**Signalman Leslie (Les) David Walsh - 4th February 1974**

SEFF remembers Leslie Walsh (known as Les) who was one of 12 victims of the M62 Coach Bomb who was murdered 46 years ago today.

The M62 Coach bomb was a Provisional IRA bomb detonated within the luggage compartment of a coach which was carrying army personnel and their families from Manchester to Catterick Garrison.

Les was born in Blackpool and spent most of his childhood there along with his parents, brothers and sisters.

Although his family did not have much money they had everything that was important and was said to have had a very happy upbringing.

The Summer holidays were spent in Blackpool travelling from the stables to the beach with the donkeys where he and his brother, Albert would walk the donkeys giving rides to the holiday makers - this is why this image of a donkey is depicted on Leslie’s patch within the ‘Terrorism knows NO borders’ memorial quilt.

Les was believed to have never been happier than when he joined the army; he made some genuine friends and seemed to really enjoy his time there.

Speaking in SEFF’s ‘Innocent Victims United’ publication Les brother Albert stated: “My fondest memories of Les were the happy childhood we shared growing up together in Blackpool. We shared a bedroom for most of our early years as we were the youngest of  ve children, two years and ten months separated us, to our parents Jack & Doris, although we never had much money we had everything we could ask for- our parents kept us fed and clothed and we were always happy”.

“At Secondary School Les was always getting into trouble for either  ghting or smoking - or both! Our headmaster always asked me why he was not like me (I was the ‘good’ boy - Les was a rebel!) and asked me to try to change him-this was NEVER going to happen!”

“In the summer holidays, Les and I used to travel from the stables to the beach with the donkeys where we would walk the donkeys giving rides to holidaymakers-our parents never had to worry where we were all those summer days. We always had a large group of friends and enjoyed- what appeared to us-to be an idyllic childhood”.

“In 1970, following our Dad su ering a heart attack at 49 years old, we moved from Blackpool to Tyldesley, a small mining & spinning town on the outskirts of Manchester, I had started work at a VW & Ford Dealer in nearby Bolton, Les, being only 13 joined a local secondary school where he found it a challenge-his school mates spoke broad Lancashire accents and it took him a while to settle down. When he left school, he started working for the local butcher but again it wasn’t what he really wanted and he decided to join the army, joining the Royal Signals Regiment, based at Catterick Camp, North Yorkshire”.

“I genuinely think he was never happier as he had made some genuine friends and I think he needed the discipline the Army gave him”.

“Les had been on leave for the weekend, he enjoyed his life in the army and I considered he had ‘grown up’ there. He was amongst a group of Service Personnel returning to Catterick Camp in North Yorkshire from Manchester, a coach had been laid on due to the rail strike so I drove him to Piccadilly Station to catch the coach”.

“On the way there he really didn’t want to go back as he had enjoyed his weekend break, I just told him that he needed to return as otherwise he would be put on a charge and then leave would be cancelled as a result. He did eventually accept this fact – I have lived with this regret for 43 years”.

“A member of the Provisional IRA had placed a bomb on the coach which exploded on the Eastbound carriageway of the M62 motorway near Hudders eld. The bomb destroyed most of the coach killing Leslie and eleven other Servicemen and their families”.

“The immediate impact on my family was devastating. We had no phone at home, my Mother had heard about a bomb but there were very few details, the first my parents knew was when the police called at the house to inform them of the tragedy, my Mother was distraught, my Father had been in bed as he worked nights and he phoned me at work to tell me the news”.

“My brother and sisters all came round to be together at this time. Mum took it the hardest as she had lost her youngest child, I declined to visit the funeral parlour as I wanted to remember Les as I had last seen him, I will never forgive myself for taking him on that fateful journey. I had lost my best mate and Brother”.

“The lasting impact on my family- my parents split up a year later after 29 years of marriage, my older brother stayed with Dad and I split my time between them both, both my sisters were married with young children of their own, I married in 1976 and the family, as we were previously, was shattered”.

“Our parents are no longer with us and sadly never got to see the new memorial at Hartshead Moor Services. Mum never got over losing Les and I still miss him to this day, wondering what he would have achieved as he would have now been 61 years old”.

“I think the Family would like this never to be forgotten, my own son and daughter who are now in their thirties and never knew Leslie but know all about him, will continue to attend the annual memorial service in February after I am no longer able”.

“We would love to see lasting peace in Northern Ireland as I am sure the vast majority of people would - I have met many Irish people over the years and count many as close friends, we need peace to prevail,” concluded Albert.

SEFF’s thoughts and prayers are with The Walsh family today and everyday.