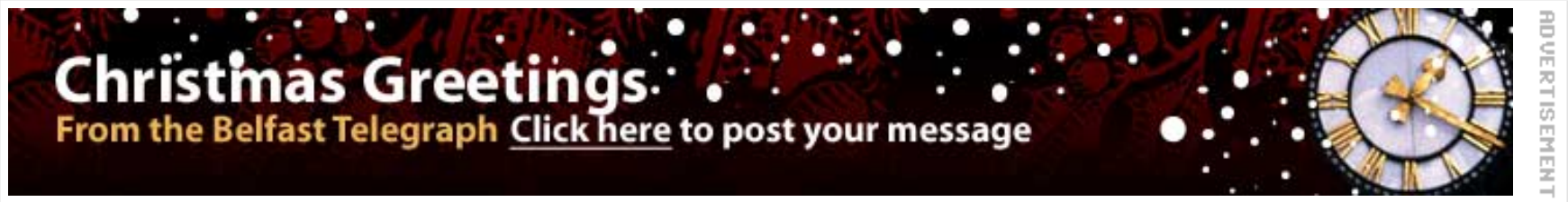


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Local & National

Mother of slain soldier 'accepts' report

Tuesday, December 12, 2006

By Jonathan McCambridge

The mother of the last serving British soldier to be killed by the IRA today said she accepted the findings of a Police Ombudsman's report that the murder could not have been prevented.

However, Rita Restorick said she was unhappy that the Ombudsman probe into the circumstances surrounding the shooting of her son in 1997 was unable to question retired RUC officers.

The report released today revealed that Special Branch had prior intelligence that the stolen Mazda car from which Lance Bombardier Stephen Restorick was shot was due to be used in an attack. However, there was no specific intelligence that the soldier was to be murdered.






Mr Restorick (23) from Peterborough was shot by a sniper on February 12 1997 as he manned a vehicle checkpoint at Bessbrook in south Armagh.

The Ombudsman launched her report following a Sunday Times article in which a former undercover special forces soldier claimed the killing could have been prevented. The story suggested that police might have wanted to protect an informant.

Rita Restorick told the Belfast Telegraph she believed the Police Ombudsman had carried out an exhaustive investigation.

She said: "We think it is a thorough investigation and have no reason not to accept it. We believe the original story came about because a soldier misinterpreted something he had heard.

"The only drawback is that the Ombudsman was not able to question retired RUC members. These cases

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look at things which happened years ago and this can hamper their findings.

"This whole series of events has caused a lot of hurt for my family because there is so much suspicion and rumours. However I am pleased with how this has been carried out and consider this to be the end of the matter."

Nuala O'Loan concluded that there was no evidence that the soldier's murder could have been prevented but was critical of police for not carrying out greater surveillance on a car they had suspicions about.

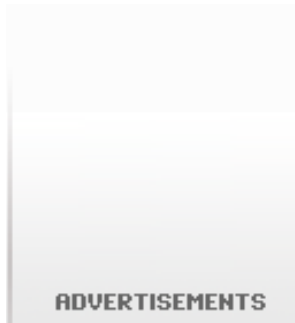
She said: "It is very regrettable police did not pay closer attention to this car, given that they had concerns about it. However we have not uncovered any evidence they had information which would have allowed them to prevent Stephen's murder."

Mrs O'Loan was also concerned about the level of information and original documentation which had been destroyed, including 'decision' logs, policy files and documentation about a surveillance operation in the area at the time. She said there was no 'audit trail' as to who made the decisions to destroy this material and why.

Her report concluded that the car used in the attack was under surveillance but there was no listening device planted on board and no prior knowledge about plans for the car on that day.

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