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Thursday, 21st August 2008

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Paula's day of 'Hell on earth'. . .

The Omagh Bomb: Tenth anniversary

Published Date: 15 August 2008

By Staff reporter

'Hell on earth' for Paula Helguero was the day she was forced to identify the bodies of the two Spanish people killed in the Omagh attack, and then having to break the heart-wrenching news to their devastated parents.

Spanish teacher Paula has been spending her summers in Buncrana for the past 20 years.

And on August 15, 1998, the co-ordinator should have been celebrating what would have been the organisation's tenth summer in Donegal.

Instead she was endlessly searching for the 30 plus students who had travelled to Omagh - on that tragic day - not knowing if she would find them dead, alive, or find them at all.

Sadly Spanish leader Rocio Abad Ramos (23) and student Fernando Baselga (12) were killed in the brutal blast.

Recalling the nightmare, Paula told the 'Journal' yesterday that she had been phoned minutes after the bomb went off, by one of her leaders.

She said: "At 3.10pm I got a phone call from a phone box - it was one of my leaders ringing me on my mobile saying there had been a bomb and that many students were at the scene where the bomb had gone off.

"I was pregnant with my fourth child, Patricia, so I got my father-in-law to take me to Omagh.

"I was very nervous, when we got to the scene we went straight to the hospital.

"How to react to devastation like that when you are responsible for these students that are in Ireland? well it was just awful and to find some of them dead or badly injured. It was just terrible, words cannot describe how I felt.

"We had Irish kids with us too, and three of them had died that day."

Paula said the worst part was trying to locate the students and not knowing what had happened to each and every one of them.

She desperately tried to find out how badly injured they were and worst of all, had any died?

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She was also conscious not all of the students spoke good English and was deeply concerned for their welfare.

Paula said it was her strong Catholic faith that helped her to get through that day and the days that followed.

She said without her sense of religion she simply would not have gotten through this travesty.

She was given rosary beads at the Omagh hospital and to this day she still has them and prays with them regularly.

Praying

Brave Paula had the hard task of identifying her student and leader's bodies in the hospital morgue.

She said: "We were there in a group and there were the families from Buncrana with us.

"Because it wasn't my own family I said I would go last to recognise them.

The full article contains 466 words and appears in Journal Friday newspaper.

Page 1 of 2

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