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Willie McCrea: I was potential terror target

By Victoria O'Hara
Tuesday, 3 February 2009

DUP MP the Rev Willie McCrea was tipped off by an anonymous source that he would be targeted along with Billy Wright just weeks before the loyalist was murdered, an inquiry has heard.

During yesterday's hearing in Banbridge Mr McCrea revealed he received a phone call from someone he believed had "clear knowledge" of what was going on inside the peace talks in 1997.

The South Antrim politician told the Billy Wright inquiry he couldn't identify the person or remember the exact date, but took handwritten notes at the time.

The notes were featured along with a number of documents he had discovered in his home, which he said he thought were lost.

Mr McCrea claimed he was told that he was going to be "removed" and Wright would be killed. The former boss of the LVF was shot dead in the Maze prison in December 1997.

He also said he was told during the phone call that former UUP leader David Trimble would be receiving an honour.

Mr McCrea said although he didn't know the identity of the caller, there were a "number of possibilities" of who it was.

He referred to previously getting information from "senior figures" in governmental circles and told the inquiry he received leaked information about former Secretary of State Sir Patrick Mayhew.

Sir Patrick had denied meeting the Provisional IRA, but Mr McCrea claimed he had received confidential minutes from sources of such events taking place.

During questioning Mr McCrea said the file presented to the inquiry, contained a number of documents brought to a meeting with the Secretary of State at the time, Mo Mowlam, in 1998.

He was among a DUP delegation which also included the Rev Ian Paisley and Peter Robinson.

A confidential document of the meeting was shown stating that Mr McCrea said at the time he had been told the murder had been "an inside job". But he told the inquiry that he had "no recollection" of saying that.

Mr McCrea said he first met Wright between 1991 and 1992.

He said Wright approached him while carrying out work at his church and told him that he feared there was a conspiracy to have him killed.

Mr McCrea said that Wright indicated he didn't want him to take any action over the alleged threat.

Wright told him if the conspiracy came true, he would "leave papers" and Mr McCrea believed he would leave them with a solicitor.

During further questioning Mr McCrea also appeared to break down when talking about threats to his own life.

He said he was sent a bomb on his 40th birthday and in 1994 his house was shot at.

A document was also shown which named Mr McCrea and Billy Wright as INLA intended targets. An INLA source in the document said they were targeted due to Wright's membership to the UVF and the politician's "links" to the loyalist paramilitary group.

Mr McCrea denied he has ever had any links to the organisation.

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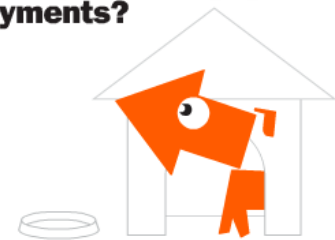
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Alan Kane, QC, the counsel for Billy Wright's father, asked Mr McCrea if he had contacted police about the threats to Wright's life after he had died.

Mr McCrea said he wasn't sure who he could speak to.

He added that: "Ordinary people believed that the murder was allowed to happen."

The inquiry is investigating whether there was any form of collusion by state agencies in the murder of the LVF founder.

Retired former Chief Constable of the RUC Sir Hugh Annesley, who was scheduled to give evidence, was unable to attend due to bad weather in England.

At hearing.

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