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By Chris Thornton
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The Afghan deployment of paratrooper Lee Clegg — convicted and then cleared of murdering a Belfast joyrider — shows the Army has “not drawn any lessons” from Northern Ireland, a victims' group says.

Relatives for Justice said it was “not at all surprising” that Sergeant Clegg has been sent to serve as a frontline medic in Helmand Province.

Clegg was jailed for life in 1993 for murdering Karen Reilly (18) who died alongside driver Martin Peake (17) in a stolen car that members of the Parachute Regiment opened fire on in west Belfast in 1990. A third teenager was injured.

Clegg was convicted after an RUC officer on patrol with the soldiers testified that members of the patrol struck Pte Barry Aindow on the leg to make it appear he had been hit by the car.

Clegg was released from prison two years after the conviction, having

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served a total of four and a half years, including time on remand. His release was greeted by rioting in Belfast. He was returned to the Army and became a cause celebre for a group of retired officers.

What are these?

Repeated appeals of his case led to a retrial which overturned the murder conviction but upheld a conviction for attempting to wound Martin Peake. A further Court of Appeal hearing cleared him of that charge.

Clegg was promoted twice after his return to the Army and has been serving as a physical fitness instructor.

But he was recently returned to frontline duty as a medic.

One retired officer who supported his campaign for freedom said Clegg is "back at the sharp end of war, providing essential support to soldiers of his battalion who are wounded in action".

"For many of the world's neutral observers, the deployment of Clegg in Afghanistan will be judged against his role in the killing of two children, Karen Reilly and Martin Peake, no matter how much the British spin their version," said Mark Thompson, director of Relatives for Justice.

"It is not at all surprising that the British Army have deployed Clegg in Afghanistan and most likely numerous other British soldiers and former RUC personnel who were equally involvement in human rights abuses in Ireland and who were given impunity.

"In terms of transition, it is evidentially the case that the British Army have not drawn any lessons from its campaign in Ireland despite its numerous military failings not least the killing of hundreds of children and civilians.

"One would have thought that given such a legacy that clear lessons would have been learnt. Let's hope that the people of Afghanistan are spared three and half decades of the British Army."

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