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Omagh bombing civil case draws to close

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A LANDMARK civil action brought by relatives of Omagh bomb victims finally drew to a close at the High Court in Belfast yesterday.

Twelve months after the case opened against five men being sued over the atrocity, Mr Justice Morgan heard final submissions on behalf of the defendants.

He is now set to begin work on his judgment over the Easter recess, with a verdict anticipated by June.

With no one convicted for the August 1998 Real IRA outrage which killed 29 people, some of the bereaved are seeking an order for millions of pounds in damages.

They claim jailed dissident republican chief Michael McKeivitt, Liam Campbell, Séamus McKenna, Colm Murphy and Séamus Daly can all be held responsible for the worst single loss of life in 30 years of conflict in Northern Ireland.

All five men deny liability.

Lawyers for the families opened their case last April by describing the bombing as a massacre of the innocents, and ended with a declaration that the day of reckoning had arrived for the Real IRA and those suspected of involvement.

Mr Murphy supplied the mobile phones used by the bomb team, knowing what they were to be used for, they alleged.

But defence counsel Dermot Fee QC argued that their case had not been proved.

He said: "Even if your lordship were to find an admission had been made to gardaí, even if your lordship were to find all admissions were made to gardaí, it still does not deal with the intention to carry out what is described as the Omagh atrocity."

Mary Higgins QC, on behalf of Mr Daly – who is alleged to have been in the bomb car – began her closing speech by stating he has always maintained that he was not responsible for the attack or loss of life.

She told Mr Justice Morgan: "The case against him is one of conjecture and is fundamentally flawed."

The court also heard that the evidence pointed to a conclusion that the bombing, like other strikes in the dissident campaign at that time, was intended to cause damage to commercial property.

A tragic failure to convey information to police on the ground led to people being killed and injured, it was claimed.

Ms Higgins argued that a lack of evidence was the difficulty facing the families.

This article appears in the print edition of the Irish Times

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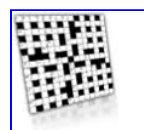
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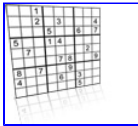
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