



Family Report/Narrative

The brutal murder of a young father

David Andrew Shiels

David Andrew Shiels was shot dead outside his mobile home near Maghera County Londonderry at 10 30 pm on Monday 3rd December 1990.

He was known as Dave and was born on 5 July 1960 and was 30 at the time of his murder. He was the fifth eldest of nine children having seven brothers and one sister. Dave was a protestant and worked as a baker at Hyndman's of Maghera. He married in 1987 and he and his wife moved into a mobile home beside his family home on the farm near Maghera. They planned to build a house in the field in front of this mobile home and had one son who was born four weeks before the murder of his father.

DAY OF THE MURDER

About 4.25pm Dave arrived home from his work at the bakery. He tended to some cattle before going to Gulladuff on a tractor to get a low loader.

He joined his wife and his new born son in the mobile and later on their insurance man called followed by an aunt and uncle who called to see the baby. The aunt and uncle left about 9:30pm and the insurance man about 10:20pm.

About 10.30 pm his wife was in the kitchen and Dave said he was going outside to feed the dog. As he opened the front door his wife heard him shout out appearing to enquire as to what are you doing there to someone . Almost immediately she heard the sound of gunfire and was aware of bullets coming through the walls of the mobile home. She dived onto the kitchen floor and proceeded to hit her forehead causing it to bleed.

The shooting only lasted a short time and when it stopped she went outside and found him lying on the ground groaning. She ran to his parent's home and they called for an ambulance. Dave's brother ran over to him but could get no response.

Attendance at the scene by the emergency services was rapid. Two police patrols and an ambulance arrived within minutes. A doctor arrived at 11:05pm and pronounced life extinct. After the scene was secured two firing points were identified and thirty-five cartridge cases as well as a number of bullet head fragments were recovered.

INVESTIGATION AND AFTERMATH

The investigation was assisted by a reconstruction and wide media coverage which included numerous appeals for information. Police believed from the start that the South Derry Provisional IRA were the culprits. The South Derry Provisional IRA were one of the most notorious terrorist units during the Troubles. Along with terrorists in South Armagh and East Tyrone they proved most difficult for the security forces to penetrate. It took a full week after the murder for a telephone call to Downtown Radio on 10 December to be made wherein the person who called apologised for the murder of Dave and stated they were acting on what was referred to as erroneous information.

The caller also went on to admit the murder of Bertie Gilmore on 1st December 1990. This incident occurred at a building site near Kilrea County Londonderry when Bertie and his wife were shot at while inspecting the progress on their new home. Police linked both these similar murder incidents and arrested seven people. Five of these individuals were in custody at the time of Dave's murder with two others arrested the day after. However, the RUC were unable to obtain sufficient evidence to link any of these people to either murder. Intelligence led to the arrest of four other South Derry PIRA suspects. Two of these individuals refused to even speak to detectives and the others denied involvement. All were subsequently released without charge. (1)

In total eight arrests were made relating to Dave's case and seven for Bertie with no charges whatever. Intelligence suggested that one of his other brothers was the intended target (2). This brother was a member of the RUC and had lived in a mobile home on the same site as Dave and his family a few years earlier. This ties in with the terrorists statement around erroneous information. Following information received police recovered two rifles at

Swatragh in January 1992. After examination Police were able to link one rifle to Dave's murder and the other to Bertie's. The weaponry was also linked to local PIRA activity.

The Historical Enquiries Team (HET) conducted a review of Dave's murder. During the course of this review they interviewed some of the original investigating officers. The South Derry PIRA were seen as prolific proficient and hardened terrorists by the former officers and numbered up to 20 members at any one time. (3)

These terrorists were seen as well organised around planning of attacks which included creating diversions and using lookouts as well as safe houses. They were also forensically aware and prepared comprehensive alibis. This group was well known and had the advantages of good local knowledge as well as support of many members of the local community. Police found them difficult to interrogate and they rarely even spoke to police. (4)

The Detective Chief Superintendent who led the investigation had no doubt that some of those arrested for suspected involvement in Bertie's murder at the time of Dave's killing were definitely involved in planning of the latter. He was firmly of the opinion that Ian was the intended target. (5)

Dave's family however totally rejected the terrorists purported apology and believe that Dave was the intended target.

They took comfort in the fact that Dave had become a born again Christian a year prior to his death.

REFERENCES

- (1) HET Review Summary Report 15/11/10 page 16.
- (2) HET RSR page 22.
- (3) HET RSR page 25.
- (4) HET RSR page 25.
- (5) HET RSR page 26.