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## Local & National

### The LVF's first victim?

Thursday, May 01, 2008

By Victoria O'Hara

A young Catholic man stabbed to death in a brutal attack 12 years ago was the victim of a sectarian attack, an inquest has heard.

The family of Niall Donovan (28), who was killed in June 1996 during a visit to relatives in Dungannon, wept as details of his death were read out in court yesterday.

The inquest, held in Belfast heard Mr Donovan was found lying on the roadside at Manse Road by passing taxi driver Dominic Donaghy and two passengers at around 4.20am.

He had sustained a deep stab wound to his stomach.

He was rushed to hospital and underwent an emergency blood transfusion but later died from internal bleeding at the South Tyrone Hospital.

Despite extensive inquiries no-one has been charged with his murder.

The court also heard that 21 knives had been recovered from the area but not one could be linked to the murder.

The case is now being reviewed by the Historical Enquiries Team.

Coroner John Leckey asked Detective Inspector Ian McDonald if a motive for the murder had been established.

Mr McDonald said there had been speculation it was the first murder carried out by the LVF.

However, he added that although there was no direct evidence to link the murder to the LVF he said a number of people questioned about the killing were later arrested in connection with loyalist paramilitary activity.






Mr McDonald also said the LVF first emerged in the summer of 1996. He said it was his personal belief that the motive for the murder was sectarian.

A postmortem carried out by State pathologist Prof Jack Crane indicated that possibly a kitchen knife, was the murder weapon.

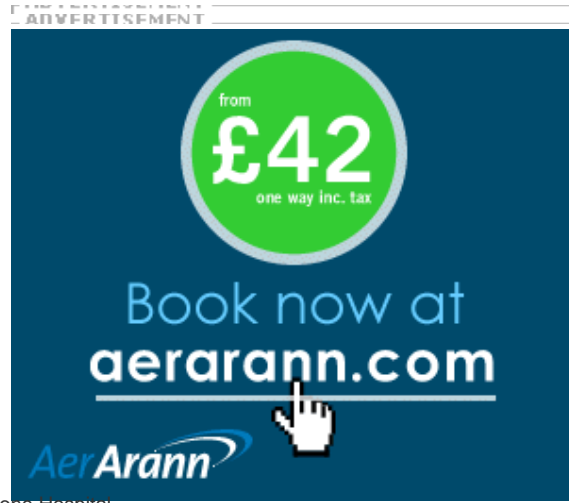
Mr McDonald said there had been no new evidence. In court the victim's father Dermott Donovan hit out at why it took so long for the inquest to be held but asked Mr McDonald to "keep trying hard please" to find his son's killers.

Mr Leckey explained all the coroners offices in Northern Ireland had been merged and many files had been passed to his office.

"I'm terribly sorry the inquest has not been held earlier," he said.

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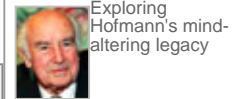
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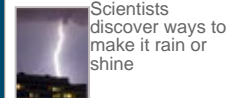
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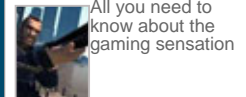
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Speaking afterwards Carolee Donovan said it was "the worst day of my life" hearing how her eldest son had died 12 years after his murder.

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