



THE MURDER OF **MICHAEL LEONARD**

17th May 1973

Fr. Joe McVeigh

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SHOT AND KILLED

Michael Leonard was 24 years of age when he was shot dead by police officers of the Royal Ulster Constabulary on 17th May 1973 on a quiet, country road close to the border. His only crime was that he was driving whilst disqualified.

Michael was killed near the Donegal-Fermanagh border at Brookhill, Letter, in Co Fermanagh. He was driving on his own along the road from Belleek to Pettigo on his way home and was fired on by members of the RUC who were, we were told, following his car in a police Land Rover. They claimed later that he had refused to stop at a checkpoint but there was no checkpoint. He was just 200 yards from the border at Letter when he was shot in the back and killed.



SHOT AFTER TALKING TO HIS FIANCEE

MICHAEL Leonard, the young Donegal man shot dead by the R.U.C. on Thursday night, was to have married a Northern Ireland girl in September. The 22-year-old cattle dealer was shot minutes after he had spoken to his fiancée Meena Gallagher of Fermanagh, on the telephone.

After the incident, the R.U.C. for the fullest possible investigation into the shooting. In a long statement they asked the following question:—

A police spokesman said they tried to get the driver to stop his car, but when it was 200 yards from the Border and the driver had not responded to the police calls, a single shot was fired. Leonard was seriously injured and taken to hospital where he died.

The North-West Fermanagh branch of the S.D.L.P. at an emergency meeting have called on M.P.s of their party to press

- (1)—Exactly what time did shooting take place.
- (2)—Exactly what time was Mr. Leonard admitted to Enniskillen Hospital.
- (3)—Were firearms or any offensive weapons found in deceased's car or on his person.
- (4)—Did Mr. Leonard attempt to resist arrest in any way other than by trying to drive the short distance to the Border.
- (5)—Did the policemen concerned recognise the man prior to the shooting.
- (6)—Was Mr. Leonard's car pursued because of a comparatively minor traffic offence.

The statement was signed: P. Daly, Chairman, North-West Fermanagh S.D.L.P. J. Cunningham, Secretary, do.

John Leonard, Michael's 25-year-old brother, said last night he was convinced his brother would not stop for the R.U.C. because he was disqualified from driving.

Michael was my first cousin, a few years younger than me and someone I knew very well growing up - my mother and his father were sister and brother so we were always in each other's homes. He was an affable and vivacious young man, a man always in a hurry. Michael's home was in the townland of Tievemore, three miles from Pettigo, County Donegal where he lived with his father, mother, three brothers and two sisters. At the time of his death, he was engaged to be married to Mena Gallagher who lived near Ederney, County Fermanagh. He was well known as a cattle-trader in the farming communities on both sides of the border and the police who shot him dead knew him too.

"Members of a police patrol called on a man to halt as he left a shop at Letter, two miles from the Fermanagh border. He got into a car and was again called on to halt, but he drove off towards the border. The car was followed by a police Land Rover."

Immediately after the killing, an RUC spokesman stated that Michael was being pursued by the RUC because he was a disqualified driver and that he had refused to stop. He claimed that Michael was hit by a single, accidental shot fired from a Land Rover after he ignored several calls to halt:

"Members of a police patrol called on a man to halt as he left a shop at Letter, two miles from the Fermanagh border. He got into a car and was again called on to halt, but he drove off towards the border. The car was followed by a police Land Rover."

The police spokesman said the Michael's car held the middle of the road and police were unable to overtake it. The Land Rover bumped the back of the car and sounded the siren but it still failed to stop. About 200 yards from the border a member of the patrol allegedly fired one shot which hit Michael in the back. The car eventually came to a halt and Michael was found mortally wounded. He died soon afterwards at Erne Hospital, Enniskillen.

Shortly after the shooting of my cousin, I went to the RUC station in Kesh and asked to speak to the Inspector in charge. I told him that we were distraught about the killing of Michael and that we found it hard to believe that the RUC would shoot dead a young man wanted for motoring offences. The Inspector showed little emotion and told me that it was an accidental shooting by a young, inexperienced police officer.

"About 200 yards from the border, a member of the patrol allegedly fired one shot which hit Michael in the back."

Priest cousins seek inquest

Two Catholic priests, cousins of the late Michael Leonard, Pettigo, Co. Donegal, have called for an early inquest into the circumstances of his death as a result of a shooting incident involving an R.U.C. patrol on Thursday, May 17.

"As priests, we feel that the taking of human life is the most serious event that can occur in any community. Because of this, we request that the inquest be held as soon as possible and that a full statement be made of all the circumstances leading up to Michael's death. We believe that this is a matter of grave public concern. The family and the public have a right to know all the facts immediately.

"As priests, we stress that this statement is made with a Christian spirit of understanding and compassion. We abhor and reject any feelings of hostility that may arise because of this tragic event. We are asking for the truth and nothing more."

The statement is signed by Father Sean McGrath and Father Joe McVeigh.

Irish Independent, 24th May 1973

INQUEST

The three RUC officers in the Land Rover did not appear at the inquest into Michael's controversial killing. Instead, Inspector Darrell Beaney of RUC Kesh just relayed information from the three to the Coroner on 31st October 1973. The family's solicitor, Pat Fahy, highlighted the difficulty of not having the three policemen in front of the Coroner to answer questions directly. The Coroner, R.E. Hanna, told the court that it was his decision to allow Inspector Beaney to speak in the absence of the three police witnesses, one of whom killed Michael.

Solicitor Pat Fahy recalls:

"The inquest into the death of Michael Leonard in 1973 was highly unusual even by the standard of the times. There were no statements before the inquest from the police involved in the incident, in particular statements from the driver of the police Land Rover and the officer who claimed to have accidentally fired the fatal shot. While the police involved in the incident might have been excused from personal attendance, the fact that there were no accounts available to the inquest from each of them about what had happened was, to say the least, highly irregular."

"I did raise this issue at the time but was overruled by the Coroner, who said that the RUC officer attending the inquest, Inspector Beaney – who was not at the scene of the shooting – could tell the inquest what had happened. Again, this ruling, admitting as it did hearsay evidence without justification, seriously compromised the integrity and the legality of the inquest proceedings."

"What we have recently learned about the killing of Michael Leonard from investigations into British military records of the time challenges compellingly the veracity of the police story in the aftermath of the shooting."

Inquest on Donegal man shot at border

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meant that he was merely reporting what the other constables told him.

Inspector Beaney replied that this was true and added that he was also reporting what he had learned from independent witnesses.

When Mr. Fahy inquired if those independent witnesses would be appearing at the inquest, Mr. R. E. Hanna, Coroner, interrupted and said that these people would not be appearing.

Mr. Fahy then asked Inspector Beaney: "How far back from the car was the Land Rover when the constable instructed his colleague to load the rifle?"

Inspector Beaney: "From what I have been told, they were directly behind Mr. Leonard's vehicle." He added later that the width of the road where the shooting took place was about 14 feet.

"RISE TO CONCERN"

Mr. Fahy asked Inspector Beaney about the significance in his deposition as to the fact that the deceased had raised his right arm in the car seconds before he was shot.

"I would imagine that anyone turning round in such a fashion in a car would give rise to concern to the security forces," replied Inspector Beaney.

"Is that then an allegation that Mr. Leonard may have been carrying a weapon?" asked Mr. Fahy.

"Yes," replied Inspector Beaney.

"If Mr. Leonard had had a weapon, could it not have been seen?" inquired Mr. Fahy.

"It could have been, and it could not have been," replied Inspector Beaney.

Mr. Fahy then said that there was difficulty in not having the people concerned present at the inquest.

CORONER'S DECISION

Mr. Hanna pointed out that it had been his decision and his responsibility that the people concerned in the incident were not present at the inquest. He felt that it was proper that they should not be present at the inquest. He then said that he could adjourn the inquest if the parties were not satisfied with the evidence, but he also pointed out that the purpose of the inquest was to inquire into the cause and circumstances of Michael Leonard's death.

Mr. Fahy then asked Inspector Beaney if he knew from what distance from Mr. Leonard's car was the person who accidentally fired the round of gunfire from the rifle.

Inspector Beaney replied that he could not give an estimation of the distance.

Mr. Fahy then pointed out that in Inspector Beaney's deposition he had said that "Leonard had a number of convictions." "Would it not be better," said Mr. Fahy, "if this statement was qualified by calling them motoring convictions?"

"And apart from these motoring convictions, Mr. Leonard had a clear record," added Mr. Fahy, with which the Inspector agreed.

"Was Michael Leonard a member of any subversive or illegal

organisation," asked Mr. Fahy.

"I don't know. I have no knowledge of such a thing," replied Inspector Beaney.

"Was he a member of the I.R.A.?" asked Mr. Fahy.

"I have no knowledge that the deceased was a member of the I.R.A.," said Inspector Beaney.

Dr. G. P. Corrigan, Erne Hospital, Enniskillen, gave evidence that at 8.10 p.m. on 17th May, he attended to Michael Leonard who arrived at the hospital in a deeply unconscious state and dying. Attempts at resuscitation were fruitless. He died as a result of shock and haemorrhage after being shot in the spleen.

Constable J. Oldcroft, R.U.C. Forensic expert, told the inquest that he had arrived at the scene of the incident at 7.15 p.m., where he examined the car in which the deceased had been shot. There was blood on the driver's seat and two pools of blood on the roadway which were dried when he arrived. A single bullet hole had penetrated the boot of the car, and had passed on through the car. When it hit the deceased it had fragmented.

WOUNDS BY BULLET FRAGMENTS

The Coroner said the deceased was a healthy person of 24 years, and the pathologist's report indicated that he had no natural disease. The cause of death had been due to wounds in the trunk caused by bullet fragments. Summing up Inspector Beaney's evidence, Mr. Hanna said that the bullet fired was accidentally discharged when the police Land Rover had swung to the right. The bullet entered the boot of the deceased's car. He added that it was a million to one chance that the deceased had been in its path.

Returning a verdict of misadventure, Mr. Jack Rooney, foreman of the jury, tendered sympathy, on behalf of himself and his colleagues, to the parents and relatives of the deceased.

Mr. Hanna then asked Mr. Fahy to convey his own expression of sympathy to the family of the deceased.

Mr. N. Morrow, on behalf of the State, associated himself with the sentiments of sympathy.

Mr. Fahy, on behalf of the deceased's next of kin, thanked those concerned for their very kind expressions of sympathy to the relatives of the victim of "this dreadful and unfortunate accident."

KINAWLEY FARMHOUSE

SAVED

Lisnaskea Fire Brigade, by a swift turn-out and efficient action, saved a Kinawley farmhouse from destruction by fire on Monday evening.

A chimney fire at the home of Mr. John Maguire, Clonfane, Kinawley, was threatening to spread to serious proportions when the brigade arrived and extinguished the blaze before any serious harm was done.

Inspector Beaney relayed that a Constable had indeed recognised Michael in Rowe's shop and knew he was disqualified from driving from March 1973. He even knew that Michael had appealed the disqualification but had been refused leave to drive pending the hearing of the appeal. So, when the officers saw Michael getting into his car, the Constable allegedly shouted for Michael to stop but he drove off and the police pursued him in their vehicle.

The Inspector reported that the police driver instructed another Constable to put a round into the breech of the .303 Enfield rifle, open his door and fire high over Michael's car. Before he could fire the warning shot, the driver allegedly saw Michael turn his body and raise his right hand in a suspicious manner so he swerved.

The police led the court and the family to believe that the Constable with the rifle was violently jolted and nearly fell out of the open door. He "accidentally" pulled the trigger of the rifle and, instead of firing high, the round travelled through the back of the car and into Michael's back. The Coroner said that it was a million-to-one chance that Michael was in its deadly path. He returned a verdict of death by misadventure indicating that Michael's death was due to an accident and not criminal intent or negligence.

"The Coroner said that it was a million-to-one chance that Michael was in its deadly path."

Inquest on Donegal man shot on Fermanagh border

THE controversial shooting of a young cattle dealer from Pettigo, as he fled from a police Landrover last May was described to an inquest in Enniskillen on Wednesday last.

The young man, 24-year-old Michael Joseph Leonard died from a bullet wound in the Erne Hospital, Enniskillen, and his death sparked off a wave of protest from many quarters. The actual incident was described to the jury on Wednesday by Inspector Darrell Beaney, R.U.C. Kesh, in whose district the shooting occurred. As a result of a report at Letter, County Fermanagh, the following information was obtained by Inspector Beaney.

Three R.U.C. constables were on patrol in the Belleek sub-district. They were in a police Land Rover. At 4.50 p.m. they stopped outside Rowe's shop situated on the main Kesh/Belleek road in the townland of Stonefort. The police Land Rover was facing Belleek and there was another civilian Land Rover and a red Morris 1100 facing Letter also outside the shop. One of the constables went into Rowe's shop. Inside the shop he saw the deceased, Michael Leonard, purchasing goods. Also in the shop was Mrs. Lucy Rowe and another customer. The constable knew that Leonard had been disqualified from driving, having been present when his case came up at Kesh Court on 27th March. The constable also knew that Leonard had appealed against this disqualification but had been refused leave to drive pending the hearing of the appeal. The constable

remained in the shop for a minute, then left and returned to the police Land Rover to have a conversation with his colleagues regarding Leonard's presence in the shop. The constable then noticed a red 1100 in the forecourt of the shop. The car was unknown to him, and the police suspicions were aroused by the presence of the vehicle.

Then Leonard himself came out of the shop, walked past the police Land Rover and went over to the 1100. One constable sitting in the police Land Rover jumped out and called him. Leonard did not stop but kept on going towards the 1100. When he was six or seven yards from the car he started to run, looking back at Rowe's shop. The constable continued to call on him to halt and the exact words he used were: "Hey, you, stop, stop, stop."

Leonard failed to stop, jumped into the driver's seat of the 1100, and drove off. The constable ran after him, but was unable to catch up with the car. The police Land Rover then followed Leonard's car, which was travelling along the Belleek road in the direction of Kesh.

At the junction of the Letter road, where it joins the main Belleek/Kesh road, Leonard turned off to his left and travelled down the Letter road in the direction of the border. When the police Land Rover got to this junction the car would have been approximately 400 yards in front of them. Leonard's car continued down the Letter road with the police Land Rover in pursuit. When both vehicles reached the townland of Portnablaghy, the police Land Rover had caught up with the car and was sounding the siren. The 1100 held the middle of the road and the police Land Rover was trying to get past it. The chase continued towards the border. During this time a warning siren of the police vehicle was sounding. The Land Rover endeavoured to force the 1100 off

the road by bumping the rear of it several times, but were unsuccessful in stopping it. As the chase continued the two vehicles went towards the townlands of Letter and Brookhill, in the direction of the border. They were zig-zagging across the road. One independent witness described the vehicles as "travelling very fast." A short time after that, this particular witness said that, when the vehicle went out of sight, there was the sound of a bang.

INSTRUCTED TO FIRE

The driver of the Land Rover realised at this stage that they were getting very close to the border. He instructed another constable to put a round into the breach of the .303 Enfield rifle, open his door and fire high over the fleeing car.

The constable put a round into the breach and opened the front passenger's door. He placed the rifle between the body of the Land Rover and the open door. He had the rifle pointing high and to the left of Leonard's car. The police driver glanced at Leonard's car and saw Leonard turn about half-way around in his seat and raise his right arm. Being unsure of Leonard's intention, the driver then swung hard immediately to his right to try and get out from behind Leonard's car. The constable, who had the rifle out of the passenger's side of the Land Rover, was almost thrown out of the vehicle because of the violent turn and the opened door. At the same time he accidentally pulled the trigger and discharged a round. The front windscreen shattered in Leonard's car and it came to a gradual stop on its near-side. When the 1100 eventually stopped the police Land Rover pulled up alongside it.

One of the constables got out

and opened the door of Leonard's car. Leonard looked up at the police and said: "You've have got me stopped now, boys. I am shot. I am shot."

The left side of his coat was torn and the blood was spilling out.

FIRST AID

Two of the constables then applied first-aid and the third went off to phone for medical help.

The injured man was then taken to the Erne Hospital, Enniskillen, by ambulance, but he expired shortly after arrival.

Inspector Beaney added in his deposition to the inquest that there had been 102 serious incidents in the area, including murders, shootings and explosions.

He then said that Leonard had a number of convictions, and a lengthy list of these was read out.

The jury was then informed that Leonard lived with his mother and father at Tievamore, Pettigo, Co. Donegal. He had three brothers and two sisters, and had been educated in Northern Ireland until he was 13. He then went to school in the Republic before going to St. Mary's College, Birmingham, where he spent a year at a teacher's training course. The deceased was single and worked as a cattle dealer.

Mr. Patrick Fahy, appearing for the deceased's next of kin, asked Inspector Beaney if the police who pursued Michael Leonard on that day knew him. The Inspector replied that one constable at Rowe's shop knew him. The police may or may not have known his car, but he really did not know.

Mr. Fahy asked the Inspector if his appearance at the inquest

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Fermanagh Herald, 3rd November 1973

The Coroner reached this decision solely on the words of an RUC Inspector who allegedly reported what the three police witnesses told him. None of the three were present at the inquest and, therefore, could not be asked a single question by the Leonard family's solicitor, Pat Fahy, nor the Coroner himself.

Secret British archives written in the minutes and hours after Michael's killing tell a completely different story and may best explain why the police officers did not wish to attend the Inquest and be questioned.

"None of the three were present at the inquest and, therefore, could not be asked a single question by the Leonard family's solicitor, Pat Fahy, nor the Coroner himself."

MULTIPLE SHOTS

Ciaran MacAirt is founder and manager of the charity, Paper Trail (Legacy Archive Research) which advocates on behalf of victims and survivors of the conflict in the north of Ireland. A key component of the charity's work is to help families access information buried in Public Records. Whilst researching British military operations logs in the National Archives, Kew, London, Ciarán discovered that the version of the killing reported to the media and at the Inquest in October 1973 does not correspond to contemporaneous reports made by British Armed Forces at the scene to their Commanders.

The startling documents also show how the RUC's story changed in the hours after the killing and yet not one of these versions record a single, accidental discharge.

In fact, the logs record multiple, deliberate gunshots and the attempt to criminalize Michael and his family as members of the proscribed Irish Republican Army (IRA).

British Military Logs

British military and relevant RUC reports were relayed to the British Army's Brigade Command and recorded in a contemporaneous operations log. The command area of 3rd Infantry Brigade (3 Brigade) took in the counties of Fermanagh and Armagh and most of the counties of Tyrone and Down. During this period, the British Army assumed primacy over the police as they waged war against the IRA and the Irish Catholic community.

The resident British Army Battalion in the area of the incident was the 16th/5th The Queen's Royal Lancers (16/5 L) and its units attended the scene of the killing within minutes and reported to Brigade Command. From there, reports were relayed to Headquarters Northern Ireland (HQNI).

16/5 L first recorded the "Shooting Incident Near St. Angelo" at 1755 hours (5:55pm) 17th May 1973 (Serial 15):

"At Approx. 1740 hrs in GR [Grid Reference] square 0864 at VCP [Vehicle Check Point] at GR 085652 an RUC Police road block, a car tried to break through and was shot at by Police. The driver is wounded and the occupants have been apprehended. 2 x Chief Inspectors [RUC] from Enniskillen are going to the scene. 1 x sub unit 16/5 L going to the scene"

"The Logs record multiple, deliberate gunshots and the attempt to criminalize Michael and his family as members of the proscribed Irish Republican Army (IRA)"

| | | | | | | |
|----|------|---|--------|---|-------------|-----|
| 15 | 1755 | + | 16/5 L | <p><u>SHOOTING INCIDENT NEAR ST ANGELO</u></p> <p>At approx 1740 hrs in GR square 0864 at VCP at GR 085652 an RUC Police road block, a car tried to break through and was shot at by Police. The driver is wounded and the occupants have been apprehended. 2 x Chief Inspectors from ENNISKILLEN are going to the scene. 1 x sub unit 16/5 L going to the scene.</p> | HQNI Info'd | APD |
|----|------|---|--------|---|-------------|-----|

Researcher Ciarán MacAirt says:

"First reports can be muddled for a number of reasons such as shock, the fog of war or simple miscommunication; but subsequent reports should become clearer and more detailed. So, the less cynical researcher can excuse this first report as we know that there was no RUC Vehicle Check Point or road block, and we know there were no other occupants in the car with Michael when he was killed. Another reader might query whether this is the first instance that the police involved are trying to develop a pretext for the shooting of the victim."

At 2100 hours (Serial 18, 9pm), 16/5 L reports:

"The shots were fired at 1750 hours, Michael Joseph Leonard... died after the incident. Driving a Red Austin A 40, GMM 470, he was driving into Northern Ireland. He was driving while disqualified and it is thought that this was the reason he did not stop. There was no other occupant in the car."

"Action: Passed to HQNI. 2215 hours B2 report says he is PIRA"

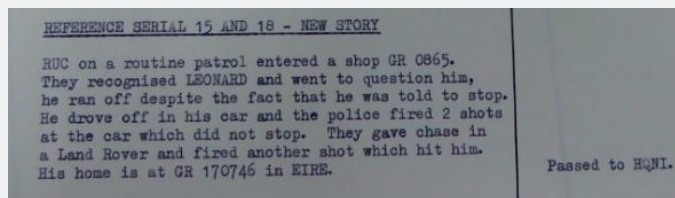
| | | | | | | |
|----|------|---|--------|--|---|-----|
| 18 | 2100 | + | 16/5 L | <p><u>REFERENCE SERIAL 15</u></p> <p>The shots were fired at 1750 hours, Michael Joseph LEONARD, 25 Yrs, RC, died after the incident. Driving a Red Austin A 40, GMM 470, he was driving into Northern Ireland. He was driving while disqualified and it is thought this was the reason he did not stop. There was no other occupant in the car.</p> | <p>Passed to HQNI 2215 hours B2 report says he is PIRA.</p> | APD |
|----|------|---|--------|--|---|-----|

This clarifies that there were no other people in the car and is correct that he was disqualified but erroneously records that Michael was travelling into Northern Ireland and did not stop, presumably at the RUC vehicle check point in the previous report. Neither of these reports – hours apart – take account of obvious witnesses to Michael leaving Rowe's Shop and the police in pursuit as he tried to get across the border to his home in Donegal. Worryingly, it records that "shots were fired" – not a single shot – and implies that these shots were fired because Michael did not stop.

This record also proves that the British Armed Forces injected disinformation about their victim within hours of his killing as if to justify it further. The falsified report that Michael was a member of the Provisional IRA (PIRA) was referenced to B2 – Annex B, Number 2 – in the file but had since been extracted and replaced by an unrelated file by the time Paper Trail recovered it. This is a horrific lie. Michael was not a member of any Republican paramilitary group. He was a civilian and the police knew that.

NEW STORY

An hour and a half later at 2330 hours (11:30pm), less than six hours after Michael was shot dead, 16/5 L reference the previous two reports and record a "NEW STORY". By now, the Security Forces have had plenty of time to gather the facts or for the police involved to get their stories straight.



REFERENCE SERIAL 15 AND 18 – NEW STORY

"RUC on a routine patrol entered a shop GR 0865. They recognised Leonard and went to question him, he ran off despite the fact that he was told to stop. He drove off in his car and the police fired 2 shots at the car which did not stop. They gave chase in a Land Rover and fired another shot which hit him [author's emphasis]. His home is at GR 170746 in Eire."

This is a damning admission that the police did not fire a single, "accidental" shot which killed Michael, but two shots at his car before the fatal, deliberate shot. The local police force also admit that its officers recognised Michael. They knew who he was when they killed him.

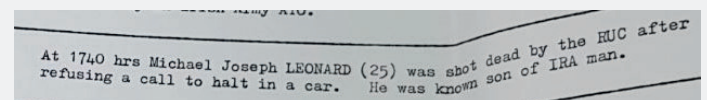
The RUC had rectified its report within six hours that its patrol had indeed spotted Michael in the shop, recognised him and pursued him. They fired two shots at the car but Michael did not stop. Just before he reached the sanctuary of the border, the RUC

fired again and killed him. They knew that his only misdemeanour was that he was a disqualified driver and they killed him for that.

In the month before the Inquest in October 1973, the British Armed Forces again tried to justify its killing of Michael and again no "accidental" shot is recorded.

Brigadier Commander CS Wallis-King of 3 Brigade prepared a report on the security of the Pettigoe border area and included a "Summary of Incidents in Pettigoe Area Over the Last Nine Months", dated 8 September 1973:

"17 May 73 At 1740 hrs Michael Joseph Leonard... was shot dead by the RUC after refusing to halt in a car. He was known son of an IRA man [sic]."



This tries to excuse the killing as Michael did not stop and that he was the son of an IRA member which is an egregious lie and attempt to blacken the name of Michael's father and the Leonard family. Again, there is no attempt to disguise that it was a deliberate shot which killed Michael although the RUC officers' story changed when it was relayed to the Inquest the following month.

The police account also changed when the RUC Assistant Chief Constable and Office of the Chief Constable had to answer to the Irish Government for the killing of one of its citizens.

The family's solicitor, Pat Fahy, says:

"It is now clear from the new evidence in the British military logs, compiled immediately after the killing, that the account given by police to the family, the media and the Coroner was nothing less than a tissue of lies. The British Army archives record multiple shots by the police and then re-confirm that the RUC fired three deliberate shots in total at the car driven by Michael Leonard – two after the car left Rowe's shop at Boa island, and then the fatal shot as Michael neared the border."

"In other words, the police account was a concoction, designed to fool the Leonard family, the general public and the Inquest."

Irish Citizen Murdered

We knew it then and now have the proof that the Inquest into Michael's death failed to investigate the circumstances of the shooting or even interrogate those involved in the killing so our family was left with even more questions than answers. It remained a highly contentious killing in the local area too as Michael was well known in the farming community on both sides of the border.

Even the Irish Government had questions unanswered and so sought to remedy this through quiet, diplomatic channels as Paper Trail discovered again in the National Archives,

London. The charity tracked contact and correspondence between the Dublin authorities, the British Foreign and Commonwealth, the Northern Ireland

Office and the Assistant Chief Constable of the RUC to a file relating to the *"Rules for the Use of Firearms by the Security Forces in Northern Ireland (1974 – 1979)"* which only opened to the public after 30 years in 2010.

The chain of correspondence opens with John Swift of the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs asking Kenneth Thom of the British Embassy in Dublin in February 1974 for further information on the following aspects of the case which show which areas were problematic even then for the Irish state. Thom refers the same to J P B Simeon of the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office in March 1974:

"(a) For what specific purpose was a shot fired. Did the only information on Mr Leonard available to the constables at the time relate to motoring offences? Was there any suspicion that Mr Leonard was at that time a member of the IRA? ["No" is handwritten in answer to this] Are there written regulations governing the use of firearms by the RUC in such circumstances?

(b) In what sense is the matter under enquiry? Was any disciplinary action taken or is any envisaged in respect of the constables? Is it true that a possible prosecution was considered by the Director of Public Prosecutions and, if so, on what grounds was a decision not to prosecute taken?

(c) Are the inquest depositions made available to us complete in all respects? You will note that they do not include any direct evidence by the constables involved in the incident. If there are further depositions, we would be glad to receive copies. If not, a summary of the constables' evidence, even if not used at the inquest would be appreciated."

Wendy Clements of the Northern Ireland Office furnished David Ward of the Republic of Ireland Department, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, with the answers to these questions in correspondence dated 27th March 1974:

"1 (a) The shot was presumably intended as a warning shot (although the incident is still subject to investigation – see 1(b)). The only information available to the constables at the time was of Mr Leonard's motoring offences, but suspicion was aroused by his behaviour in refusing to stop both before and after driving away. There are written regulations governing the use of firearms by members of the RUC. (Copies of these are not, however available to the public.)"

1 (b) Papers were referred to the DPP for a decision on possible criminal proceedings, but after very careful consideration of the evidence the DPP directed that there were not sufficient grounds to institute a prosecution. The reasons behind this decision are entirely a matter for the DPP. A further detailed investigation of the incident is at present being conducted by the RUC with a view to placing a report before the Chief Constable for consideration of possible disciplinary measures. I have asked to be advised of the outcome of the investigation."

1 (c) The inquest depositions are complete. It is not unusual, in cases involving security considerations, for a senior RUC officer to give evidence on behalf of the officers actually involved, as happened in this case. The Inspector's deposition may therefore be regarded as a summary of the constables' evidence."

Ward then records in correspondence back to Paul Coulson of the Northern Ireland Office on 4th June 1974 that, whilst "grateful for the information", Dublin pressed for the "precise RUC regulations concerning the use of firearms in this type of case and asked whether he could inform the Irish Government of this pending the outcome of the disciplinary investigation.

Ward chased Coulson for a reply from NIO Belfast on 11 September 1974 in correspondence which also contains the handwritten memo:

"last year – border – RUC. Failed to stop. Warning shot hit – killed him".

The disclosure of the RUC rules for opening fire to the Irish authorities was a major stumbling block as it had to be referred to the Chief Constable himself. On 5th November 1974, Assistant Chief Constable Bill Meharg replied to the Northern Ireland Office:

"I am directed by the Chief Constable to furnish, as requested, a copy of Force Order No. 181/71 which was in force at the time of the shooting incident in question."

"The fatal shooting of Michael Joseph Leonard at Brookhill, Letter, Co. Fermanagh, on 17th May 1973, was fully investigated. The investigation papers were referred to the DPP, who, upon careful consideration of all the facts and circumstances, directed that the file be marked "No Prosecution".

"At the Inquest on the deceased... a verdict of 'misadventure' was returned."

"On 24th May 1974, the Chief Constable dismissed the disciplinary case on the grounds that the fatal shot was discharged accidentally."

The Irish must have pressed for details of the disciplinary as NIO correspondence from D. Petch on 26th March 1975 wrote:

"The RUC would resist giving any details of an internal enquiry to an outside body and certainly consider that the details of such a case should not be passed to the Irish Government. The Chief Constable dismissed the disciplinary case on 24 May 1974 on the grounds that the fatal shot was discharged accidentally."

Our family now know it was no accident.

MURDER ADMISSION

13

We published the first edition of this booklet on the 46th anniversary of Michael's murder along with breaking news from the office of the Attorney General.

The Attorney General, John Larkin, had written to our family and said:

"There was clearly no justification for the for the shooting at Mr. Leonard whether by way of warning or otherwise, and the posthumous attempts to blacken his character are despicable."

That day too, Assistant Chief constable George Clarke of Police Service Northern Ireland admitted to Irish News reporter Connla Young:

"[Michael's] murder is within the caseload of the Legacy Investigation Branch."

The admission that the police were finally and correctly treating Michael's killing as murder made front page news.

PSNI then retracted its admission the following week, which did nothing but retraumatize Michael's grieving family.

PSNI told the media too that it was aware that a complaint had been made to the Police Ombudsman and would not be commenting further on it.

The damage had already been done.

The family solicitor, Michael Fahy corrected PSNI again:

"The Attorney General, John Larkin, has referred the case to the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) for consideration of criminal proceedings. This will require the PSNI to investigate an report back to the PPS."

"This must be a swift investigation, as the Attorney General has deferred his decision on the issue of the Leonard family's request for a new inquest until the question of criminal action against the perpetrators has been answered."

Three years later, by the 49th anniversary of Michael's murder, the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Office of the Police Ombudsman and the Public Prosecution Service have done nothing.

The police murderers remain free to this day.

There was clearly no justification

Attorney General John Larkin

THE IRISH NEWS

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Bradley's Labour counterpart backs historical abuse survivors

RUC murdered Catholic man in 1973 admit police

New evidence in 1973 RUC killing

CONNLA YOUNG
c.young@irishnews.com

ARMAGH and the family of a Catholic man shot dead by the RUC almost 35 years ago have been told new evidence suggests the shooting may not have been accidental.

Michael Leonard (23) was shot after a car chase close to the Fermanagh and Dromedary border between Pettigo and Ballyvaughan on May 17 1973.

At the time police claimed that Mr Leonard, who was a disqualifier driver, had failed to stop when he got into a car after leaving a shop and that a single shot was later fired during a chase.

New evidence uncovered by research charity Paper Trail later contradicted the single shot claim after British army logs from the time suggest that a total of three shots were fired at the cattle dealer.

It was reported that on entry to a mill, Mr Leonard claimed that Mr Leonard was a member of the IRA.

At a 1973 inquest, an RUC inspector claimed that a policeman who held a rifle on the passenger side of a touring Land Rover "accidentally" switched the trigger and discharged a round "after the vehicle took a violent turn".

None of the three officers involved appeared at the inquest, which returned a finding of manslaughter.

The material also contained in British army logs discovered by Paper Trail, make no mention of an accidental shooting.

A British army situation report from May 18 1973 provides a military account of what happened.

It states: "The RUC gave chase and as they were trying to overtake Leonard he turned round (sic) and made a motion as if going for a weapon."

"The RUC fired one shot, fatally wounding Leonard."

A British army intelligence summary dated June 1973 also states: "The Land Rover drove off on to the car and the police fired two shots at the vehicle which did not stop."

"The police followed up in a Land Rover and fired one more shot which struck Leonard, who later died."

Another intelligence summary dated June 1973, claims that the IRA killing of an RUC man in Enniskillen had nothing to do with the killing by RUC of Michael Leonard.

A further report said the RUC shot dead

Michael Leonard when he refused a call to halt.

Mr Leonard's cousin and campaigning Catholic priest Fr Joe McLaughlin last night said the new evidence suggested that the shooting was not properly investigated.

A PSNI spokesperson said: "This investigation currently sits with Police at the Police Command for Northern Ireland and we do not intend to comment further at this time."

Fr Joe McLaughlin said the RUC killed an unarmed Irish citizen. There must be a new and proper inquest, he said.

Clair McLaughlin said the RUC killed an unarmed Irish citizen. There must be a new and proper inquest, he said.

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In June 2022, Paper Trail published NEW evidence in the RUC murder that substantiates our previous report.

The new evidence includes previously undisclosed information from British military and police files recorded hours, days and weeks later:

A British Army Situation Report (SITREP) recorded at 0300 hours (3 am) 18th May 1973, around ten hours after Michael's murder:

"THE BELEEK (sic) RUC RECOGNISED MICHAEL JOSEPH LEONARD IN A SHOP. ON BEING APPROACHED, THE SUBJECT RAN OUT OF THE SHOP AND REFUSED TO HALT WHEN TOLD TO. HE GOT INTO HIS CAR AND AS HE DROVE OFF THE RUC FIRED 2 SHOTS AT HIS CAR. THE RUC THEN GAVE CHASE AND AS THEY WERE TRYING TO OVERTAKE LEONARD HE TURNED ROUND [sic] AND MADE A MOTION AS IF GOING FOR A WEAPON. THE RUC FIRED ONE SHOT, FATALLY WOUNDING LEONARD."

PAGE 2 RBDABE 012 R E S T R I C T E D
2. A. 16/5 L.
(1) AT ABOUT 1715HRS THE BELEEK RUC RECOGNISED MICHAEL JOSEPH LEONARD IN A SHOP NEAR GRID 085632. ON BEING APPROACHED THE SUBJECT RAN OUT OF THE SHOP AND REFUSED TO HALT WHEN TOLD TO HE GOT INTO HIS CAR AND AS HE DROVE OFF THE RUC FIRED 2 SHOTS AT HIS CAR. THE RUC THEN GAVE CHASE AND AS THEY WERE TRYING TO OVERTAKE LEONARD HE TURNED ROUND AND MADE A MOTION AS IF GOING FOR A WEAPON. THE RUC FIRED ONE SHOT, FATALLY WOUNDING LEONARD HE WAS AGED 25 AND LIVED AT GRID 170746.
(2) 1920 OMAGH GR 443728. CHILDREN FOUND 1 X ARMALITE RIFLE WITH FULL MAG AND 1X .38 PISTOL WITH 2 RDS. A YOUTH HANDED THEM TO THE

A British Army Intelligence Summary from RUC Divisions L & M, 22nd May 1973 recorded:

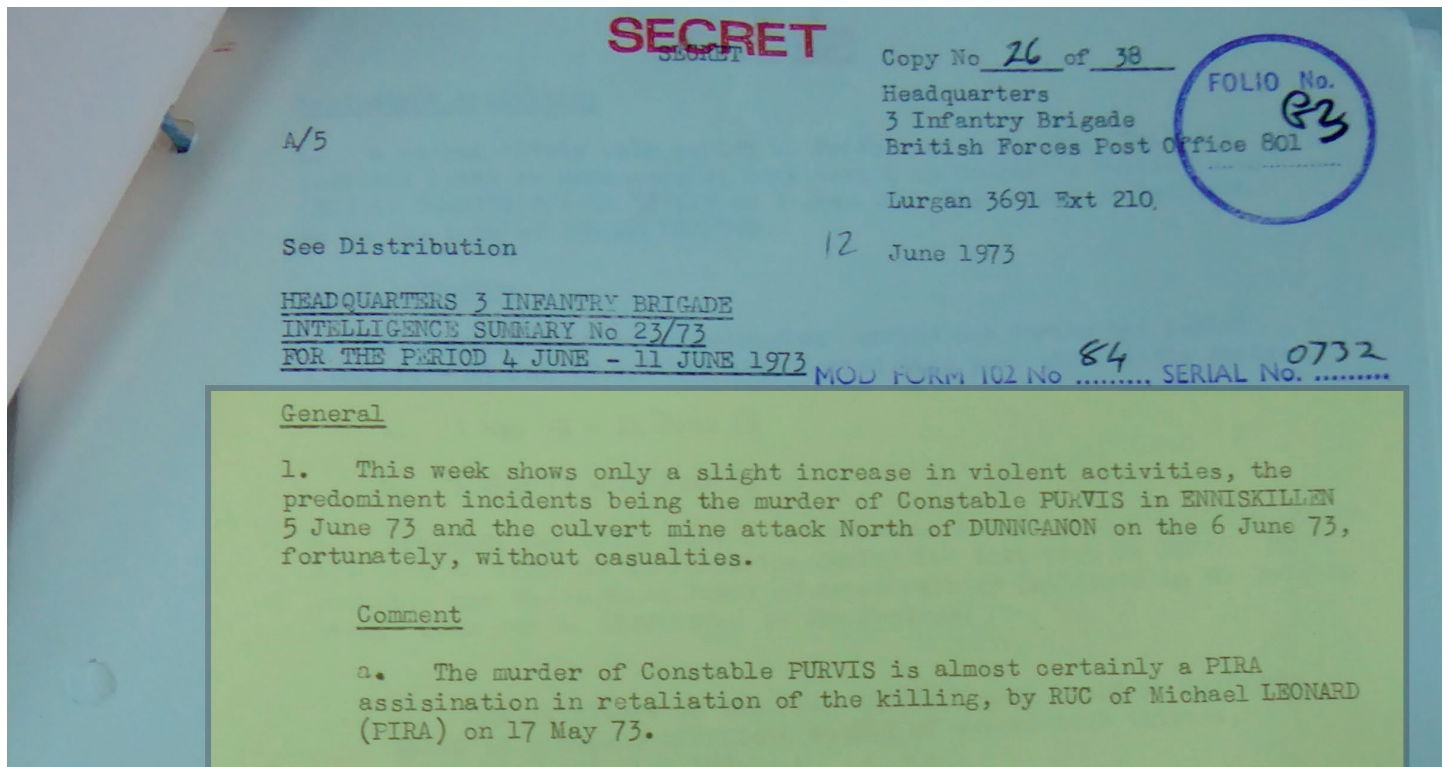
"The RUC... recognised Michael LEONARD a suspected member of the PIRA [Provisional Irish Republican Army] from Pettigo. When they went to question him he ran off despite the fact that he was warned to stop. He then drove off in his car and the police fired two shots at the vehicle which did not stop. The police followed up in a landrover and fired one more shot which struck LEONARD, who later died."

82. Shooting: On 17 May, the RUC while on routine patrol, recognised Michael LEONARD a suspected member of the PIRA from PETTIGOE. When they went to question him he ran off despite the fact that he was warned to stop. He then drove off in his car and the police fired two shots at the vehicle which did not stop. The police followed up in a Landrover and fired one more shot which struck LEONARD, who later died.

Comment. The shooting of Michael LEONARD will no doubt produce a reaction from the PIRA, possibly with the selection of a policeman as the target for an assassination in reprisal.



Fr. Joe (front, second from left) with other members of the Leonard family and Paper Trail's Ciarán MacAirt (second from right) at the Time for Truth Campaign March in June 2019.



Paper Trail tracked this previously undisclosed evidence over the last few years whilst the the Public Prosecution Service, Office of the Police Ombudsman and Police Service of Northern Ireland have done nothing to bring Michael's police murderers to justice.

Paper Trail even travelled to London, discovered and secured an unredacted British military file of information from its 3 Brigade in 1973.

In this secret archive was another British Army Intelligence Summary for 4th -11th June and dated 12th June.

This particularly pernicious file again produces no evidence but records the lie that Michael was a member of the Provisional IRA and links his murder to that of 22-year-old RUC Constable David Purvis in Enniskillen a few weeks later on 5th June 1973.

"The murder of Constable PURVIS [6th June 1973] is almost certainly a PIRA assassination in retaliation of the killing by RUC of Michael LEONARD (PIRA) on 17 May 1973."

In the same file in the National Archives, Kew, Paper Trail's Ciarán MacAirt also discovered a British Army Periodical Summary from RUC L Division which records the indisputable

and stark admission:

"The RUC shot dead Michael John LEONARD when he refused a call to halt."

Michael was murdered and the British authorities at every level knew it.

The RUC shot dead Michael John LEONARD when he refused a call to halt.

"The RUC shot dead Michael Leonard when he refused a call to halt."

Secret British Army record from RUC

CONCLUSION

The discovery of these archives has produced startling new evidence which has confirmed many of our family's worst fears. They point to a senseless and unlawful killing of our loved one – an Irish citizen – close to the safety of the border and his home in Donegal. They also point to a heinous cover-up by the British state and its Armed Forces in the wake of the killing.

We now have hard evidence that:

1. The RUC changed its story in the hours afterwards. There was no vehicle checkpoint and Michael was alone in the car
2. None of these reports in the 3 Brigade Operations Logs record that Michael was killed by an accidental discharge
3. Nowhere is it reported that Michael posed a threat to the police officers or made any movement which caused them to take evasive action or open fire
4. The RUC officers knew Michael and knew that his only crime was driving whilst disqualified
5. The Security Forces tried to criminalize Michael and even his father as being IRA members
6. Most importantly, these files record multiple, deliberate shots at Michael's car – not "a million-to-one" accidental shot

What the family fear now is that the RUC officers who killed Michael and covered up the crime, killed others and got away with murder.

We sadly lost the family solicitor, Pat Fahy, in late 2019 but a few months before he died he said:

"There is no other way of putting it – Michael was killed deliberately and unjustifiably. Therefore, the inquest was a sham and the Coroner did not have the true facts in front of him. There was no single, accidental 'million-to-one shot'. These British state records prove that there were three shots. If the Coroner had known this, he could not have reached a finding of misadventure, as he did."

"Justice requires that there should be a fresh inquest at which the truth can be made known. We have written to the Attorney General for Northern Ireland asking that a fresh inquest be held into Michael's death. Pending that, the Leonard family are fully entitled to make the truth of what occurred known publicly."

'What made it even more senseless was that the RUC officers knew Michael, they knew he was a local man and, even if they wanted to hold him to task him about motoring offences, they could have picked him up the next time he crossed the border to visit his girlfriend's house or at the many cattle markets he attended.'

Solicitor Adrian O'Kane in Pat's firm is now working with the Leonard family. He said:

"Since the unjustified killing of Michael Leonard on 17 May 1973, there have been investigations conducted by RUC, PSNI, PONI, whilst the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and the Attorney General have expressed serious misgivings about the circumstances of Michael's death. Some 50 years later it is clear that the true circumstances of Michael's killing have been withheld from the Leonard family. A fresh Inquest is called for as a matter of priority and public importance."

REMEMBERING MICHAEL



Class photo, St Macartan's College, Monaghan, circa 1968. Michael is in the back row, third from right

All who knew Michael were heartbroken at the news of his killing. He was only 24 years of age and was highly regarded by everyone in the community. He was vivacious, so full of life and always smiling.

He had been a student in St. Macartan's college, Monaghan, for a number of years but came back to work on the family farm at Tievemore when his other brothers emigrated. There he learned the demands of farming and caring for animals from his father, Maurice.

Maurice was a well-known cattle-dealer throughout Donegal and the nearby counties of Tyrone and Fermanagh. Maureen, Michael's mother, was a hard-working home-maker, always there when you called, always welcoming and ready to serve a meal at any time of the day. Maureen (nee Gallagher) was born and reared in the Montiagh area of county Fermanagh, not far from Ederney. She cared deeply for each of her children and encouraged them in their choice of career.

Maurice and Maureen made their family home on the farm at Tievemore and raised their children as committed Catholics who

regularly attended Mass in Lettercran Catholic Chapel.

Michael's parents never recovered from the shock of losing their son in such dreadful and cruel circumstances.

Michael's sister, Carmel, remembers him:

"Michael was a great guy. There was something very special about him. He was older than me and older than my other sister Gertie and he always looked out for us. He was always smiling and had a head of black curly hair with curls hanging down on his forehead. He was generous to me when I was travelling back and forward to Dublin to train for nursing.

"I will never forget seeing him in the morgue in the Erne hospital in Enniskillen. His body was pure black. Michael bled to death. After Michael's death we all got on with our lives. When Daddy died years later, Mammy came to live with me for some time. It was only then I realised that she never got over the Michael's cruel death. She would talk about Michael every day. Mammy died broken-hearted."



Wedding photo of Michael's sister Carmel to Eugene McNamara (RIP) on 29th January 1972

Back left to right: John (brother), Maurice Jnr. (brother), Mary (Maurice's wife), Eugene, Carmel (sister), Gertrude (sister), Mena RIP (fiancée), Michael RIP

Front left to right: Paul (brother), Maureen RIP (mother), Maurice RIP (father)

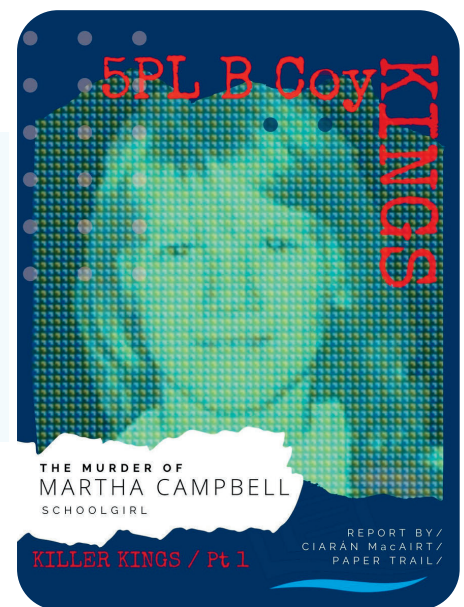
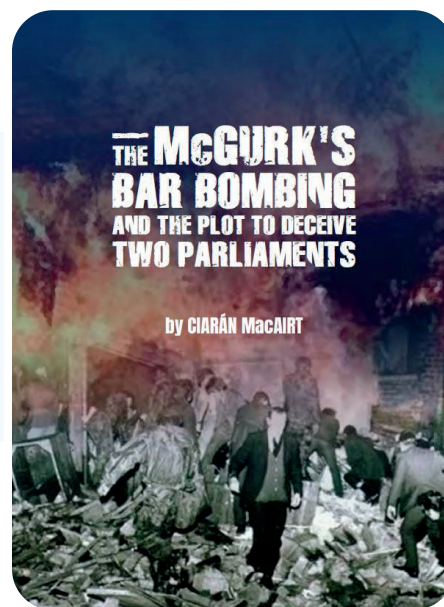
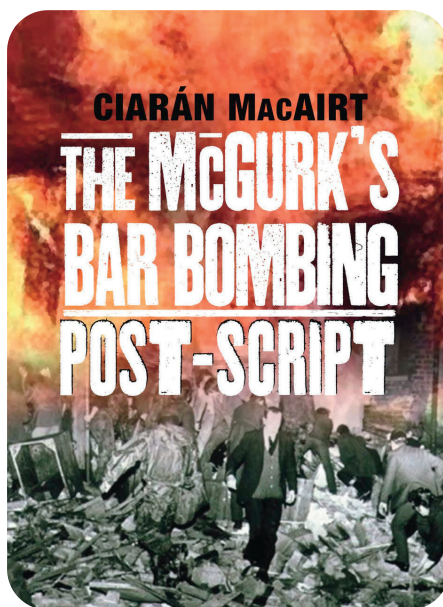
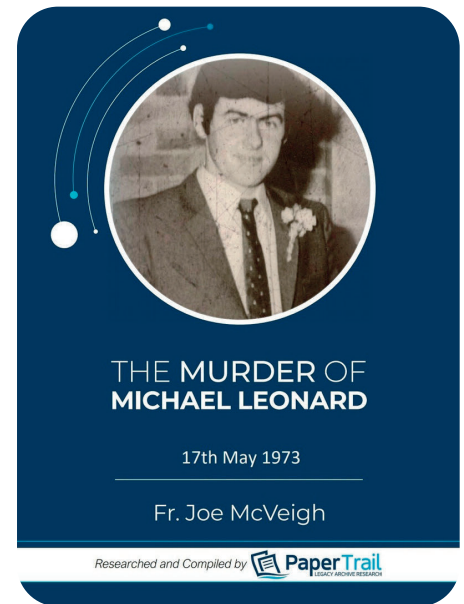
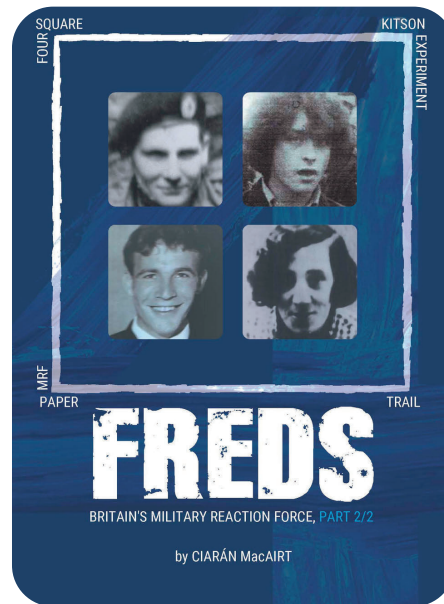
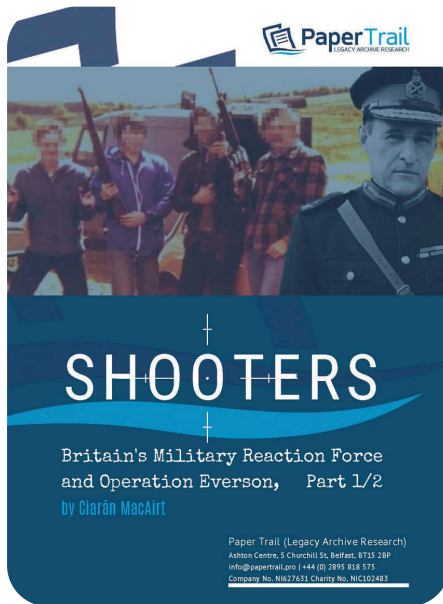
Michael was always on the move, going to cattle-marts and, in his free time, calling to see Mena, his fiancée. She was shattered when he was killed just a year before they had planned to be married. She too has died since and she too carried the heartbreak of Michael's killing.

No matter how re-traumatizing this new evidence is to us, the family of Michael Leonard will not rest in our campaign for truth and we will fight in Michael's memory.



We now demand:

1. A fresh Inquest at which the new evidence in the British Ministry of Defence records can be considered in relation to any finding regarding the killing of Michael Leonard.
2. An immediate criminal investigation into the actions of the personnel travelling in the police Land Rover from which the shots directed at Michael Leonard's car were fired. Such investigation to be overseen by the office of the Police Ombudsman.
3. The Irish government to commit to pressing the British government to cooperate fully with the fresh investigation, including making discovery of all relevant police and military records relating to the killing of Michael Leonard, an Irish citizen from County Donegal.



Visit the Paper Trail website (www.papertrail.pro/books) to read and download our other ground-breaking reports for FREE.

Following years of research and work with families, these reports have made national news, and led to historic investigations and legal cases.

The reports include proof that Britain's covert killer gang, the Military Reaction Force, was behind a number of murders and attempted mass murders although the police has yet to bring a single British soldier of the unit to justice. All of the victims were unarmed civilians.

You can also read about the Murder of Michael Leonard by the police who then covered up his murder, lying to his family, the Coroner investigating his murder, and the Irish government. This was written by Fr. Joe McVeigh, a cousin of Michael, with research by Paper Trail.

Author Ciarán MacAirt has also published supplementary research to his critically acclaimed book on the McGurk's Bar Bombing.

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THE MURDER OF MICHAEL LEONARD

17th May 1973

Fr. Joe McVeigh

MAKE HISTORY. FOLLOW THE PAPER TRAIL.



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