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News

Haddock is the tip of the iceberg

Sunday, January 21, 2007

By Brian Rowan

He describes the UVF as "a vile, dirty, dangerous, killing organisation" and says: "We had to get among them."

This is an intelligence source with detailed knowledge of the inner workings of Special Branch.

He knows the role of the informer Mark Haddock. He knows the period when the loyalist was being run as a covert intelligence source. He knows it in fine detail.

"When you start mixing with it, you will get some splatter," added the source.

So, is this the explanation for all that was wrong in the handling or mishandling of Haddock?

Is there any explanation?

How can the running and the paying of this loyalist informer be justified, given all of the suspicion about his own involvement in murder and other terrorist activity?

"There would have been more people in the cemeteries of Northern Ireland if we hadn't run people like Mark Haddock," said the source.

It's not an answer to any specific question, but a statement of fact as far as the source is concerned.

"The briefings coming in [said] Haddock was worth keeping" - keeping, not just for his knowledge of the UVF in north Belfast, but in relation to planned attacks in the Republic.

The intelligence source dismissed any suggestion of collusion with loyalists: "If you examined some of the republicans we ran, we ran them exactly the same way."

Haddock, who will be described as "Informant 1" in Mrs O'Loan's report, is the "main suspect for ordering the murder" of Raymond McCord jnr in 1997.

But later, according to intelligence sources, Haddock told Special Branch about the people and the car linked to the murder.

What are we dealing with here?

An agent who orders a murder, then informs on those involved, and, six years after that killing, he's still on Special Branch's books.

Haddock wasn't stood down until sometime in 2003. Who can explain this?

In the pages of the Ombudsman's report tomorrow, we may also read that the Special Branch dropped Haddock as an agent because of his suspected involvement in another killing in 1997 - not the McCord murder - but that he was "back on the books" within a short period of time. Is there an answer for this?

The intelligence source did not deal with the specifics of that question.

His argument is that looking back from the present misses the "context of time and place". He said: "It's all right sitting back [now]."

"But it's different when you are dealing with a live terrorist situation."

In our peace we are left to walk through the filth of a very dirty war. In this story of murder, agents and the Special Branch, the puppets and the strings became a tangled mess - and Haddock is the tip of the iceberg.

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Sir Hugh has many questions to answer

When Sir Hugh Orde responds to the report of the Police Ombudsman tomorrow, he needs to do a number of things.

He needs to say sorry - a policing sorry. He needs to explain what has changed within the Special Branch system - and how the mess of Haddock can never happen again.

And he needs to leave the specific explanation of the mishandling of that agent to those who were directly responsible - to the police and the Special Branch of yesterday and not today.

Speaking last night, Sir Hugh said: "There has been a fundamental root-and-branch review of how intelligence and informants are handled."

That review, he said, had been "overseen by the Policing Board" and followed the recommendations in a series of reports - Stevens, Blakey and Crompton.

"It has been done," he added.

One senior republican interviewed by Sunday Life yesterday was also very clear about the next steps.

He said: "Orde needs to speak to the Catholic community, and reassure republicans, not that it won't happen again, but that it can't happen again - that the system is crafted in a way that doesn't allow for any repeat."

The police say the new structure now in place is "absolutely designed" to "make it impossible" for the past to be repeated.

The report from the Police Ombudsman comes at a critical moment of decision for republicans. This day next week, at a special Ard Fheis, Sinn Fein will decide their policing future.

"He [Sir Hugh] should be giving a guarantee to people that on his watch there will never be a force within a force," said Sinn Fein's Gerry Kelly.

Kelly - the party's policing and justice spokesman - added: "Then it's up to the accountability mechanisms, hard negotiated, to ensure that no-one at any level in a police force can do it again.

"They [Special Branch] were so fixated with dealing with republicans, that they let everything else go."

Now, he says, victims must "know the truth", and people must know "that it can never happen again". Kelly's argument is that policing and justice powers must be moved away from "the hidden places in the British system".

And the SDLP say there is an argument for yet more accountability.

"Hugh Orde has to recognise that this report is of recent vintage and confirms why robust accountability is needed for any person and any organisation involved in intelligence in the north," said the party's Alex Attwood.

"Orde should step back and tell the NIO that's what's needed, and, critically, around MI5."

This is another of those moments when the past plays into the present - and when the spotlight will shine again on the Special Branch.

Agent may spend rest of his life behind bars

Caged Special Branch agent Mark Haddock was last night believed to be "deeply disturbed" by the publication of tomorrow's report into his gang's activities.

A senior prison source told Sunday Life the heavyweight loyalist has been telling fellow inmates that he fears for his life because of the report's findings.

The source also told of how Haddock has been telling pals that he will spend the rest of his days behind bars.

Said the source: "Haddock is at his wits' end and he has been dreading the publication of this report.

"He knows he will be the laughing stock of the jail on Monday. He now knows that he's finished and he firmly believes he will face new charges which will keep him in jail for a very long time.

"He keeps telling the guards he will be poisoned or something and how he will have to move out of Northern Ireland if he ever gets out of jail.

"Haddock knows Raymond McCord took him on and won and he can't stomach it. He is a man at the end of his tether with nowhere to go.

In a separate development, sources also believe that the UVF has vowed to kill one of Haddock's gang because of their roles as Special Branch agents.

Added the source: "The word on the street is that the UVF is going to nail someone over this whole McCord thing. They are dreading the publication of this report and there's no way the Chief of Staff will take the rap for it.

"It will be one of the members from Mount Vernon and already a number of them are believed to have gone into hiding.

"This report has sent shockwaves through the UVF and it will be interesting to see if the PUP makes any comment on it."

No charges for officers

No police officers are to face criminal charges arising from the Police Ombudsman's report into the murder of Raymond McCord jnr.

Sunday Life understands that serving and former officers who had previously been warned they could face criminal charges arising out of the contents of the Ombudsman report have been told crown prosecutors



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will not be pursuing criminal charges. The Attorney-General, Lord Goldsmith, is currently examining papers compiled by Mrs O'Loan recommending the prosecution of up to seven former RUC and PSNI officers.

But it is understood that all those involved have already been told that there will be no prosecutions.

Criminal trials could have seen former Secretaries of State subpoenaed as witnesses and quizzed over Mark Haddock's activities. One former senior Special Branch officer told Sunday Life: "Don't forget: ultimately, we implemented security policy in Northern Ireland that was determined by (the Government).

"Senior Special Branch officers attended weekly meetings of the joint policy group at Stormont that were chaired by the Secretary of State - not by us.

"Ultimately, security policy was decided in London and it was the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to ensure that the policy was correctly and effectively carried out and there are minutes of those meetings."

With Haddock understood to have been operational as a paramilitary from 1991 and a police agent from 1992, his role covers both Conservative and Labour administrations. Sir Patrick Mayhew, Peter Mandelson, and Paul Murphy could all become potential witnesses in a trial if "policy" relating to the handling of informants becomes an evidence issue.

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