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Former RUC chief can't explain lack of Wright intelligence files

By Emily Moulton
Friday, 27 March 2009

Former Chief Constable Sir Ronnie Flanagan could not explain why intelligence documents relating to plans by the INLA to murder Billy Wright were absent from police records, an inquiry has heard.

Sir Ronnie, who was head of police from 1996 until 2002, told the Billy Wright Inquiry he could not explain why there were so few documents relating to the intelligence despite being Chief Constable at the time of the LVF leader's death.

Earlier, the inquiry heard that the security service had received information about plans by the INLA to murder the loyalist boss eight months before his death. However there was some dispute over whether this information was passed to the RUC.

An investigation was carried out by former Assistant Chief Constable Samuel Kinkaid which found a reference that the intelligence had been passed in some form but could not find any hard evidence of this.

Chairman Lord MacLean told Mr Flanagan the inquiry found it "puzzling" there was very little information relating to the intelligence and asked him if he could explain why.

"I can't offer any explanation other than it was never received in the way it was described," Mr Flanagan said.

Mr Flanagan, who was head of Special Branch from 1995-1996, told the inquiry that the suggestion officers within the old RUC deliberately did not keep records so "nothing could be traced" was wrong.

Earlier, Lord MacLean, chairman of the inquiry, asked Mr Flanagan if he was aware former ACC Kinkaid had given evidence suggesting there was this culture within Special Branch.

He explained Mr Kinkaid even said he coined the phrase "plausible deniability" to explain the lack of records relating to his inquiries regarding the murder of Billy Wright at the Maze prison in 1997.

This phrase, he said, was then used by the Police Ombudsman Office in its reports.

"Assistant Chief Constable Kinkaid gave evidence yesterday of the phrase plausible deniability which was coined by him and used by the Police Ombudsman," he said.

"I think by plausible deniability Mr Kinkaid was referring to the kind of practice and culture in Special Branch that you do not keep records so nothing could be traced back and then becomes plausible deniability. Am I clear?"

Responding to the suggestion, Mr Flanagan said: "You make it clear and I refute it. These are officers in my 40 years experience of policing, these officers are unsurpassed in their integrity, professional ability and determination to protect life."

The hearing continues.

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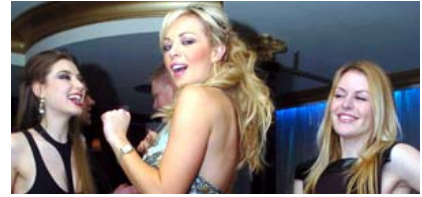
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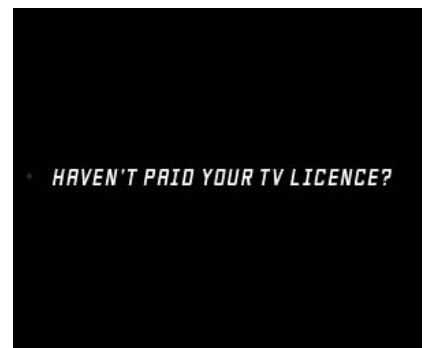
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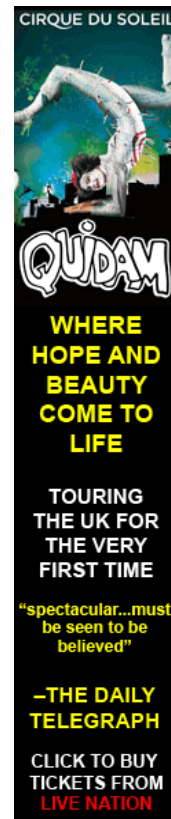
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