

If you had told me five years ago that I would be studying a master's degree I would have laughed out loud and said you were mad. I started my journey with SEFF after being introduced to Kenny Donaldson by a friend, Serena. At the time my father's murder had been due to be reviewed by the HET. I had been told by everyone else it was pointless and to "move on", which is very hard to do with so many unanswered questions. The HET had left me with SEFF's Advocacy service and they immediately started contacting the PSNI, Kenny sorted out some counselling and arranged visits to Fermanagh for the families of the soldiers killed and injured that day - during the counselling I was diagnosed with PTSD which I hadn't realised I had lived with from the age of eight; I'm on medication and hopefully managing it better for the rest of my life now. SEFF and the VSS have been a huge support in helping get my life together with financial and wellbeing support I really don't have the words to say how truly humbled I am by the love they have shown not only my family but those of so many people out there that have suffered due to terrorist acts - without their support I would still be a lost angry soul intent on self-destruction.

A year or so ago I wanted to start giving something back to the network that has helped me, so I offered what help I could voluntarily and loved the feeling and satisfaction I received from making a difference in someone else's life. As veterans are close to my heart, I started trying to see if I could get a job within the sector and hopefully bring about change in Great Britain with regards to the treatment of veterans and their families. The right training is hard to find and in the jobcentre one day I spotted an advert for the Anglia Ruskin university's master's degree in Military Veterans and Family Studies, perfect I thought. The fees alone were beyond me, I spoke to Yasmin in SEFF's London office and she agreed it sounded perfect for me. She said that she would make some enquiries and see what could be done and to my surprise a few weeks later she came back with great news that the VSS would pay for the degree fees, however I still needed a way to complete the work online as the whole course is distance learning via webinar lectures. I explained this to Kenny and he has loaned me a laptop in time for my first lecture.

I feel my future is a whole lot brighter and I can only thank SEFF and the VSS for this and especially ALL the staff and volunteer', they make a real difference with the limited resources they receive.

By Craig Agar

Jarrow, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne



Craig with his daughter Demi



Advocacy for Innocent Victims Newsletter



**AfIV Office (c/o SEFF), 1 Manderwood Park,
1 Nutfield Road, Lisnaskea, Co. Fermanagh, BT92 0FP**

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Dear Member

This month we have two very personal presentations from John Radley and Craig Agar. Both of them are on the LIVES Project (Liberating Innocent Victims Empowering them to Succeed) steering committee for GB, and their support and inputs are invaluable.

John was badly injured in a no-warning bomb on October 10th 1981 by PIRA at Chelsea Barracks in London. Paul Kavanagh, Martina Anderson's husband, was convicted of murder, attempted murder and other offences in relation to that bomb and other incidents.

Craig's dad, Tom Agar was murdered alongside his friend and colleague Bob Huggins from the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers on May 18, 1984, after they had been taking part in a fishing competition at Enniskillen. A bomb was hidden underneath the bonnet of their hired van. Peter Gallimore was to die from his injuries a few months later, and a fourth colleague (Clive Aldridge) lived with severe injuries for the rest of his life.

I thank them greatly for their reflections, and encourage you as members, to also offer up your inputs in future Newsletters.

I listened with interest to Good Morning Ulster and later Talkback on 20th March. Martin O'Muilleoir, who supported Barry McElduff, following the incident when McElduff thought it 'funny' to ridicule the Kingsmills victims, was making comment. O'Muilleoir, virtually without challenge, now alleges that Michael Stone's attack on the Milltown funerals was collusion. Later, on Talkback, Andree Murphy, who writes for the Andersonstown News and works for Relatives for Justice, supported his view. William Crawley did not question her, he later gave Gerry Kelly a 'free run' without taking issue with anything he said. How did they come to this assertion, do the BBC care as many would feel that 'state bashing' appears to fit their narrative. The reality is it suited the BBC to headline this story on BBC NI twice on one day, it does not matter that the PROVOS collusion allegation is based on a tenuous link with the UDA/Army agent Brian Nelson. It is also quite interesting that the PROVOS are now taking offence when they are accused of rewriting history.

The old adage, 'he who alleges must prove' no longer rings true, it appears that the revisionist ideological tactics of the PROVOS is quite simply to make any statement, no matter how outrageous, repeat it often enough and there will be those who will believe it. We MUST continue to challenge them.

Kind Regards,

Ken

For general Advocacy queries please contact the SEFF Office on (028) 6772 2242 or email advocacy@seff.org.uk

To contact Ken Funston by email ken.funston@seff.org.uk or mobile 0783 4488635

To contact Ann Travers by email ann.travers.afiv@seff.org.uk or mobile 07860 850003

To contact Pete Murtagh by email peter.murtagh.afiv@seff.org.uk or mobile 07860 850004

To contact Wendy Stewart by email wendy.stewart.afiv@seff.org.uk or mobile 07860 850008

To contact Yasmin Wright by email yasmin.wright.afiv@seff.org.uk or mobile 07860 850 017



Fairy Tale of New York

Despite Gerry Adams having retired from Provisional Sinn Fein; he “hasn’t gone away” and continues to overshadow Mary Lou McDonald’s leadership and that of her deputy Michelle O’Neill. The Mayor of New York Bill de Blasio changed St. Patricks Day to “Gerry Adams Day” in recognition of his Republicanism. This is probably the most divisive figure in modern politics both North and South of our Island’s border. Mr de Blasio is surely naïve and uneducated in the true history of the most recent troubled period of Northern Ireland, to show such disregard for the thousands of innocent victims that have suffered through no fault of their own, at the hands of all acts of terrorists.

We talk about truth, acknowledgement and justice; with Sinn Fein publicly saying they recognise these principles in addressing the past and moving forward, Mr. Adams personally appears to disregard all three. Truth; despite substantial evidence to the contrary he has continually denied being a member of the IRA. Acknowledgement; Mr. Adams and the Sinn Fein party generally continue to justify their actions in their so called struggle, they refuse to acknowledge that the murder of hundreds of innocent law abiding victims was abhorrent, not to mention the thousands of victims left to live with and cope with these atrocities. The only justice Mr. Adams appears to have embraced is the injustices (widely suggested in many respected journalistic articles and books written over the years) that he directed towards others, many of them towards his own nationalist community he so vehemently claimed to protect and represent. Provisional Sinn Fein now rightly condemn the actions of dissident groupings, this is welcomed, but in reality is it not contradictory, in that they refuse to recognise their own similar murderous past actions were fundamentally wrong? They stand accused of displaying double standards in their condemnation of the current dissident groupings, who utilise very similar tactics and the same criminal intent the PIRA used for years in the name of a United Ireland.

But we do embrace the transition to the pursuit of political objectives by peaceful and lawful means. However, this has to be genuine, absent of any underlying threat of a return to violence. There therefore has to be a recognition that the many horrendous criminal acts carried out by terrorist groupings on all sides during the ‘Troubles’ were wrong and can never be repeated, likewise the relatively small numbers of members of the Security Forces resorting to criminal activities needs to be acknowledged. People generally fail to grasp the fact of who the true victims of the legacy of the ‘Troubles’ are; politicians too often disregard and treat innocent victims as an irritating distraction from their own political agendas and egos.

The Provisional IRA, through terrorism and violence have achieved nothing that would have not been achieved through lawful means in a modern democratic society, there were no doubt injustices experienced by certain sections of our communities, but the sustained period of murder and violence from the late 1960’s through to the signing of the Belfast Agreement did nothing to redress these imbalances. Society has moved on and many discriminations that were acceptable 40 to 50 years ago, are quite rightly no longer tolerated; society continues to evolve. The irony is, they may have easily slipped virtually unnoticed closer towards their ultimate goal had they chosen a lawful route. There is no doubt that their murderous campaign hardened the resolve of those lawfully opposed to a United Ireland.

Irish Americans continue to put forward this romantic idealistic portrayal of the Provisional IRA, so called freedom fighters in pursuit of a worthy cause, totally choosing to ignore the brutality of the thousands of innocents they murdered and maimed in the name of republicanism, not to mention the thousands of bereaved left behind. The Irish Republican movement is brazen in continually exploiting this American mindset. They shy away from any criticism of America’s actions or policies, completely going against their so called socialist values they claim to base their political mandate on, obviously scared they may endanger their invaluable source of American funding.

I often wonder how the Americans would have reacted had there been a similar period of a sustained terrorist campaign on American soil; would they have shown the restraint and control that members of our security forces and the majority of our law abiding communities displayed throughout these threatening and difficult times?

This is why the Innocent Victims voice is so important to try and correct the distortion of the truth and push forward the true narrative of what occurred during those troubled times; not some mythical fairy tale that is epitomised in how the story of the ‘Troubles’ is being currently delivered in America.

Regards,

Pete Murtagh

Irish Government Double Standards

I remark with interest the ruling from the ECtHR on the so-called 'hooded men' case. One of these men, Jim Auld stated, "The court of human rights in Strasbourg has **colluded** with governments who do torture by allowing them to keep this ruling in place, and those techniques of torture can be used on their citizens and other people for their own ends." I also listened to the statement by the men's solicitor and how they intend to continue to appeal this case originally presented by the Republic of Ireland.

The ECtHR has upheld its' 1978 judgment in the so-called 'hooded men' case by 6-1 in which it ruled the men had been subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment, but not torture at the hands of the British authorities during the 'Troubles.' Irish republicans have lauded previous judgments by this court over and over, but now appear to be dismayed when unusually the court has ruled against them. It is my understanding that the 'five' methods used on these men were standard procedures of the time used against those who the British would have deemed 'enemy combatants', and accepted by the Geneva Convention. I therefore presume this had some bearing on the ruling.

When the RoI government took their original case against the British in the early 70s, the Provisionals were launching a full scale assault on the border people of Northern Ireland. Like most terrorist organisations, it needed a safe haven, and the Provos had that in the Republic of Ireland. Outside the urban conurbations of Belfast and Londonderry, any graphical map will show you that incidents were most concentrated along the border. As a fellow EU state, it should have been the duty of the RoI to fully assist the UK in defeating this evil organisation. Yet the Provos continued to use the Republic as a launch pad, and numerous requests for extradition of the most evil perpetrators of Republican crimes were continually refused by the Irish government, who justified these crimes as political.

I work with many people who were failed by the Irish state, left defenceless by these constant cross-border raids. I understand that there are still a number of Provos living in the Republic who were unable to avail of the so-called 'OTR' letters due to the evidence against them, yet they are living openly and freely.

Where is the Irish government in upholding the human rights of the border people, where are their cries for justice and accountability?

Their role as a democratic state is surely not restricted to representing the position of the 'hooded men' but also in upholding the rights of the many thousands of British citizens of Northern Ireland failed by what that the RoI State either did or failed to do over the years of the terrorist campaign.

Ken Funston

I was injured by a PIRA nail bomb while serving with the 1st Battalion Irish Guards at Chelsea Barracks London

This incident has affected my life in the most awful way, bringing many issues and problems including PTSD.

The bomb left me with life changing injuries however to add insult to injury the army medically discharged me some 7 years after the bombing.

I have been left alone to deal with incidents and injuries which have made others take their own lives. There is no support from the army nor the MOD and you are left to just get on with it. Should you ask for help you are considered a nuisance and a trouble maker. This attitude stops you requesting assistance.

Over the past year I have started my own security company and this has helped me greatly mentally and given me focus.

Along with SEFF it is my hope that we can help other people with similar experiences or have been affected by the ‘Troubles’ back into work through training and personal development.

Being back doing something worthwhile is priceless and having something to focus on is invaluable.

SEFF has helped and supported me when I was on my knees - I feel it an honour to hopefully put something back into the community.

John Radley