

The Red Hand Defenders' Claim of Responsibility

The claim made by the Red Hand Defenders at 20.45 hours on the 15.03.99 to the BBC Newsroom in Belfast was significant. In Northern Ireland, SIOs had to carefully consider any claim of responsibility made following the incident, particularly if such came with a recognised codeword as did this claim. The person making this claim knew the old code and introduced a new code. The old code had been used by the RHD to make claims relating to previous terrorist incidents and the new code was later used in a press statement issued by the RHD after the murder of Mrs Nelson.

The RHD did not generally carry out paramilitary operations themselves. Rather they were used as a flag of convenience by other Loyalist groups. From late 1998, when both the UDA and LVF were claiming to be on ceasefire, these organisations found the RHD's claims of responsibility a useful way of masking their own actual involvement in terrorist operations. (See Appendix C for further information about the activities of paramilitary groupings at the time of ceasefire.)

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I am also now aware of information that came into the MIT after I left the investigation. It indicated that one of the key LVF suspects targeted by the MIT, [REDACTED] on the [REDACTED] stated that the LVF were carrying out their campaign under the name of the Red Hand Defenders and Orange Volunteers. I knew from previous experience that the RHD was loosely based around [REDACTED] and his Dissident Loyalist associates and that it was strongly sectarian and against the Peace Process (I return to consider [REDACTED] in greater detail below).

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Another source of information available to the SIO when deciding on who should be treated as a suspect is the choice of weapon selected by those who carried out the murder. Historically, Republican terrorist