

# The Abduction and Murder of Mr. Seamus Ludlow, 2nd May 1976

Updated background to the case, January 1999. This is split into the following sections:

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## A Profile

On the 1st May 1976, Seamus Ludlow returned from work at 1.15p.m. It was a lovely sunny day on a Saturday afternoon. Seamus was employed by Mr. Danny Philips, Timber Merchant, in Ravensdale, Co. Louth. His brother-in-law, Tommy Fox, also worked there as a tree feller. Both men got on very well with each other and enjoyed a bit of 'craic'.

Seamus cleaned himself up and headed for Dundalk at about 3.00p.m. which was his customary routine on a Saturday afternoon, where he would enjoy a few pints and play a few games of darts and rings with his friends, frequenting two or three pubs in the town.

It was known he drank in the Lisdoo Arms Pub. Leaving at about 11.30p.m. to hitch a lift home to his home at Thistle Cross, Mountpleasant, he was spotted by a number of people hitching a lift between the Lisdoo Arms and Smith's Garage on the Newry Road. Sometime between 11.40p.m. and 12.30a.m. a strange car with strange men stopped and gave him a lift. The journey to his home would have taken 8-10 minutes, depending on the traffic, Seamus never returned home.

On Sunday morning, 2nd May 1976, his sister Nan Sharkey, whom Seamus lived with along with his

mother, was getting her children ready to attend Mass at 8.00a.m. in the local Convent when she noticed Seamus had not returned home from Dundalk from the previous day. She became quite agitated and upset as this was not what Seamus would have ever done. On returning from Mass at about 9.00a.m. she contacted his two brothers in Dundalk to see if he had stayed with them. His two sisters were also contacted to see if he had stayed with them, but they also had not seen him. At about 11.30a.m. the Gardai were informed that Seamus was missing. A large search party was organised by family, friends and Gardai to look for him.

At about 3.00p.m. two people from Northern Ireland were out walking down the bog road which leads to the back entrance to Ballymascanlon House Hotel and one mile from Seamus Ludlow's home. They turned left down a lane off the bog road about 25 ft. down the lane on the right hand side the two people notice a group of cattle in the field standing close to the ditch. The cattle were quite agitated and they were looking at something lying on the ditch in the field. One of the two people climbed up on the ditch from the laneside of the field. They noticed a body of a man lying prone on the ditch on the field side.

The two people made their way to a nearby house to phone the Gardai. The Gardai arrived within 10 minutes and, on inspection, of the man's body noticed a lot of blood and what seemed to be gunshot wounds or stab wounds. Immediately the area was sealed off and a murder inquiry began. Members of the Ludlow family were informed of the discovery of a body. Kevin Ludlow, the deceased brother, Tommy Fox and John Sharkey, both brothers-in-law of the deceased, went to the murder scene. Positive identification was made by Mr. Kevin Ludlow of his brother at this time, approximately 4.15p.m. News had spread fast of the gruesome discovery and a large crowd of neighbours had gathered close to the scene at about 6.00p.m. Dr. John Harbison, the newly appointed State Pathologist, arrived to examine the body and the murder scene. At about 7.30p.m. the body of Seamus Ludlow was removed to the Louth County Hospital for a more thorough examination by Dr. Harbison. The murder scene was sealed off and the murder squad took over the case. An incident room was set up in the Garda Station in Dundalk. The murder Squad was lead by Detective Chief Superintendent Dan Murphy (now deceased) and his team of 30 Detectives comprising Detectives from Dublin and Dundalk.

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## The Investigation

The murder investigation got into full swing with over 2,000 people questioned. 1,700 homes were visited and 1,000 cars stopped at vehicle checkpoints over the coming four weeks. The Gardai concentrated their investigation on the Provisional I.R.A. In the area where Seamus Ludlow lived there were up to 40/50 top I.R.A. men domicile.

All family members were questioned vigorously by the Special Branch about the murder. In fact, the

Special Branch became very hostile towards family members and showed no sign of sympathy or compassion towards the family. Family members, at the time, could not believe the behaviour of the Special Branch (but there was a method in the behaviour as time was to tell...)

On Wednesday the 5th May 1976, Seamus Ludlow was buried in Calvary Cemetery in Ravensdale, Co. Louth. An estimated 2,500 people attended the removal and burial. The largest funeral seen in Ravensdale in living memory.

four weeks after the murder, abruptly and suddenly, the investigation came to a halt. No reason was ever given to the family by the Gardai or the Special Branch as to why this happened, in fact, relations between the family and the Gardai deteriorated. Individual Gardai who were on good terms with the family, stopped talking to the family members to the amazement and surprise of the family members.

The Gardai or Special Branch never came back to the family to explain how far their investigation had got - this was very strange indeed.

Some old family members approached the Gardai soon after the investigation ended and they were told a variety of reasons as to why Seamus Ludlow was murdered, but nothing concrete. The Gardai were pointing the finger firmly at the Provisional I.R.A. and over the coming years Kevin Ludlow, who called to the Gardai Station in Dundalk on a yearly basis to see if any new information had come to light on the murder, was repeatedly told by a Special Branch Detective whom, he (Kevin) was friendly with, that it was the I.R.A. and, in fact, named names to Kevin, saying "We will 'f.....' get them for this sometime".

The family now know that this was part of the propaganda machine orchestrated by the Gardai to divide the family and to dishonour Seamus's good name, which they did for 22 years and are still trying to do.

The inquest into the murder of Seamus Ludlow was held on Thursday 19th August 1976 in Dundalk. The Coroner that day was Dr. Scully. No member of the family were ever told that the inquest was to be held.

Kevin Ludlow received a phone call that morning at 10.15a.m. that the inquest was to be held at 11.00a.m. Kevin was working on the Warrenpoint Road in Newry Co. Down when he received the phone call. It would have taken Kevin one and a half hours to get home and dressed to attend the inquest. He phoned his wife in Dundalk asking her to try and get the inquest put back, but she was told it was first on the list. Sergeant Jim Gannon said he spoke for the family which was not true. Again, this was further proof of the behaviour of the Gardai at that time.

The Coroner's Report showed that Seamus Ludlow was shot three times in the lung, liver and the fatal shot to the heart. He also had a bullet wound to his left hand where he had put up his hand to stop a bullet. Seamus had been shot at point blank range, possibly 2 ft., and he was in a seated position when he was shot. Seamus's clothing and shoes were clean, given that the lane where the murder took place was wet and mucky, indicating that he was shot elsewhere, possibly, in the back of a car.

For 20 years the murder remained a mystery. The Gardai repeatedly told Kevin Ludlow "no new evidence" had come to light on the murder and the only organisation they were looking at was Provisional I.R.A.

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## New Evidence

Then in October 1995 a investigative journalist who worked in Northern Ireland approached members of the family, saying he had new information about the "Ludlow Murder". (The same journalist came to see Mrs. Sharkey about 1985 but she did not entertain him). A meeting was set up between him and the family. He told the family that Loyalist paramilitaries from Northern Ireland (and not Republicans) murdered Seamus Ludlow and that the Gardai knew this all along. A series of meetings was held between the journalist and the family over the coming months. Jimmy Sharkey, a nephew of Seamus Ludlow, asked the journalist where he got this information. He said he had a source (a retired Detective), whom he trusted for 12 years and his source told him that the men who murdered Seamus Ludlow were from Dundonald, east of Belfast in North Down and were known to the Gardai all along. With this information the family held a Press Conference in the Buswell Hotel in Dublin on 2nd May 1996, the 20th Anniversary of the murder. They called on the then Gardai Commissioner, Mr. Patrick Culligan, to reopen the murder case, which he did.

On the 16th May 1996 the family held their first meeting with the Gardai and there was several meetings over the next two years between them. The Gardai liaised with their counterparts in Northern Ireland, the R.U.C. and on Tuesday 17th February 1998, four prime suspects were arrested and taken to Castlereagh Holding Centre in Belfast. One of the suspects was arrested in his home in Staffordshire in England and flown to Belfast. All four were questioned for six days. On the sixth day, all four were released without charge and a file sent to the D.P.P. in Northern Ireland for consideration.

On hearing the news that all four prime suspects were released without charge, the family though disappointed, were not disheartened. As the pressure was kept on the Gardai and the R.U.C. to come up with some answers, both the Gardai and the R.U.C. told the family that these four prime suspects were the ones involved in the murder of Seamus Ludlow and they were 100% sure of that.

The car used in the murder that night was a two door yellow Datsun, sporty type - the gun used was a .38 revolver.

On Thursday 5th March 1998, Mr. Ed Moloney contacted Kevin Ludlow and Jimmy Sharkey. Ed Moloney is the Northern Ireland Editor of the "Sunday Tribune" newspaper. He told them that one of the suspects, a Mr. Paul Hoskings from Newtownard, Co. Down, wanted to tell his story to Ed Moloney and

on Sunday the 8th March 1998, the "Tribune" printed the full text of "Hoskings" gruesome story. This article is reprinted on this website.

A short time after the murder was committed in 1976, possibly 3/4 months, the Gardai had 60 - 70% of this information. In 1979 two Senior Detectives travelled to R.U.C. Headquarters in Belfast and received all relative information to the murder. The information was put in the murder file and never acted upon, but this did not stop the Gardai from telling lies to the family. The Detective who got the information in 1979 and put it in the file, Chief Supt. John Courtney, is now retired, and living in Dublin.

On Thursday 20th August 1998, Kevin Ludlow and Jimmy Sharkey travelled to Dublin to meet Mr. Courtney. On hearing the name "Ludlow", Mr. Courtney became very aggressive and hostile towards both men, using very threatening language to them. Mr. Courtney then entered his house and would not come out.

The R.U.C. have said the file would be submitted to the D.P.P. by the end of September 1998.

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## Summary

In the mid-seventies, the Northern Ireland troubles were at their peak, especially so around the border areas. Portadown, in Mid-Ulster was a staunchly Loyalist town. Dundalk was seen as a staunchly Republican town. It was at this time that the troubles had spilled over into the south. Loyalist paramilitaries made some spectacular attacks across the border into the Irish Republic - chief amongst these were:-

Dublin and Monaghan bombings 1974.

The shooting of I.R.A. Commander John Francis Green near Castleblayney in January 1975.

Car bomb in Castleblayney March 1976 - one killed, Patrick Moone.

Murder of Mr. Christy Phelan in Sallin in Co. Kildare in 1975 - stabbed 57 times with a dagger.

Car bomb in Dundalk town centre in December 1975 - two dead - Hugh Watters and Mr. Rooney.

Murder of Seamus Ludlow 2nd May 1976

As can be seen, Loyalist paramilitaries were very active at this time i.e. U.V.F. and Red Hand

Commandos, also the S.A.S were operating covertly along the South Armagh, North Louth Border and they murdered and abducted 2/3 well known Republicans in and around the South Armagh and Dundalk area. In fact, three days after Seamus Ludlow was murdered, on the 5/6th May 1976, eight heavily armed SAS men were arrested by the Gardai on the southside of the border at a place called 'Flagstaff' near Omeath, in Co. Louth.

It is also important to point out that the Government at that time was the Coalition Government of Mr. Liam Cosgrove TD - it ran from 1973 - 1977. This Government was very Pro-British and was very Anti-Republican.

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## **Case update January 1999**

The Ludlow family have met with the Victims Commissioner in the South and put their case for a proper investigation of the murder of Seamus Ludlow. In addition it has been confirmed that a file has been sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions in the North though no decision has yet been made public by the DPP. The wider family circle are organising a public information meeting in the town hall in Dundalk on Thursday February 18 at 8pm. Further information from the PFC.

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