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## McCord won't rest until son's killers are brought to justice

### UVF ceasefire recognised

By Barry McCaffrey

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Expose: Raymond McCord snr with a copy of his book Justice for Raymond PICTURE: Hugh Russell

As he prepares to publish the story of his fight to bring his son's killers to justice, Raymond McCord tells Barry McCaffrey of his friendship with Bobby Sands and the lack of support from unionist politicians

HE is in constant fear of being killed and lives behind bulletproof windows with CCTV cameras watching his home.

However, after 10 years of fighting to expose his son's killers as Special Branch agents Raymond McCord insists that his journey for justice is not yet over.

The story of his solitary campaign to bring his son's killers to justice will be published in a new book tomorrow.

Justice For Raymond exposes the extraordinary extent that RUC Special Branch went to protect Mark Haddock and Mount Vernon UVF members from prosecution despite involvement in more than a dozen murders, including 22-year-old Raymond McCord jnr.

The book also accuses unionist politicians of deliberately snubbing Mr McCord's pleas for support in his campaign.

"I believe one of the reasons unionist politicians shunned me was because I wasn't a member of a paramilitary organisation," he says.

While Mr McCord's father Hector had been a UDA member he insists that he was never interested in joining

any paramilitary group and recalls his teenage friendship with Bobby Sands.

“From a very young age I had Catholic and Protestant friends so there was no way I was going to join the paramilitaries, even though that was what was expected of you,” he said.

“I respect people having their own political beliefs but I don't believe anyone has the right to force their beliefs on you through the barrel of a gun.

“Myself and Bobby Sands grew up on the Rathcoole estate together.

“We went to discos together and were in the same football team.

“We had a great team spirit. There was no politics or sectarianism. We just talked and played football.

“There were guys on the team who went on to join the UVF, UDA and IRA while others like me took nothing to do with anyone but when we were kids we were all mates.

“The face staring out of republican murals is not the Sandsy I knew. He was a young man led by the Troubles and older men into the IRA.”

Mr McCord, a former shipyard worker, admits to having been a street fighter throughout his life

and to having “stepped outside the law” at times.

“I've never claimed to be an angel but I was no bully either and if someone hurt my family, then I'd hurt them back,” he said.

“That's the way I was brought up and I make no apologies for it.”

Mr McCord's refusal to bow down led to conflict with both the UDA and UVF.

In the 1990s the UDA twice tried to kill him after he beat up the organisation's south east Antrim 'brigadier'.

“I saw John Gregg bullying a guy in a bar so I knocked him out,” Mr McCord said.

“I hit him so many times that I broke both my hands.

“He went to the police and had me charged with ABH but when it came to court he refused to give evidence against me.”

Weeks later a UDA gang broke both of Mr McCord's legs.

However his life changed forever on Sunday November 10 1997 when police arrived at his York Street home to break the news that his eldest son had been beaten to death.

"I just broke down and cried when they told me that Raymond had been murdered," Mr McCord said.

"To this day I can't remember what hymns were played at his funeral because I was just numb."

In the years that followed the heartbroken father attempted to prove that his son's killers were being protected by Special Branch.

"No-one wanted to know, especially unionist politicians. I was labelled a crank," he said.

"Protestants didn't want to believe that collusion took place against Protestants."

The campaign to expose his son's killers led to his family paying a heavy price with countless deaths threats and attacks on their homes. Raymond jnr's grave was desecrated on three occasions.

However, Mr McCord gained an invaluable ally in 2003 when he approached the then police om-budsman Nuala O'Loan .

"She was my last chance," he said.

"I had nowhere else to go but Nuala O'Loan believed in me and gradually her office was able to show that I'd been telling the truth all along.

"One of the most satisfying days of my life was being there on January 22 2007 to witness Nuala O'Loan exposing the fact that Special Branch had allowed Haddock and his gang to commit up to a dozen murders.

"It showed that 10 years of my life hadn't been wasted and it showed that police had allowed innocent Catholics and Protestants to be killed in cold blood."

Mr McCord said it is ironic that he received more support from nationalists than politicians from within the unionist community.

"Unionist politicians promised to raise Raymond's murder in the House of Commons but never did," he said.

"It's ironic that it was Irish Labour leader Pat Rabbitte who named Haddock in the Dail in October 2005.

"Irish politicians were prepared to do something which unionists would never do."

In January Mr McCord took another unusual step by addressing the Sinn Fein Ard Fheis in his father's Orange Order collerette.

"I wore my father's collerette to show people in the south that not all Protestants and loyalists were bigots and that there were just as many republican bigots," he said.

"Just as collusion wasn't one sided, neither was bigotry."

Mr McCord says that one of the proudest moments in his life came while canvassing during last year's assembly elections.

"Certain unionist politicians told me I'd no mandate to speak for anyone, so I decided to stand in the assembly elections," he said.

"I'll never forget canvassing in the New Lodge and Ardoyne and people shaking my hand and telling me I was doing the right thing.

"I got 1,320 votes – that was 1,320 people saying I was right to fight for justice for Raymond.

"I don't care whether the people who voted for me were Catholic or Protestant.

"I just want to thank them and to promise them the same thing I promised Raymond when he died.


"I'll not rest until the men that killed my son are brought to justice.

"This isn't over."

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