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Mother in 'meet me' call to the soldier who shot her daughter

(Allison Morris, [Irish News](#))

More than three decades after the British army killing of a 12-year-old south Armagh schoolgirl her family have made a heartfelt plea to the soldier who fired the fatal shot to contact them.

Majella O'Hare died on August 14 1976 after being struck twice by machine gun fire from a British army patrol as she made her way to St Malachy's Church, Ballymoyer for confession.

The child died in the arms of her father Jim who was working a groundsman in a nearby school and heard the shots ring out.

Jim O'Hare died in 1992 and since then Majella's brother Michael has led a campaign to have the British government issue an apology to the family.

Michael met recently with senior diplomats from the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs to ask them to bring pressure to bear on the British government to issue an acknowledgement of wrong doing.

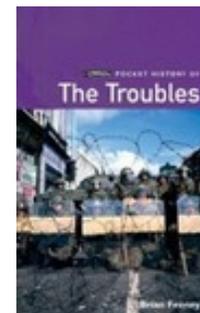
The family have also sent a heartfelt letter to the soldier named in court as having fired the fatal shot to ask him to meet with them.

Through human rights organisation British Irish Rights Watch the family sent a letter to the Ministry of Defence to be forwarded to a former Royal Marine Commando who was named in court as having fired the fatal shot.

Private Michael Williams, was first charged with Majella's murder and then later had the charge reduced to manslaughter.

He pleaded not guilty and was acquitted in court the following year after claiming he was shooting at a gunman who was hiding in a hedgerow.

Michael O'Hare said: "Michael Williams was a young man at



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by Brian Feeney

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the time he may now have his own family, even a daughter, and he may well want to speak about what happened all those years ago.

"We have been told that the MoD were able to trace him and that he was given the letter, it's disappointing in the extreme that he has not yet seen fit to respond.

"My mother is old and still grieving for her youngest child, she wants to speak to Michael Williams and hear what he has to say before she dies.

"My father was a broken man after Majella's death she died in his arms and her last words were to him, he had to carry that with him until his death."

On the day of Majella's death her father Jim was cutting grass in a nearby school yard when he heard shots and ran to investigate.

Along with a nurse, Alice Campbell, Jim went with his injured daughter in an army helicopter but the schoolgirl died in his arms on the way to Daisy Hill hospital.

In a twist of fate Alice Campbell had been in the churchyard putting flowers on grave of her fiancé John Reavey who had been murdered along with his two brothers by the UVF in January of that year. It should have been her wedding day.

In a statement the nurse later said soldiers were less than gentle with the injured child throwing her into the helicopter on her wounded side and taking off with her legs still dangling out of the door.

Michael O'Hare has been campaigning for an acknowledgement of wrongdoing from the British government since the death of his sister over 30 years ago.

Along with Jane Winters of British Irish Rights Watch he has recently stepped up the campaign, meeting senior diplomats from the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs to ask them to bring pressure to bear on the British Government.

"With the war in Iraq we feel the MOD are unlikely to apologise for the death of a child over three generations ago in the north of Ireland.

"We would hope however that the timing is right for the British government to make a statement acknowledging the wrong that was done on our family and the killing of an innocent and gentle child.

"What would be a small and painless gesture from the British government would mean a lot to my elderly mother in what are her final years."

A spokesman for the Irish Foreign Affairs Department said: "Officials from the Department met with the O'Hare family in December. The family was accompanied by Jane Winter of British Irish Rights Watch."

Four children died in week of violence

Schoolgirl Majella O'Hare was gunned down by the British army in a week of violence in Northern Ireland that began with the violent deaths of three other children.

The slaying of the 12-year-old, killed by two shots from a high velocity army machine gun on August 14 1976, was overshadowed by the deaths of the Maguire children in Belfast, an incident that led to the setting up of the Peace People movement.

Four days before her death IRA man Danny Lennon (23) was shot dead by the British army during a car chase through the streets of west Belfast.

Over 60 shots were fired at the car, one fatally wounding the Andersonstown man. The car he was driving left the road mounting a pavement and hitting Anne Maguire and her three children.

Two of the Maguire children Joanne (8) and six-week-old Andrew were killed instantly. Two-year-old John Maguire died the next day from his injuries, only one child Mark (7) survived the incident.

Their mother Annie was badly injured and though recovered physically took her own life four years later.

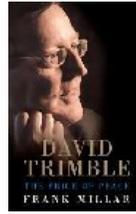
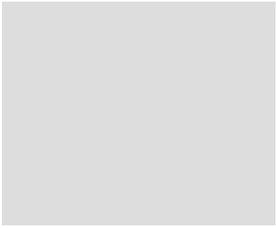
The incident gave rise to the Peace people led by the children's aunt Mairead Corrigan and Betty Williams, the two women jointly won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1976.

January 11, 2007

This article appeared first in the January 10, 2007 edition of the [Irish News](#).

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