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Friday, November 23, 2007

By Lesley-Anne Henry

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They quite literally picked up the pieces after some of Ulster's worst atrocities.

They were the first on the scene at dozens of bomb explosions, shootings and lived with a constant threat to their lives.

So how exactly did police officers cope? The fact is many didn't - and that's where the Police Retraining and Rehabilitation Trust steps in.

The Belfast Telegraph spoke to two officers who are still being treated for the trauma they suffered as a result of their two very different careers.

One of the officers, now aged 57, joined the police in 1974.

He said: "I attended a number of incidents which were at the time horrific, and I mean horrific.

"There was one in particular which I dealt with in Lower Donegall Street where the bombers had activated or detonated the bomb accidentally as they were priming it. They were blown to pieces. And we were the first on the scene.

"It was very dirty and very smelly in terms of dirt and dust and the smell which I now know to be burning flesh and, in the car park at the rear of those premises, there were literally body parts, arms, legs, torso lying all over the place."

Another former RUC man joined the force in south Armagh in 1980, aged just 18.

He said: "We lived in Enniskillen in a police house. There were loads of people getting blown up with bombs underneath their cars. So every time you got into your car, checking underneath and you drove off with the door slightly open. It was something you were living with 24-hours a day."

He was pensioned off aged 24 suffering serious psychological damage and was only later diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

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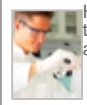
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