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Friday, March 13, 2009

PSNI has forensic lead in search for killers of soldiers

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GERRY MORIARTY and MARY MINIHAN

PSNI DETECTIVES believe they may now have "forensic opportunities" that could assist them in apprehending the Real IRA gang responsible for the killings of two British soldiers at Massereene Barracks in Antrim on Saturday.

Garda Commissioner Fachtna Murphy, who held talks about the current level of threat with PSNI chief constable Sir Hugh Orde in Belfast yesterday, is to attend the funeral of murdered police constable Stephen Carroll with Minister for Justice Dermot Ahern today.

Mr Ahern is understood to be the first Government Minister to officially attend a police funeral in Northern Ireland.

In Dublin, Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams said dissident republican groups should not be given "room to breathe".

Speaking after a meeting with Taoiseach Brian Cowen and Minister for Foreign Affairs Micheál Martin at Government Buildings yesterday, Mr Adams said the groups have a limited capacity.

"That's why I make the point that they shouldn't have any room to breathe, that no one should support them, give succour to them, join them or work with them."

Detectives were last night given five more days to question the two men, aged 37 and 17, who were arrested late on Tuesday afternoon in a housing estate close to Lismore

Manor in Craigavon where Constable Carroll was shot dead in an ambush by the Continuity IRA on Monday night.

As Banbridge, Co Down, prepared for the funeral of Constable Carroll today, the PSNI remained on high alert against further attacks by dissident republican paramilitaries.

The officer's widow said yesterday she hoped her husband had not died in vain. To his killers she said: "I hope these people are listening and if they just realised that we only get one chance at life and a piece of land is a piece of land and at the end of the day [when he is buried] my husband is just going to get 6ft by 6ft and that's all any of us are going to get and why don't they realise this and talk to each other."

Sinn Féin politicians planning to attend the funeral include Upper Bann Assembly member John O'Dowd, Policing Board member Alex Maskey MLA, and Banbridge councillor Dessie Ward.

Sinn Féin members previously attended the funerals of four PSNI officers killed in a crash in Co Down in November, but this is the first time Sinn Féin will attend the funeral of an officer murdered by republican paramilitaries.

In the investigation into the killing of the two soldiers, the PSNI confirmed yesterday that an attempt was made to burn out the Vauxhall Cavalier car, believed to be the getaway vehicle of the Real IRA gang. It was found on Ranaghan Road in Randalstown, Co Antrim, just 8km from Antrim town, where the soldiers were shot dead.

There was some charring on side windows of the car but the gang failed to burn the vehicle and detectives hope this will present them with significant "forensic opportunities" that will assist their investigation of the murders of army engineers Mark Quinsey and Patrick Azimkar.

Detectives are also examining CCTV footage that captured the 30-second ambush at Massereene Barracks in which some 60 shots were fired by the masked killers.

Police are on extra guard against further attacks. In Derry yesterday, uniformed police patrolled armed with rifles and wearing flak jackets.

The police commander in the city, Chief Insp Chris Yates, warned that dissidents were trying to recruit members in Derry. Police would be maintaining a high profile to prevent attacks, he said.

This article appears in the print edition of the Irish Times

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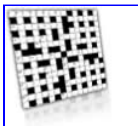
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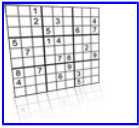
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