Ballygawley Bus Bomb

Today marks the 32nd Anniversary since the Ballygawley Bus Bomb which took place on 20th August 1988. The Ballygawley bus bombing was a roadside bomb attack by the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) on a bus carrying British soldiers in Northern Ireland. It occurred in the early hours of 20th August in the townland of Curr near Ballygawley, County Tyrone.

The attack murdered eight soldiers and wounded another 28. It was the second-deadliest attack on the British Army in Northern Ireland during the ‘Troubles,’ after the Warrenpoint ambush of 1979. In the wake of the bombing the British Army began ferrying its troops in and out of County Tyrone by helicopter.

The bus was transporting 36 soldiers of The Light Infantry from RAF Aldergrove to a military base near Omagh. The soldiers, who came from England, had just finished 18 months of a two-year tour of duty in Northern Ireland and were returning to the base after a short holiday.

As it was driving along the main road from Ballygawley to Omagh, at about 12:30AM, IRA members remotely detonated a roadside bomb containing 200 pounds (91 kg) of semtex. According to police, the bomb had been planted in a vehicle by the roadside and had been detonated by command wire from 330 yards (300 m) away. The blast hurled the bus 30 metres down the road and threw the soldiers into neighbouring hedges and fields. It left a crater 6 feet (1.8 m) deep and scattered body parts and twisted metal over a wide area.

Witnesses described finding dead, dying and wounded soldiers strewn on the road and caught in the wreckage of the bus. Others were walking around, "stunned”. Some of the first to arrive on the scene and offer help were bandsmen of the Omagh Protestant Boy's Band and Star of the Valley, Londonderry returning from a parade in Portadown, who had also been travelling in buses.

Since the 25th Anniversary of the attack, SEFF has assisted in bringing back the bereaved and survivors of the attack to Northern Ireland to support them in their journey of personal healing.