Belturbet Bomb – O’Reilly & Stanley 28th December 1972

Today marks the 46th Anniversary since a bomb ripped through Belturbet Town, County Cavan.

On 28th December 1972 two young people, Geraldine O'Reilly (aged 15 years) Staghall, Belturbet and Patrick Stanley, from Clara, Co. Offaly, (aged 16 years) were murdered as a consequence of a Loyalist car bomb.

On that fateful day, a bomb had previously exploded in a blue Morris 1100 car on Fermanagh Street, Clones, at 10.01pm, seriously injuring two men. A third bomb exploded outside the licensed premises of Hugh Britton at Mullnagoad, near Pettigo, Donegal. No one was injured, though the pub was extensively damaged.

The cars used in Clones and Belturbet had both been stolen in Enniskillen earlier that day and the locations of all three bombs were in a radius of 20 miles from Enniskillen, and all in towns south of the Border.

Reports at the time describe damage to property caused by the 100lb-bomb, planted in a Red 1969 Ford Escort, to be estimated at £200,000. The car was driven across the Border and to the town through the Aghalane crossing at 9pm, an hour and a half before the blast. Twenty-three houses in Butler Street were damaged by the explosion, 13 houses in The Diamond and 18 houses in Bridge Street, with others less seriously damaged on Holborn Hill, The Lawn and at Banker's Lane.

Fourteen cars were also damaged, while pieces of the bomb car were recovered from a 100-yard radius of the blast site.

Patrick Stanley, a helper on a bottle gas container lorry, had been making a phone call in a nearby kiosk when the bomb went off. Geraldine O'Reilly, who was on her Christmas holidays from school, was across the road in Slowey's chip shop waiting to be served when the bomb exploded, where she suffered head injuries from flying shrapnel.

Geraldine's brother, Anthony, had been waiting for her outside in the car when the bomb went off. His car was parked a mere 10-feet from the blast site. From a family of eight, Geraldine being the youngest, Anthony remembers her as following him everywhere. "We were very close. When it went off, to tell you the truth I thought I had fallen asleep. I heard a bang, I thought I was dreaming and fell out onto the footpath. I was dazed, I didn't know what had happened, I went down the street, I didn't know which way was which. It was then I realised that Geraldine was in the chipper. I started to call for her and someone came and took me then. Later that evening, I had to go an identify Geraldine's body in the hospital, I identified her by her clothes.

"The hurt of what happened still hasn't gone away, it never will. Our mother and father couldn't ever nearly talk about it, it was only after they died did anyone really begin to talk about it really, get something done. You do think what they could have grown up to be, would Geraldine have had her own family now, it's just so sad they have to be remembered in this way."

A specially sculptured monument was erected in early 2007 on the site of the bomb, dedicated to these two victims.

Geraldine was a student at St. Bricin's Vocational School, Belturbet.

The symbol of a book was chosen as Geraldine's goal in life was to become a teacher. The dancing pumps represent her keen interest in Irish dancing, she attended the local Irish classes.

Patrick was also a member of his local GAA club in Clara and had a keen interest in Gaelic football. He also enjoyed a game of Hurley which is symbolised on the Memorial Quilt by the crossed Hurley sticks. Patrick was the eldest of a family of 10.

SEFF's thoughts and prayers are with the Stanley and O'Reilly families whose love ones were innocents lost to terrorism.