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Local & National

Our fight is just beginning say family of soldier victim

Wednesday, June 25, 2008

The family of a County Tyrone man shot dead by the Army 20 years ago said last night the publication of a report into his killing marks the "beginning and not the end" of their fight for justice.

Aidan McAnespie (24) was shot by a soldier as he walked through a border checkpoint at Aghnacloy in February 1988.

He had been on his way to a GAA match at Aghaloo and had previously complained of receiving death threats from soldiers.

The soldier said he had opened fire accidentally when moving a sub-machinegun with his wet hands and was fined for misuse of his weapon. A charge of manslaughter against the soldier was later withdrawn.

Yesterday a report by the Historical Enquiries Team (HET) was made public by the family who claimed this was "the least likely version" of what had happened.

The report concluded: "The HET is of the view that ... it is unlikely that the GPMG (general purpose machine gun) was discharged in the circumstances or the manner" described.

After testing an identical gun the HET report said activating the trigger required a "firm grip on the pistol grip and squeezing the trigger until it activated".

The report said "considerable force" was needed to activate the trigger if the hand was not firmly placed around the pistol grip.

The family claim the tests carried out by the HET contradict the soldier's explanation.

Speaking last night, Mr McAnespie's sister, Elish, welcomed the report and claimed the full truth may never come to light.

"We welcome the fact that the HET has highlighted the glaring inconsistencies in the official version of events," she said.

"Reluctantly we have come to terms with the reality that the full truth may never be established. Only the soldier and others on duty that terrible Sunday know what really happened but at least we have an official report which rejects the accepted version of the incident."

The Irish government appointed Garda Deputy Commissioner Gerry Crowley to investigate the killing after eye witnesses were reluctant to give evidence to the RUC. Earlier this year the family urged Bertie Ahern to

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release the findings of Mr Crowley's report.

Ms McAnespie said the family were "disappointed and frustrated" by the Irish Department for Justice's refusal to allow them access to the report.

Last night Mr McAnespie's niece, Una McCabe, said the family intended to continue to seek the truth.

"The search will continue to go on and continue," she said.

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