

However, what the Government failed to do was make the changes retrospectively, meaning that those who had their pensions stopped would not have the payments reinstated. The obvious unfairness of this was highlighted at the time and has been reiterated on numerous occasions since. It has even been suggested that some of the widows and widowers effected should divorce or leave their partner, the payment would then be reinstated and then they could re-marry or re-cohabitate with their partner; quite understandably this was met with disdain. With regards to the terrorist campaign in Northern Ireland this has had a massive impact the number of those left widowed who lost loved ones serving with the regular Army and UDR. We include a brief snapshot of the thoughts of some of the SEFF members affected.

A meeting was scheduled to take place on the 24th March 2020 between the War Widows Association GB and the Defence Secretary Ben Wallace to discuss the matter; this was cancelled because of the current pandemic; this meeting was due to take place on the 16th June 2020 but again was cancelled. The day after the meeting was first due to take place in March, Defence Minister, Johnny Mercer said, "The government recognises the unique commitment that Service families make to our country and remains sympathetic to the circumstances of those widows who remarried and cohabited before 1 April 2015. However, the government currently has no plans to reinstate War Widows' Pensions for war widows who remarried or cohabited before the 2015 changes took effect".

For the last number of years SEFF has been lobbying for the 2015 change to either be implemented retrospectively or for a one-off acknowledgement payment to be made with the Pension reinstated as of NOW. In the bigger scheme of things this is a small financial cost for those whose loved ones made the ultimate sacrifice.

Regards,

Peter



Elizabeth Morris's husband Ronnie Finlay was murdered in Strabane in 1983 says, ***"They didn't care, really, at the end of the day. He was just a number there.....We deserve to have our pension back. We should never have lost the pension in the first place and I speak for a lot of widowed women who feel the same as myself."***



Susan Rimmer's husband James Lee was murdered in Crossmaglen in 1972 says, ***"If you stood 10 War Widows in a room and told 5 of them you can have a pension and the told the others 5 you can't, I don't see the difference, I don't understand it, it's the principle, not the money"***.



Advocacy for Innocent Victims Newsletter



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AfIV Office (C/O SEFF),
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Dear Member,

We are hoping that we are nearing the end of the national crisis caused by the COVID19 pandemic, and we can start moving back into normality. The advocates have had to alter the way they worked but to continue in that capacity is not ideal. Nothing is better than face to face meetings, whether that is with you or the statutory organisations. As soon as the restrictions are relaxed in accordance with medical advices, it is our intention to resume the meetings.

Issues with the roll-out of the victims' and survivors' pension continue with the Provisional Republican movement insisting that their members receive the pension, thereby equating them with the innocent. We cannot and will not support a terrorist of any persuasion being equated with an innocent victim.

As advocates, we will continue to support you on this and in other situations, such as the stalemate on the plans of dealing with the past. We are still waiting to see the full plans of how the government intend to deal with legacy; it is now two years since the NIO-led Legacy consultation process, and it was your input that made the government realise that their plans as per the Stormont House Agreement had to change.

Your voice matters, we will continue to insist that your voice is not only heard, but also heeded.

Please continue to use and support the AfIV service.

Yours, Ken Funston (Advocacy Support Manager)



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Education and recollecting

A couple of weekends ago Mary Lou McDonald, President of Sinn Fein gave an interview to the Sunday Independent. In it she stated when asked about the IRA, if the IRA carried out terrorist acts.

“Back then - and now - I don’t regard that people who fought for Irish freedom were terrorists. I do accept that IRA actions hurt and killed a great many people. I also know that actions of state forces and actors and loyalist paramilitaries similarly caused grief and loss. For me, the important piece of this is not to label people as ‘terrorists’ but to accept that there was apolitical context, there was a reason.”

The Sinn Fein President’s attempted justification of murder is what many of us have had to listen to over the years and is one of the reasons why organisations such as SEFF exist, to offer a safe space and support. No murder can be justified. None of our loved ones were ‘legitimate targets’, although they have been labelled as such by those who carried out criminal acts and bombing campaigns.

In February SEFF started a new project, which I have the pleasure of working on. It is recording the lived experiences of our members and those who are not, but who are victims and survivors of terrorism. These ‘stories’ are vital to record the human cost and effect of terrorism and to ensure that our stories belong to us. They are our life experience, by sharing them we help to educate those who were never impacted by terrorism, the young and indeed those from different communities. They put the human face to the uniform, job, religion, civilian, etc.,

I am meeting with individuals and families to record each recollection using a digital device. The hope is to produce an oral archive; hearing the human voice recall resilience through adversity, captures the listener’s heart and mind. Many people today listen to podcasts instead of reading, and this method of recording especially in educational settings will be very beneficial. The story is also typed out so there is a written record and will include newspaper clippings from that time and personal photographs. The story teller will get a copy of both the oral recording and the written word. If permission is given, we will securely store it and also use it for educational purposes, treating the testimony with the utmost respect. However, the story always belongs to the person/family who gave it and they may request its’ removal at any time. We are only the facilitators; the stories never belong to us.

In my opinion it is only until we flood the media, educational facilities etc. with the stories of the consequences of terrorism that politicians, such as Mary Lou McDonald, will be forced to stop justifying murders. Terrorism or criminality is never justified.

If you are interested in taking part in the ‘Life Experiences - My Story’ project, please contact the SEFF office on: 028 677 23884 (048 677 23884 from RoI) or any of the Advocacy / Health and Well-being staff.

Take Care,

Ann Travers

War Widow’s Pension

Prior to 2015 anyone receiving the Widows War Pension would lose any continued entitlement if they remarried or cohabited with a new partner. This has always been a contentious and insensitive approach; when you take into account what these widows and widowers had been through in the aftermath in the loss of their loved one, the pension was only a small token of acknowledgement for their loss. In 2015 the Government announced that from the 1st April 2015 War Widows Pension payments would be continued until the death of the widow or widower, this was widely welcomed.



2016, The then Liberal Democrats MP for Leeds North West, Greg Mulholland, with a group of War Widows near the Palace of Westminster



Linda McHugh husband John Gibbons was murdered in Crossmaglen in 1972 says, ***“it’s a cruel rule and had been admitted by Mr. Cameron’s Government in 2015.... They must no longer punish us because we remarried at the wrong time”.***



Lila Madden’s husband John McKeegan was murdered in Strabane in 1989 says, ***“I feel let down and hurt by the Government, at the end of the day my husband gave up his life for the country”***