

PROVOS CHIEF OF STAFF DID IT ALL 'FOR THE CAUSE'

Slab's €58m war chest held for IRA

■ **JOHN MOONEY**
Crime Correspondent

THE investigation into the financial affairs of Thomas 'Slab' Murphy has revealed that he did not benefit personally in any great way from the millions he raised through smuggling.

Murphy, the Provos' Chief of Staff, raised the money to help finance the IRA's campaign through the Troubles.

Gardai believe Murphy has access to at least Stg£40m (€58m) — but he holds this in trust for the republican movement.

They say he has never used the cash for personal gain.

"Whatever he did, he appears to have done for the organisation. He did not do it to buy a holiday villa or a sports car. It was for the cause.

"He has not used the money he earned to better his own circumstances," said a security source.

"He still lives in the house where he was born and drives an old car. The house is not luxurious by any means."

The Criminal Assets Bureau last week secured an order in the High Court freezing €1m in cheques and cash seized from Murphy's farm two weeks ago.

The money was stuffed in plastic bags and hidden on the farm, which straddles the south Armagh/Co Louth border.

CAB have also hit him with a tax bill for €4m following an assessment of his wealth.

Officers are continuing to investigate a property portfolio of 250 houses located in Manchester and various other investments as part of their inquiry into alleged money laundering.

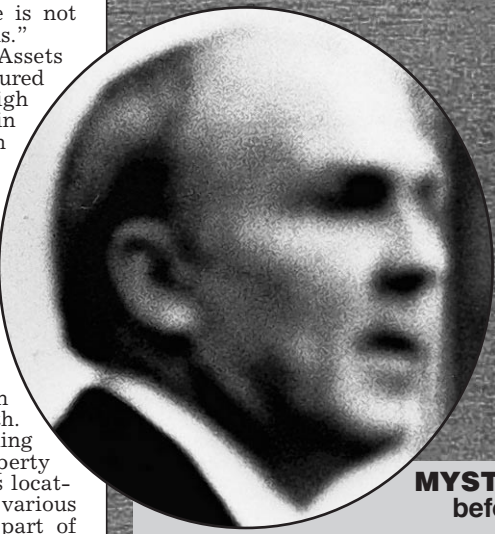
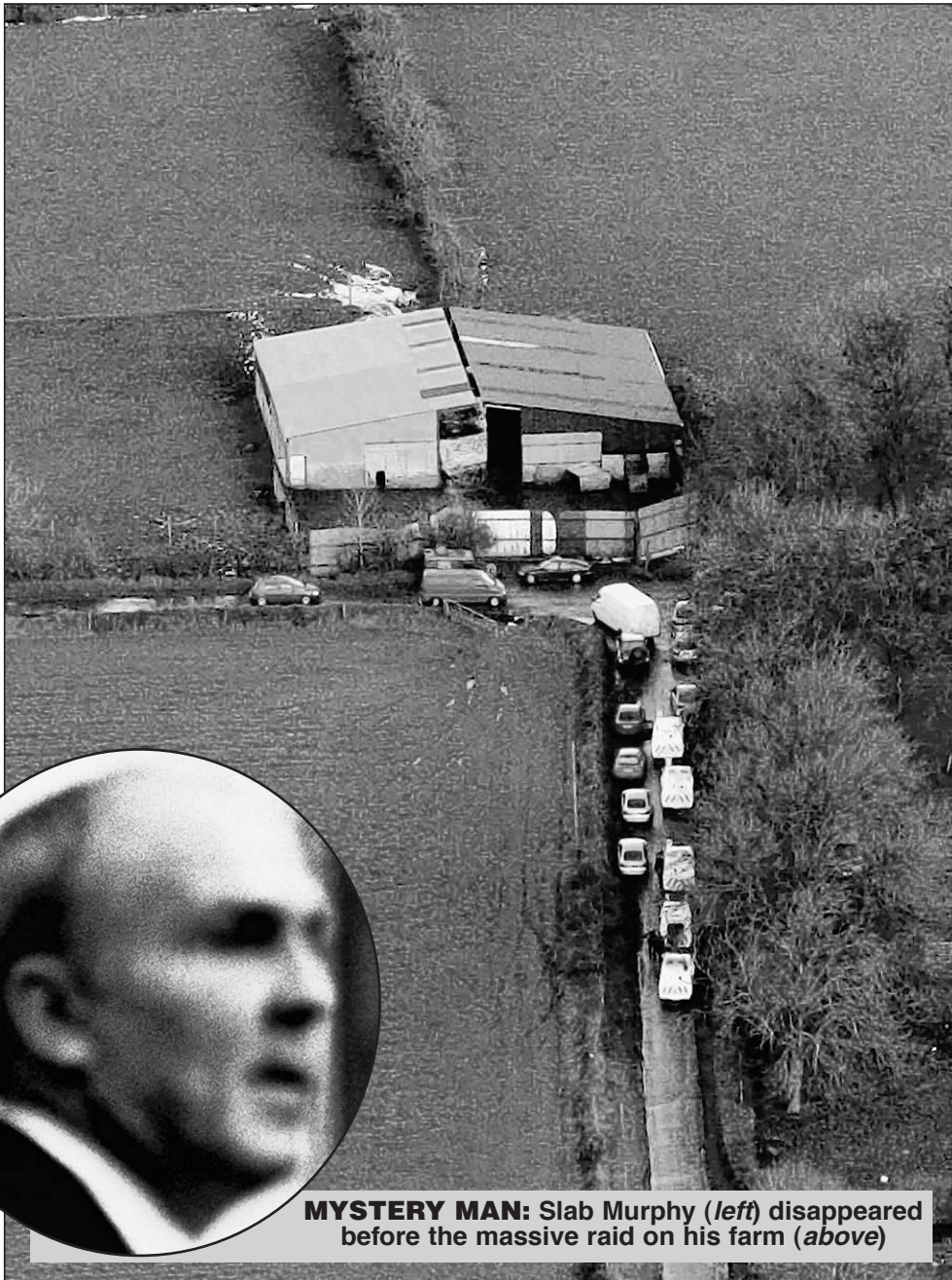
Murphy vanished on the morning of the CAB raid by hiding out in a neighbour's home. He has remained there ever since.

Gardai plan to arrest him after they have examined a mountain of paperwork seized from his farm complex.

Murphy is an intensely private man who joined the IRA in 1971 after a local man was shot by British troops in a sectarian killing.

He went on to lead the IRA's south Armagh Brigade, which mounted a successful campaign of guerrilla warfare against the British forces.

Murphy himself was never a member of Sinn Fein but sees himself as an IRA volunteer.



MYSTERY MAN: Slab Murphy (left) disappeared before the massive raid on his farm (above)

Politically, he believes the Troubles are the result of the partition of the country in 1921. Murphy sees himself in the same light as past republican leaders.

Members of his IRA unit can even trace their own lineage back to the Fenians of 1849.

He is held in high esteem by republicans.

He used his remote farm at Hackballscross to smuggle oil, diesel, cattle, pigs and grain. He also used it to co-ordinate the IRA's bombing campaign in mainland Britain.

Gardai say Murphy ran the biggest smuggling operation they have ever investigated.

"It's a very strange case. This man appears to have had

access to more money than people could ever imagine but he didn't spend it on himself," said the source.

"In some ways, he is becoming a scapegoat for crime and racketeering organised by the IRA to fund its campaign.

Activity

"Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness also sat on the Army Council with Murphy and they were equally responsible for some of the fund-raising activity in the past.

"And now they are travelling the world and claiming to be statesmen while he's being turned into a crime lord," said the source.

Republicans on the border

feel deeply uneasy about Murphy's portrayal in terms of the Peace Process.

"He was instrumental in holding the ceasefires together," said one. "Adams and McGuinness would not have been able to keep the show on the road without Slab's help and influence."

Murphy only really came to widespread public notice in 1998 when he lost an 11-year libel action in the Irish courts against The Sunday Times after taking exception to their describing him as a leading IRA member.

Despite his alleged wealth, the paper is still waiting for him to pay them Stg£600,000 (€870,000) in legal fees.



ROLE: The character called Slab in the film

'My Murphy character a coincidence'



DRAMA: A loaded gun in Reckless Minds

■ **KEN SWEENEY** Showbiz Correspondent

AN IRISH film director has denied that a character named 'Slab Murphy' in his movie about an IRA bomb attack on London has anything to do with the Provos' former chief of staff.

Tom Begley told *Star Sunday* he didn't know of the existence of border republican Thomas 'Slab' Murphy when he penned the semi-fictional screenplay for *Reckless Minds*.

The film tells the story of the terrorists behind London's 1992 Baltic Exchange bombing, in which three people died.

London-based Begley told *Star Sunday*: "I did the short film a few years and when I was looking to name one of the characters, the cameraman from Armagh suggested 'Slab Murphy'."

"That's how I ended up using it again in this film. I didn't even know there was a real Slab Murphy until recently. I'm saying that now because I don't want to end up with a horse's head in my bed."

The Co Longford-born director says he has been amazed by the hostile reaction to his short.

The film follows the terror team as they plot the bombing. In one scene shot outside the New Baltic Exchange, built to replace the one blown up by the IRA, the 'terrorists' are seen parking a car bomb outside.

Although the real life bombers were never caught, the IRA team in *Reckless Minds* are later eliminated in a 'Gibraltar-style' SAS hit.

Tom said: "I wanted to mix fact and fiction and give an idea of what the gang risked."

But even with filming over, opposition to the film continues.

With UK distributors deeming the subject matter too hot to handle, the only cinema who would agree to show the film was an independent house in London.

Tom — who invested his own money in the flick — said: "The film doesn't sympathise with one side or the other but we're facing huge problems."

"Channel Four have tentatively shown interest but I think the only way people will see it is by getting the DVD through our website."