

= Miami Showband killings =

The Miami Showband killings (also called the Miami Showband Massacre) was an attack by the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) , a loyalist paramilitary group , on 31 July 1975 . It took place on the A1 road at Buskhill in County Down , Northern Ireland . Five people were killed , including three members of The Miami Showband , who were then one of Ireland 's most popular cabaret bands .

The band was travelling home to Dublin late at night after a performance in Banbridge . Halfway to Newry , their minibus was stopped at what appeared to be a military checkpoint , where gunmen in British Army uniforms ordered them to line up by the roadside . At least four of the gunmen were serving soldiers from the British Army 's Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) but , unbeknownst to the band , all were members of the UVF . While two of the gunmen (both soldiers) were hiding a time bomb on the minibus , it exploded prematurely and killed them . The other gunmen then opened fire on the dazed band members , killing three and wounding two . It is believed the bomb was meant to explode en route , killing the band and framing them as IRA bomb @-@ smugglers , and possibly leading to stricter security measures at the border .

Two serving British soldiers and one former British soldier were found guilty of the murders and received life sentences ; they were released in 1998 . Those responsible for the attack belonged to the Glenanne gang ; a secret alliance of loyalist militants , rogue police officers and British soldiers . There are also allegations that British military intelligence agents were involved . According to former Intelligence Corps agent Captain Fred Holroyd , the killings were organised by British intelligence officer Robert Nairac , together with the UVF 's Mid @-@ Ulster Brigade and its commander Robin " The Jackal " Jackson . The Historical Enquiries Team , which investigated the killings , released their report to the victims ' families in December 2011 . It confirmed that Jackson was linked to the attack by fingerprints .

The massacre dealt a blow to Northern Ireland 's live music scene , which had brought young Catholics and Protestants together . In a report published in the Sunday Mirror in 1999 , Colin Wills called the Miami Showband attack " one of the worst atrocities in the 30 @-@ year history of the Troubles " . Irish Times diarist Frank McNally summed up the massacre as " an incident that encapsulated all the madness of the time " .

= = Background = =

= = = Political situation in Northern Ireland = = =

The conflict in Northern Ireland , known as " the Troubles " , began in the late 1960s . The year 1975 was marked by an escalation in sectarian attacks and a vicious feud between the two main loyalist paramilitary groups , the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) . On 4 April 1974 the proscription against the UVF had been lifted by Merlyn Rees , Secretary of State for Northern Ireland . This meant that both it and the UDA were legal organisations . The UVF would be once more banned by the British government on 3 October 1975 .

In May 1974 unionists called a general strike to protest against the Sunningdale Agreement ? an attempt at power @-@ sharing , setting up a Northern Ireland Executive and a cross @-@ border Council of Ireland , which would have given the Government of Ireland a voice in running Northern Ireland . During that strike on 17 May , the UVF carried out the Dublin and Monaghan car bombings , which killed 33 civilians . The Provisional IRA were suspected by British police of bombing two pubs in the English city of Birmingham the following November , resulting in 21 deaths .

UK Home Secretary Roy Jenkins introduced the Prevention of Terrorism Act , which gave the government unprecedented powers against the liberty of individuals in the United Kingdom in peacetime . At Christmas 1974 the IRA declared a ceasefire , which theoretically lasted throughout most of 1975 . This move made loyalists apprehensive and suspicious that a secret accord was being conducted between the British government and the IRA , and that Northern Ireland 's Protestants would be " sold out " . Their fears were slightly grounded in fact , as the MI6 officer

Michael Oatley was involved in negotiations with a member of the IRA Army Council , during which " structures of disengagement " from Ireland were discussed . This had meant the possible withdrawal of British troops from Northern Ireland . The existence of these talks led unionists to believe that they were about to be abandoned by the British government and forced into a united Ireland ; as a result , the loyalist paramilitary groups reacted with a violence that , combined with the tit @-@ for @-@ tat retaliations from the IRA (despite their ceasefire) , made 1975 one of the " bloodiest years of the conflict " .

In early 1975 Merlyn Rees set up elections for the Northern Ireland Constitutional Convention at which all of Northern Ireland 's politicians would plan their way forward . These were held on 1 May 1975 and the United Ulster Unionist Council (UUUC) , which had won 11 out of 12 Northern Irish seats in the February 1974 general election , won a majority again . As the UUUC would not abide any form of power @-@ sharing with the Dublin government , no agreement could be reached and the convention failed , again marginalising Northern Ireland 's politicians and the communities they represented .

= = = Robin Jackson and the Mid @-@ Ulster UVF = = =

The UVF Mid @-@ Ulster Brigade operated mainly around the Portadown and Lurgan areas . It had been set up in Lurgan in 1972 by part @-@ time Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) sergeant and permanent staff instructor Billy Hanna , who made himself commander of the brigade . His leadership was endorsed by the UVF 's leader Gusty Spence . The brigade was described by author Don Mullan as one of the most ruthless units operating in the 1970s . At the time of the attack the Mid @-@ Ulster Brigade was commanded by Robin Jackson , also known as " The Jackal " . Jackson had assumed command of the Mid @-@ Ulster UVF just a few days before the Miami Showband attack , after allegedly shooting Hanna dead outside his home in Lurgan on 27 July 1975 . According to authors Paul Larkin and Martin Dillon , Jackson was accompanied by Harris Boyle when he killed Hanna . Hanna was named by former British Intelligence Corps operative Colin Wallace as having organised and led the 1974 Dublin and Monaghan bombings , along with Jackson . Journalist Joe Tiernan suggested that Hanna was shot for refusing to participate in the Miami Showband attack and that he had become an informer for the Gardaí in exchange for immunity from prosecution for the Dublin bombings . Dillon suggested that because a large number of joint UDR / UVF members were to be used for the planned Miami Showband ambush , Hanna was considered to have been a " security risk " , and the UVF decided he had to be killed before he could alert the authorities .

Jackson was an alleged RUC Special Branch agent who was said by Yorkshire Television 's The Hidden Hand : The Forgotten Massacre programme to have had links to both the Intelligence Corps and Captain Robert Nairac . A report in the Irish Times implicated Jackson in the Dublin bombings . More than 100 killings have been attributed to him by the Pat Finucane Centre , the Derry @-@ based civil rights group .

= = = The Miami Showband = = =

The Miami Showband was a popular Dublin @-@ based cabaret band , enjoying fame and , according to journalist Peter Taylor , " Beatle @-@ like devotion " from fans on both sides of the Irish border . A typical Irish showband was based on the popular six- or seven @-@ member dance band . Its basic repertoire included cover versions of pop songs that were currently in the charts and standard dance numbers . The music ranged from rock and country and western to Dixieland jazz . Sometimes the showbands played traditional Irish music at their performances .

Originally called the Downbeats Quartet , the Miami Showband was reformed in 1962 by rock promoter Tom Doherty , who gave them their new name . With Dublin @-@ born singer Dickie Rock as frontman , the Miami Showband underwent many personnel changes over the years . In December 1972 , Rock left the band to be briefly replaced by two brothers , Frankie and Johnny Simon . That same year keyboardist Francis " Fran " O 'Toole (from Bray , County Wicklow) had

won the Gold Star Award on RTÉ's Reach For the Stars television programme . In early 1973 , Billy MacDonald (aka " Billy Mac ") took over as the group 's frontman when the Simon brothers quit the band . The following year , Fran O 'Toole became the band 's lead vocalist after Mick Roche (Billy Mac 's replacement) was sacked . O 'Toole was noted for his good looks and popularity with female fans. was described by the Miami Showband 's former bass guitarist , Paul Ashford , as having been the " greatest soul singer " in Ireland . Ashford had been asked to leave the band in 1973 , for complaining that performing in Northern Ireland put their lives at risk . He was replaced by Johnny Brown , who in turn was replaced by Dave Monks until Stephen Travers eventually became the band 's permanent bass player . In late 1974 , the Miami Showband 's song Clap Your Hands and Stomp Your Feet (featuring O 'Toole on lead vocals) reached number eight in the Irish charts .

The 1975 line @-@ up comprised four Catholics and two Protestants . They were : lead vocalist and keyboard player Fran O 'Toole (28 , Catholic) , guitarist Anthony " Tony " Geraghty (24 , Catholic) from Dublin , trumpeter Brian McCoy (32 , Protestant) from Caledon , County Tyrone , saxophonist Des McAlea (aka " Des Lee ") , 24 , a Catholic from Belfast , bassist Stephen Travers (24 , Catholic) from Carrick @-@ on @-@ Suir , County Tipperary and drummer Ray Millar (Protestant) from Antrim . O 'Toole and McCoy were both married ; each had two children . Geraghty was engaged to be married .

Their music was described as " contemporary and trans @-@ Atlantic " , with no reference to the Northern Ireland conflict . By 1975 they had gained a large following , playing to crowds of people in dance halls and ballrooms across the island . The band had no overt interest in politics nor in the religious beliefs of the people who made up their audience . They were prepared to travel anywhere in Ireland to perform for their fans .

According to the Irish Times , at the height of the Irish showband 's popularity (from the 1950s to the 1970s) , up to as many as 700 bands travelled to venues all over Ireland on a nightly basis .

= = Ambush = =

= = = Bogus checkpoint = = =

Five members of the Dublin @-@ based band were travelling home after a performance at the Castle Ballroom in Banbridge , County Down on Thursday 31 July 1975 . Ray Millar , the band 's drummer , was not with them as he had chosen to go to his home town of Antrim to spend the night with his parents . The band 's road manager , Brian Maguire , had already gone ahead a few minutes earlier in the equipment van . At about 2 : 30am , when the band was seven miles (11 km) north of Newry on the main A1 road , their Volkswagen minibus (driven by trumpeter Brian McCoy with Stephen Travers in the front seat beside him) reached the townland of Buskill . Near the junction with Buskill Road they were flagged down by armed men dressed in British Army uniforms waving a red torch in a circular motion . During " The Troubles " it was normal for the British Army to set up checkpoints at any time .

Assuming it was a legitimate checkpoint , McCoy informed the others inside the minibus of a military checkpoint up ahead and pulled in at the lay @-@ by as directed by the armed men . As McCoy rolled down the window and produced his driving licence , gunmen came up to the minibus and one of them said in a Northern Irish accent , " Goodnight , fellas . How are things ? Can you step out of the van for a few minutes and we 'll just do a check " . The unsuspecting band members got out and were politely told to line up facing the ditch at the rear of the minibus with their hands on their heads . More uniformed men appeared from out of the darkness , their guns pointed at the minibus . About 10 gunmen were at the checkpoint , according to author and journalist Martin Dillon .

After McCoy told them they were the Miami Showband , Thomas Crozier (who had a notebook) asked the band members for their names and addresses , while the others bantered with them about the success of their performance that night . As Crozier took down the information , a car pulled up and another uniformed man appeared on the scene . He wore a uniform and beret

noticeably different from the others . He spoke with an educated English accent and immediately took charge , ordering a man who appeared to have been the leader of the patrol , to tell Crozier to obtain their names and dates of birth instead of addresses .

The jocular mood of the gunmen abruptly ceased . At no time did this new soldier speak to any of the band members nor did he directly address Crozier . He relayed all his instructions to the gunman in command . Travers , the band 's new bass player , assumed he was a British Army officer , an opinion shared by McCoy . Just after the arrival of this mysterious soldier , McCoy nudged Travers , who was standing beside him , and reassured him by saying " Don 't worry Stephen , this is British Army " . Travers thought that McCoy , a Protestant from Northern Ireland , was familiar with security checkpoints and had reckoned the regular British Army would be more efficient than the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) , who had a reputation for unprofessional and unpredictable behaviour , especially towards people from the Republic .

McCoy , son of the Orange Order 's Grand Master for County Tyrone , had close relatives in the security forces ; his brother @-@ in @-@ law was a former member of the B Specials which had been disbanded in 1970 . Travers described McCoy as a " sophisticated , father @-@ type figure . Everybody was respectful to Brian " . McCoy 's words , therefore , were taken seriously by the other band members , and anything he said was considered to be accurate .

= = = Explosion = = =

At least four of the gunmen were soldiers from the UDR , the locally recruited infantry regiment of the British Army in Northern Ireland . Martin Dillon suggested in *The Dirty War* , that at least five serving UDR soldiers were present at the checkpoint . All the gunmen were members of the UVF 's Mid @-@ Ulster Brigade , and had been lying in wait to ambush the band , having set up the checkpoint just minutes before .

Out of sight of the band members , two of the gunmen placed a ten @-@ pound (4 @. @ 5 kg) time bomb in the rear of the minibus . The UVF 's plan was that the bomb would explode once the minibus had reached Newry , killing all on board . However , Martin Dillon alleged that the bomb was meant to go off in the Irish Republic . He suggested that had all gone according to plan , the loyalist extremists would have been able to clandestinely bomb the Republic of Ireland , yet claim that the band were republican bomb @-@ smugglers carrying explosives on behalf of the IRA . They had hoped to embarrass the Government of Ireland , as well as to draw attention to its level of control of the border . This may have resulted in the Irish authorities enforcing tighter controls over the border , thus restricting IRA operations . Dillon opined that another reason the UVF decided to target the Miami Showband was because Irish nationalists held them in high regard ; to attack the band was to strike the nationalists indirectly .

Stephen Travers heard the gunmen rummaging in the back of the minibus , where he kept his guitar . Concerned it might be damaged , he approached the two gunmen and told them to be careful . Asked whether he had anything valuable inside the case , Travers replied no . The gunman turned him round , punched him in the back and pushed him on the shoulder back into the line @-@ up .

When the two gunmen closed the rear door , clumsy soldering on the clock used as a timer caused the device to explode prematurely , blowing the minibus apart and killing soldiers Harris Boyle (aged 22 , a telephone wireman from Portadown) and Wesley Somerville (aged 34 , a textile worker from Moygashel) instantly . Hurling in opposite directions , they were both decapitated and their bodies dismembered . What little that remained intact of their bodies was burnt beyond recognition ; one of the limbless torsos was completely charred . ?

= = = Shootings = = =

Following the explosion , the remaining gunmen opened fire on the dazed band members , who had all been knocked down into the field below the level of the road from the force of the blast . The order to shoot was given by the patrol 's apparent leader , James McDowell , to eliminate witnesses

to the bogus checkpoint and subsequent bombing . Three of the musicians were killed : lead singer Fran O 'Toole , trumpeter Brian McCoy , and guitarist Tony Geraghty .

Brian McCoy was the first to die , having been hit in the back by nine rounds from a 9mm Luger pistol in the initial volley of gunfire . Fran O 'Toole attempted to run away , but was quickly chased down by the gunmen who had immediately jumped down into the field in pursuit . He was then machine @-@ gunned 22 times , mostly in the face , as he lay supine on the ground . Tony Geraghty also attempted to escape ; but he was caught by the gunmen and shot at least four times in the back of the head and back . Both men had pleaded for their lives before they were shot ; one had cried out , " Please don 't shoot me , don 't kill me " .

Bassist Stephen Travers was seriously wounded by a dum @-@ dum bullet which had struck him when the gunmen had first begun shooting . He survived by pretending he was dead , as he lay beside the body of McCoy . Saxophone player Des McAlea was hit by the minibus 's door when it was blown off in the explosion , but was not badly wounded . He lay hidden in thick undergrowth , undetected by the gunmen . He also survived . However , the flames from the burning hedge (which had been set on fire by the explosion) soon came dangerously close to where he lay ; he was forced to leave his hiding spot . By this time the gunmen had left the scene , assuming everyone else had been killed . Travers later recalled hearing one of the departing gunmen tell his comrade who had kicked McCoy 's body to make sure he was not alive : " Come on , those bastards are dead . I got them with dum @-@ dums " . McAlea made his way up the embankment to the main road where he hitched a lift to alert the RUC at their barracks in Newry .

= = = Forensic and ballistic evidence = = =

When the RUC arrived at the site they found five dead bodies , a seriously injured Stephen Travers , body parts , the smouldering remains of the destroyed minibus , debris from the bomb blast , bullets , spent cartridges , and the band members ' personal possessions , including clothing , shoes , and a photograph of the group , strewn across the area . They also discovered a stolen white Ford Escort registration number 4933 LZ , which had been left behind by the gunmen , along with two guns , ammunition , green UDR berets and a pair of glasses later traced to James McDowell , the gunman who had ordered the shootings .

One of the first RUC men who arrived at Buskhill in the wake of the killings was scenes of crime officer James O 'Neill . He described the scene as having " just the smell of utterly death about the place ... burning blood , burning tyres " . He also added that " that bomb was definitely placed there with a view to killing all in that band " .

The only identifiable body part from the bombers to survive the blast (which had been heard up to four miles away) was a severed arm belonging to Wesley Somerville . It was found 100 yards from the site with a " UVF Portadown " tattoo on it .

The RUC 's investigative unit , the Assassination or " A " Squad of detectives , was set up to investigate the crime and to discover the identities of the UVF gunmen who perpetrated the killings . Afterwards , as Travers recovered in hospital , the second survivor Des McAlea gave the police a description of McDowell as the gunman with a moustache and wearing dark glasses who appeared to have been the leader of the patrol . Some time after the attack , RUC officers questioned Stephen Travers at Dublin Castle . He subsequently stated they refused to accept his description of the different @-@ coloured beret worn by the soldier with the English accent . The UVF gunmen had worn green UDR berets , whereas the other man 's had been lighter in colour .

The dead bombers were named by the UVF , in a statement issued within 12 hours of the attack . Harris Boyle and Wesley Somerville were UDR soldiers as well as holding the rank of major and lieutenant , respectively , in the UVF . In 1993 Boyle was named by The Hidden Hand programme as one of the Dublin car bombers .

The stolen Ford Escort belonged to a man from Portadown , who according to Captain Fred Holroyd , had links with one of the UVF bombers and the driver of the bomb car which had been left to explode in Parnell Street , Dublin on 17 May 1974 . He was also one of the prime suspects in the sectarian killing of Dorothy Traynor on 1 April 1975 in Portadown .

Ballistic evidence indicates that the 10 @-@ member gang took at least six guns with them on the attack . An independent panel of inquiry commissioned by the Pat Finucane Centre has established that among the weapons actually used in the killings were two Sterling 9mm submachine guns and a 9mm Luger pistol serial no . U 4 . The submachine guns , which had been stolen years earlier from a former member of the B Specials , were linked to prior and later sectarian killings , whereas the Luger had been used to kill leading IRA member , John Francis Green , the previous January . In a letter to the Independent Commission of Inquiry into the Bombing of Kay 's Tavern dated 22 February 2004 , the Northern Ireland Office stated that : " The PSNI [The Police Service of Northern Ireland] have confirmed that a 9mm Luger pistol was ballistically traced both to the murder of John Francis Green and to the Miami Showband murders . " In May 1976 , Robin Jackson 's fingerprints were discovered on the metal barrel of a home @-@ made silencer constructed for a Luger . Both the silencer and pistol ? which was later established to have been the same one used in the Miami Showband killings ? were found by the security forces at the home of Edward Sinclair . Jackson was charged with possession of the silencer but not convicted , the trial judge having reportedly said : " At the end of the day I find that the accused somehow touched the silencer , but the Crown evidence has left me completely in the dark as to whether he did that wittingly or unwittingly , willingly or unwillingly " . The Luger was destroyed by the RUC on 28 August 1978 .

= = Aftermath = =

= = = Reactions = = =

Within 12 hours of the attack the UVF 's Brigade Staff (Belfast leadership) issued a statement . It was released under the heading Ulster Central Intelligence Agency ? Miami Showband Incident Report :

A UVF patrol led by Major Boyle was suspicious of two vehicles , a minibus and a car parked near the border . Major Boyle ordered his patrol to apprehend the occupants for questioning . As they were being questioned , Major Boyle and Lieutenant Somerville began to search the minibus . As they began to enter the vehicle , a bomb was detonated and both men were killed outright . At the precise moment of the explosion , the patrol came under intense automatic fire from the occupants of the other vehicle . The patrol sergeant immediately ordered fire to be returned . Using self @-@ loading rifles and sub @-@ machine guns , the patrol returned fire , killing three of their attackers and wounding another . The patrol later recovered two Armalite rifles and a pistol . The UVF maintains regular border patrols due to the continued activity of the Provisional IRA . The Mid @-@ Ulster Battalion has been assisting the South Down @-@ South Armagh units since the IRA Forkhill boobytrap which killed four British soldiers . Three UVF members are being treated for gunshot wounds after last night but not in hospital .

It would appear that the UVF patrol surprised members of a terrorist organisation transferring weapons to the Miami Showband minibus and that an explosive device of some description was being carried by the Showband for an unlawful purpose . It is obvious , therefore , that the UVF patrol was justified in taking the action it did and that the killing of the three Showband members should be regarded as justifiable homicide . The Officers and Agents of the Ulster Central Intelligence Agency commend the UVF on their actions and tender their deepest sympathy to the relatives of the two Officers who died while attempting to remove the bomb from the minibus .

Harris Boyle and Wesley Somerville were given UVF paramilitary funerals conducted by Free Presbyterian minister William McCrea , a Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) politician .

The killings shocked both Northern Ireland and Ireland and put a serious strain on Anglo @-@ Irish relations . The Irish Times reported that on the night following the attack , the British ambassador Sir Arthur Galsworthy was summoned to hear the Government of Ireland 's strong feelings regarding the murder of the three band members . The government held the view that the British Government had not done enough to stop sectarian assassinations in Northern Ireland .

Following the post @-@ mortems , funerals were held for the three slain musicians ; they received

televised news coverage by RTÉ , Ireland 's public service broadcaster . According to RTÉ , " Their families were in deep mourning and Ireland mourned with them " .

According to Peter Taylor , the Provisional IRA 's gun and bomb attack on the loyalist Bayardo Bar in Belfast 's Shankill Road on 13 August was in retaliation for the Miami Showband ambush . Four Protestant civilians (two men and two women) and UVF member Hugh Harris were killed in the attack . Two days later , Portadown disc jockey Norman " Mooch " Kerr , aged 28 , was shot dead by the IRA as he packed up his equipment after a show at the Camrick Bar in Armagh . Although not a member of any loyalist paramilitary group , he was a close friend of Harris Boyle and the two were often seen together . The IRA said it killed him because of an alleged association with British Army officer and member of 14th Intelligence Company , Captain Robert Nairac , and claimed it was in possession of his diary , which had been stolen in Portadown .

= = = Gilford and Altnamachin attacks = = =

Over the following month , there were two similar attacks in the area .

The night after the Miami Showband massacre , gunmen opened fire on a minibus near Gilford . It had been travelling from Banbridge to Bleary with nine people on board ; all were Catholics and most had been returning from a regular bingo session . One report says it was stopped at a fake British Army checkpoint . Five Catholic civilians were shot ; passenger Joseph Toland was killed outright and driver James Marks died of his wounds in January 1976 . The attack was blamed on loyalists and Lost Lives ? an account of every death in the conflict ? states that reliable loyalist sources have confirmed the UVF was responsible . However , police have blamed the IRA . The RUC suggested the IRA had meant to attack a police minibus in revenge for the Miami killings , but had mistakenly attacked a civilian minibus instead . A report by the police 's Historical Enquiries Team (HET) also suggests this . The IRA has denied responsibility .

On 24 August 1975 , Catholic civilians Colm McCartney and Sean Farmer were stopped in their car at another fake British Army checkpoint at Altnamachin (near Newtownhamilton) . They were driving home from a Gaelic football match in Dublin . The two men were found shot dead nearby . Earlier that night , three RUC officers in an unmarked car had been stopped at the same checkpoint but allowed through . However , the officers suspected that the checkpoint was fake . After receiving radio confirmation that there were no authorised checkpoints in the area that night , they reported the incident and requested help from the British Army to investigate it , but no action was taken . RUC officer John Weir claims that UDR corporal Robert McConnell was involved in the attack .

= = = Convictions = = =

A number of suspects were arrested by the RUC in early August 1975 . One of these men , Lance @-@ Corporal Thomas Raymond Crozier (aged 25 , a painting contractor from Lurgan) of C Company , 11th Battalion UDR was charged with the Miami killings . It was believed he had been betrayed to the RUC by a member of the gang .

Thomas Crozier recounted that on the night of the killings , he had driven to the grounds of a school in Lurgan where he had picked up two men . He then drove to a lay @-@ by on the Newry @-@ Banbridge dual carriageway and met up with another five men , who were all wearing British Army uniforms . They subsequently set up a roadblock with " all the trappings of a regular military checkpoint " . Crozier told police , and later a court , that he had not played a large part in the attack . He refused to name his accomplices , as he felt that to do so would put the lives of his family in danger .

On 22 January 1976 , a second UDR soldier , Sergeant James Roderick Shane McDowell (aged 29 , an optical worker , also from Lurgan) was arrested and charged with the Miami killings . He served in C Company , 11th Battalion UDR . The RUC were led to him through his glasses which had been found at the murder scene . Tests done on the glasses , which were eventually traced back to McDowell , revealed that the lenses were of a prescription worn by just 1 in 500 @, @ 000 of the population .

McDowell 's statement of admission was published in David McKittrick 's book Lost Lives :

" There was very little planning . I only came into it because of my UDR connection and the fact that I had a uniform . I was given a sub @-@ machine gun but I had never fired it . I passed out when the explosion happened and that was when I lost the gun , the glasses , and a UDR beret " .

On 15 October 1976 , Crozier and McDowell both received life sentences for the Miami Showband murders . McDowell had pleaded guilty . Crozier had pleaded not guilty . The judge , by sentencing McDowell and Crozier to 35 years imprisonment each , had handed down the longest life sentences in the history of Northern Ireland ; he commented that " killings like the Miami Showband must be stopped " . He added that had the death penalty not been abolished , it would have been imposed in this case . During the trial Des McAlea had received death threats which made him fear for the safety of his family ; this caused him to eventually leave Northern Ireland .

A third person , former UDR soldier John James Somerville (aged 37 , a lorry @-@ helper and the brother of Wesley) , was arrested following an RUC raid in Dungannon on 26 September 1980 . He was charged with the Miami Showband murders , the attempted murder of Stephen Travers , and the murder of Patrick Falls in 1974 . He was given a total of four life sentences (three for the murders of the Miami Showband members and one for the Falls murder) on 9 November 1981 ; he had pleaded not guilty . The three convicted UVF men , although admitting to having been at the scene , denied having shot anyone . None of the men ever named their accomplices , and the other UVF gunmen were never caught . The three men were sent to serve their sentence in the Maze Prison , on the outskirts of Lisburn . Fortnight Magazine reported that on 1 June 1982 , John James Somerville began a hunger strike at the Maze to obtain special category status . Crozier , McDowell , and Somerville were released after 1998 under the terms of the Belfast Agreement .

= = = Allegations = = =

A continued allegation in the case has been the presence of Captain Robert Nairac at the scene . Former serving Secret Intelligence Service agent Captain Fred Holroyd , and others , suggested that Nairac had organised the attack in co @-@ operation with Robin Jackson and the Mid @-@ Ulster UVF . In his maiden parliamentary speech on 7 July 1987 , Ken Livingstone MP told the House of Commons , " it was likely " that Nairac had organised the attack . Surviving band members Stephen Travers and Des McAlea told police and later testified in court that a British Army officer with a " crisp , clipped English accent " oversaw the Buskill attack , the implication being that this was Nairac . In his book The Dirty War , Martin Dillon adamantly dismissed the allegation that Nairac had been present . He believed it was based on the erroneous linkage of Nairac to the earlier murder of IRA man John Francis Green in County Monaghan ? the same pistol was used in both attacks . Regarding the soldier with the English accent , Dillon wrote :

it is to say the least highly dubious , if not absurd to conclude from such superficial factors that Nairac was present at the Miami murders . I was told by a source close to " Mr. A " and another loyalist hitman that Nairac was not present at either murder [Miami Showband and John Francis Green] .

Travers had described the English @-@ accented man as having been of normal height and thought he had fair hair , but was not certain . Travers was not able to positively identify Nairac , from his photograph , as having been the man at Buskill . The RTÉ programme Today Tonight aired a documentary in 1987 in which it claimed that former UVF associates of Harris Boyle revealed to the programme 's researchers that Nairac had deliberately detonated the bomb to eliminate Boyle , with whom he had carried out the Green killing . Journalist Emily O 'Reilly noted in the Sunday Tribune that none of the three men convicted of the massacre ever implicated Nairac in the attack or accused him of causing Boyle 's death .

The band 's road manager , Brian Maguire stated that when he drove away from Banbridge in the lead , a few minutes ahead of the band 's minibus , he passed through security barriers manned by the RUC . As Maguire continued ahead , up the by @-@ pass towards Newry , he noticed a blue Triumph 2000 pulling @-@ out from where it had been parked in a lay @-@ by . Maguire recalled that the car first slowed down , then it accelerated , flashing its lights . Two men had been observed

acting suspiciously inside the Castle Ballroom during the band 's performance that night , suggesting that the Miami Showband 's movements were being carefully monitored .

Another persistent allegation is the direct involvement of Mid @-@ Ulster UVF leader Robin Jackson . He was one of the men taken in by the RUC in August 1975 and questioned as a suspect in the killings , but was released without charge . The independent panel of inquiry commissioned by the Pat Finucane Centre concluded that there was " credible evidence that the principal perpetrator [of the Miami Showband attack] was a man who was not prosecuted ? alleged RUC Special Branch agent Robin Jackson " . The same panel revealed that about six weeks before the attack , Thomas Crozier , Jackson , and the latter 's brother @-@ in @-@ law Samuel Fulton Neill , were arrested for the possession of four shotguns . Neill 's car was one of those allegedly used in the Buskhill attack . He was later shot dead in Portadown on 25 January 1976 , allegedly by Jackson for having informed the RUC about Thomas Crozier 's participation in the attack . The panel stated that it was unclear why Crozier , Jackson , and Neill were not in police custody at the time the Miami Showband killings took place . Martin Dillon maintained in *The Dirty War* that the Miami Showband attack was planned weeks before at a house in Portadown , and the person in charge of the overall operation was a former UDR man , whom Dillon referred to for legal reasons as " Mr. A " . Dillon also opined in *God and the Gun : the Church and Irish Terrorism* that the dead bombers , Harris Boyle and Wesley Somerville , had actually led the UVF gang at Buskhill . Journalists Kevin Dowling and Liam Collins in the *Irish Independent* however , suggested in their respective articles that Jackson had been the leader of the unit .

Former British soldier and writer Ken Wharton published in his book *Wasted Years , Wasted Lives , Volume 1* , an alternative theory that was suggested to him by loyalist paramilitarism researcher Jeanne Griffin ; this was that the ambush was planned by Robin Jackson as an elaborate means of eliminating trumpet player Brian McCoy . Griffin suggests that McCoy , who originally came from Caledon , County Tyrone and had strong UDR and Orange Order family connections , was possibly approached at some stage by Jackson with a view of securing his help in carrying out UVF attacks in the Irish Republic . When McCoy refused , Jackson then hatched his plan to murder McCoy and his band mates in retaliation , even macabrely choosing Buskhill as the ambush site due to its similarity to Bus @-@ kill . Griffin goes on to add that the bogus checkpoint was set up not only to plant the bomb on board the van but to ensure the presence of McCoy which would have been confirmed when he handed over his driver 's license to the gunmen . She also thinks that had everything gone to plan once the bomb was planted in the van McCoy would have been instructed to drive through Newry where the bomb would have gone off and the UVF could then afterwards portray the Miami Showband as IRA members on a mission to blow up the local RUC barracks . Griffin based her theory on the nine bullets that were fired from a Luger into McCoy 's body and that Jackson 's fingerprints were found on the silencer used for a Luger . She furthermore opined that Jackson was the man Travers saw kicking McCoy 's body to make sure he was dead .

The Pat Finucane Centre has named the Miami Showband killings as one of the 87 violent attacks perpetrated by the Glenanne gang against the Irish nationalist community in the 1970s . The Glenanne gang was a loose alliance of loyalist extremists allegedly operating under the command of British Military Intelligence and / or RUC Special Branch . It comprised rogue elements of the British security forces who , together with the UVF , carried out sectarian killings in the Mid @-@ Ulster / County Armagh area . Their name comes from a farm in Glenanne , County Armagh , which was owned by RUC reservist James Mitchell ; according to RUC Special Patrol Group officer John Weir , it was used as a UVF arms dump and bomb @-@ making site . Weir alleged the bomb used in the Miami Showband attack came from Mitchell 's farm . Weir 's affidavit implicating Robin Jackson in a number of attacks including the 1974 Dublin bombings was published in the 2003 Barron Report ; the findings of an official investigation into the Dublin and Monaghan bombings commissioned by Irish Supreme Court Judge Henry Barron .

= = Later years = =

During the six years from the onset of " The Troubles " until the July 1975 attack , there had never

been an incident involving any of the showbands . The incident had an adverse effect on the Irish showband scene , with many of the bands afraid to play in Northern Ireland . The emergence of discos later in the decade meant that ballrooms were converted into nightclubs , leaving the showbands with few venues available in which to perform . By the mid @-@ 1980s , the showbands had lost their appeal for the Irish public ; although The Miami Showband , albeit with a series of different line @-@ ups , did not disband until 1986 . The Miami Showband reformed in 2008 , with Travers , Des McAlea , Ray Millar and other new members . It is fronted by McAlea , who returned to Northern Ireland the same year after living in South Africa since about 1982 .

In 1994 , Eric Smyth , a former UDR member and the husband of Brian McCoy 's sister , Sheila , was killed by the IRA .

Travers travelled to Belfast in 2006 for a secret meeting with the second @-@ in @-@ command of the UVF 's Brigade Staff , in an attempt to come to terms with the killing of his former colleagues and friends . The meeting was arranged by Rev. Chris Hudson , a former intermediary between the government of Ireland and the UVF , whose role was crucial to the Northern Ireland peace process . Hudson , a Unitarian minister , had been a close friend of Fran O 'Toole . The encounter took place inside Hudson 's church , All Souls Belfast . The UVF man , who identified himself only as " the Craftsman " , apologised to Travers for the attack , and explained that the UVF gunmen had opened fire on the band because they " had panicked " that night . It was revealed in Peter Taylor 's book *Loyalists* that " the Craftsman " had been instrumental in bringing about the 1994 Combined Loyalist Military Command (CLMC) ceasefire .

Travers also visited the home of Thomas Crozier , hoping to meet with him , but the latter did not come to the door . He presently resides near Craigavon . James McDowell lives in Lurgan , and John James Somerville became an evangelical minister in Belfast . The UVF had cut all ties with Somerville after he had opposed the 1994 ceasefire . In January 2015 he was found dead in his Shankill Road flat . Aged 70 , he died of cancer of the kidney .

= = Memorials = =

A monument dedicated to the dead Miami Showband members was unveiled at a ceremony at Parnell Square North , Dublin , on 10 December 2007 . Survivors Stephen Travers and Des McAlea were both present at the unveiling , as was the Taoiseach , Bertie Ahern , who made a tribute . The monument , made of limestone , bronze and granite , by County Donegal sculptor Redmond Herrity , is at the site of the old National Ballroom , where the band often played .

A mural and memorial plaque to Harris Boyle and Wesley Somerville is in the Killycomain Estate in Portadown , where Boyle had lived . The plaque describes them as having been " killed in action " .

In a report on Nairac 's alleged involvement in the massacre , published in the Sunday Mirror newspaper on 16 May 1999 , Colin Wills called the ambush " one of the worst atrocities in the 30 @-@ year history of the Troubles " . Irish Times diarist , Frank McNally , summed up the massacre as " an incident that encapsulated all the madness of the time " . In 2011 , Journalist Kevin Myers denounced the attack with the following statement : " in its diabolical inventiveness against such a group of harmless and naïve young men , it is easily one of the most depraved [of the Troubles] " .

A stamp was issued in Ireland on 22 September 2010 commemorating the Miami Showband . The 55 @-@ cent stamp , designed with a 1967 publicity photograph of the band , included two of the slain members Fran O 'Toole and Brian McCoy as part of the line @-@ up when Dickie Rock was the frontman . It was one of a series of four stamps issued by An Post , celebrating the " golden age of the Irish showband era from the 1950s to the 1970s " .

= = The HET Report = =

The Historical Enquiries Team (HET) , which was set up to investigate the more controversial Troubles @-@ related deaths , released its report on the Miami Showband killings to the victims ' families in December 2011 . The findings noted in the report confirmed Mid @-@ Ulster UVF leader Robin Jackson 's involvement and identified him as an RUC Special Branch agent . According to the

report , Jackson had claimed during police interrogations that after the shootings , a senior RUC officer had advised him to " lie low " . Although this information was passed on to RUC headquarters , nothing was done about it . In a police statement made following his arrest for possession of the silencer and Luger on 31 May 1976 , Jackson maintained that a week before he was taken into custody , two RUC officers had tipped him off about the discovery of his fingerprints on the silencer ; he also claimed they had forewarned him : " I should clear as there was a wee job up the country that I would be done for and there was no way out of it for me " . Although ballistic testing had linked the Luger (for which the silencer had been specifically made) to the Miami Showband attack , Jackson was never questioned about the killings after his fingerprints had been discovered on the silencer , and the Miami inquiry team were never informed about these developments .

Robin Jackson died of cancer on 30 May 1998 , aged 49 .

The families held a press conference in Dublin after the report was released . When asked to comment about the report , Des McAlea replied , " It 's been a long time but we 've got justice at last " . He did , however , express his concern over the fact that nobody was ever charged with his attempted murder. and that none of the perpetrators ever offered him an apology . Stephen Travers offered , " We believe the only conclusion possible arising from the HET report is that one of the most prolific loyalist murderers of the conflict was an RUC Special Branch agent and was involved in the Miami Showband attack " .

The HET said the killings raised " disturbing questions about collusive and corrupt behaviour " .