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TUESDAY  
15/04/2008  
14:07:59

### IRA Murder of Policeman poorly investigated - Ombudsman

Poor investigation

Police officers failed to properly investigate the murder of an off-duty colleague gunned down by the IRA, it was revealed today.

The Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland has uncovered serious flaws in the Royal Ulster Constabulary's handling of the inquiry into the killing of Constable John Larmour in south Belfast almost 20 years ago.

The 42-year-old father of one from Ballyclare was shot dead while he was helping out behind the counter of his brother's ice cream parlour, Barnams, on the city's Lisburn Road.

Two customers were also injured in the IRA gun attack on October 11, 1988.

Ombudsman Al Hutchinson, who was asked to re-examine the original police investigation by the victim's son, has highlighted a number of shortcomings.

A spokesman from Mr Hutchinson's office said while there is nothing to suggest the RUC had any intelligence that would have enabled them to thwart the murder bid, officers did fail to adequately follow up information about the identity of the killer, possibly because he was an informer.

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*"We accept the information was not necessarily evidence but it could have led to evidential opportunities which should have been explored by the police,"* said the spokesman.

*"It did not happen in this case, as the police officers investigating the murder were never made aware of all the information available."*

While noting the pressure on investigating officers working during the Troubles, the independent probe found that many routine procedures were not followed.

*"More thoroughness would have been expected in relation to follow-up inquiries concerning witnesses, suspects, telephone calls and vehicles thought to have been used in the attack,"* added the spokesman.

*"Some of these inquiries were either not started or not completed."*

Constable Larmour's son Gavin has now called for a full reinvestigation of his father's murder.

*"While I welcome the Ombudsman's statement of their findings, it merely gives official recognition of the fact that after 19 and a half years the investigation into my father's murder was not given the care and attention that should have been expected of any murder case, let alone one of their own",* he said.

*"I feel that the RUC/PSNI have let my dad, me, our families, and all of their members down by not doing their job. I have tirelessly sought to seek a satisfactory resolution and it has now been proven that numerous senior officers approached did not fully address my concerns."*

Mr Larmour said it is inexcusable that so many senior officers apparently failed to recognise the mistakes and omissions in the original handling of the case.

*"At very best I feel it constitutes gross negligence, if not criminal misconduct",* he added.

The PSNI Historical Enquiry Team (HET), which is looking afresh at unsolved Troubles murders, including Constable Larmour's, has been handed a copy of the Ombudsman's report.

The findings and recommendations will also be forwarded to PSNI Chief Constable Sir Hugh Orde.

*"It is now up to the PSNI to make a decision on any new lines of inquiry",* said the Ombudsman's spokesman.

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