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## Policeman accused in Hamill case was 'stressed'

By Lesley-Anne Henry  
Thursday, 12 February 2009

A police officer accused of tipping off a Robert Hamill murder suspect was in a stressed 'state' in the weeks immediately after the killing, an inquiry heard yesterday.

Robert Atkinson was one of four RUC officers in a police Land Rover parked close to the scene of the fatal assault on Mr Hamill (25) on April 27, 1997. He was later investigated over an allegation that he telephoned a suspect, named as Allister Hanvey, warning him to dispose of clothes he was wearing on the night.

Giving evidence at the Belfast Interpoint Centre yesterday, Andrea McKee, who was convicted along with her husband at the time of perverting the course of justice, said she was "foolish" for getting involved with a cover up.

Mrs McKee also told the hearing that her husband, Michael, had felt compelled to 'help' his friend and agreed to "cover the call".

She said: "I don't think it was so much of a shock to Michael because he had been aware of Robbie (Robert Atkinson) saying stuff to Allister. I just remember he knew he was going to be asked to cover that call and he wasn't happy about it. He knew the seriousness of the trouble he was in at the time because of the state of Robbie, who was stressed. He wasn't sleeping well. He had lost weight."

When asked by Ashley Underwood QC, counsel for the Inquiry, whether she believed Mr Atkinson's stress was related to a phonecall made to Allister Hanvey, she said "yes".

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