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IRA role in McCartney tragedy laid bare in court

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Dead man's best friend afraid to name names and met an IRA Army Council representative days before making statement to police, writes Alan Murray



ie Sunday June 01 2008

THE IRA's involvement in the murder of [Robert McCartney](#) and the pivotal role its [Army Council](#) played in the decision of a witness to give evidence was revealed in a [Belfast](#) courtroom last week.

In his testimony, Robert McCartney's 'best friend' [Edward Gowdy](#) told the Court how the murdered man had been a restraining influence when a fight broke out in Magennis's Bar in the centre of

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Belfast in January 2005.

Gowdy said he didn't see how the fight had started or knew at the time what caused it but he remembered returning from a toilet and seeing a commotion in the Whiskey Cafe part of the pub where he had been drinking.

Another companion, [Brendan Devine](#), was covered in blood and he remembered pushing Devine out of the bar with Robert McCartney. He remembered Devine trying to get back in to the bar to resume the fight and shouting back at men outside the door.

Gowdy said he and McCartney ushered Devine into Market Street which runs alongside the pub and they were pursued by a crowd of men from the bar.

He said he was hit across the face with a stick or rod by one of the accused, [Joseph Fitzpatrick](#), who is charged with affray and also assaulting [Ed Gowdy](#). Gowdy's reaction was to hit back but he didn't, because it was a dangerous situation.

When asked under cross examination by [Mr Orlando Pownell](#), representing [Terry Davison](#), who is charged with Robert McCartney's murder, why he had told the police a pack of lies when first questioned, he said "if these people were connected to a paramilitary organisation I was not going to mention names".

And when pressed by Mr. Pownell again about lies he told the police at the outset about who was involved in the attack he said he "didn't know the situation, there were paramilitaries involved".

"I didn't know what I was allowed to say and what I was not allowed to say", he helpfully explained to the English QC because, he pointed out, the bar was "full of republicans at the time".

Later explaining why the situation was different on the night Robert McCartney was fatally stabbed he said "The IRA don't usually kill people in the street. They usually do it the next day".

Gowdy said he hadn't told the police the names of those he knew were involved in the fatal fracas but had told Robert McCartney's sisters who was involved. He said it was a lie to suggest that he had told [Donna McCartney](#) who had stabbed her brother but conceded he had said "I might know".

He admitted telling many lies to the police, explaining that where he lived in the Short Strand area of East Belfast left him vulnerable to repercussions from the IRA and he made a decision not to mention "anybody".

It was during cross examination on Thursday afternoon by Patrick Lyttle QC counsel for Joseph Fitzpatrick that Gowdy revealed that he had been visited by the IRA to discuss the events of January 30, 2005, and outline how Mr. McCartney had met his death.

The 40-year-old admitted that statements he had made to police before March 10, 2005 included no names and contained lies. He said he had received four to six visits from the IRA between the murder of Robert McCartney and the March 10 statement.

He received "no assurances" during the first visit but a couple of weeks later he received clearance from the IRA to make statements that contained names.

The first meeting wasn't with the "Army Council", Gowdy said. "There may have been three meetings before that". The IRA representatives were "courteous" and "wanted justice", he told the court.

Gowdy said he spoke to the [IRA Army Council](#) representatives two days before he made a 90-page statement to police. "As soon as I got the clearance I made the statement", he told Mr. Lyttle in what was becoming an increasingly acrimonious series of exchanges between witness and defence counsel. In one response Gowdy said to the QC, "Do you think I take minutes of them"(meetings with the IRA)?

Later, during questioning about events in the bar when the fracas first began he said to Mr Lyttle, "What are you on about", "wise up" and "catch yourself on", to the amusement of the public gallery.

And when he was asked about a visit to a woman in the Markets area after he left Maqennis's Bar and

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before he went to the [Royal Victoria Hospital](#) and why he hadn't told his wife about the visit he responded by saying "What do you think, Sherlock?"

Gowdy said he didn't know why he had described the man who struck him with a pole as having red hair when the accused Fitzpatrick had fair to grey hair colouring, but he responded unshakeably, every time, that the person who struck him was Fitzpatrick.

"I was 100pc sure it was Joseph Fitzpatrick", he said.

Repeatedly agreeing that he had told lies to police, Gowdy admitted to [Eilish McDermott](#) -- representing [James McCormick](#), who is charged with affray -- that he couldn't remember 90 per cent of what happened on the night Robert McCartney died because he had consumed around 10 pints of cider and two pints of lager and had drunk 20 pints the day before.

"The 10 per cent is the three men in the dock", he said.

On Friday, before the murder trial was adjourned, Gowdy gave more details of his meetings with the IRA during further difficult cross examination by Mr. Lyttle for Fitzpatrick.

He said the first visit from the IRA lasted about one hour and was for the organisation's "fact finding" purposes.

He had two further meetings with the IRA which lasted about three hours each during which he told its representatives the story of what happened "and who was there" when Robert McCartney was killed.

There were two further meetings with the IRA after he made his affidavit to police on March 10, 2005.



When Mr. Lyttle asked him if he had told the police about these meetings with the IRA Gowdy erupted angrily saying "Tell the police about IRA business, do you think I am f***** nuts".

Before the court adjourned for the day Gowdy directed a final cutting riposte to Mr. Lyttle after a replay of the court tape proved that he was correct in his recollection of what he had stated in reply to a question posed by the trial judge Mr. Justice Gillen just minutes earlier.

Mr. Lyttle had suggested that Gowdy in reply to the Judge had said he had gone outside the pub on previous occasions only to have a cigarette, not to have a cigarette and make phone calls from his mobile.

When the tape replay proved Gowdy to be correct he retorted "You ask me to remember what happened three and a half years ago and you can't remember what happened five minutes ago".

The case will resume tomorrow.

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