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# Squaddie who killed twice after Ulster nightmare

Aly Renwick  
[The Observer](#), Sunday August 31 2008

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Jimmy Johnson, who served with the Royal Tank Regiment, was so affected by his experiences in Northern Ireland that he went on to commit murder.

Jimmy Johnson served two tours of duty with the Royal Tank Regiment in Northern Ireland in the early Seventies. 'When I first took my section on a mobile patrol through this estate we loved it. We had never experienced anything like it before - the whole estate hated the Brits!' he recalled.

Johnson's section gloried in the fighting and often, by their own admission, went 'looking for aggro'. But two incidents were to haunt him. In one a woman died of injuries suffered in a bomb explosion. Johnson refused to leave her because she reminded him of his wife, even though there were fears that another bomb was about to go off. The second incident occurred in the middle of a riot. Johnson chased a man into the kitchen of a house after he threw paint on him. He caught the man and beat him around the head with a rubber bullet gun. 'I couldn't stop. I was panicking and he wouldn't go down,' he said.

Soon afterwards, Johnson bought himself out of the army but found he 'could not handle Civvy Street'. Suffering from nightmares and tension, he began to drink heavily. As he drifted from job to job his marriage disintegrated. One day, living near Middlesbrough, Johnson killed a security guard, who was a former workmate, after he offered

him a lift. I've a vague recollection of kids playing on the side of the road. All I remember is a crash on the side of the van. I think the kids had thrown something at it.

'The next thing I remember is running. I was carrying Keith [his victim]. I dropped him down, I battered him with a pole, I must have hit him three or four times.' Johnson said that when he carried out the attack he was 'thinking about hitting that bloke in Northern Ireland'. He served nine years in jail. Eighteen months after being released, he beat a man to death with a lump hammer, a crime for which he was sentenced to life.

It was only after sharing a cell with a doctor who had killed his wife that Johnson first learnt about post-traumatic stress disorder. Dr Morgan O'Connell, a former consultant psychiatrist with the Royal Navy who examined Johnson, suggested he carried out both murders while 'in a state of detachment or flashback to conditions of severe stress while serving in Northern Ireland'. Johnson is still in jail.

• Adapted from Hidden Wounds: Problems of Northern Ireland Veterans in Civvy Street, by Aly Renwick

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