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## Omagh accused 'told gardai that loss of life was disaster'

By Staff reporter

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One of the men accused of carrying out the Omagh bombing told detectives that the loss of innocent lives was a disaster, a court heard yesterday.

Investigating officers said Colm Murphy described the blast, which killed 29 people including a women pregnant with twins, as a tragedy and an outrage but maintained that he had nothing to do with it.

Former detective garda James Hanley told the Omagh civil action case in Dublin that Murphy would not condemn the attack when he was arrested in February 1999 for the unlawful possession of explosive substances in Dundalk between August 13 and 15 1998.

The Real IRA bomb exploded on August 15, a busy Saturday afternoon, injuring hundreds.

Alleged RIRA leader Michael McKeivitt, Liam Campbell – said to be his number two – Murphy, Seamus McKenna and Seamus Daly all deny any involvement.

The court heard that Mr Hanley, who has since retired, interviewed Murphy six times in Monaghan Garda Station in February 1999

during which he was told that his mobile phone signal had been picked up at a number of locations in Northern Ireland, including Omagh, on August 15.

Reading from his interview notes, the Mr Hanley said Murphy first maintained that he had his phone at all times at home but later admitted lending it to another man.

Mr Hanley said officers asked Murphy if he condemned the attack.

"I'm not in the business of condemning, as I said it was a tragedy," he replied.

It was claimed Murphy also told gardai that even if he got 20 years his conscious was clear.

"I was not in Omagh. It does me good to know I wasn't there," he was reported as saying.

Murphy later told officers that the loss of innocent lives was a disaster.

"I have told you what I know,"

he said.

"If I could change things I would. But other people have caused this disaster."

Murphy (56) was convicted in connection with Omagh in 2002 but later had his conviction overturned following claims that two officers lied during his trial.

The £14 million action by six families is the first time that evidence from a Northern Ireland case has been heard in the Republic.

Dermot Fee QC, for Murphy, said his client's position throughout


his trial was that a concoction and agreement between interviewing officers had been used to manufacture admissions.

The barrister was granted leave to cross examine Mr Hanley and Detective Garda Kieran King, who also interviewed Murphy, when the case returns to Dublin on June 9.

The court heard that in the meantime Mr Fee was seeking disclosure on a number of documents in relation to a criminal case against two other gardai who were acquitted of forging notes of an interview and of committing perjury during Murphy's trial five years earlier.

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