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20 August 2007

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Conrad Atkinson EXHIBITION



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From the Balcony




A publisher's blog

By Máirtín Ó Muilleoir

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Headlines

Murder witness comes forward



By Evan Short

An eyewitness who was present when Riverdale student Frank McGuinness was shot dead by Paratroopers on the day internment was introduced in August 1971 has come forward in a bid to help the family of the tragic teenager get closer to the truth of what happened on the day he was killed.

Well-known local man Brian 'Homer' Holmes was responding to an appeal from Frank's sister Geraldine in last week's Andersonstown News.

And in a new revelation that may help the family find out who fired the fatal shot, Brian has said that television footage exists of the soldier who shot the schoolboy.

Seventeen-year-old Frank was shot as he stood at the corner of Ladybrook Park and Finaghy Road North on the day internment was introduced. The promising artist had been sent out to find his younger brother who his parents feared was getting caught up in unrest on the day - but he was never to return home.

Disturbances

Speaking for the first time in 36 years about the fateful day, Brian says Frank was shot during a lull in the trouble when the British army were under no danger from rioters.

Neither was Frank, he recalled, who wasn't taking part in the disturbances.

"I was there and I was standing beside Frank when he was shot dead. There were over 100 people there and I remember it was myself and two other people who lifted Frank and carried him to the car.

"I remember there was a girl there, who would have seen more than us maybe, and she was shouting 'Where is the blood coming from?'"

At first Brian says everyone thought Frank had been knocked out by a piece of flying masonry because there was a cut on his head - but further examination revealed he had been shot under the arm.

"We didn't know they were live rounds and we were surprised because the Brits were in no danger.

"The Brits had two pigs just at this side of the motorway bridge and we were standing at Riverdale so if you were to take a stone and try and hit them you would have to be superhuman. You would be in an American football team. We couldn't have got near them."

Brian then described their desperate attempts to get Frank medical assistance.

"When he fell I remember saying, 'Come on Frank, it's just a wee graze on your head' because we thought it was a stone that hit him.

"But a girl was screaming and Frank's eyes were rolling in his head and when I lifted him up I saw the blood on his shirt.

"I grabbed Frank's arm and two others helped me get him into the estate and he was taken up to Holy Child [primary school] by someone who had a car."

Frank had been a school friend of Brian's when they both attended Holy Child and Brian says it is a sad twist that that is where he died.

"We went up to Holy Child and the last thing we expected to see was a lad you went to school with dying in front of you.

"He was a brilliant artist with a great future ahead of him. At that particular time it was a great shock to us all."

The day's shocking events were not over for Brian as he was to see the incident repeated on television that night.

"It was on the television news that evening when I went home.

"I remember there was a TV crew there all day and that night it actually showed you the soldier lifting the rifle out of the back of the pig and leaning across the bonnet to get his aim. It wasn't the standard SLR he used - it was a sniper rifle."

Assassination

Brian says this is why he is convinced it was an assassination.

"He must have just decided he was going to shoot someone because at that particular time there was no threat. People will say Frank was doing something, but he wasn't.

"Because this happened during internment it was brushed under the carpet but the evidence is there.

"The guy who did it was either a sergeant or a corporal because I can remember the stripes [when he saw it later on television]."

Recalling his anger at the time, Brian says he hopes he will now be able to complete a promise he made to Frank's mother.

"I was screaming and shouting at the TV and my da was telling me to calm down but who do you go to?"

"I called round to see the family after that and I remember Frank's mother was wrecked."

"I promised her at the time that if it went to court I would give evidence so I am hoping for the family's sake that something will come of this investigation.

"I am doing this for Geraldine's sake and I am hoping for her sake more people will come forward because there were lots of people there," he said.

In last week's Andersonstown News, Frank's sister Geraldine revealed that the PSNI's Historical Enquiries Team was investigating the murder and called on anyone who witnessed the killing to contact her through the Andersonstown News.

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