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Local & National

Sectarian killing that began evil chain of death

Friday, January 19, 2007

The brother of the woman named as police informer Mark Haddock's first murder victim speaks to Chris Thornton ahead of a devastating report by Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan

Sharon McKenna's murder crossed a line. Even in north Belfast, where sectarian murder was practically an ordinary occurrence, her death stood out for its viciousness.

A 27-year-old Catholic from Newtownabbey, she had been engaged in an act of goodwill when she met her death 14 years ago this week. She was cooking dinner in the Shore Road home of an older Protestant friend who had just been released from hospital, when a gunman forced his way in and demanded her car keys.

He then blasted her twice with a shotgun. She died on the floor of her friend's home for no reason other than being a Catholic who was doing someone a good turn.

But her death violated more than just standards of decency.

It also corrupted the rule of law - within hours of her death, police knew Mark Haddock, then a relatively low-level member of the Mount Vernon UVF, had killed Sharon McKenna.

They knew, because Haddock told them.

But because he was an informer and supposedly in a position to save lives, he was not prosecuted. Instead, he was protected and rewarded, and he went on to kill again and again.

Sharon McKenna's murder was the start of a damning chain of events that will culminate on Monday with the publication of a report by Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan.

Its impact on policing is likely to be huge, not least because Haddock is not simply a product of the Troubles. He is believed to have been retained for some time by the PSNI, which knew of his background, after many police reforms were already in place.

Sharon's brother, Paul, who was 19 when she was killed, says he never suspected her death was at the heart of such a scandal.

"I just took it as another unfortunate random sectarian killing that you get in this part of the world," he said.

"I never thought I'd be facing a day like Monday... As time goes on, I'm realising more and more how explosive this case could actually be."

An irony is that, from what he knows, Paul McKenna accepts that police probably could not have stopped his sister's murder.

But Mrs O'Loan's report is expected to make it plain that, if police had acted after Sharon's death, many other murders could have been prevented.

"He could have been and should have been stopped," Paul McKenna said. "That's the bottom line. (But) I don't think they could have ever stopped my sister's murder, from what I'm led to believe.

"They (the UVF) suspected Haddock had been an informer, which was true. The night of the murder, he was told what his job was.

"He wasn't allowed to go out of the sight of his head honchos within the UVF. He was taken straight to the scene and he was told who and what to shoot.

"So he wasn't given a chance to even inform police. Basically, he had to prove his bona fides in their organisation because they suspected him of being a tout and this was to get him off the hook. If he could


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do this, he wasn't a police informer.

"But he should have been stopped right there."

THE only thing that seemed to stop was the investigation into the murder. Prior to a new examination by the PSNI's Historic Enquiries Team (HET), Paul McKenna says police contacted his family about the investigation just once, two weeks after the murder.

"In that whole time there was nothing," he said. "Straight away you hoped they'd get the people that done it, but as time went on, I thought to myself, 'It's not going to happen'.

"Then all this reared up - I've been let down, my family's been let down, and a lot of other families have been let down."

Much of what happened came to light because of the campaign of Raymond McCord, whose son was murdered on Haddock's orders four years later. "I take my hat off to him," says McKenna, "the way he's pursued it."

For his part, McCord says he is sickened by the same failure to act against Haddock.

"They could have stopped him. The man was a killer. You know, in '93 he admitted to police officers he murdered Sharon McKenna," he said.

"Four years later, he had my son murdered. Think of the murders he done between those times - the robberies, the drug dealing... Think of the heartache it would have saved so many families."

Including McKenna's. Paul believes his father's death was related to grief over Sharon's murder, and the killing has also taken its toll on the health of his mother, Collette.

"She still cries herself to sleep on numerous occasions to this day," he said.

Paul McKenna is sceptical about the timing of an appeal for information about his sister's murder, conducted by the HET this week on the 14th anniversary of the murder.

Police insist it was the right time, but Paul McKenna wonders why action came days before Mrs O'Loan's report.

"Obviously, I have to welcome any sort of a move, but the more and more I think about it, the timing is a wee bit suspect."

He is hopeful that there will be developments in the wake of Mrs O'Loan's report. "The expectation now would be that charges would be brought against Haddock and the others (including police officers) involved," said Paul McKenna.

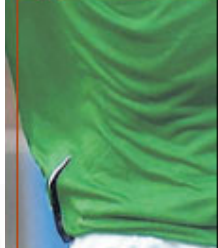
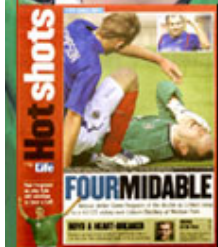
"This isn't over by a long shot."

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