A.A. 2018-2019 **Reading Comprehension TEXT 4**

**Inquest seeks answers to ‘forgotten’ massacre**

The story sounds grimly familiar. It is the early years of the \*Troubles and on the streets of Northern Ireland nationalists are marching. Paratroopers open fire. People drop, bloodied, some dying. Others come to their aid and they too are shot. By the time the shooting stops, 10 people lie dead.

The official investigation exonerates the soldiers and says the dead were terrorists. Relatives call it a cover-up, an insult, and campaign for a new investigation.

A seemingly well-known story, except this was not Bloody Sunday, the killings in Derry’s Bogside in 1972 that prompted worldwide condemnation. This was 1971 and Ballymurphy, a small neighbourhood in west Belfast. No journalists were present, and for a long time few outsiders seemed to remember or care about what locals called the Ballymurphy massacre.

That is set to change today when a coroner’s inquest in Belfast starts to shine a light on what happened nearly half a century ago.

The inquest is expected to last several months and call hundreds of witnesses, including scores of soldiers, to try to reconstruct the chaotic, deadly 36 hours from the evening of 9 August to the morning of 11 August 1971. And to perhaps pave the way for prosecutions.

John Teggart, whose father, Daniel, was killed, said: “It’s a step closer to the truth. My daddy was a good, loving, family man. He was labelled a terrorist. That was a stigma the family had to endure.”

The dead included Joan Connolly, a mother of eight shot in the face, and Father Hugh Mullan, shot giving the last rites to a wounded man. An 11th person died days later of a heart attack, allegedly after a mock execution by soldiers.

Families have had to battle decades of official obstruction and deceit, starting with the original military investigation, which falsely claimed the dead were armed, said Teggart, 58. “It’s been hard taking on the British establishment.”

A week before the inquest was originally due to begin in September, the Ministry of Defence handed the coroner a spreadsheet with 4,773 entries of individuals from the Parachute Regiment, the Queen’s Regiment and the Queen’s Division serving at the time. This was a cynical attempt to “swamp” and delay the inquiry, said Teggart.

Pádraig Ó Muirigh, a solicitor representing the families, said missing paperwork from the “deeply inadequate” original investigations had helped veil the shooters’ identities. “The big difficulty has been in tracing soldiers,” he said.

The families were happy to finally have an inquest that should supply an official, credible narrative, he said. “It’s been a long, long road for them. They would argue that it is a basic human right to find out what happened to their loved ones.”

Tumult erupted across Northern Ireland on 9 August 1971 when troops started rounding up republicans for internment without trial. Homes were destroyed and thousands fled across the border.

A 2014 Guardian newspaper article and interactive map reconstructed events in Ballymurphy. Residents erected barricades and clashed with Protestants in neighbouring Springmartin. Youths threw stones and petrol bombs. A small number of shots appear to have been fired.

Some Ballymurphy residents were fleeing when soldiers started shooting into the Catholic area. Soldiers “were on a high”, according to one paratrooper’s memoir. They recovered no weapons from any of the 10 people shot dead.

Callum Macrae, the director of the documentary The Ballymurphy Precedent, argued that the shootings created a culture of impunity in the army that led to Bloody Sunday.

This year was the 20th anniversary of the Good Friday peace agreement. Next year will be the 50th anniversary of British troops deploying on the streets. History, however, continues to shower sparks across Northern Ireland’s politics and justice system with former soldiers, police and paramilitaries facing fresh questions. Last week Irish police arrested an alleged IRA bomber, John Downey, over the killing of two soldiers in Northern Ireland in 1972.

Now it is the turn of retired soldiers to complain. “I find it hard to believe that 11 innocent civilians were gunned down just for slaughter,” said Alan Barry, a former Grenadier Guardsman who founded the group Justice for Northern Ireland Veterans. “We fought terrorism. We didn’t go to Northern Ireland to oppress people. To claim we were running amok and shooting civilians at will is just appalling.”

The inquest, he said, was a \*\*Sinn Féin-driven witch-hunt against retired soldiers, many in their 70s, and could lead to murder prosecutions if “fading memory” tripped them up while giving evidence. He hopes they ignore the inquest letters. “We’ve advised veterans to throw them in the bin.”

\*The conflict in Northern Ireland from the late 1960s to 1998

\*\*An Irish political party historically associated with the [Provisional Irish Republican Army](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Provisional_Irish_Republican_Army) (IRA)

**Now read the following statements and write TRUE or FALSE after each of them.**

1. The original inquest into the 1971 Ballymurphy killings not only cleared the soldiers of blame but also sullied the names of those killed.

1. The Ministry of Defence is reported to have furnished documentation to facilitate the coroner’s inquest in Belfast.

***Third-language students are asked to answer the following questions.***

**Now answer the following in your own words.**

1. Why have the 1971 Ballymurphy killings been described as the forgotten massacre?
2. What, according to Callum Macrae, led to Bloody Sunday in 1972?