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McGurk victim's daughter wants to meet killer

North Belfast News

By Aine McEntee

ON the 37th anniversary of the atrocity that claimed her mother's life, the daughter of Kathleen Irvine has revealed she wants to meet with the only man ever convicted of the UVF bombing.

Pat Irvine, whose mother Kitty was murdered along with 15 other people on December 4 1971 in the McGurk's Bar bombing, said she wants to meet Robert James Campbell to speak about the killings, which she believes were carried out in conjunction with the British security forces.

Campbell, a self confessed member of the UVF living in Ballysillan at the time, has admitted to his part in the murders.

However he told the Historical Enquiries Team (HET), who delivered their Operation Bakerhill report on the atrocity earlier this year, that he didn't want to take part in any discussions.

"I am a man in my seventies who simply wants to live out my remaining years in peace and to put the events of the past well and truly behind me," he wrote in a letter sent to the HET last year.

However Pat Irvine said the victims and their families deserved the whole truth about what happened that fateful night.

"I am prepared to meet with Robert James Campbell one of the murderers. If he is not prepared to talk to the HET, will he talk to me?" she proposed.

Mr Campbell confessed to his part in McGurk's when he was arrested in connection with the 1976 killing of John Morrow, a Protestant worker who was shot dead when UVF gunmen ambushed the van he was driving through Ligoniel. His five Catholic workmates managed to escape without injury.

Mr Campbell appeared before Belfast City Commission in 1978 and received 16 life sentences for the McGurk's Bar bombing and for the further

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murder committed in 1976.

When he was first arrested Mr Campbell revealed there were two others in the car the night of the McGurk's bombing and that he was directed by a third man. However he refused to name any of those involved.

Campbell was released from prison in 1993 having served 15 years.

"Whilst I understood the families need for answers I have nothing new to add," his letter to the HET stated.

Pat Irvine said the recent government's apology clearing the names of the victims only served to heighten her belief that collusion lay at the heart of the atrocity.

"This man says he understands the families need for answers, he wants to live in peace, but we want to live in peace too. Fifteen people died and had their names blackened we want to know why."

Meanwhile the Police Ombudsman, who started their probe into the bombing in November 2005, have told us they have completed their report.

However they are considering claims made in a recently published book that British military intelligence instructed loyalists to plant explosives in the bar that fateful day in 1971.

"Our investigation is now complete and a report has been finished pending the outcome of some additional enquiries prompted by the publication of the book," a spokesman said.

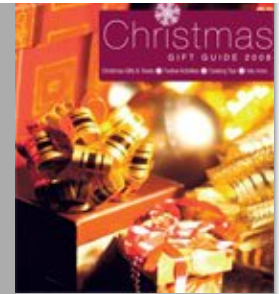
Pat Irvine's letter to Robert James Campbell

I am writing in response to your letter dated 6th July 2007 to the HET. You were invited to attend an "informal discussion about the explosion of McGurk's bar 4th Dec 1971". Your response was: " I admitted my involvement many years ago. It has taken me many years to come to terms with what I have done. I have not been involved in any other criminal or paramilitary behaviour since."

In other words Mr Campbell , you want everyone to believe what a model citizen you have become. You want to live your remaining years in peace and you want your family's need for peace and privacy to be respected.

You, Mr Campbell, have not earned the right to be respected or to ask for

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anything. You gave up those rights when you murdered innocent men women and children. From my mother, Kathleen Irvine, you took her right to life, a basic human right. You also violated my rights as a 14 year old child when you left me without a mother. Now you ask for compassion for you and your family. No, Mr Campbell. I refuse to grant you peace in any form.

You see Mr Campbell, when the British government apologised for the hurt and lies they had caused to the families of the McGurk's Massacre, they reinforced my belief that they were involved in the slaughter. Their apology now opens many other questions that demand answering:

- Why did they lie to the press?
- Why did they mismanage any serious investigation into the bombing?
- Why did they continue to lie for 37 years?
- Why were you allowed to remain free to kill again?
- What else have you done that you have not admitted to?
- Were you an agent for the British?
- Is that how you were able to continue until you mistakenly killed Mr Morrow?

To me Mr Campbell, you have not served your sentence, you have not paid for your crimes and you have not told the truth. You certainly have not earned the right to live in peace and privacy.

By murdering my mother, Kathleen Irvine, you have given me the right to ask and continue to ask questions until the truth is told.

I am now asking you, Mr Campbell, to meet with me, to afford me the right to live my life in peace and privacy, to tell me the truth!

Pat Irvine

Daughter of Kathleen Irvine, murdered 4th December 1971 McGurk's Bar

