



TWITT



When it comes to naming Bloody Sunday murderer, Soldier F, Twitter isn't enforcing its own rules that allow censorship only in accordance with the laws of the tweeter's own country



By David Burke

THE BAN against naming Soldier F, one of the Bloody Sunday murderers, by his real name, remains in force, but only in the UK. Last July, Colum Eastwood, leader of the SDLP, got around the prohibition by naming him under privilege in the House of Commons.

War criminal

'Soldier F' shot a number of people including Patrick Doherty on Bloody Sunday. He did so while Doherty was lying on the ground crawling away from him. Barney McGuigan stepped forward with a white handkerchief looking to help him whereupon Cleary dropped to one knee, aimed his rifle and shot McGuigan in the head.



The victims and families are not a threat to Soldier F's life?

The survivors and families of Bloody Sunday's innocent murder victims have known perfectly well who F is for years and have left him alone. He has even posted selfies on social media, including one taken on a recent holiday. There is another one of him in circulation in what looks like a bar or hotel.

Does the IRA pose F a threat? Hardly. If they wanted him dead, it would have happened by now. There is little chance that the IRA's Army Council would sanction a hit with their minions in Sinn Fein edging close to political power in the South. Moreover, it suits them to have him alive as he is a propaganda stick with which to beat the British government. The same argument applies to dissident Republicans.

There is only one realistic threat to F, and that is from his own side. F and his former superior, Colonel Derek Wilford, Commander of 1 Para, know the full truth about what happened on Bloody Sunday. Wilford had a secret conclave with soldiers F and H immediately before the Bloody Sunday massacre. Soldier H has since died. If, as I suspect, Wilford gave F and H orders to provoke the IRA by shooting at anyone who looked like a possible IRA volunteer, then F has a lot to fear.

The lone wolf argument



Byron Lewis, a 1 para radio operator, seen here on the left

The judge in Derry who acceded to the PSNI's request for the ban pointed out in his judgment that threat assessments had been carried out in July 2019 and March 2021 which had found that F was at low risk from dissident republicans but that the threat level could rise if F was to be denied anonymity.

The judge also stated that F faced a threat not only from dissident republicans but "from a lone actor, not a member of any organisation, but someone who might be prepared to carry out an attack".

These were perfectly reasonable grounds upon which to reach a determination, especially in light of the dire warnings put before him by the PSNI. However, in the months that have passed, no one from any quarter has lifted a finger against F.

If this precedent is to come the norm, it will become virtually impossible to name any defendant in future since anyone named in public could be targeted by "someone who might be prepared to carry out an attack". Perhaps this could be a good thing – a robust extension of the idea that all accused are innocent until proven guilty - but it is notable that the PSNI is only making it for F, not for other criminals.

Byron Lewis

Paratrooper Byron Lewis broke ranks and told the truth about what he witnessed F do on Bloody Sunday.. In 1998 the Saville Inquiry – then up and running – recorded that Lewis "has had to move out of his home. Last night 2 men attacked the person he has been sharing a bungalow



with while he was outside the house in his car. First they attacked the car, then they dragged him [the other man living at the bungalow] out of the car and beat him up...They offered him a block of concrete and said, 'That's your one chance. Give it your best shot, because afterwards we're going to kill you". They mentioned Bloody Sunday, blood money, the SAS,; and that friends of theirs, and

people who dealt with the media, had been killed. They were very violent and it was not possible to reason with them. "[Lewis] did not resist them, was compliant, and they did not in fact harm him. His friend is in hospital and is seriously hurt." Lewis was also branded a traitor on an ex-paratrooper website. Lewis is still in hiding 24 years later.

Twitter squall

After the murder charges against F were dropped last year, his name appeared on notices in Derry, proving, yet again, that his name was well-known.

The ban on naming F only applies to the United Kingdom. F was named by this magazine on its website A number of residents of the Republic retweeted posts emanating from Village highlighting the publication of the articles. They and Village were suspended by Twitter, mostly for a 12-hour period.

A few weeks ago, 'F' was named by Peadar Tóibín in the Dail. Village reported Deputy Tobin's speech later that night. Feargal McCann, whose father was murdered by paratroopers ten weeks after Bloody Sunday, read the story and transmitted a tweet about it. Twitter locked McCann's account.

A twitter force field to protect the uk



For a while it looked like Twitter might have had a point. It could have argued that tweets are international. Hence, one emanating from the Republic could reach the UK. The consequences of such an argument, however, have a far-reaching potential. If, for example, a Russian Court were to ban coverage of Alexei Navalny or Pussy Riot, Twitter might lock the account of anyone who mentioned them.

Now it transpires that Twitter had the ability to block tweets from the Republic flying across the border all along.

Will the PSNI pick on someone else?

Someone - presumably the PSNI - is putting pressure on Twitter to provide them with the details of other account holders who have transmitted F's name. At things stand, at least one such individual, Jim Smith, not a resident of the UK, has asked Twitter not to breach his GDPR rights by furnishing anybody with his details. No doubt the PSNI is hoping to find someone who is a resident of Northern Ireland and with a low profile, to make its point. 

