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# Widow recalls murder of young binman 30 years ago

6-8 minutes

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**By age 16 Edward Gibson had met his wife-to-be. By age 18 he was married. And by age 22 he was dead.**

It is now 30 years since the young council worker was killed by the IRA as he collected bins in east Tyrone, and his widow has used the opportunity to speak out about his life, death, and the family's struggle to continue without him.

Whilst the killing of the new UDR recruit may have sunk from the public memory, she told of the grief she still endures, even if no-one outside the family "really cares".

The News Letter approached her as part of an occasional feature looking at some of the less-known victims of the Troubles, and she said that she has never spoken in such detail about the killing before.

## **THE MAN:**

Born in the little village of Coagh, Edward Gibson was one of five children. He left Cookstown High at 16, and followed many of his family members into the Orange Order about a year later.

He was almost always called 'Ned'.

“He only got ‘Edward’ if he’d done something wrong,” said Wendy.

They first met in Omagh’s Birches hotel where Ned (who was a virtual teetotaler) “very cheekily pinged my bra while I was at the bar”.

Wendy scolded him and thought no more of it. But next week they ran into one another again, shared a dance, and started to go out.

He was 16 at the time and she 18. And just five months later, they were engaged.

They got a house together in Coagh, had a daughter named Marlene, and Ned secured a council job sweeping roads, cutting grass, and collecting bins.

As the sole breadwinner at the time he also took a job in the UDR, in large part to earn a bit of extra cash.

### **THE MURDER:**

On the day of his death – April 26, 1988 – Ned had done six weeks of UDR training and had been a fully fledged member for just a fortnight.

He had no personal weapon.

He left for work at about 8am, after his usual breakfast of 7UP and a cigarette.

Wendy estimated that the shooting took place about three hours later.

Her understanding is two gunmen approached a Catholic man who lived in a house in Ardboe, about four miles away, and asked for car keys.

The householder refused.

The gunmen proceeded with their plan regardless, lying in wait for the bin lorry nearby.

As Ned dismounted and lifted a bin, the killers opened fire.

“They apparently called him by his name,” said Wendy.

“As far as I can remember it was seven times on the torso and twice on the head.”

She was back at home, and learned of the attack when a local man called Leslie Dallas (who was later to die at the hands of the IRA, see below), called to say that two men were looking for her.

The men were from the UDR, and Wendy’s first thought was: “What has he done now?!”

“We sat on the sofa, and they started to say: ‘Your husband has fatally wounded.’

“I said: ‘Well ... is he alright?’

“I wasn’t picking up the word ‘fatal’. I was picking up the word ‘wounded’.

“In my mind he was wounded, and they were there to take me to the hospital.

“It wasn’t registering. I just fixed my eyes on the clock.

“Then for some reason I said: ‘My mum’s only dead three weeks.’ And I went into hysterics.”

### **THE AFTERMATH:**

Wendy said the other members of the lorry’s crew “must have all frozen in shock”.

The driver of the bin lorry came to the wake, and told the widow:

“I’m so sorry. I thought they were going to shoot us all.”

Ned died at the scene.

Wendy said no-one was ever arrested in relation to the attack.

She said “good, decent people were horrified and said they felt ashamed and it shouldn’t have happened”.

But the killers “seen him as a legitimate target – it didn’t matter whether he’d been in it 20 years or eight weeks”.

Wendy added: “Every year it’s been the same. I hate the month of April. Mummy died on the 4th of April.

“The wedding anniversary is the 14th of April. And then Ned was murdered on the 26th.”

For the anniversary, she went to the grave and released balloons in his memory.

“I still feel the loss,” said Wendy, who still lives in the same house and did not remarry. “Why me? Why has it happened to me? What did we ever do that we deserved this to happen?”

“This is what life is. I feel very sad that you’re just a number nowadays.

“You’re forgot about. You’re talked about for three, four days. Nobody really cares – only your family.

“You’ll get the odd person say: ‘Oh – I mind that happened.’ But it doesn’t really mean anything to them because they’re not really living with it every day.”

### **POSSIBLE CULPRITS:**

**Wendy, a recently retired receptionist at a Coagh doctors’ surgery, said no-one was ever arrested over the murder.**

**However, she believes her husband's killers were themselves later shot dead.**

**"It's hearsay," she said.**

**"But I wanted to believe that, because it was easier. Do you understand what I mean?"**

**"It's easier to cope with knowing they've been got for it, than that person maybe walking into the surgery and being sweet and nice to me at work, and they are the one who murdered my husband."**

**When it comes to culprits, she mentioned two names specifically – Michael Ryan and Lawrence McNally.**

**They were shot to death in a car in Coagh on the morning of June 3, 1991, in an ambush planned by the SAS.**

**They had been lying in wait to kill a UDR member when the commandos struck.**

**Dying alongside McNally and Ryan was a man called Tony Doris.**

**He was the cousin of Sinn Fein's current NI leader Michelle O'Neill, who is herself the daughter of another east Tyrone IRA man.**

**After McNally, Ryan, and Doris were killed firearms were recovered from their stolen car.**

**According to the book 'Lost Lives', police said one of these weapons had been used in another fatal IRA attack in the small village; namely, it had been used to kill Leslie Dallas, Austin Nelson, and Ernest Rankin on March 7, 1990. A rifle in the car had also been used to kill Derek Ferguson on April 9, 1991.**

**The IRA claimed Mr Dallas and Mr Ferguson were UVF members, but ‘Lost Lives’ says the police – and UVF itself – rejected these claims.**

**‘Lost Lives’ and the University of Ulster-based ‘Conflict Archive on the Internet’ both list all four of those dead men as being Protestant civilians.**

**To add further to the tragedy, Wendy’s own uncle Jack Scott had also been killed by the IRA in Ardboe, east Tyrone, in 1979. An off-duty police reservist, he was shot whilst working on a milk tanker.**

**In addition to these deliberate killings, one of Ned’s childhood friends had died in a car crash. His sister Alison Gibson was also killed in a traffic accident.**