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Omagh widower calls Flanagan in civil action

Henry McDonald
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Sir Ronnie Flanagan is to be called to give evidence in a civil action being taken by the widower of an Omagh bomb victim. The civil action against the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Secretary of State alleges failure to prevent and properly investigate the Omagh bombing of 1998, during Flanagan's tenure as RUC Chief Constable.

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Laurence Rush, whose wife, Libbi, was one of 29 victims of the bomb, said his civil action could now progress after Sean Hoey was found not guilty of the bombing. 'What is much more damaging regarding the Omagh investigation is the evidence that wasn't presented in the Hoey judgment, which really rubbished police actions,' Rush said.

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'The car that was left lying under a tarpaulin for four years so it rotted away and was of no value as evidence is probably about the worst. The so-called investigation was not only flawed, as Mr Justice Weir said, but non-existent. My case has been on hold since Sean Hoey was charged four and a half years ago. The authorities have put every obstacle in my way. Hopefully it will go ahead this year.'

Michael Mansfield QC will represent Rush, whose case is separate from another civil action - given the go-ahead by a judge last week - being taken by several Omagh families against a number of alleged Real IRA figures.

Speaking last night, the former army agent known as Kevin Fulton, who infiltrated both the Provisional and later the Real IRA, said he was prepared to speak at either of the two civil trials. Fulton's evidence formed the central elements of Nuala O'Loan's Police Ombudsman report in 2001 which heavily criticised the RUC's handling of the Omagh investigation. The British agent claimed he delivered warnings to the RUC that an attack was about to take place at Omagh but was ignored. 'If I receive a legal document asking me to come forward then I will obey it. I have no problem giving evidence,' he said.

Meanwhile, the father of a young boy who died in the Omagh massacre revealed yesterday that Flanagan - who is now head of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), which is responsible for enforcing policing standards in the UK - has been in touch with him in recent days. Victor Barker, whose son James was killed in the bomb blast, said he hoped after the phone call he would be able to meet him.

Barker said: 'It was Ronnie Flanagan's RUC whose investigation came in for such withering criticism (in the Hoey judgment). The judge said the means of storing evidence was very poor. For example, the tagging was not done properly and there was no way of knowing if evidence had been interfered with. Ronnie Flanagan said he would fall on his sword if anything was wrong with this investigation. I will give him the sword.'

Last week the Prime Minister said he backed Flanagan and his stewardship of the HMIC.

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