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Judge rules Omagh trial can proceed

The man accused of murdering 29 people in the Omagh bomb atrocity today failed in a bid to have the charges thrown out.

Belfast Crown Court today refused efforts by the defence team representing Sean Hoey (37) to scrap all 56 charges he faces in relation to the 1998 bombing, which was blamed on the Real IRA.

Separate counts of causing an explosion and conspiracy to murder have been dropped after Mr Justice Weir's intervention.

All the charges against Mr Hoey, an electrician, from Molly Road, Jonesborough, Co Armagh, involve alleged Real IRA attacks.

Chief prosecutor Gordon Kerr accepted on Tuesday that both dismissed counts should be taken from the charge sheet.

The conspiracy count related to a device discovered on the Blackwatertown Road, Armagh, on July 9th, 1998. The explosive charge involved a car bomb in Banbridge, Co Down, which exploded on August 1th, 1998, causing extensive damage.

Police discovered the Blackwatertown Road device in a trailer. The 1,400lb explosive was found inside the trailer with two booster tubes and a timer power unit in a lunchbox.

Prosecutors had argued that an earlier incident nearby, when occupants of a house fled two masked men, was designed to lure security force members into the area and kill them.

The Banbridge car bomb exploded as police evacuated the area following an earlier warning. There were a number of minor injuries and damage to property.

The attack happened two weeks before the Omagh bomb, which exploded on August 15th in the middle of the Co Tyrone town's busy shopping area.

Mr Hoey, who has been in custody since September 2003, is the first person to be charged over the slaughter. The trial was adjourned until the New Year when the defence team will begin their case.

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