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Local & National

Omagh civil action: 'Spy lured terror boss into view of gardai'

Tuesday, May 13, 2008

By Lesley-Anne Henry

Convicted terror boss Michael McKeivitt was paraded in front of Gardai surveillance officers by an FBI agent who infiltrated the Real IRA, a court heard yesterday.

The Omagh civil action is sitting in Dublin this week to take evidence from more than 50 Gardai heard how informant David Rupert "lured" the RIRA leader into the front garden of a house in Dundalk following an alleged secret RIRA meeting because he knew Gardai would be watching.

Detective sergeant Thomas Finbar Healey told day 18 of the multi-million pound civil trial he believed Rupert had created a rare "opportunity" for the surveillance team tracking McKeivitt's movements.

The court was told the alleged meeting took place at a house at Oakland Park, Dundalk on February 18, 2001 three years after the bombing and that in attendance were Michael McKeivitt, his son Stephen McKeivitt and the US trucker-turned-spy David Rupert.

Detective sergeant Healey said: "It was my understanding it was a clandestine meeting of RIRA members and they wouldn't want this meeting to be observed by gardai. Mr Rupert was very good and lured him (McKeivitt) out the door. People don't usually hang around just talking."

Under cross-examination by Ciaran Vaughn QC, Mr Healey said he believed McKeivitt was trying to impress Rupert because he had come all the way from America. Alluding to Michael McKeivitt's efforts to stay away from the Gardai he said: "Any time you get Michael McKeivitt at the meeting it was a good day for it."

He added: "Out of common courtesy and manners he (Rupert) just lured him (McKeivitt) out."

Detective Sergeant Healey, a member of the Garda National Surveillance Unit for 25 years, said no photographs or video evidence were taken of the meeting. Instead he said he used a dictaphone to record "snippets of information."

Twenty-nine people, including a woman pregnant with unborn twins, were killed and hundreds more injured when the 500lb car bomb exploded on August 15, 1998.

Families of six victims are suing five men they believe to have been behind the blast in the first civil action of its kind. Michael McKeivitt, Liam Campbell, Seamus Daly, Seamus McKenna and Colin Murphy all deny any part in the bombing.

The groundbreaking Omagh civil action made history yesterday as it was the first time a British judge had gone to the Republic on judicial business. Mr Justice Morgan headed a commission assisted by Dublin District Judge Connail Gibbons to take the evidence from Garda officers who are protected under public interest immunity legislation.

The case was due to make another legal first when Mr Justice Morgan was expected to take control and rule on the admissibility of evidence.

The district court in Dublin Four Courts is to be transformed into Belfast High Court to allow the defendants' lawyers to raise concerns about questions being put to the Garda witnesses. Michael O'Higgins SC objected that questions being put to the Garda officers had been drawn up by the plaintiffs' legal representatives.

He said: "If a question is asked and the answer is very damaging that answer is likely to be published the length and breadth of the country. My client's good name will be tarnished. It is little consolation that two or three weeks down the line we can raise objections back in Belfast." Mr Justice Morgan was expected to hear the objections today.

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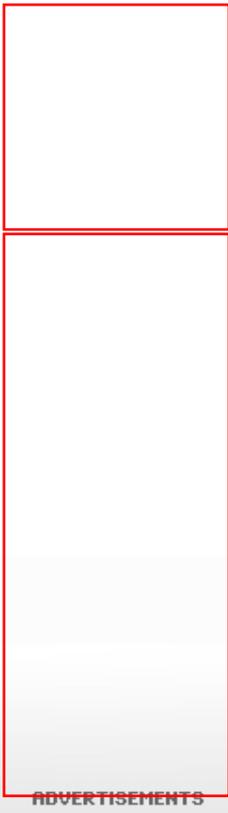
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