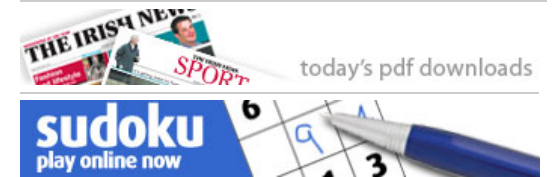


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IRA killer-turned-informer may be called as Omagh trial witness

By Staff Reporter

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An IRA informer convicted of two murders may be called to give evidence at the Omagh bomb civil trial.



Lawyers for victims' relatives have urged a judge to allow Sean O'Callaghan to testify at the High Court action against five men being sued over the 1998 atrocity.

A statement submitted to the proceedings in Belfast by O'Callaghan alleges that one of the defendants, Michael McKeivitt, was at one stage a high-ranking member of the Provisional IRA's northern command.

He further claims that the jailed dissident republican leader attended a meeting in the mid-1980s to discuss obtaining deer-hunting rifles and was linked to an operation to import arms from Libya.

Lawyers for McKeivitt, who is said to have quit the Provisionals to form the Real IRA in opposition to the peace process, declared complete opposition to O'Callaghan's evidence and warned they would seek to adjourn the case until next year if it was allowed.

But Lord Brennan QC, for the Omagh families, emphasised the significance of hearing from a man whose senior position within the Provisional IRA during the 1970s and 1980s brought him into contact with McKeivitt.

"In a terrorist organisation bent on murder and bombing the relationship, understanding and assessment of each other by those at its leadership is going to be a state of affairs ordinary people would hardly ever find out about unless someone turns informer which this man did and, in this instance, perhaps to tell this court what it was like in such an organisation," he said.

Lord Brennan, who confirmed that the plaintiffs' case was now closed against all defendants apart from McKeivitt, also sought to stress the relevance of the alleged rifle discussions.

"You don't have to be an expert to realise that a deer-hunting rifle gives the opportunity for long-range sniping and killing of people, in particular soldiers and police officers," he told the court.

Mr Justice Morgan said he would rule later this month whether O'Callaghan's statement contained enough value to the case to allow him to be called to give evidence in the trial in which McKeivitt, Liam Campbell, Seamus McKenna, Colm Murphy and Seamus Daly all deny responsibility for the Real IRA's Omagh bombing of August 15 1998.

Twenty-nine people including a woman pregnant with twins were killed in the blast.

Michael O'Higgins SC, for McKeivitt, argued that details in the statement referring to matters stretching back more than 20 years were too remote. He also called into question the worth of a man with "a very significant degree of baggage".

"He's not an ordinary witness. He's a twice-convicted murderer and got 529 years [of a prison sentence] on top of that. For what, I don't know but I would be very curious to find out," Mr O'Higgins said.

As parts of the IRA volunteer-turned Garda and MI5 informer's statement were explored in court, Mr O'Higgins used an entry for O'Callaghan in the online reference site Wikipedia to strengthen his case.

The court heard that O'Callaghan was said to have joined the IRA as a teenager and been involved in operations during the 1970s, including a mortar attack on a British army base in Co Tyrone in which a female soldier was killed.

He also shot dead an RUC Special Branch officer in a bar in Omagh, Mr O'Higgins said.

O'Callaghan, originally from Tralee, Co Kerry, was released from prison under a royal prerogative, the court heard.

He was said to have resigned from the Provisionals and moved to England before deciding to become an informer.

His claims to have been head of the IRA's southern command and to have helped foil a bomb attack on a London theatre in 1984 where Prince Charles and Princess Diana were attending a Duran Duran concert were also referred to.

"It's a feature that it's never pensioners – Mr and Mrs Smith – it's always Charles and Diana or the nearest equivalent," Mr O'Higgins said.

Another episode involved O'Callaghan's appearance as a prosecution witness at a burglary trial after he was bound to a chair by two men he met in a gay bar in London.

He was said to have gone to the pub because it was closest one to a house he was looking after for a friend and that he invited the men back for a drink.

"If you meet someone in a gay bar and you voluntarily agree to certain things with them that doesn't entitle them to burgle property or rob a person," Mr O'Higgins said.

"But if under oath Mr O'Callaghan said in that case that this was all a set-up he was the unluckiest man in London.


“He appears to have stumbled into the nearest gay bar and stumbled into these two men and all this happened.”

Stressing the time taken to prepare his client's defence in the case, the barrister said his legal team might now have to make further inquiries with police, MI5 and the publishers of O'Callaghan's autobiography, *The Informer*.

“If the court admits this evidence we will be seeking an adjournment to investigate these matters,” he said.

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