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Guilty plea meant loyalist's double life remained secret

(Barry McCaffrey, [Irish News](#))

The killing career of one of the most notorious loyalist gunmen of the Troubles went largely unnoticed in February of this year when he admitted the manslaughter of a UDA former colleague and received just five years in jail.

South Belfast UDA commander's Stephen 'Inch' McFerran's decision to plead guilty to the manslaughter of Roy Green meant that his double life as a multiple killer while working as a Special Branch agent would remain a secret.

Despite Special Branch's best efforts it emerged during McFerran's trial that the 39-year-old had been a police agent at the heart of the UDA in south Belfast.

However, what remained a secret until now was his involvement in dozens of murders while working for Special Branch.

Loyalist and security sources last night (Thursday) confirmed that McFerran was involved in more than 20 murders between 1990 and 2003 but was protected from prosecution because he was a Special Branch informer.

'Inch' McFerran is known to have been the UDA's 'military commander' in the Ormeau area of south Belfast throughout the 1990s and was one of the organisation's main killers. He was a close associate of UDA killers Raymond Elder and Joe Bratty.

However, the confirmation that he was a Special Branch agent has now led to calls for an ombudsman investigation into Special Branch actions relating to more than 20 UDA killings in south Belfast.

Among the murders McFerran's gang carried out are:

- 34-year-old Catholic man Emmanuel Shiels who was murdered as he slept with his pregnant girlfriend at their Deramore Street home off the Ormeau Road in September 1990
- Catholic father-of-five John O'Hara who was shot

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dead after he answered a bogus taxi call at Dunluce Avenue off the Lisburn Road in April 1991. McFerran was knee-capped after the murder because the killing had not been sanctioned by the UDA

- Catholic taxi driver Harry Conlon who was shot dead after he was abducted by the UDA and forced to drive to the Taughmonagh estate in south Belfast where he was killed
- Catholic man John McGuigan who was shot dead by UDA gunmen as he worked at a timber yard on the Ravenhill Road in October 1991
- Catholic taxi driver James McCaffrey who was murdered as he delivered Chinese food on the Ormeau Road
- William Johnston who was shot dead by UDA gunmen as he lay in bed with his girlfriend at their home off the Donegall Road in October 1991 after it was discovered he was a Catholic
- in February 1992 McFerran was arrested after UDA gunmen murdered five Catholic men at Sean Grahams' bookmakers on the Ormeau Road. While the senior loyalist is not thought to have been one of the two gunmen who carried out the attack he is understood to have helped plan the massacre and the killers' escape afterwards
- Catholic father-of-three Michael Gilbride was shot dead in November 1992 as he visited his parents' home at Fernwood Street off the Ormeau Road
- Protestant mother-of-three Donna Wilson who was beaten to death three days later by a six-man UDA gang at her home in the Annadale Flats
- Catholic father-of-one Anthony Butler died after UDA gunmen burst into his home at Agra Street off the Ormeau Road in January 1993
- Catholic taxi driver Martin Moran who was shot dead as he delivered a Chinese meal to a house in the Donegall Pass area in October 1993. The 22-year-old had just become a father five weeks earlier
- Catholic father-of-three Desmond Doherty who was shot dead at a boarding house in Candahar Street off the Ormeau Road in January 1994
- Catholic mother-of-two Theresa Clinton who was shot dead in April 1994 when UDA gunmen threw a concrete block through the window of her home at Balfour Avenue before opening fire on the 33-year-old. McFerran, Roy Green, Joe Bratty and Raymond Elder were all implicated in the murder
- two years later McFerran kicked UDA man Thomas 'Tucker' Annett to death after a row outside a loyalist bar on the Ormeau Road. McFerran was later charged with Annett's murder after forensic evidence and a number of witnesses identified him as one of the killers. However, the charges were dropped in what Annett's mother would later claim was a deal between

the police and her son's killers

- in January 1998 McFerran's UDA gang struck again when Catholic father-of-two Larry Brennan was shot dead outside the taxi office where he worked on the Ormeau Road
- three days later McFerran was implicated in the murder of Catholic 55-year-old Benedict Hughes as he left a motor supply shop on the Donegal Road where he had worked for 30 years
- in January 2003 Roy Green was shot dead as he stood talking to McFerran outside the Kimberly Bar off the Ormeau Road. The UDA claimed Green had been passing on information to Johnny Adair.

Following the murder McFerran is suspected of having made an anonymous phone call to police to inform them that a cache of UDA weapons had been hidden in a lock-up on the Belvoir estate on the outskirts of south Belfast.

Days later police received a second phone call informing them that one of the weapons had been used to kill Roy Green.

However, it is understood that at least one set of fingerprints recovered from the weapons cache belonged to a Special Branch officer.

Despite it being widely known that McFerran had lured Green to his death, the 39-year-old was not charged with the murder until March 2005.

It was the beginning of the end for McFerran's life as a Special Branch agent. He had become a chronic cocaine addict.

His Special Branch handlers are known to have flown him to Liverpool in a bid to prevent his arrest.

However, McFerran grew homesick and returned to Northern Ireland denying to the UDA that he was an informer.

His unexpected decision to plead guilty to Green's manslaughter at the opening of the trial in February meant that his involvement in more than 20 murders would never emerge.

However, legal papers disclosed in the case unexpectedly revealed McFerran's life as an informer.

He was sentenced to five years' imprisonment and is being held at Maghaberry prison away from UDA prisoners.

He is due for release next year.

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