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# **Truth and lies**

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**By Staff reporter**

Hardly had the dust settled on the pile of rubble that once was Mc Gurks Bar, in North Queen Street, Belfast, in 1971, than the disinformation hacks at the British Army Barracks in Lisburn were at work. The bombing was 'an own goal and the bombers were among the fifteen dead'. The dead included two

children, three women and the wife and fourteen year old daughter of the owner. A compliant English media always ready to absorb unquestionably any story from the British Army press core as th

An article in the London Times, under the headline ' Blast that killed 15 may have been IRA error', and written by the established journalist, John Charters, explained that Police and Army intelligence had information that an IRA operation was planne

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d for the North Queen Street area and that the bomb was in transit. The other story emanating from Army intelligence officers and carried in most of the English papers was that it might be a 'Protestant' bomb but the more likely theory was that the 'Provisionals had deliberately killed their own people to provoke open rioting again'!

When evidence emerged that a witness, a young paper seller had seen a car stop outside the pub and a man get out and plant the bomb and when the bombing was claimed by an anonymous phone caller stating it was the work of the 'Empire Loyalists', the British Express not to be outdone ran a story straight out of the book of British Army fairy tales, which stated ' that though the intelligence services were suspicious of the call, they would not rule it out as a double bluff by Republican extremists'.

Similar headlines were carried in most of the English gutter press newspapers. The Sun always reliable for a good anti Irish story, confused its readers by telling them that ' The Security Forces have no clue to the mad bombers. Was it murder by mistake?'

In the midst of the welter of statements issued by the security forces, the Republican MP for Belfast, the late Paddy Kennedy, stated that the bomb was planted by British intelligence agents a claim that was immediately counteracted by the British Army press cops.. The London Telegraph in a front page article responded by reproducing a series of denials by senior British Army personnel, the RUC and security forces rubbishing the 'Empire Loyalists' claims and finishing with a lengthy assortment of condemnations.

With the exception of The Guardian, the Fleet Street press corps accepted as verbatim the British Army press statements and the much quoted allegations of the then Stormont Minister of Home Affairs, John Taylor, that the IRA were wholly responsible.

A British Army 'situation report' sent to senior Government ministers two days after the bombing stated; It is not at present known who was responsible; the likelier explanation is thought to be that the explosion took place accidentally while a quantity of bomb material was in transit, intended for use elsewhere'.

A second report on the 14th December, strengthened the previous claims from Army Pres officers that the explosion had been an 'own goal'. It stated that ' forensic evidence now available shows quite clearly that five of the victims killed by the blast indicated that the explosion must have been inside the bar.'

It was left to Simon Winchester of The Guardian to report all the accounts of the explosion, including the eye witness account of the nine year old paper seller Francis McClory who saw a car stop and a man plant the bomb.

Winchester also detailed the number of calls to a Belfast newspaper office claiming that the bombing was the work of the Ulster Branch of the Empire Loyalists, a group unknown at the time.

He also quoted denials of responsibility by the then spokespersons for the IRA, the late Sean MacStiofain. Readers of the Guardian had to work their way from the front to the back page to discover his conclusions that this was the work of militant loyalists.

Reports in some newspapers in the period prior to 1969, suggested that British military personnel had been training and arming Unionist paramilitaries in anticipation of a doomsday situation. Some seven years on from the bombing, a self confessed Unionist paramilitary, Robert Campbell admitted that he had been part of a UVF gang that carried out the attack. He refused to name the other people responsible and the story did not make the front pages of the British press.

In 2001, on the 30th Anniversary of the bombing, relatives of those killed called for an investigation into allegations that British Army intelligence was involved with the UVF gang. Relatives present at the commemoration told of the pain not only of their loss but also having to live with the stigma of the allegations that some of those killed may have been part 'of the bombing team'.

A thousand people packed St Patrick's Chapel in Donegall Street, for the memorial Mass and at the site where so many lost their lives and their characters as well, Fr. David White condemned the reporting which had added to the grief of relatives, 'a grief intensified when the Army and Police personnel together with the media, rushed to blame republicans'.

He could have added that it's the first story that counts and the first story of the atrocity of Mc Gurks Bar by the British Army disinformation services was 'good copy' for the blinkered Fleet street editors and took precedence over truth and objectivity.

The attempt to distort the truth surrounding the McGurk's bar bombing was strongly criticised by the Historical Enquiries Team, which has recently investigated the incident. They state that the briefings contained in the situations reports after the bombing are fundamentally flawed and 'demonstrates the prevailing military mindset and 'off the record briefings' given as a result, would have led to the slew of inaccurate reporting '. They also said that the families deserved an apology.

It was left to Robert McCallaghan, whose 73 year old grandfather was killed in the bomb to ask why the Army were so quick to blame, the IRA and was it possible that the Army knew in advance what the Unionists paramilitaries intended to do or were the Army themselves controlling the entire operation. These are questions that the HET team have not asked but that require answers.

The Mc Gurk's bar bombing was raised last week in the British House of Commons by the Scottish Labour MP, Michael Connarty, whose great Uncle Phillip Garry was killed in the blast.

The British Government and the Secretary of State, Shaun Woodward, apologised to the families of those killed for the deliberate distortion of the facts surrounding the atrocity, and for maligning the characters of the dead. Goggins nice words, 'preconceptions' is code for downright lies by the British

Army.

Evidence is now emerging that the bombing of Mc Gurks Bar, like many atrocities in the early years of the conflict, may have been part of a policy of assassination by British intelligence services that allowed, encouraged and initiated violence, crime and terrorism to alienate and divide both communities.

Whatever the truth behind the bombing of Mc Gurks Bar there is no doubt that most of the British Press, were cheer leaders for the bombers.

The full article contains 1221 words and appears in Journal Sunday newspaper.

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