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Garda denies concocting Omagh evidence

A senior Garda officer who investigated the Omagh bombing today denied he concocted and manufactured the interview notes of a prime suspect.

Detective Garda James Hanley rejected claims officers added a flavour of authenticity to statements by inserting stock Garda phrases.

Dermot Fee QC, for Colm Murphy, told the landmark civil action that similar statements appeared in the transcript of notes taken by the retired officer in other high-profile court cases in the Republic.

The barrister criticised Mr Hanley's evidence that Garda members did not exchange information between interviews.

Mr Fee also raised concerns over why interviews were not tape recorded, times they were conducted not noted, and queried why there were only a small number of notes from interviews which were up to four hours long.

“Mr Murphy says he made no incriminating admissions or remarks at anytime during his interview,” said Mr Fee. “What he says happened here is more has been added on to the interview notes by gardaí.”

Mr Fee accused the officers of concocting admissions in order to make Mr Murphy liable for the incident.

“I deny that happened,” said Mr Hanley.

The Omagh bomb exploded on August 15th, 1998, killing 29 people including a pregnant woman with twins.

Alleged Real IRA leader Michael McKevitt; Liam Campbell, said to be his number two; Colm Murphy; Séamus McKenna and Séamus Daly all deny any involvement.

The court heard Mr Murphy was arrested in February 1999 for the unlawful possession of explosive substances in Dundalk between August 13th and 15th 1998.

He was interviewed 16 times by three teams of gardaí during his three-day detention at Monaghan Garda Station.

Mr Fee said his client’s position throughout his criminal trial was that interviewing officers concocted and made an agreement to manufacturer admissions.

Mr Murphy (56), was convicted in connection with Omagh in 2002, but later had his conviction overturned following claims two officers lied during his trial.

Detective Gardaí John Fahy and Liam Donnell had pleaded not guilty to charges of perjury, forgery and using a forged document.

During their trial in October 2006, a judge at Dublin Circuit Criminal Court directed the jury to find the detectives not guilty on grounds that the forged interview notes and technical analysis of them were inadmissible.

Mr Fee claimed when Mr Murphy adopted a stance on day two not to comment on Omagh, gardaí stopped reading back notes and manufacturing admissions.

He said Mr Murphy’s statements included a number of “stock Garda phrases” which he claimed also appeared in previous interviews conducted by Mr Hanley following the murder of journalist Veronica Guerin.

The barrister read a line from one of Murphy’s interviews: “This is a dangerous scene I’m happy if I get

20 years. My conscious is clear. I wasn't in Omagh.”

“This phrase came from you, the garda interviewing Mr Murphy. He never uttered those words,” said Mr Fee.

Mr Hanley replied: “He said those exact words.”

The evidence from gardaí is being heard by District Judge Conal Gibbons in the presence of Mr Justice Declan Morgan who has presided over the case in Belfast Crown Court but has no judicial powers in Dublin.

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