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Police officers tell court of warning calls confusion before Omagh bomb carnage

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- [Henry McDonald](#), Ireland correspondent
[The Guardian](#), Wednesday April 9 2008

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This article appeared in [the Guardian](#) on [Wednesday April 09 2008](#) on p4 of the [UK news](#) section. It was last updated at 02:05 on April 09 2008.



Aftermath of the Omagh bombing. Photograph: Paul McErlane/AP

Some of those injured by the Omagh bomb accused police officers of sending them into the path of the explosion, Belfast high court heard yesterday.

An RUC officer who was one of the first policemen on the scene of the massacre recalled hearing some of the casualties minutes after the bomb exploded shouting to police: "You drove us into the bomb, police put us into the bomb."

The court was also told that there was a discrepancy between a bomb warning given by the Real IRA to the Samaritans in Northern Ireland at 2.34pm on August 15 1998 and one passed from RUC command to police officers on the ground in Omagh six minutes later. The first message said the car bomb had been left in Main Street, which runs through the centre of Omagh, while, according to the first police witness, officers in the town were told there was a bomb near Omagh courthouse. As a result, police cleared the area around the courthouse. In a day of harrowing evidence, Sergeant Wesley McCracken relived the scenes of horror he and fellow officers were confronted with.

Another policeman called to give evidence at the multi-million pound civil action taken by some of the families of the Omagh victims remembered using a fire extinguisher to put out burning bodies. On the second day of the civil case against five men being sued by the families over the Real IRA attack in which 29 people were killed, the court was also shown disturbing video footage taken minutes after the explosion, including close-up pictures of dead bodies alongside footage of men, women and children with horrific injuries.

McCracken described himself as a veteran of bomb scenes throughout the Northern Ireland Troubles but he said Omagh "went beyond the pale" in terms of horror. Defending himself and eight officers under his command who were there when the bomb exploded, McCracken said: "My understanding was the bomb scare was in the courthouse area. It would have been totally unprofessional of police to put people in the area where the bomb was if they knew it was there."

Cross-examined by defence lawyer Dermot Fee QC, McCracken confirmed he had not been told about one of the three bomb warnings which said the device had been left at Main Street, 200 yards from Omagh courthouse. Constable Louise Stewart told the court that at a temporary mortuary she remembered putting her hand inside a girl's pocket and lifting out her name badge. "She was a young girl either coming from work or going to work, but I can't recall her name now," she said.

One of her colleagues, Geoffrey Eaken, said that a woman in a shop was oblivious to her lower leg being on fire. "I got a fire extinguisher and went around for a few minutes and for anyone I could put flames out I did so. I just continued, going from casualty to casualty."

Omagh victims' relatives have taken convicted Real IRA leader Michael McKeivitt, and Seamus McKenna, Liam Campbell, Colm Murphy and Seamus Daly to court, claiming they were responsible for the atrocity. All deny liability.

The hearing continues.

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