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Back to 10/96[Papers](#)[Reference](#)[About](#)[Contact](#)

Trial gave chilling insights into LVF violence and crime

([Irish News](#))

The conviction of Jim Fulton for a litany of paramilitary offences has given a chilling insight into a campaign of violence and crime and waged by a band of LVF members in the mid-Ulster area in the 1990s.

The son of a Co Armagh woman murdered in a pipe-bomb attack on her home has welcomed the conviction of LVF leader Jim Fulton for his role in the attack.

Fulton has been told that he will serve a life sentence for a catalogue of offences including his admission to undercover police officers of his involvement in the 1999 murder of Portadown grandmother Elizabeth O'Neill.

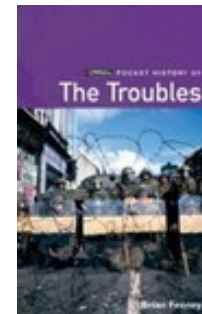
The 38-year-old – a brother of former LVF leader Mark 'Swinger' Fulton who was found dead in his prison cell in 2002 – could also face two further life terms on charges of conspiring to murder Sinn Féin office workers in Newry and another man.

Instead of reading his 226-page judgment in full at Belfast Crown Court yesterday (Thursday) Mr Justice Hart went through the indictment, telling Fulton he was guilty of 48 charges but acquitting him of 14 others.

He was convicted of aiding and abetting the murder of Mrs O'Neill, two counts of conspiring to murder, seven of attempted murder, nine explosive charges, 12 woundings and attempted woundings, and seven firearm offences – including possessing the gun which hitman Clifford McKeown used to murder Catholic taxi driver Michael McGoldrick at the height of the Drumcree dispute in 1996.

The charge list also included one attempted robbery, one of perverting the course of justice, two false imprisonments, two hijackings, two drug-dealing offences, being a member of the LVF and directing its activities.

Among the judge's acquittals were one charge of attempted murder, two attempted woundings, two explosive charges, one firearms offence, two drug-dealing offences, three robberies, two false imprisonments and an attempted robbery.



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by Brian Feeney

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Mr Justice Hart acquitted Fulton's co-accused Muriel Gibson (56) of involvement in the murder of Catholic council worker Adrian Lamph but convicted her of impeding the arrest and prosecution of his killers.

Gibson, with an address at Clos Trevithick in Cornwall, was also found guilty of withholding information about a shooting, two charges of possessing firearms, two of having explosives and LVF membership. She was acquitted on three explosives charges.

The convictions come after both Fulton and Gibson confessed to undercover surveillance police about their activities with the LVF between 1991 and 1999.

Their trial, the longest in Northern Ireland's legal history, had run from September last year until June.

They will be sentenced in January but Fulton was told that he would receive a life term.

Fulton, from Queen's Walk, Portadown, is the second person to be jailed for involvement in the murder of Mrs O'Neill who was married to a Catholic.

She died when she picked up a pipe bomb which had been thrown at her house in the loyalist Corcrair estate in June 1999.

Fulton confessed to the undercover police that although he was not present he had planned how attacks would be carried out, instructing that one man throw a brick through a window and another throw a bomb through the hole.

Mrs O'Neill's son Martin last night said his family were happy with the conviction.

"That was the guy who gave the go-ahead for the attack which killed my mother to take place," he said.

Mr O'Neill also said the family would not lose hope that the other men involved would be pursued.

"There are men out there who have never been charged or brought to justice," he said.

"I have two wee children, Reese (9) and Sophie (4). Our mother never got to know them because of these cowards.

"They didn't get anything out of [killing her]. I don't know what excuse they could have."

Among Fulton's litany of other convictions are four attempted murders in July 1998 when a blast bomb was thrown at security forces during the Drumcree stand-off, wounding four officers and leaving three unable to return to duty.

On the transcript Fulton can be heard describing the weapons as "just like grenades... that's the ones we were throwing at the peelers at Drumcree", and that he threw one so hard it "very nearly took my shoulder out".

There were also so-called punishment attacks on three men who had fallen foul of the loyalist paramilitaries, a gun attack on the home of a retired prison officer and the hijacking of a Post Office van which was then loaded with a hoax bomb and the driver ordered to take it to police lines at Shillingtons Bridge in Portadown.

Initially the Crown had contended that Gibson had "pre-knowledge" of the murder of 29-year-old Adrian Lamph, gunned down in Portadown on April 21 1998 but Mr Justice Hart convicted her instead of impeding the arrest and prosecution of Mr Lamph's killers and of possessing the gun which killed him.

He said although she had no "prior knowledge" of what was to happen, "she did everything she could to ensure that all evidence would be destroyed or removed" and confessed to the police about taking the "still hot" gun away.

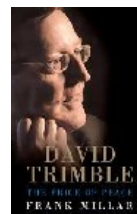
December 9, 2006

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