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Republican dissidents say shootings were 'an act of war'

Friday, 27 March 2009

The shootings of two soldiers and a policeman in Northern Ireland were an act of war, hardline republicans have said.

At a press conference in west Belfast yesterday, Richard Walsh, a spokesman for the Continuity IRA-aligned Republican Sinn Fein, also attacked Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness.

While admitting the "deaths" of Sappers Patrick Azimkar, Mark Quinsey and Constable Stephen Carroll were "regrettable", he claimed dissident republicans "made no apology" for "defending" themselves.

"It is regrettable that anyone has to lose their life but the reality is that when you have occupation within a country there is invariably resistance, including armed resistance," he said.

Mr Walsh, who was flanked by Josephine Hayden, a former Continuity IRA prisoner who was convicted in connection to an arms find nine years ago in the Republic, also called for the immediate release of suspects still being questioned about the security forces murders.

Meanwhile, yesterday a 21-year-old man appeared in court accused of withholding information in relation to the murder of Constable Carroll.

The officer was shot dead as he answered a call in Craigavon on March 9 — just days after the two soldiers were gunned down at Massereene army barracks.

The man accused appeared at Lisburn Magistrates' Court yesterday afternoon amid a heavy police presence in the city.

Several police officers stood in the courtroom while members of the PSNI Tactical Support Unit, of which Constable Carroll was a member, patrolled the lobby of the court building.

The accused, wearing a royal blue sweatshirt and dark-coloured trousers, appeared pale and waved at two people sitting in the public gallery as he was led into court.

One of the people he waved at put his head in his hands as the charge was read to the accused, who was remanded in custody to appear via videolink at Craigavon Magistrates' Court next month.

Reporting restrictions were imposed on the case and no further details about the hearing can be published.

A 17-year-old youth and former Sinn Fein councillor Brendan McConville (37) have already been remanded in custody charged with murder.

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