

RUC given advance warning of the 1989 murder of Irish lawyer

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Following revelations in a Belfast court last week that a man charged with the 1989 murder of Pat Finucane was an Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) agent, an article has appeared in the *Sunday Tribune* that claims to give the full story. Finucane, a civil rights lawyer, was shot in his north Belfast home by Ulster Defence Association (UDA) gunmen, acting on information from a British army intelligence agent.

Writing on Sunday June 27, Ed Moloney reveals that the suspect, Billy Stobie, was arrested nine years ago in connection with the Finucane murder. Northern Ireland legal authorities were forced to abandon the trial of Stobie, a 48-year-old former soldier from the Ulster Defence Regiment, allegedly because he threatened to make public the fact that he had warned the RUC in advance of the assassination.

The new charges against Stobie were brought by London Metropolitan Police Deputy Commissioner John Stevens, who was asked in April to reopen his 1989 inquiry into the case. The charges are based on evidence from a British official in the Northern Ireland Office (NIO). Neil Mulholland, a press officer in the NIO Information Department, has handed the Stevens team a 28-page statement that names Stobie as the man who supplied the weapons used to kill Finucane. Mulholland has agreed to give testimony when the case comes to trial.

It is reported that Mulholland learned of Stobie's role while working as a reporter for a Belfast newspaper in 1990. At the time, he gave the RUC the information that is now in the hands of the Stevens team, but they chose to take no action. In the *Sunday Tribune* article, Moloney writes:

"This reporter has also been fully aware of the Billy Stobie story since late 1990 but under the terms of an agreement with the former Special Branch informer

agreed never to publish the details without his permission. Last week, from his interrogation room in Gough RUC barracks, Armagh, Stobie gave the *Sunday Tribune* written permission to tell the full story."

In an accompanying article, "Frightened informer claimed RUC forced his silence," Moloney reveals that he has had several meetings with Stobie since 1990. The most recent was "in May last year during an unsuccessful attempt to get his extraordinary story about the killing of Belfast lawyer Pat Finucane into the public domain."

Recalling his first meeting with Stobie, Moloney writes: "Stobie was an ill man that day but he was also frightened. He had confided his story to another journalist [Mulholland] who had then blurted it out to senior officers in the RUC press office, to a senior Special Branch officer and to colleagues at work.

"The result was that he had been arrested and given a tough time by detectives in Castlereagh interrogation centre from which he emerged scared that his role as a police agent might be revealed to his paramilitary superiors. He feared that his life was in danger and he needed reliable insurance, someone who would make his story public if anything happened to him.

"More than that, he claimed that the Special Branch had fitted him up by planting guns in his apartment in a bid, he believed, to force his silence over the Finucane killing. At the time of our first interview he was facing charges of possessing guns with intent and the prospect of a lengthy spell in jail. He would consider going public if the alternative was the Maze prison. That's why we were talking."

In 1990, Stobie's threats to go public seem to have worked and a not guilty verdict was entered. Now, however, he finds himself arrested not by the RUC but by a team investigating the criminal wrong-doings of

the security forces themselves. Stobie concluded that the time had come to have his story published.

Moloney claims that the account he presents in the article is "based upon contemporaneous notes made of interviews in the autumn and winter of 1990 with Stobie and others, conversations and court hearings at the time."

The article explains that Stobie was recruited as an RUC agent in 1989, after being arrested for his involvement with a UDA team that shot dead a 19-year-old County Fermanagh Protestant, Adam Lambert, at a building site in the Highfield area of north Belfast. The UDA mistook Lambert for a Catholic, and he was gunned down in a revenge attack for the Enniskillen bombing the previous weekend. The charges of providing the getaway van used by the gunmen were not proved and Stobie was set free. Shortly afterwards, he began working as an informer for a salary of £20 per week plus bonuses for good information.

In his capacity as UDA quartermaster, Stobie had control of the organisation's arms caches in his area. Weapons from one of Stobie's caches were used in the Finucane murder.

Citing notes made at the first interview with Stobie, Moloney provides the following account: "He (Stobie) brought along a Heckler and Koch but the commander said that wasn't good enough—an H & K only holds 9 rounds—he wanted a Browning 9mm because it has 13 bullets. Assassins prefer more bullets because (of the) better chance of hitting (the) target.

His "commander told him: 'This is for a special job, we're going to hit a top provie' [Provisional IRA-editor]. He phoned the SB (Special Branch) and told them all (of the) above—he said he didn't tell them it was Finucane because he didn't know, only that it was a top Provie. He said that the commander was well known to the cops and that they would have known that at most two teams under him would have been tasked with the killing—all would have been known to the cops—included well known characters like McK, S, GK, KL and WD".

According to Moloney, Stobie then delivered the guns to the UDA killers on the Sunday afternoon/evening of February 12, the day of Pat Finucane's death. Again citing notes Moloney says: "... he saw S, McK and K along with three others in the club—all are heavy drinkers but that evening they were

only drinking Coke—this was a sure sign that something was on because they only drink Coke when they're on a job."

Moloney says Stobie saw them get into a van and realised they were beginning the operation. He phoned his Special Branch handlers and told them what he had seen. Stobie subsequently complained to the Special Branch about their inaction. According to his account, "...they said they hadn't time to get things organised and 'anyway he (Finucane) was just an IRA man'".

Stevens' original 1989 report detailed substantial evidence of complicity between the Force Research Unit, an army intelligence unit, and loyalist gunmen—but concluded that there was no evidence of "widespread or institutionalised" collusion between the RUC and loyalist paramilitaries. The report was suppressed and only became known when parts of it were published in the *Daily Telegraph* last year.

Despite its limitations, Stevens' new inquiry has unearthed evidence of a high level cover-up in relation to the Finucane murder. The lines of inquiry being pursued by the Stevens team do not suggest there was advance collusion between the police and terrorists. Instead they are concentrating on determining whether there was a cover-up afterwards—to conceal the existence of a well-placed informer, Stobie.



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