

Panorama's "A Spy in the IRA" reveals British collusion in Irish Republican Army internal discipline murders

By Steve James
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The BBC's April 11 flagship documentary *Panorama*, "The Spy in the IRA" by veteran journalist John Ware, highlighted the decades-long British state infiltration of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA).

Ware centred on Alfredo Scappaticci, who became infamous 14 years ago, in 2003, when he was named as the alleged British agent "Stakeknife."

Scappaticci, notorious as the alleged one time head of the IRA's Internal Security, responsible for identifying and dealing with informers, denied everything.

In the intervening period, such material that has emerged into the public domain has tended to confirm the role of "Stakeknife" in the extended and murderous British military intelligence operation, which for many years hopelessly compromised the security of the IRA.

Three years after Scappaticci was named, in 2006, Denis Donaldson, the former head of the IRA's international relations, was exposed as a long-term British agent.

Donaldson was assassinated later the same year. No one has ever been charged with the killing.

In 2008, Roy McShane, also formerly of IRA Internal Security, was taken into "protective custody" for fear his role as a British agent was about to be revealed.

Scappaticci, Donaldson, and McShane are only a few of the most prominent figures thus far identified, in what is now assumed to be a list of agents that runs into many hundreds.

The role of "Stakeknife" and Scappaticci's name only became known because of the efforts of a former British military intelligence officer, Ian Hurst. Hurst was a member of the British Army's Force Research Unit (FRU), one of whose tasks was running spies in

both loyalist and republican paramilitary organisations. Hurst appears to be primarily motivated by anger over the fact that British agents' lives were sacrificed to maintain "Stakeknife's" cover within the IRA. This was chiefly the angle taken by Ware, although the broadcast shed light on how Scappaticci came to be recruited.

Former IRA volunteer, now historian and writer, Anthony McIntyre, told Ware that Scappaticci was an admired and feared republican figure in the Markets area of Belfast. Scappaticci was detained in 1971, when, during the early years of "the Troubles" the British government introduced mass internment without trial, and was only released four years later.

Sometime after this, according to Ware, Scappaticci, who was a building worker, appears to have become tangled up in a VAT fraud. He was arrested by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), was recruited as a police informer and avoided prosecution. At some later stage, responsibility for handling him was transferred to the FRU. He was given number 6126, and a codename, "Stakeknife." By this time, he already appears to have been placed in the IRA's Internal Security section, which he came to lead during the 1980s.

McIntyre described Internal Security as "like an electrical junction box through which every wire must flow."

Scappaticci was able to inform his handlers on many operations the IRA was planning and on threats to other perceived or real British agents within the organisation. Some of these, like Vincent Robinson, were innocent. According to Ware, Robinson was killed by the IRA after he was tortured by the police into revealing the

location of an arms dump.

Others, such as Frank Hegarty, were spies. Hegarty was a republican who dropped out of the movement, then rejoined as an FRU agent. Having passed on the whereabouts of a stash of Libyan-supplied arms, he was shot in the head in 1986. According to Ware, Scappaticci knew Hegarty was going to be killed and told his handlers as much.

Ware has also recently brought out another aspect of Scappaticci's activities, although this was not covered by *Panorama*.

Writing in the *Irish Times* April 15, Ware noted that Scappaticci was also responsible for the IRA's "Civil Administration" in nationalist areas. According to Ware, Civil Administration was responsible for the vile practice of shooting working class youth in the knees, elbows and ankles for petty misdemeanours such as car theft and drug dealing. One mother described Scappaticci as warning her, "The next time we hear he's been at it, or of any complaints against him, I will personally blow the head off him."

The man in question was shot dead a few years later.

In 2016, after years of delay, the British police opened Operation Kenova, a £35 million police investigation involving as many as 50 detectives from across the UK with a remit to establish whether there is evidence of crimes that may have been committed by "Stakeknife" or "by members of the British Army, the Security Services or other Government agencies."

Head of Operation Kenova, Jon Butcher was distinctly non-committal to *Panorama*, but Ware outlined the circumstances surrounding two of the cases with which Kenova is likely to be dealing.

One was the murder of Joe Fenton, a Belfast estate agent who was manipulated into serving as an agent for the Special Branch of the then Northern Ireland police, the RUC. According to Ware, Fenton set up safe houses for the IRA, which were then bugged by Special Branch and information gathered used to compromise their operations. As head of IRA Internal Security, Fenton came to Scappaticci's attention, as did a succession of failed operations. Scappaticci is said to have warned his handlers that an investigation into Fenton was imminent. Nothing was done, so Fenton was interrogated and shot.

As many as 50 murders are alleged to have been carried out by Internal Security, 30 under Scappaticci.

By contrast, another agent, Sandy Lynch, who was facing the same fate under Scappaticci's supervision, was rescued at the last moment by the RUC.

The entire sordid affair is a testimony to the brutal and oppressive character of the British and Northern Ireland military, intelligence and police operations against the IRA during the decades-long "dirty war." But Sinn Fein have also colluded with the British state in preventing exposure of the infiltration and subversion of their own ranks and leading bodies. This is consistent with the party's key goal of securing a working agreement with British imperialism. Following the 1999 Good Friday Agreement, and 2006 St Andrews Agreement, Sinn Fein has functioned as a loyal government partner with the hard-right Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) in Northern Ireland and currently promotes itself as a prospective coalition partner with either Fine Gael or Fianna Fail in the Irish Republic.

Sinn Fein are currently embroiled in protracted negotiations with the British government and the DUP over the terms on which it might be possible for the Northern Ireland Assembly to be revived after an indecisive election in March left the DUP with just one more seat than Sinn Fein. Items under dispute include the impact of Brexit, the status of the Northern Ireland border, the Irish language, and the continued leadership of the DUP by Arlene Foster.

Also under discussion are the so-called "legacy" cases of "the Troubles." However, while historical cases are the subject of immense tension between the talks' participants, none of them, including Sinn Fein, have any interest in a full exposure of what took place since all are compromised and implicated.

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