

THE continuing pursuit of Northern Ireland veterans is grossly iniquitous and unfair.

I have first-hand experience of this. In Belfast in 1973 my driver, Private Raymond "Tapper" Hall, was kneeling by my Land Rover, acting as a sentry, and was shot in the back and killed.

Has anyone ever investigated his murder? No. He was a soldier and soldiers get shot on duty. But on my last day in the Army as Chief of the General Staff my last appointment was with two investigators from the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

They came to talk to me about an Irish gentleman who had been shot dead on that same day and in that same area. He had almost certainly been shooting at us. Another of my soldiers had been shot and wounded that day, too.

These investigators were not interested in following up the death of my driver. No one has ever taken a blind bit of interest in my driver.

All they were interested in was who killed a suspected terrorist. This shows the barrenness and complete lack of integrity of the process.

It is largely inspired by Sinn Fein trying to rewrite history to their own advantage as part of their tactics to achieve their strategic aim of getting Northern Ireland to join the Republic of Ireland as one country. It just will not wear.

Currently six veterans are being tried or facing trial over deaths in the Troubles, including Dennis Hutchings. If I were him, I would be



Killed...Private 'Tapper' Hall

COMMENT LORD DANNATT

Former Chief of the General Staff



hugely encouraged that the state of the evidence presented in the trial of Soldiers A and C was unacceptable.

It shows the weakness of this whole legacy business for the judicial system. How can you credibly and with integrity pick up cases that are 49 years old? It is not a level playing field. The Army kept detailed records; the terrorists kept none. No wonder the

investigators come running to the Army for information.

But if it turns out that Soldier A and C's trial was based in part on answers, they gave to questions to the Historical Enquiry Team in a process to give closure to the family of Joe McCann, that would be outrageous.

If that is the case, why would any sensible

veteran give any information to an inquiry team again?

I have seen the figure that 200 deaths allegedly caused by members of the Armed Forces during the Troubles are being looked at.

It means many more veterans face these investigations and possibly being charged and tried over events decades ago.

My advice to any veteran is simple: Do not say anything. Do not cooperate. You are in serious danger of being stitched up.



IRA leader...Joe McCann was killed

By **John Ingham**
Defence Editor

THE trial of two elderly former paratroopers accused of murdering an IRA gunman in 1972 collapsed yesterday as the judge ruled evidence against them was inadmissible.

The pair, identified only as Soldiers A and C, were charged with shooting Official IRA leader Joe McCann, 24, as he ran away from police and the Army in Belfast.

The prosecution relied on statements given by the pair in 1972 and 2010. But Mr Justice O'Hara ruled that could not be used, effectively ending the trial. Lawyers for the prosecution, who accepted the case must fail if the evidence was excluded, might appeal.

That means the case, thought to have cost taxpayers at least £1million, could still drag on for the ex-Paras who are in their seventies.

DAILY EXPRESS VOTE

Q Should all cases against veterans be dropped?

YES: 0901 133 4440

NO: 0901 133 4441

Yes text DXYES to 84988

No text DXNO to 84988

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THIS week was shameful – one in which I felt genuine and deep shame at our Government. It was perhaps the lowest moment in our nation's record of how it treats its servicemen and women.

I was in court in Belfast. What was clear is that these two vulnerable gentlemen had been totally abandoned by their country, to the clutches of those who simply seek financial gain or a rewriting of history.

I have sympathy for the McCann family too. War is messy. People do things you don't expect. Actors pursue their beliefs to the point of no return. But they are victims in this too. Led down a garden path in the false hope of "justice", whatever that has come to mean in Northern Ireland – by lawyers and politicians who should hang their heads in shame.

The way our politics has become stuffed full of imposters with a belief in almost nothing. Who could not for one moment consider the human impact of their inaction. Imagine if Soldier A or Soldier

COMMENT JOHNNY MERCER



Tory MP and former Veterans Minister

C was your father. "Northern Ireland is a tinderbox Johnny; they'll collapse the Executive and return to violence," the stuffed shirts used to tell me when I was Veterans Minister.

I wasn't aware we lived in a country where our actions were dictated by those who threaten violence.

Enough is enough. This Government must move fast to implement legislation to end the vexatious pursuit of veterans for their service.

This Government – and others before them – have promised to tackle this.

Options are on the table. But the net result was what I saw in court in Belfast today.

A pathetic failure borne by some of this nation's finest people.

Former soldier Johnny Mercer – sacked as a defence minister last week after railing at a failure to protect Northern Ireland veterans – attended the Belfast hearing.

He called it "an appalling spectacle. The judge could not have been clearer in court, but this process will never end for our men and women until the UK Government legislates to protect them from these persistent efforts to rewrite history".

Mr Mercer urged veterans to "demand change. We will keep doing it until legislation is brought forward to end the current pursuit".

While Richard Tice, leader of Reform UK, said he was "delighted this unjustified trial against two British soldiers has collapsed".

Chelsea Pensioner David Griffin, 80, who is waiting to hear if he will be charged eight years after being questioned about a Belfast operation in 1972, said: "If this has happened with the first legacy case, the others should be axed." The ex-



Soldiers on Belfast's Falls Road...these were not on trial

Marine added: "It is like hitting a bruise with a hammer."

The failure of the trial underlines the task of having reliable evidence decades later. Other veterans still face trial while hundreds fear reinvestigation and potential charges.

The Daily Express campaign Betrayal of Our Veterans demands justice for Northern Ireland servicemen and contrast their plight with terrorists' "pardons".

Under Tony Blair's 1998 Good Friday Agreement, about 500 including IRA men were freed from jail early. Up to 300 suspected terrorists were given guarantees they would not face prosecution.

Republican paramilitaries were responsible for around 60 per cent of the 3,500 deaths during the Troubles; security forces accounted for about 10 per cent.

One of the men still facing trial, Dennis Hutchings, 79, wants to take his case to the European Court of Human Rights, say-

Court appeal.. Mr Hutchings

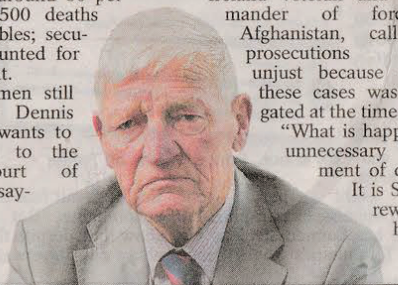
ing it is "discriminatory". Mr Hutchings, from Cornwall, denies attempted murder and attempted grievous bodily harm with intent over a shooting in 1974.

He said yesterday: "I am so pleased for these two lads. This ruling has got to cast doubt on all the legacy trials and whether you can get a fair trial. We should have a tribunal of three judges independent of Northern Ireland to look at the evidence in these cases before they go to court."

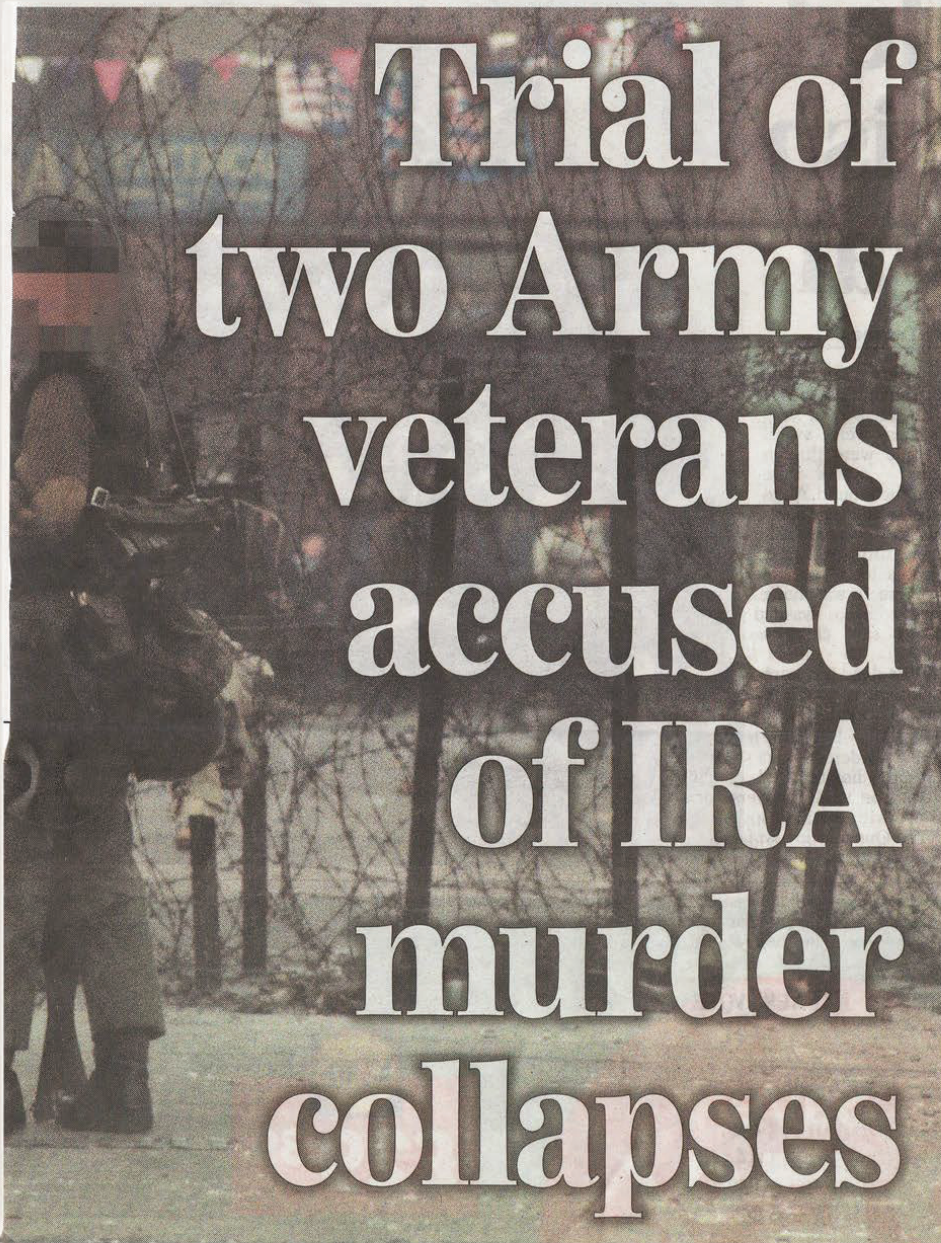
"Soldiers A and C should not have been put through this. Soldiers being dragged through the courts are caught up in political mayhem."

Col Richard Kemp, a Northern Ireland veteran and ex-commander of forces in Afghanistan, called the prosecutions "deeply unjust because each of these cases was investigated at the time."

"What is happening is unnecessary harassment of old men. It is Sinn Fein rewriting history so their



Trial of two Army veterans accused of IRA murder collapses



Court support...people standing up for the two Paras on trial and, right, Joe McCann's widow Anne yesterday



men appear as freedom fighters and British soldiers as imperialist oppressors. The reality is that the terrorists set out to kill innocent people...British soldiers and police tried to stop them."

Belfast Crown Court heard the only evidence implicating Soldiers A and C was statements they gave to the Royal Military Police in 1972 plus answers they volunteered to the Historical Enquiries Team of the Police Service of Northern Ireland

in 2010. Defence lawyers said it was inadmissible as the 1989 Police and Criminal Evidence Northern Ireland Order can bar evidence which would damage a fair trial.

The prosecution agreed the 1972 statements were not admissible as the Paras were ordered to make them, they were not under caution and lacked legal representation.

After Joe McCann died, the Official IRA said he was responsible for the deaths of 15 British soldiers.

Apart from Mr Hutchings, three more ex-soldiers face trial over "legacy" killings: Soldier F – the only one charged over Bloody Sunday in 1972, he is accused of two murders and four attempts;

Soldier B – accused of murdering a boy aged 15, also in 1972, and

David Holden – ex-Guardsman charged with gross negligence manslaughter at a checkpoint in 1988.



Lt-Gen Jonathon Riley, Maj-Gen Tim Cross and Col Richard Kemp

Military leaders: Stop prosecuting British soldiers

SENIOR military commanders yesterday told Boris Johnson to stop the persecution of British veterans and serving troops.

A letter signed by three retired generals, an admiral and a former commander of British troops in Afghanistan, raised particular objection to the witch-hunt against Northern Ireland veterans.

The letter declares: "How can it be right to issue a blanket pardon for criminal acts committed by the IRA in Northern Ireland while persecuting those soldiers operating in support of the laws that those same IRA men set out to break?"

The letter is signed by Lieutenant-General Jonathon Riley, former Commander British Forces Sierra Leone, Iraq and deputy commander of Nato forces in Afghanistan; Major-General Julian Thompson, the Commander of 3 Commando Brigade in the 1982 Falklands War; Major-General Tim Cross, Commander Theatre Troops in Iraq; Rear Admiral Roger Lane-Nott, Flag Officer Submarines; and Colonel Richard Kemp, Commander British Forces, Afghanistan.

Most are Northern Ireland veterans.

In 2019 Boris Johnson made a manifesto pledge to end "vexatious" prosecutions of veterans.

But the Overseas Operations Bill, which this week imposed a five year time limit for prosecutions of soldiers unless there is compelling new evidence, does not cover Northern Ireland.

Legislation supposed to address so-called "legacy" killings has been delayed for years amid suspicions that the Government fears antagonising Republican Sinn Fein.

The letter suggests that

By **John Ingham**
Defence Editor

frontline soldiers are being made scapegoats for operations approved by politicians.

The letter says no-one could condone service personnel who "deliberately" break the law.

But it warns: "The last five years have seen a steady stream of investigations, prosecutions and convictions of former and active service people for alleged wrongdoing in theatres of military operations... We must, however, reject entirely the persecution of service people

for actions legitimately taken in the line of duty.

"In particular, we object to prosecutions over events in Northern Ireland."

The letter highlights the plight of "Soldier F" over Bloody Sunday in 1972 in which British soldiers shot and killed 14 civilians during a protest march in Londonderry.

The letter states: "The events that day involved a direct chain of command – starting at Cabinet minister level and descending through the Senior General in the Province, down

to the local brigade commander, commanding officer and company commander.

"Yet the only person being held to account is a solitary lance corporal."

The senior officers accuse successive governments of failing to honour the Military Covenant, which pledges support for military personnel in return for the risks they take.

It states: "Natural justice alone demands that those placed in harm's way by their nation and at the orders of a chain of command are entitled to the reciprocal support and protection of that nation."

The covenant, they say, "is being set aside for reasons that remain unclear".



Lane-Nott, above, Maj-Gen Thompson

