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Brother of man murdered by soldier in 1983 wants answers

([Irish News](#))

The brother of a west Belfast man gunned down by a British soldier say 24 years on he is now ready to put questions to the man convicted of the killing.

Thomas 'Kidso' Reilly (22) was shot by a member of the Light Infantry on Springfield Road on August 9 1983.

A road manager with a number of 1980s' pop groups, thousands attended his funeral including members of girl band Bananarama, with whom he had been working shortly before his death.

Flowers and cards were also sent from several other pop stars including Paul Weller and Spandau Ballet.

Legal history was made when the soldier who fired the fatal shot, Private Ian Thain, was the following year convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison.

It was the first time that a British soldier serving in Northern Ireland had been convicted of murder while on duty.

However, just over two years later it was revealed that Thain had been released on licence and was back serving with his regiment.

Speaking in the run-up to the anniversary of his brother's murder, Michael Reilly said there were unanswered questions that he would now like to put to the man responsible for the fatal shot.

"It's always in your thoughts and while I don't think I could ever meet him face to face I would like to know what he now thinks about having murdered my brother," he said.

"Does he feel any guilt or remorse at all?"

"I sat throughout the court case and he never once showed any remorse. He sat chatting to his mates who were witnesses, chewing gum and eating sweets.

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"He is older now. He could possibly have a son the age my brother was when he killed him.

"I'd like to know what happened after he went back in the army and did he ever come back to serve in the north.

"Despite the fact 24 years have passed my family still feel Kidso's loss every day but I wonder how the man who pulled the trigger feels."

During the five-week trial Thain claimed he thought Mr Reilly was armed. However, this was rejected by the court after they heard that he had been wearing only a pair of shorts and had been searched prior to his murder.

Mr Justice Higgins rejected the defence, saying that it had obviously been "concocted" during the soldier's time on remand in a military base in England. He said that Thain had been deliberately dishonest throughout.

Thain, who had an address in Doncaster in England, was sentenced to life but transferred to an English prison on the authorisation of the then home secretary Douglas Hurd before being released just over two years later.

"Kidso's death devastated our family, my mother and father never got over it," Mr Reilly said.

"It was a relief when Thain was convicted of murder but when we heard he had been released and was back in the army after just two years it was a bitter, bitter blow.

"I remember my father, God rest him, saying 'well that's British justice for you'.

"There was one rule for them and one for the rest of us. Had I shot a soldier in the back I would have rotted behind bars."

As the last troops withdrew from Northern Ireland this week at the end of Operation Banner, at 38 years the British army's longest campaign, Michael Reilly said he felt nothing but relief.

"When you've had experience with the British army in the way my family have you can honestly say nothing good ever came of them being here," he said.

"You'd like to think lessons had been learnt but now we see the same thing happening all over again in Iraq, you wonder how many innocent victims like my brother have been created there.

"Kidso loved life and everyone he met loved him yet he was denied the right to grow old and have a family of his own.

"He was a charmer and he loved music and his job working as a roadie.

"Just a few months before his murder he'd been the best man at my wedding.

"There's not a day goes by that I don't miss him.

"The British army were supposed to be here to uphold the law but they instead became an unaccountable force taking innocent lives and leaving nothing but grief behind in their wake."

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