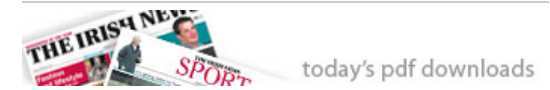


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Claim that RIR failed to arrest murder suspects

By Barry McCaffrey

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A BRITISH soldier has claimed that RIR members failed to arrest two well known loyalist suspects stopped a

short distance from the home of solicitor Rosemary Nelson shortly after her murder.

Christopher Jopling of the Royal Military Police told the inquiry that he had been on patrol with RIR soldiers in Lurgan shortly after Mrs Nelson was killed by an undercar booby trap bomb on March 15 1999.

Mr Jopling, who is still a serving soldier, said his position while on duty in Portadown in the late 1990s had been to act as an army 'spotter' identifying known loyalist and republican suspects in the mid Ulster area.

Within minutes of Mrs Nelson's murder his patrol were ordered to set up a roadblock at North Circular Road and Lake Street in Lurgan, a short distance away from Mrs Nelson's home.

He revealed how a car containing two loyalist suspects was stopped at the checkpoint.

"I remember this as they were believed to be loyalists and were in a staunchly republican area," he said.

"I spoke with both men who said they'd been visiting the graveyard.

"I can't remember this conversation now but remember that the graveyard was in a Catholic area and therefore it would have been strange for them to have been there.

"I'm surprised that they and their vehicle were not searched at the time, given their explanation."

However, Mr Jopling said that when he asked the patrol commander, identified only as A620, to alert his superiors back at base to the fact that two known loyalists had been spotted in the area of the killing, he was told: "I probably won't bother with that. You know, there is no need."

Questioned by the inquiry's legal counsel if he thought the refusal to pass on this information was unusual, Mr Jopling replied: "Yes, pretty much.

"He told me not to bother doing it.

"It appeared that he knew who these persons were but did not want to pass the information on.

"I thought his actions were strange."

In a statement to police, Mr Jopling claimed that A620 "would be more verbally aggressive to residents of Catholic estates than other RIR soldiers that I worked with".

He claimed A620 was "always reluctant to pass details of loyalist sightings and would encourage officers in his patrol to do the same".


However A620 denied Mr Jopling's claim that he had refused to pass on details of the two suspects.

“No, I never said nothing about not radioing any sighting through and I never seen no individuals that has been named there,” he told the inquiry.

“I was not slanted at all in any way.”

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