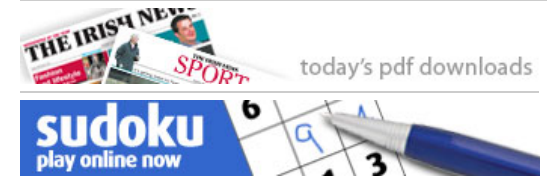


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Omagh review detective backs ex-chief constable

By Staff reporter

25/01/08

THE detective who exposed the Omagh police investigation fiasco defended Sir Ronnie Flanagan last night and blamed other retired senior officers for the bungled probe.

"These are the people who should be held to account," former chief superintendent Brian McVicker said.

"They have washed their hands of it."

His criticism of one-time colleagues followed an apology to victims' relatives by former RUC chief constable Sir Ronnie over shortcomings in the failed initial inquiry.

Mr McVicker, speaking publicly for the first time about the affair, said other senior officers - all retired - were

primarily responsible.

"Sir Ronnie is taking the rap for Omagh as he must because he was in charge of the RUC at the time," he said.

"He was the top layer of supervision but there were others just below him, the men on the ground.

"They are just as much to blame as he is and they've escaped all the abuse and criticism Sir Ronnie is having to take. That is unfair."

Mr McVicker was called in by Sir Ronnie in March 2000 to carry out a full review of the first investigation of the August 1998 bombing by the Real IRA, which claimed the lives of 29 people including a woman pregnant with twins.

His report revealed serious shortcomings and a failure by officers to follow up inquiries with people he believed to be key witnesses.

The McVicker dossier effectively formed the basis of a damning report prepared later by the then police ombudsman, Nuala O'Loan.

Sir Ronnie refused demands to resign after Ms O'Loan accused him of defective leadership.

He retired from the RUC in March 2002 and is now head of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary.

English solicitor Victor Barker, whose son James was killed in the Omagh bombing, has demanded Sir Ronnie leave his job following last month's acquittal of south Armagh man Sean Hoey.

Sir Ronnie has insisted he will not resign but he apologised to the Omagh families.

"Their trauma and terror has been to the forefront of my mind since this happened," he said last night.

"I feel desperately sorry that we have not to this point brought people to justice for that terrible attack and I wholeheartedly apologise to them for the failings and indeed for any shortcomings as highlighted by Mr Justice Weir."

Michael Gallagher, whose son Aidan was killed, said Sir Ronnie's apology was a positive step but the victims' families still wanted a full north-south judicial inquiry.

"There have been serious failings at all levels on both sides of the border and the only way to address all these issues is through a comprehensive independent cross-border public inquiry rather than having them raised in a piecemeal fashion," he said.

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