

Wife's long vigil ends as Irish bombing victim dies

During the 13 years her husband was in a coma, Noreen Hill never wavered in her devotion - even buying a nursing home so she could be close to him

By DAVID SHARROCK

BELFAST- For the last 13 years, Noreen Hill has been a devoted wife to her husband Ronnie, nursing him, feeding him, loving him even though he has lain in a coma since he was injured in the IRA bombing of a Remembrance Sunday ceremony.

Today, Noreen Hill will bury the man to whom she was married for 44 years. It will close another tragic chapter in Northern Ireland's "Troubles," but also one of its great love stories.

Some say it would have been a blessing to Noreen Hill in some ways had her husband died along with the other victims of the Enniskillen massacre.

But she will have none of that, **trusting to her faith in God** and tending to her grievously injured husband with never a word of bitterness.

Through her agonizing and often lonely vigil at this bedside, she has been a constant reminder of the way in which the suffering of innocent victims goes on in Northern Ireland long after the headlines have faded.

Ronnie Hill, a former headmaster of Enniskillen high school in the County Fermanagh town, died on Thursday, a week away from his 69th birthday.

He lapsed into a coma two days after the bomb shattered the peace of the mainly Protestant memorial

service at the town's cenotaph. Eleven people were killed and 63 injured in the attack in November 1987, Ronnie Hill's is the 12th death.

Noreen Hill has been a constant presence at her husband's bedside ever since he suffered horrific injuries, including a fractured skull, jaw, shoulder and pelvis. Rescuers spotted his hand sticking up through the rubble and dug him out.

She was with him again when he died at the nursing home, which she had bought to care for him full time, at 3 a.m. on Thursday in Hollywood, County Down.

"We had known from Sunday that he was dying," Noreen Hill said. "We had been taking turns just sitting with him. Ronnie died very peacefully. He just slipped away."

For the first four years after the bombing, Noreen Hill stayed with her husband every night in hospital. She bought the residential nursing home for him and lived in a small apartment at the top of the house so she could be close to him at all times.

"I don't know who planted the bomb," she said in an interview on the 10th anniversary of the massacre. **"Someone said, however, that until they get the Lord in their hearts, it won't make any difference. And I pray for them all."** *Daily Telegraph*