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## Local & National

### The war may be over but our pain goes on

Friday, May 04, 2007

By Lisa Smyth

As the Ulster Volunteer Force and Red Hand Commando move towards 'civilianisation' relatives of their victims tell the Telegraph what they think

*Relative of Protestant victim*

#### 'Hard to take pledge seriously, says death squad victim's dad'

The father of a Co Antrim man gunned down by a UVF death squad last night angrily hit out at the loyalist organisation for refusing to destroy its weapons.

John Allen Snr said it was difficult to believe yesterday's announcement by the UVF that it has ended its war when his own son was murdered by members of the group during a ceasefire.

Protestant Ballyclare murder victim John Allen Jnr was shot twice in the head by the UVF in November 2003. Despite Mr Allen Snr claiming that both he and the police know the identity of his son's killer, no-one has ever been brought to justice for the shooting.

Speaking to the Belfast Telegraph, he said: "It's hard to take it very seriously. In the last ceasefire the weapons were supposed to be beyond reach but some members were able to get to them and murder my son."

Still obviously devastated by his 31-year-old son's violent death, he continued: "I go to John's grave every day and it's hard to take.

"I would get down on my knees in public if I have to and beg the likes of Dawn Purvis to name the man who killed my son.

"I want him brought to book. I know he will never serve a day behind bars and I have accepted that. I don't mind if he never even serves an hour in prison but I want the people who are up in Stormont getting my taxes to help the police catch this man.

"I was in Ballyclare today and saw the man who shot my son for the first time since 2003, and it is only my faith that stopped me from doing something I would regret for the rest of my life. I came home and thanked God for giving me the strength to walk on.

"I have been told that John was murdered by rogue elements in the UVF and the shooting wasn't sanctioned so it would show they were serious about the ceasefire if they stood up and named the man who killed him.

"I heard a man today who lives on the Shankhill asking if he will still have to pay his protection money this week and I think that's also a very important point. It's more than just the shootings, it's the drugs and racketeering and thuggery. The UVF never existed to protect us from republicans. That was just an excuse."

But despite his scepticism, Mr Allen Snr said he hoped that the UVF's pledge would be carried out: "Everyone says we have to move forward and I agree. I would love nothing more than to be able to move forward.

"I just hope they are serious so that no more families have to go through this but only time will tell."

*Relative of Catholic victim*

#### 'I am pleased they said the war is over'

A catholic man blinded by UVF gunmen in the same attack that killed his brother last night welcomed the announcement that the loyalist terror group is to end its campaign of violence.

Coleraine man Chris Doherty was just 19 when he lost the sight in both eyes after he was shot in the head in a gun attack 32 years ago.

Mr Doherty was returning from a dance at the university in Coleraine on February 14, 1975, with his 23-

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year-old brother, Brendan, and their cousin, Charlie McLaughlin, when a gang of four men opened fire.

He explained: "We were walking home from a community dance and we were ambushed. My cousin was fortunate because my brother fell on top of him so he survived.

"They missed me first time. I can't remember much about it but I knew that something was coming. I saw what had happened to Brendan and I was fortunate in a way because I put my hand up to protect myself.

"I was shot through the head but because I had put my hand up the bullet was deflected away from my brain down through my eyes instead which is how I was blinded.

"I came out about 10 days after and my brother eventually died in hospital. He was kept on a life support machine until February 23."

Speaking of his loss and the effect the attack has had on his life, Mr Doherty said he regards yesterday's announcement as a positive step.

"If anything at all I am at peace in myself when I hear something like that," he said.

"If they are willing to set down that war attitude, then no more people are going to suffer and that is the most important thing. We have to try and give people a chance to discover what we had here in Northern Ireland before the Troubles.

"I'm not so worried about them saying they are not going to give up their arms because how do we really know the IRA ever did that? I am just pleased they are willing to say the war is over."

However, Mr Doherty admitted he endured a difficult struggle to accept his situation: "I was 19 at the time of the shooting and it took me a long time to cope with the stress of it all.

"Football was a career I was hoping to get somewhere with and that was taken away from me. It was about three and a half years or more before I started to come to terms with the fact that I was blind and I made slow progress from there.

"Between going to rehabilitation colleges in England and getting to the point in my life where I was meeting lots of people I felt a bit happier in myself, became a Christian and built my life up.

"I came to have a lot of time for David Ervine because he seemed like someone who was trying to move forward and I heard him say that the UVF targeted Catholics because they wanted the IRA to step back. It was the first time I realised what was behind the shooting. I needed an answer."

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