Walter (Sandy) Saunderson 10th April 1974

SEFF remembers Walter (known as Sandy) Saunderson on this, the 46th Anniversary since his murder. Walter who was shot dead by the Provisional IRA on 10th April 1974 in the Earl of Erne Primary School in Teemore, County Fermanagh.

At the time of his murder, Walter was 58 years old, married and had seven children.

On the day of the killing 6 gunmen hijacked a car some 4 miles away on the border at Gortineddan. Three cooks at the school were preparing lunch when the cook in charge saw the gunmen arrive at the school. She said “I watched the first man go into the kitchen and I heard him speak to Master Saunderson. He was having a cup of coffee. I heard the man say ‘What’s your name?. The Master put his hands up and said ‘Saunderson’. I knew what was going to happen and I could not look. I heard the sound of shooting. There was a pause in the shooting and then further shots were fired”.

A teacher left her class and went to the kitchen to find Walter Saunderson lying face down on the floor. She said, “I could see immediately that he had been shot in the back … He had been hit ten times from both an automatic weapon and a rifle”.

Some of the school children are said to have seen the gunmen escaping.

He was locally referred to as Master Saunderson - joined the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers when he was 18 and served in Palestine and the Middle East before the outbreak of World War II. He transferred to the Parachute Regiment, and he was then commissioned in the Royal Irish Fusiliers and served throughout the war. On demobilisation, with the rank of Captain he trained as a teacher at Larkfield College, Belfast, and after a short time at Enniskillen Model School, he was appointed Principal of the Earl of Erne School. Around 1952, he moved with the pupils into the new building, and resided in the bungalow in the grounds of the school. He continued in the teaching profession until his death.

He had also served in the Territorial Army, B Specials and had been commander of B company of 4th Fermanagh UDR.

Walter was the highest ranking former member of the UDR killed during the 'Troubles.' He had retired from the UDR in the previous year.

The brutal murder of Walter has had a lasting impact on the communities of South Fermanagh. Walter Saunderson was no threat to anyone, he was a family man and committed defender of Justice, Peace and what was right.

His life was symbolised by service, whether that was his notable Army achievements or his contribution to Education as headmaster of Earl of Erne Primary School in Teemore.

Walter's legacy lives on in the hearts of those left behind. Our thoughts and prayers are with the Saunderson family circle today and everyday.