

I'm ashamed of it. He strayed outside the law at our behest. We instructed him to carry on his job of targeting these people. There were certain risks but it was loosely seen by my hierarchy that if he carried out an action and then reported it, it would negate his guilt. In other words he was doing his job under our direction and once he'd informed us of what he had done, it would not be illegal. Brian believed, not that he was bullet proof, but that he had protection from us and that what he was doing, he was doing at our request and therefore he had immunity. And he didn't.

Nelson's role as a FRU agent came to light in the wake of the UFF's killing of a Catholic from Rathfriland, County Down, called Loughlin Maginn (28) on 25 August 1989. Maginn had never been charged or convicted of any terrorist offence. The UFF insisted he was an IRA intelligence officer, and what is more, said they could prove it. The UDA subsequently produced copies of confidential security force material containing information on suspected terrorists. Details of Maginn were included. The classified details were thought to have come from a UDR base in County Down. To republicans and nationalists it was evidence of what they had always maintained, that the loyalist 'death squads' were the puppets of British intelligence.

On 14 September 1989, in response to the huge outcry that followed the killing of Maginn and revelation of the classified intelligence material, Sir John Hermon's successor as RUC Chief Constable, Sir Hugh Annesley, appointed the Deputy Chief Constable of Cambridgeshire, John Stevens, to investigate the theft and leaking of the security force intelligence documents. Eleven years later, when Mr Stevens became Sir John Stevens, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, the now widened investigation was still going on as Sir John and his team of detectives continued to piece together the elaborate jigsaw of alleged collusion between the FRU and the loyalist paramilitaries.

In his initial inquiry, Stevens made numerous arrests as a result of which members of the old UDA/UFF leadership were gaoled, leaving the way open for Johnny 'Mad Dog' Adair and his associates to take over the UFF's 'C' Company on the Shankill Road. Four months into the inquiry, as the trail led the Stevens team ever closer to Nelson, whose fingerprints were on many of the intelligence documents, a mysterious fire broke out on 10 January 1990 at the office of the Northern Ireland Police Authority in Carrickfergus where the team was based. The fire broke out on the very day that Nelson was due to be arrested. That same day he fled to England to escape arrest. The events seemed to be too coincidental to be an accident. When the team discovered the blaze, they found that the fire alarms were