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## Bloody legacy of internment and the Troubles still live on

(Marie Louise McCrory, [Irish News](#))

*An exhibition by Irish News photographer Jonathan Porter tells the stories of 11 families who lost loved ones in a small area of Belfast during violence which erupted after the introduction of internment 36 years ago. West Belfast correspondent Marie Louise McCrory met relatives still searching for the truth*

On Monday August 9 1971 dawn raids at hundreds of homes across Northern Ireland signalled the beginning of internment.

Over the next days there was an upsurge in rioting and violence and an estimated 7,000 people were forced to flee their homes.

In the Ballymurphy area of west Belfast alone, 11 people – including a Catholic priest giving Last Rites to an injured civilian – lost their lives.

Internment gave authorities the power to detain people indefinitely without trial and those seized were often subjected to a catalogue of mistreatment.

Stormont ministers persuaded London to back the desperate measure as violence escalated in 1971.

Since the start of the year there had been almost 300 bombings and 320 shootings.

Police and soldiers arrested almost 350 suspected republicans in dawn raids but poor intelligence meant many had been wrongly identified and within 48 hours a third had been released.

In one case, an elderly man informed soldiers he had not been in the IRA since the War of Independence in the 1920s. Many active republicans had meanwhile fled.

'Operation Demetrius' proved disastrous for Stormont minister Brian Faulkner, leading to a serious rise in unrest and deaths and boosting support for the IRA.

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By the end of 1971, a total of 180 people had been killed – republicans were responsible for 107 deaths, the British army for 45, loyalists for 22 and the RUC for one.

However, internment would remain in place until 1975, by which time almost 1,900 people would be detained.

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Briege Voyle was just 14 when her mother Joan Connolly was shot dead by the British army during the violence that followed the introduction of internment in 1971.

She left behind eight children, the youngest of whom was just three years old, when she was shot in the head, shoulders and thigh by soldiers near the Springfield Road in west Belfast.

The 45-year-old, who lived on Ballymurphy Road, had gone out to look for two of her daughters on the evening of August 9.

The killing devastated her husband and children, who had been separated after being taken to safety at a refugee camp in the Republic.

Her husband later suffered a nervous breakdown, having never got over the loss of his wife.

Now a mother-of-four and grandmother herself, Briege recalls the pain of losing her mother in such tragic circumstances and the disgust her family felt at being awarded just £250 in compensation.

"The British soldiers had come in at around 4am and arrested people," she said.

"Women were out on the streets with their bin lids.

"My mother had come out to look for some of us as there was a curfew.

"Me and my younger sister Joan were watching young ones throwing stones from beside the Henry Taggart barracks on the Springfield Road. The Protestants had come in and were attacking homes.

"Mum said to us to come home and just then the Protestants surged down Springfield Park."

Joan and her daughters became separated after soldiers fired gas into the crowd.

She did not know that the girls had headed for home when she walked towards Springfield Park to look for them.

"It was then that the soldiers opened fire," Briege said.

"My mum then saw this young man, Noel Phillips, crawling along the ground.

"He had been shot in the backside.

"As she went to help him, she was shot in the head.

"She was heard to shout 'I'm blind and I can't see'.

"She was then shot in the shoulder and the bullet travelled down her arm and out her hand. She was also shot in the thigh."

When their mother did not return home, Briege recalls her father Denis frantically phoning community centres and hospitals looking for his red-haired wife.

"A nurse told him that there was one woman with red hair but she was in the morgue," she said.

"A neighbour went with him to identify my mother.

"When he came back to the house, he was literally carried in and we were all roaring and crying.

"About half-an-hour later, a car arrived and me and four of my sisters were taken to a refugee camp in Cork and then to Waterford.

"We were there a few days when one day we were all gathered around the television and we saw a report saying our mother had been buried.

"We all started crying. What else could we do?"

The children were subsequently split up and taken to live with relatives of their father in the Republic.

Gradually, they arrived back home in Belfast over the autumn and winter.

Briege said life was "unbelievable".

"Daddy had gone to pieces. He became very protective," she said.

"After Bloody Sunday, he took a nervous breakdown and spent six weeks receiving treatment.

"It was the worst two years of my life. There was no help from anyone. Half the time you didn't even get dinner.

"It was devastating. There are no words to describe it."

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A similar grief was suffered by the Lavery family. John Lavery (20) was last seen alive by his loved ones in the early hours of August 11 1971.

The young council worker had set out from the family home in Whitecliff Parade in Ballymurphy that morning, followed soon afterwards by his brother Terry.

John was in Dermott Hill when he was shot in the back and then the thigh by British soldiers.

Terry, who was 18, heard the gunfire as he walked in another direction but did not know it was his brother who had been killed.

Minutes later Terry found himself in trouble near Ballymurphy and was surrounded by British soldiers who marched him towards St Aidan's Primary school at the top of the Whiterock Road.

He said he was made to lie on the ground and his socks and shoes were removed.

At one stage a gun was held to his head and the trigger pulled, though Terry did not know its magazine was empty.

As this happened, the teenage barman who worked at McEnaney's on the Glen Road said a prayer for his older brother John in the hope that he was safe.

He was then made to walk barefoot across glass before being chained to washettes at Dermott Hill.

This was the start of a 56-hour nightmare for the young man, who was taken to Girdwood Barracks.

Thomas and Mary Lavery – having been told that their son John was dead – believed they had lost both sons, as Terry was also missing.

Terry first heard of his brother's death from his father when

he was released from Townsend Street police station three days later.

Thirty-six years on, Carmel Quinn remembers how the loss of her brother and the treatment of Terry devastated her family.

"It was desperate. I will never experience a Christmas like that again," she said.

"Terry was jailed for six months for riotous behaviour over Christmas, so both brothers were missing.

"My mummy and daddy were just heartbroken."

Terry said he still also finds it hard to talk about what he experienced behind the high walls of Girdwood.

"We had to sit for 16 or 18 hours facing the wall with our hands on our knees," he said.

"If you turned left or right you got smacked.

"They would force you to do press-ups in the urinals. It was degrading."

His sister Rita Bonner said the family were "still finding out different bits and pieces" about what happened to the brothers and until they found out the truth about John's death, they could never have closure.

"You learn to live with it and get on with life but it's always there," she said.

"My mum said to us to 'always tell the world that John was not a gunman'.

"She never had a bitter bone in her body.

"In 1972 a soldier was shot at the bottom of our street and my mummy went down and held him and put her cardigan under his head and said an Act of Contrition.

"She said she did it because he was somebody's son."

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Joseph Corr's family also still live with the pain of their loss every day. His death left behind a devastated wife and seven heartbroken children, unable to comprehend what had happened to their loved one.

Joseph was also shot by British soldiers on the morning of August 11.

The 43-year-old – who worked as a craft engineer for Shorts – had gone out with his eldest son Joe (21) in the early hours to see what was happening in the area.

The father and son from Divismore Crescent in Ballymurphy had been walking towards Dermott Hill at around 3am when shooting broke out and the pair became separated.

Joe, now 57 and a father-of-four and grandfather, said there was panic on the streets.

"All of a sudden there was shooting coming from paratroopers who were coming down the Pound Loney from the mountains," he said.

"We thought it was plastic bullets at first but it was live rounds because some of them bounced off metal rails.

"There was a wee fella who had been shot in the arm so I lifted him and carried him up to the top of the Whiterock."

When the shooting ceased, Joe could not find his father and returned to the house, where the family made desperate attempts to trace him.

"We phoned every hospital in Ireland," Joe said.

"Dad was found 14 hours later in the military wing of Musgrave Park Hospital by a family friend.

"We don't know why he was there. They must have thought he was a soldier.

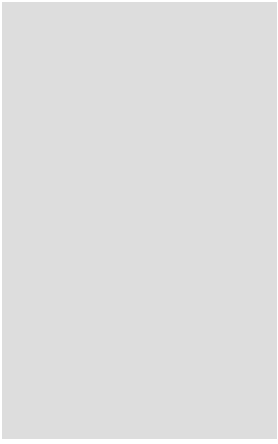
"He was later flown to the Royal Victoria Hospital but during the flight, his liver haemorrhaged.

"Then one day, me and my mum had just left him in the hospital and came home when my uncle came and told us we had to go back down.

"We had no telephone then but when we got to the hospital, we were too late, he had died."

Joe said his mother never recovered from the loss of her husband.

"Her youngest child was just four months old at the time. It devastated the family," he said.



"After my dad was killed a letter was delivered to our home which was addressed to my mother.

"It said 'May your sub-human husband and his pals roast in hell'. All we want to know is the truth."

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