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Fresh drive to reveal contents of Stalker 'shoot-to-kill' report

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Coroner to hold talks over winning access to findings of probe

Friday, October 05, 2007

By Chris Thornton

A new push to reveal the top secret Stalker report begins next week when inquest proceedings resume in a series of so-called shoot-to-kill cases - most 25 years old.

The report - the summary of a controversial investigation into the killings of five republicans and a teenager by the RUC - has been under lock and key for more than two decades.

Senior Coroner John Leckey will discuss the prospects for accessing the report with lawyers for the families of the dead men and the PSNI next week.

The 1982 killings created huge controversy because of claims they were shot deliberately.

But it is not clear if the full inquests - which were abandoned by Mr Leckey 13 years ago because the Stalker report was unavailable - will go ahead.

That depends on the outcome of Tuesday's hearing in Belfast.

A House of Lords ruling earlier this year should oblige the PSNI to hand the Stalker report to the coroner, unless it can get a minister to impose a national security gag.

The Court Service has confirmed that Mr Leckey does not yet have a copy of the report by John Stalker or a further report by another English policeman, Colin Sampson, who completed the Stalker probe.

According to the Court Service, Mr Leckey will ask the legal representatives "whether he should hold inquests" into the six deaths, which all occurred in November and December 1982.

Three IRA men, two INLA members and a 17-year-old youth died in the shootings.

IRA members Sean Burns, Eugene Toman and Gervaise McKerr were shot outside Lurgan.

Three policemen, who claimed the IRA men crashed through a checkpoint, were tried for their murders, but Lord Justice Gibson declared the officers "absolutely blameless".

Michael Tighe was shot in a police ambush inside a hayshed near Craigavon where IRA explosives were stored.

MI5 made an audio recording of the shooting, but the tape has never been released and may no longer exist.

The youth had no security record or convictions, and his family were paid compensation for his death. A teenager wounded in the shooting was later arrested in Colombia for aiding FARC terrorists.

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In the third shoot-to-kill incident, INLA members Seamus Grew and Roderick Carroll were shot in a car outside Armagh.

The policeman who shot them was also tried and acquitted. Controversy over the 1982 shootings led to a special investigation by John Stalker, the deputy chief constable of Greater Manchester Police. He claimed his inquiry was obstructed and was removed from the investigation in controversial circumstances. The inquiry was concluded by Mr Sampson.

Next week Mr Leckey will also consider preliminary matters concerning the killing of Pearse Jordan, an IRA member shot by police in 1992.

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