

LOST LOVED ONES

FAMILIES SEARCHING FOR THE TRUTH ABOUT KILLINGS

Bloody legacy of internment

An exhibition by Irish News photographer Jonathan Porter tells the stories of 11 families who lost loved ones in a small area of Belfast during violence which erupted after the introduction of internment 36 years ago. West Belfast correspondent Marie Louise McCrory met relatives still searching for the truth

ON MONDAY August 9 1971 dawn raids at hundreds of homes across Northern Ireland signalled the beginning of internment.

Over the next days there was an upsurge in rioting and violence and an estimated 7,000 people were forced to flee their homes.

In the Ballymurphy area of west Belfast alone, 11 people – including a Catholic priest giving Last Rites to an injured civilian – lost their lives.

Internment gave authorities the power to detain people indefinitely without trial and those seized were often subjected to a catalogue of mistreatment.

Stormont ministers persuaded London to back the desperate measure as violence escalated in 1971.

Since the start of the year there had been almost 300 bombings and 320 shootings.

Police and soldiers arrested almost 350 suspected republicans in dawn raids but poor intelligence meant many had been wrongly identified and within 48 hours a third had been released.

In one case, an elderly man informed soldiers he had not been in the IRA since the War of Independence in the 1920s. Many active republicans had meanwhile fled.

'Operation Demetrius' proved disastrous for Stormont minister Brian Faulkner, leading to a serious rise in unrest and deaths and boosting support for the IRA.

By the end of 1971, a total of 180 people had been killed – republicans were responsible for 107 deaths, the British



■ **GRIEF:** John Teggart stands on the spot near the Springfield Road where his father Danny was shot 14 times by British soldiers on August 9 1971. The father-of-13 had gone to bring his brother Gerard to safety from Springfield Park when he was killed. His wife Bella and children were waiting for him in the family home nearby **PICTURES:** Jonathan Porter

army for 45, loyalists for 22 and the RUC for one.

However, internment would remain in place until 1975, by which time almost 1,900 people would be detained.

RIEGE Voyle was just 14 when her mother Joan Connolly was shot dead by the British army during the violence that followed the introduction of internment in 1971.

She left behind eight children, the youngest of whom was just three years old, when she was shot in the head, shoulders and thigh by soldiers near the Springfield Road in west Belfast.

The 45-year-old, who lived on Ballymurphy Road, had gone out to look for two of her daughters on the evening of August 9.

The killing devastated her husband and children, who had been separated after being taken to safety at a refugee camp in the Republic.

Her husband later suffered a nervous breakdown, having never got over the loss of his wife.

Now a mother-of-four and grandmother herself, Briege

recalls the pain of losing her mother in such tragic circumstances and the disgust her family felt at being awarded just £250 in compensation.

"The British soldiers had come in at around 4am and arrested people," she said.

"Women were out on the streets with their bin lids.

"My mother had come out to look for some of us as there was a curfew.

"Me and my younger sister Joan were watching young ones throwing stones from beside the Henry Taggart barracks on the Springfield Road. The Protestants had come in and were attacking homes.

"Mum said to us to come home and just then the Protestants surged down Springfield Park."

Joan and her daughters became separated after soldiers fired gas into the crowd.

She did not know that the girls had headed for home when she walked towards Springfield Park to look for them.

"It was then that the soldiers opened fire," Briege said.

"My mum then saw this young man, Noel Phillips, crawling along the ground.

"He had been shot in the backside.

"As she went to help him,

she was shot in the head.

"She was heard to shout 'I'm blind and I can't see'.

"She was then shot in the shoulder and the bullet travelled down her arm and out her hand. She was also shot in the thigh."

"We were all gathered around the television and we saw a report saying our mother had been buried. We all started crying"

Briege Voyle

When their mother did not return home, Briege recalls her father Denis frantically phoning community centres and hospitals looking for his red-haired wife.

"A nurse told him that there was one woman with red hair but she was in the morgue," she said.

"A neighbour went with him to identify my mother.

"When he came back to the house, he was literally carried in and we were all roaring and crying.

"About half-an-hour later, a car arrived and me and four of my sisters were taken to a

refugee camp in Cork and then to Waterford.

"We were there a few days when one day we were all gathered around the television and we saw a report saying our mother had been buried.

"We all started crying. What else could we do?"

The children were subsequently split up and taken to live with relatives of their father in the Republic.

Gradually, they arrived back home in Belfast over the autumn and winter.

Briege said life was "unbelievable".

"Daddy had gone to pieces. He became very protective," she said.

"After Bloody Sunday, he took a nervous breakdown and spent six weeks receiving treatment.

"It was the worst two years of my life. There was no help from anyone. Half the time you didn't even get dinner.

"It was devastating. There are no words to describe it."

As this happened, the teenage barman who worked at McEnaney's on the Glen Road said a prayer for his older brother John in the hope that he was safe.

He was then made to walk barefoot across glass before being chained to washerettes at Dermott Hill.

A SIMILAR grief was suffered by the Lavery family. John Lavery (20) was last seen alive