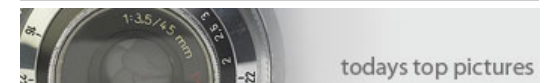


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RIRA intelligence dossier revealed in Omagh case

By Staff reporter

23/04/08

The paramilitary organisation behind the Omagh bomb massacre had up to 400 members plotting to wreck the fragile peace established in Northern Ireland, the High Court heard yesterday.

A government dossier revealed at the civil trial of five men being sued over the attack which killed 29 people, including a woman pregnant with twins, also claimed key Real IRA men held dual membership within its

Political wing, the 32 County Sovereignty Movement.

Weapons were brought in from the former Republic of Yugoslavia, with sporadic acquaintances rather than procurement processes exploited by the dissident republicans, it stated.

One link was allegedly established while a sympathiser was working with an aid agency in the war-torn Balkan region.

The intelligence files, sent to US authorities analysing the Real IRA, detailed its formation following a split with the established Provisional movement in 1997, recruitment, and areas of strength along the border in north Louth and south Armagh.

On Day 10 of the hearing in Belfast Brett Lockhart QC, for the Omagh bomb victims' families seeking multi-million pound damages, read out the assessment from David Watkins, a senior director for police and security within the Northern Ireland Office.

His analysis, compiled around three years after the August 1998 explosion which devastated Omagh, also set out how fundraising came through wealthy benefactors and crime.

Up to \$150,000 (£121,000) a year was believed to be coming into the organisation from US supporters – significantly less than its gains through smuggling, the court heard.

The document estimated that the Real IRA consisted of 150 members directly involved in or supporting terrorist attacks, with another 250 members prepared to assist through other methods including finance and criminal activity.

Experienced Provisional IRA men defected to the dissident grouping after it formed in late 1997 and then set out to thwart the following year's Good Friday Agreement.

The dossier disclosed to the court made clear the Real IRA's "raison d'etre" was to continue the armed struggle in Ireland and to supplant the PIRA as the main republican organisation.

A campaign of violence resumed following a ceasefire called in the aftermath of Omagh was described as presenting "a real threat to the fragile peace developed over many years".

And turning to the 32 County Sovereignty Movement, which always denied links to the Real IRA, the intelligence assessment said: "A number of key individuals within the group appear to hold dual membership."

The ties included senior 32 County members attending the funeral of Real IRA man JJ O'Connor in October 2000, the court heard.

Dermott Fee QC, for Seamus Dalv and Colm Murphv – who are being sued along with Michael McKevitt. Liam

Campbell and Seamus McKenna, contested the admissibility of the extracts.

He claimed the identities of the sources and experts used in Mr Watkins papers should be known to the hearing.

"It's not appropriate, in a case which has been described on numerous occasions as one of the most important cases coming before these courts, to simply read out unattributed material," Mr Fee said.

But the judge, Mr Justice Declan Morgan, declared it could be admitted under legislation.


The trial was adjourned until Monday.

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