the Silverbridge case, and we wanted to hear the views of all those involved about how best to take things forward in order that the truth be finally acknowledged about the killing of their loved one.

Each family was given a general outline of the PFC's research findings. The chart naming the alleged perpetrators was excluded as we wanted to verify the alleged perpetrators as far as possible with

members of the families of those who were killed in each attack, and with other sources. It was and remains our view that no useful purpose is served by publicly naming alleged perpetrators. It is important to stress that this project is still very much work in progress, with new information being brought to our attention all the time. We wanted to ensure, to as great an extent as possible, that information was accurate.

Permutations of the same gang:

The starting point for the mapping exercise was Donnelly's Bar, and the comment made by the (serving) RUC Chief Superintendent who met with us that 'permutations of the same gang' also carried out the bombings in Dublin and Monaghan, and on Kay's Tavern, the murder of the two GAA supporters at Tullyvallen, the attack on the Reavey family, 'and other murders'. Through analysis of various sources we attempted to ascertain details about each of these attacks and the alleged perpetrators in order to determine links. Subsequent research and scrutiny of sources ranged from books, pamphlets, newspaper archives, discussion with families and other people knowledgeable about the attacks, Sgt John Weir's sworn affidavit, and interaction with other human rights groups. In addition we have met with a former member of the RUC who served in the area at the time. The results of this research so far are that the PFC believes that the following attacks were all carried out by permutations of the same gang:

19.02.74 TRAYNOR'S BAR, AUGHENLIG
07.05.74 JAMES AND GERTRUDE DEVLIN
17.05.74 DUBLIN - MONAGHAN
27.10.74 ANTHONY DUFFY
29.11.74 McARDLE'S BAR, CROSSMAGLEN
29.11.74 HUGHES BAR, NEWRY
10.01.75 JOHN FRANCIS GREEN
10.02.75 HAYDEN'S BAR, GORTAVALE
21.04.75 DUNGANNON BOMB
27.04.75 BLEARY DART'S CLUB
31.07.75 MIAMI SHOWBAND
01.08.75 GILFORD MINIBUS AMBUSH
22.08.75 McGLEENAN'S BAR, ARMAGH CITY
24.08.75 TULLYVALLEN
04.09.75 McCANN'S BAR, BALLYHEGAN

23.10.75 PETER AND JENNIE McKEARNEY
19.12.75 KAY'S TAVERN, DUNDALK
19.12.75 DONNELLY'S BAR, SILVERBRIDGE
26.12.75 VALLELY'S BAR, ARDRESS
04.01.76 REAVEY FAMILY
04.01.76 O'DOWD FAMILY
08.03.76 TULLY'S BAR, BELEEKs
09.03.76 CASTLEBLANEY BOMB
17.03.76 HILLCREST BAR, DUNGANNON
15.05.76 CLANCY'S BAR, CHARLEMONT
15.05.76 EAGLE BAR, CHARLEMONT
05.06.76 ROCK BAR, KEADY
15.08.76 RENAGHAN'S BAR, Co MONAGHAN
16.08.76 STEP INN, KEADY
25.02.77 Sgt JOE CAMPBELL
19.04.77 WILLIAM STRATHEARN
18.06.76 THE KIDNAPPING OF Fr HUGH MURPHY

The links established between the attacks vary. For example:

- We believe exactly the same unit carried out both the attack on Donnelly's bar, Silverbridge and the attack on McArdle's Bar, Crossmaglen.
- Forensic results determined the weapon found at the scene of the Miami Showband massacre had been used to murder John Green. In addition, another of the weapons found at the scene was one of those stolen in a raid on the UDR's TA depot in Lurgan in October 1972.
- A number of attacks were linked by John Weir in his affidavit: he named those who carried out the attacks, those who planned the attacks, and the use of the farmhouse of an RUC Reservist for making the bombs for certain attacks and as an assembly point for groups before and/or after carrying out attacks. We have taken great care to attempt to corroborate his allegations as far as possible.
- Garnet Busby was convicted of the murder of Peter and Jennie McKearney on 23 October 1975. He was given six life sentences that also included four life sentences for the murder of two men and two boys at the Hillcrest Bar, Dungannon on 17 March 1976. At the time, members of the RUC stated that the same gang that killed the McKearney's had carried out the Miami Showband attack.
- Links could also be made where attacks had been co-ordinated. These included: the Dublin and Monaghan bombings; McArdle's Bar, Crossmaglen and Hughes Bar, Newry; Kay's Tavern,

Dundalk and Donnelly's Bar, Silverbridge; the killing of the three Reavey brothers and three members of the O'Dowd family.

- While making their escape after bombing Clancy's bar in Charlemont, the perpetrators carried out a gun attack on the Eagle Bar, also in Charlemont.
- The similarity of attacks is also a method for linking some cases:
- There was a tendency to carry out gun and bomb attacks on bars known to attract predominantly Catholic clientele. We are confident that there were not two gangs operating in the area carrying out similar style attacks, and this, allied with the names of the alleged perpetrators in some of the cases, leads us to provisionally conclude that these cases are linked.
- A number of the murders occurred at bogus UDR checkpoints. These included: James and Gertrude Devlin; Miami Showband; Gilford minibus ambush; and the two GAA supporters at Tullyvallen. Links between these attacks were originally made when they occurred, in some instances, but they are also linked through the names of perpetrators we have determined took part in the attacks.

The attacks that the PFC are in the process of linking together appear to have been carried out by various members of a large group. This group embraced members of the Portadown UVF and local UDA (membership of these groups was interchangeable during the mid-1970's), the 8th and 11th Battalions of the UDR, the RUC, in particular Armagh SPG, and also members of British Intelligence.

The level of collusion between British security forces and Loyalist paramilitaries included high level and low level collusion. Arguments have ranged from the assertion that 'bad apples' within the security forces took the law into their own hands, to the assertion (See Colin Wallace former MI5 and Fred Holroyd former MI6) that the murder campaign undertaken by loyalist paramilitaries was orchestrated and co-ordinated from the highest levels. The fact that this was the only period throughout the conflict when loyalists were able to consistently make incursions into nationalist areas in south Armagh/mid Ulster and across the border to carry out lethal attacks is testimony to the vital role of members of the security forces.

Raymond Murray (in *The SAS in Ireland*) succinctly outlines the links between the various organisations involved in this murder campaign:

'There was a link-up among elements of the UDA/UVF, Special Branch and SAS in the Portadown area at that time. Allegations have been made that a particular RUC Special Branch man ran the mid-Ulster UDA commander and a notorious paramilitary member as 'sources of information' or agents of the Special Branch. This Special Branch man was linked via the SAS Covert Troop based at Castledillon to HQ3 Brigade. He provided weapons not handed in to RUC Forensic to the SAS commanders, who, in turn, used their SAS Troop facilities and the Special Branch man's introductions to arm and task the Portadown loyalist gangs, using information from the Garda nicknamed 'the Badger' and his Garda friends to clear areas across the border for SAS/UDA/UVF operations. The loyalist gangs in Portadown also received British Army uniforms and weapons 'stolen'

from a TA base.'

This merely gives a taste of one set of relationships functioning at the time. There appears to be a number of different sets of relationships linking informers and agents to the RUC Special Branch and Military Intelligence, and to Robert Nairac; cross-membership of the Portadown UVF and local UDA units; and so on. This complex web of colluding members of loyalist paramilitaries and security force personnel created a gang that was able to operate in a large-scale, fatally effective murder campaign in the mid-1970's. Amnesty International have stated that 'reluctance [by the British government] to institute broad and independent inquiries into allegations of collusion with 'death squads', that have been operating in the name of the political 'status quo', has had dramatic consequences for public confidence.'

The 'bad apple' theory:

While the UDR played a role within official British 'security' policy, its members also engaged in widespread unofficial activity. Over the first ten years of the UDR's existence nearly 200 members were convicted of serious crime - many of them for offences linked to the sectarian murder campaign. UDR personnel were involved in murder, attempted murder, and bombings attributed to Loyalist paramilitary groups. They supplied weapons to Loyalist paramilitaries, and passed on intelligence files to the same groups.

The UDR gave Loyalist paramilitaries the opportunity to exploit its intelligence, to obtain military training through membership, and to have greater freedom of movement under the guise of acting in the capacity of members of the security forces. Dual membership of the UDR and the UDA was acceptable to the military authorities, and, at the start of the period in question here, UVF membership was also legal. The 8th and 11th battalions of the UDR were the major infiltration targets for the Portadown UVF/UDA. In an interview given to the BBC in August 1975, a UVF representative stated 'We must face it; there are security forces' personnel who agree with our standpoints. Let us say there is a thin line between UVF membership and security forces membership in certain cases.' It is believed that members of the UDR in both Tyrone and Fermanagh linked up with the Waterside (Derry) and Dungannon paramilitaries. Dungannon in turn fitted in with the Portadown/ Lurgan UVF. This helps to explain why the area in which this gang operated covered several counties.

The most common form of collusion throughout the 1970's took the form of UDR members joining Loyalist paramilitary groups and taking part in sectarian activities while out of uniform. However, UDR uniforms were also worn during a number of attacks, such as during fake roadblocks. A number of the attacks linked in the PFC's mapping exercise fall into this category, most notoriously the Miami Showband massacre.

Fundamental to the ability of the UVF to carry out the murder campaign of the mid-1970's was the supply of weapons. These weapons came from a raid on a UDR/TA depot in Lurgan in October 1972, in

which 83 self-loading rifles and 21 machine guns were stolen. Robin Jackson is alleged to have taken part in this raid. At the time he was a serving member of the UDR. Some of these weapons were left at the scene of attacks, including the Miami Showband attack and the killing of Patrick Campbell.

Court cases from the period demonstrate the extent of the involvement of members of the UDR in such attacks. For example, UDR member William Leonard was convicted for his part in the double murder of James and Gertrude Devlin.

The crimes committed by UDR members was dismissed by the British government as being due to a few bad apples that were bound to surface in an organisation with a large turnover in recruitment, under the pressure of life under fire.

This bad apple theory has since been applied to members of the RUC that have been found guilty of involvement in sectarian murders. However, despite the emphasis constantly placed on the alleged stringency of selection procedures for RUC personnel, it is clear that more than just a few members of that force have been directly involved in sectarian murders, and indirectly in Loyalist paramilitary activity either through aiding planning, or through acquiescence. RUC personnel were in a perfect position to pass on information about the Catholic community. RUC officers have been known to frequent Loyalist bars and clubs. Dual membership with the Orange Order has always been acceptable to the RUC leadership. Other RUC officers have passed on information about Republicans and members of the IRA in order to seek revenge for the killing of fellow RUC officers. And, sectarian murderers have also been found within the ranks of the RUC. There have been a couple of high profile cases where serving RUC officers were convicted of their involvement in sectarian murders, including John Weir and Billy McCaughey (identified as alleged perpetrators of some of the attacks we have highlighted). However, most of those who operated with the Loyalist paramilitaries have escaped justice.

Evidently, the bad apple theory does not account for the sheer scale of collusion as outlined above. It is also clear that only a handful of those involved with Loyalist paramilitaries have ever been brought to justice.

Issues raised by the activities of the gang:

Collusion throughout the south Armagh / mid Ulster area in the mid-1970's was clearly prevalent. The 32 cases that we have linked to the gang so far could still be just the tip of the iceberg, and research is ongoing to determine exactly how many people fell victim to collusion between loyalist paramilitaries and security force personnel operating within the context of 'permutations' of this gang. However, using the 32 cases already identified as a basis for asking and seeking to answer questions a number of issues are raised. These are outlined below.

- The Jackal - Robin Jackson is believed to have been an agent for both RUC Special Branch and

Military Intelligence. We have also linked him to the murder of over 100 people over a period of three decades, either playing an integral role in the planning of the fatal attacks and/or being the actual killer. For the purposes of this mapping exercise only those attacks in which we have determined his involvement along with the specific gang in question have been included. We are looking into a number of the other cases to see whether they should be included within the context of the attacks being discussed at the conference.

- Issue of agent/handler relationship - implications; who led who - were informants/ agents protected from prosecution retrospectively? In light of the recent allegations made relating to Brian Nelson, how much input into determining targets, etc did Special Branch/Military Intelligence have?
- Robert Nairac has been linked to a number of the attacks. Caution has to be taken when dealing with Nairac as attacks are sometimes attributed to him purely because of his reputation. His actions are also debated in terms of who he was actually operating for and with, and so further research is needed to answer questions raised by this.
- Misinformation - a lot of misinformation was issued by the RUC and the British Army in relation to attacks, including some of the ones included in our list. For example, the RUC has told family members the attack in which they lost their loved one(s) was carried out by the IRA when they knew the perpetrators included members of the RUC and/or the UDR.
- Why were full-time UDR patrols put on duty in the area at the end of 1975 when members of the UDR were actively engaged in terrorism locally?
- There was a pattern of prosecution of members of the security forces in relation to individual members in the 1977, although not of loyalist paramilitaries who also took part in the attacks. In addition a number of UDR personnel who operated in these attacks were subsequently killed by the IRA, amid allegations they had been set up by Robert Nairac once they had served their purpose.

List of victims:

Askin, Patrick	Fay, Patrick	McLaughlin, Frederick	O'Neill, Edward
Bowen, Marion Teresa	Feeney, John	McNamee, Thomas	O'Toole, Francis
Bradley, Josephine	Fitzgerald, Elizabeth	Mallon, John	Phelan, Marie
Brecknell, Trevor	Geraghty, Anthony	Mallon, Seamus Anthony	Reavey, Anthony
Butler, Marie	Grace, Breda	Marks, John	Reavey, Brian

Byrne, Anne	Green, John Francis	Marren, Ann	Reavey, John Martin
Campbell, Sgt Joseph Pat	Hale, Margaret	Massey, Ann	Rice, Siobhan
Campbell, Thomas	Harper, Archibald	Mone, Patrick	Rooney, Jack
Chetrit, Simone	Hughes, Patrick	Morris, Dorothy	Shiels, Maureen
Clancy, Felix/ Vincent	McCartney, Colm Gerard	Morris, Thomas	Strathearn, William
Dargle, John	McCoy, Brian	Mulholland, Arthur	Toland, Joseph
Dempsey, Concepta	McCullough, Robert	O'Brien, Anne	Toman, Joseph
Donnelly, Michael Francis	McDonald, Betty	O'Brien, Anne- Marie	Travers, John
Donnelly, Patrick	McGleenan, Gerald	O'Brien, Jacqueline	Turner, Breda
Croarkin, Thomas	McGleenan, John	O'Brien, John	Walsh, John
Devlin, Gertrude	Magillo, Antonio	O'Dowd, Barry	Watters, Hugh
Devlin, James	McKearney, Jennie	O'Dowd, Declan	White, Margaret (Peggy)
Doherty, Colette	McKearney, Peter	O'Dowd, Joe	Williamson, George
Doyle, Eugene	McKenna, Mary	O'Hagan, Sean	
Duffy, Anthony	McKenna, Michael Oliver	O'Hara, Brendan	
Farmer, John P.	McKenna, Seamus Eugene	O'Loughlin, Christina	

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