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No 1: a serial killer with a salary

[MICHAEL SETTLE, Chief UK Political Correspondent](#)

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Focus: Ombudsman's verdict

HE was simply known as Informant No 1. Yet Mark Haddock was one of the most notorious loyalist godfathers, and was yesterday described as "a serial killer with a salary" paid courtesy of the British taxpayer.

The collusion of Special Branch officers with terrorist killers of the Ulster Volunteer Force in a swath of cold-blooded killings is one of the more shameful chapters in Northern Ireland's troubled history. The significance of it was that, in the fetid atmosphere of murder and intimidation, those charged with upholding the law were the ones who crossed the line and conspired to break it.

Within the 160 pages of Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan's report, Haddock emerges as a ruthless killer let loose by his Special Branch handlers, who made sure time and again that, when he was fingered for a crime, he literally got away with murder.

Ms O'Loan's inquiry began by examining the murder of Raymond McCord Junior, 22, a former RAF man found beaten to death in a quarry on the northern outskirts of Belfast in November 1997.

Information held by police, and corroborated by other sources, indicated that Haddock, who was behind bars at the time, ordered the murder from his prison cell. The report also found that another man, out on leave from jail, carried it out. The suspects were later arrested, questioned but released without charge.

Ms O'Loan's investigations widened out to include a catalogue of other killings.

On the murder of Peter McTasney, a Catholic voluntary worker who was gunned down by the UVF while sitting in his living room in Newtownabbey in February 1991, the report revealed Haddock was arrested and questioned 19 times. However, his handlers carried out the main interviews.

One of them noted how they "babysat" him through the interview and that notes were completed which did not reflect what had taken place. Haddock was subsequently released without charge.

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A joint file on the McTasney murder and an earlier attempted killing was prepared for the Director of Public Prosecutions and two men were later convicted. However, Special Branch, with the agreement of a deputy assistant chief constable, did not disclose to the DPP the involvement of a police agent.

Another of the UVF murders under scrutiny, that of 27-year-old Catholic taxi driver Sharon McKenna who was shot dead in January 1993, found that Special Branch had authorised the arrest of Informant No 1. He was detained for six days and interviewed no fewer than 37 times, with his handler carrying out some of the questioning.

Another of those present told the investigators how he "felt like a gooseberry" sitting in on the interviews as he knew Haddock was a police source and would say nothing of relevance in front of him. Once again the suspect was released without charge.

Remarkably, within weeks Haddock's monthly retainer was increased from £100 to £160, even though he was a main suspect in the investigation, the ombudsman's report revealed.

During their investigation into the double murder of Gary Convie and Eamon Fox, who were shot dead on a Belfast building site in May 1994, Ms O'Loan's staff established that the gunman was said to have a goatee beard.

When Informant No 1 was arrested he wore such a beard but was allowed to shave it off while in custody. No identity parade was held and yet again Haddock went free.

Last year, against police advice, Haddock - who had raked in at least £80,000 over 10 years of paramilitary killings - was released on bail to await trial for his involvement in the attempted murder of Trevor Gowdy, a nightclub bouncer who was brutally attacked with a hatchet and iron bars.

Within months and with Informant No 1's UVF career now in tatters, he was summoned to meet his former associates to clear up suspicions that he was in fact a paid police informer.

At the rendezvous near Newtonabbey, Haddock emerged from his car and was shot six times. Remarkably, he survived the assassination attempt.

Last November, Haddock was finally brought to justice. He was jailed for 10 years for his part in the attack on Mr Gowdy. The trial judge branded his actions an "act of conspicuous savagery".

Ms O'Loan made clear her investigations had not shown that RUC officers deliberately set out to conspire with a UVF murder squad but it had shown how Special Branch dominated the RUC. It had effectively been a force within a force.

Yet, she pointed out how officers working with informers could not have operated without the knowledge and support at the highest levels of the RUC and its rebranded successor, the



Police Service of Northern Ireland(PSNI).

One of the more shocking aspects of the ombudsman's report is that 40 officers, many of senior ranks, refused to co-operate with her inquiry.

Files have been destroyed and no serving or retired police officer is to be charged over the scandal.

Last night, the government described Ms O'Loan's report as "deeply disturbing" but clearly sought to draw a line, stressing that what had happened was in the past. It ruled out an inquiry.

No 10 said: "What matters at this stage is that the whole community supports that process of transformation."

Perhaps there was no better sign that times have changed than when Sinn Fein's Gerry Adams, who in a previous context would have been railing against the abuses of the "securocrats", urged people to move on and keep their eyes on the prize: a power-sharing executive in Stormont.

This, no doubt, will be his rallying call when he faces down his critics at the special Sinn Fein meeting on Sunday.

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