

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM

FEIDHMIÚ CHOMHAONTÚ AOINE AN CHÉASTA

JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT

Déardaoin, 25 Eanáir 2018

Thursday, 25 January 2018

The Joint Committee met at 2.10 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan,	Senator Gerard P. Craughwell,
Deputy Brendan Smith,	Senator Mark Daly,
	Senator Frank Feighan,
	Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile.

In attendance: Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív and Senator Grace O'Sullivan.

DEPUTY DECLAN BREATHNACH IN THE CHAIR.

Legacy Issues Affecting Victims and Relatives in Northern Ireland: Discussion (Resumed)

Vice Chairman: We have received apologies from the Chairman, Deputy Seán Crowe, who is away on official business this week. It would be remiss of me if I did not welcome everyone to the first meeting of the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement for 2018. We resume our important discussions on legacy issues.

Today we will hear from the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains about its important work on behalf of the families of the disappeared. I thank the witnesses sincerely for their attendance today. I welcome Mr. Frank Murray, co-commissioner, Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, co-commissioner, and Mr. Geoff Knupfer, senior investigator. We invite all three of the witnesses to make their opening statements. Questions from the committee will follow.

Unfortunately, as always, there is a wee bit of housekeeping. It requires me to read a number of notices. I remind members, guests and those in the Public Gallery to please ensure their mobile phones or tablets are switched off completely for the duration of the meeting, as they cause interference with the recording equipment in these rooms even when they are in silent mode.

Members are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person or body outside the House or an official either by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable.

By virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to the committee. However, if they are directed by the committee to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and they continue to so do, they are entitled thereafter only to qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and they are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against any person, persons or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable.

I invite the witnesses to make their submissions, after which we will take questions from members.

Mr. Frank Murray: I am here today with my fellow commissioner, Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, and our lead investigator, Mr. Geoff Knupfer. We thank the committee for its invitation to this afternoon's meeting. We last came appeared before the committee on 16 February 2012. We are delighted to have the opportunity to inform it about the work that has been undertaken by the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains in the intervening period. We are very pleased that, since our last meeting, four disappeared victims have been recovered and their remains returned to their families.

Before we detail our recent activity, however, I would like to take the opportunity to outline briefly the background and functions of the commission for the benefit of any new committee members who were not present at our last meeting. The commission was established in 1999 by the Irish and British Governments as one element of the suite of initiatives taken by them in the context of the peace process. The commission is completely independent in its functions. It is a non-political body that, since its establishment, has enjoyed cross-party and cross-community support. This is important to us and the families. The commission has a humanitarian mission

and it is not part of the criminal justice system in either jurisdiction.

The purpose of the commission, as members will know, is to facilitate the recovery to their families of the remains of persons killed by paramilitaries during the conflict in Northern Ireland and buried secretly. These victims are known as “the disappeared”.

The interests of these victims’ families have been at the forefront of the commission’s efforts since 1999 and will remain so. They have had to endure a particular cruelty, facing not only the tragedy and injustice of losing a loved one to murder, but also the added pain owing to a relative being missing. All they seek is the return of the bodies of their loved ones for a dignified burial, to have a place to grieve and to have an end to the painful uncertainty of not knowing where the body of their brother, father, son or uncle has been concealed. The commission is deeply committed to alleviating their suffering and will continue its work to that end.

In the pursuit of its objectives, the commission has been a model of cross-Border co-operation since its establishment. The commission, the two Governments and police forces, and the many others who have provided services to the commission, have all worked seamlessly together towards a shared goal. In that sense, the commission is a testament to the spirit of the Good Friday Agreement. We are grateful for the unwavering support of the two Governments for our work.

As I stated, we have recovered four victims since our last meeting with the committee in 2012. On 1 October 2014, the commission discovered the remains of Brendan Megraw at Oristown Bog. Brendan disappeared in April 1978. It would be 36 years and multiple searches before he was recovered and returned to his family.

On 25 June 2015, the remains of Seamus Wright and Kevin McKee were recovered in Coghalstown, County Meath. Seamus and Kevin were found during an extensive search being undertaken by the commission for another disappeared victim, Joe Lynskey. They had been abducted and murdered together some time around October 1972. The commission had previously searched for the remains of Kevin and Seamus in the Coghalstown area but those earlier searches had not been successful. Their discovery during the Joe Lynskey search was unexpected but, of course, greatly welcomed by their families and by the commission. Following their recovery, the search for Joe Lynskey continued for another five months. Regrettably, we did not find him, and he remains one of our three outstanding cases.

On 6 May 2017, the commission recovered the remains of Seamus Ruddy at a forest in Pont-de-l’Arche near Rouen in France. Seamus had been teaching in Paris when he disappeared in 1985. Several unsuccessful searches had been undertaken by the commission and the Garda Síochána previously. However, following extensive inquiries undertaken by the commission prior to the new search, Seamus was recovered and returned to his family. The commission greatly appreciates the co-operation and assistance of the French authorities and the Irish Embassy in Paris in achieving the outcome.

My co-commissioner, Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, will speak about the remaining cases on the commission’s work programme.

Sir Kenneth Bloomfield: I join Mr. Frank Murray in thanking the committee for its invitation. It is an important opportunity to brief members on the commission’s activities, hear their views and elicit their support for our ongoing efforts.

There now remain just three victims on the commission’s case list. Joe Lynskey disap-

peared in August 1972 and is believed to be buried in the Coghalstown area of County Meath. Columba McVeigh disappeared in November 1975 and is believed to be buried in Bragan, County Monaghan. Captain Robert Nairac disappeared in May 1977, and the commission has received very little information to assist in his recovery. He is believed to be buried somewhere in the Ravensdale area of County Louth.

I should emphasise that information is crucial to the commission's work. The receipt of information is our greatest asset and the pursuit of information remains our greatest challenge. It is now over 40 years since the last three victims disappeared, and the passage of time creates obvious difficulties for accessing relevant information. I appeal to anybody with information that may help in locating the remains of any of the victims to provide it, in confidence, to the commission using our freephone number or our PO box address.

All information provided to the commission is treated as strictly confidential and it can be used only to locate and identify the remains. By law, it cannot be given to other agencies or used for prosecutions.

As commissioners we have always taken great satisfaction from the relief and solace that our work brings to the families of the disappeared. Mr. Murray and I have attended many of the funerals of the people the commission has recovered and have always been struck by how these occasions of great sadness are simultaneously occasions of joy. The families are joyful that one part of the great tragedy that has befallen them has finally ended. I have also noted how the families of the disappeared provide great mutual support for one another, even after their loved ones have been recovered. In that regard, I acknowledge with a deep sense of gratitude the tremendous support that the organisation WAVE has provided to the commission for many years and the work it has done with the victims' families.

At this point, we need further focused information to enable us to complete our mission. We therefore appeal most earnestly to the humanitarian instincts of anyone with such information to pass it to us now through our confidential freefone number or our PO box. We are grateful to the members of the committee for facilitating this meeting today and I implore them to use whatever influence they might have to encourage people with information to come forward in confidence.

I will ask the head of our investigation team, Geoff Knupfer, to give some more information on the final three cases in the commission's casebook. We look forward to hearing the members' views and answering any questions they may wish to put to us.

Mr. Geoff Knupfer: As members have heard from Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, we have three outstanding cases on our list of disappeared. The first is that of Joe Lynskey, who was apparently abducted and killed in 1972. His name was not included in the initial Good Friday Agreement list of victims published in 1999. It only came to attention as a result of the publication of a book in 2010. Nevertheless, we have since been given to understand that inquiries were being made into his case in 1998 and 1999.

Following the receipt of some rather patchy information as to the whereabouts of Joe Lynskey's remains, we undertook a search of a large field in Coghalstown, County Meath, in 2015. In the course of that search we found the bodies of Seamus Wright and Kevin McKee in a single grave in that field. We had previously been informed by an intermediary they were buried in an adjoining field. Despite completing a thorough search of the field following the recovery of the bodies of Seamus Wright and Kevin McKee, I am afraid we did not find any sign of Joe

Lynskey. We have been advised by the republican movement that it has no further information on this case. We believe his remains are probably buried in the Coghalstown or Oristown area of County Meath and while we keep an open mind, our inquiries are focused on those areas.

The second case is that of Columba McVeigh, who was abducted and killed in 1975. His name appeared on the list published in 1999 and the commission was advised that his remains were buried in Bragan Bog, Carrickroe, County Monaghan. Information continues to be exchanged on this case and, to date, a number of searches of that bog have been undertaken but sadly without success. Further refinement is being sought on this case and, if it is deemed positive, a further search could be programmed for Bragan Bog in the current year. Nevertheless, the information we have on this case contains some inconsistencies and is far from complete. Any additional information that could be made available would be very much welcomed.

I turn to the final outstanding case, that of Robert Nairac who was abducted and killed in May 1977. At the time he was a serving soldier. He was abducted from the Three Steps Inn in Dromintee, taken to Ravensdale and was killed. Unfortunately, his body was removed immediately afterwards and was secretly buried. Several people were tried and convicted of his killing and associated offences, but his body has not been found and no information has been passed to the commission as to its whereabouts.

We believe that this could be because he was a British soldier and that, since his death, his name has been linked in a number of books and articles with five separate killings and atrocities. Due to this dearth of information, the commission has taken the unusual step of undertaking research into his background. This has revealed that Robert Nairac was not and never had been a member of the Special Air Service; he was in fact a Grenadier Guard. His role was that of a liaison and intelligence officer, liaising between the police and the army. In military terms, he was a very junior officer and would not have had free rein. Neither was he tasked with handling informants or sources as part of his role.

On the dates of four of the incidents with which his name has been linked, Robert Nairac was not in Ireland. On the fifth occasion, he was actively deployed on an operation in Derry, many miles away from where this incident occurred in County Monaghan. In all five cases we have been able to trace and interview witnesses who are able to vouch for Robert Nairac's presence in these various locations and not anywhere near the locations where the incidents occurred. We in the commission are satisfied beyond reasonable doubt that these witness accounts are absolutely accurate and the individuals providing them are telling the truth. It is most unfortunate that the army's "neither confirm nor deny" policy was brought to bear when these various allegations came to light. Had they been countered at the time with the appropriate documentary and witness evidence, it is unlikely we would find ourselves in the present situation.

We earnestly appeal to anyone who has information on the whereabouts of Joe Lynskey, Columba McVeigh or Robert Nairac to contact the commission. Any information received will be treated in the strictest of confidence and can only be used, as the committee has heard already, to recover and repatriate victims. It cannot be passed to any other organisation and it cannot be used in a court of law.

Vice Chairman: I thank the witnesses for their excellent presentation. I will open it to the floor, starting with Deputy Brendan Smith, followed by Senators Ó Donnghaile and Feighan.

Deputy Brendan Smith: I compliment the witnesses on the excellent presentation and the appropriate manner in which they put forward the details on an extremely difficult issue. I am

very glad, as I did in 2012, to have suggested for the 2018 work programme of this committee to invite the representatives of the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains to make a presentation to the committee. My request met with unanimous approval. The thinking behind my request was that we have to use every forum open to us to try to create awareness that people with information should provide it to the commission.

I compliment the commission on what it has achieved to date in recovering so many bodies. Unfortunately the bodies of Joseph Lynskey, Columba McVeigh and Robert Nairac have yet to be recovered. I have been familiar with the work of the commission since its establishment following the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, as the first commissioner appointed by the Irish Government was my predecessor as Deputy for Cavan-Monaghan, my good friend and former Tánaiste, the late John Wilson. I was familiar with the work of the commission without knowing the detail of the work.

Mr. Murray and Sir Kenneth Bloomfield have been in very senior positions in the public service, as has Mr. Knupfer. John Wilson told me that even though he had been in very difficult positions, including up to Tánaiste and in government, nothing was anything like as difficult as his work on the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains.

I compliment the commission on its excellent work in trying to recover bodies. It is absolutely appalling that so many innocent people were abducted, murdered and secretly buried. I have met many of the victims' families over the years. I do not have the words to describe the grief that they have suffered and continue to suffer. Many of them said to me that they wanted to have a grave where their loved one would rest and where they would be able to go, say a prayer and lay a flower. It is not a big request in respect of a family member who had been murdered. These were innocent people murdered by thugs and murderers masquerading as so-called republicans and loyalists.

I am sure that with every passing day the work of the commission does not get easier. I assume that what it needs is information. I sincerely hope the Governments provide it with the necessary resources to support its work. In his opening remarks, Mr. Murray made the point that it is gratifying to have the support of the Government and the Oireachtas. Part of my thinking in inviting the witnesses to make a presentation to the committee, with the full agreement of the committee, was to let those families know the fact their loved ones are still missing is a source of concern for all of us and to try to use this forum as a means of generating awareness. If somebody has some information, even though they might think it is irrelevant or just has some relevance, they should come forward and provide it to the commission. I wish the commission well in the remainder of its work. I know the terrain in north Monaghan and Bragan Mountain well. It is part of my constituency and I know the area around Oristown in Meath, which is a neighbouring area. The topography does not make it easy for the commission to do its work. I presume that the commission needs information more than anything else.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: I welcome the commission members and thank them for their presentation.

For many of us, the hearings into victims and legacy issues have thrown up many of the awful instances that happened during the conflict. There is no question that this is a particularly awful situation and it continues to be awful for the families with the remains of their loved ones still not found. It should not have happened. This was wrong and our focus now has to be on supporting the families and loved ones who are left behind. Thankfully, 13 of the named victims have been recovered but a further three remain missing, namely, Joseph Lynskey, Robert

JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT

Nairac and Columba McVeigh. I agree with Deputy Brendan Smith's comments on using this meeting as an opportunity and a platform to make the appeal once again for anybody to bring forward information they may have in any of these cases. They should bring it forward under the certainty, which has been offered here again today, of absolute anonymity. I am sure the appeal will be made again during this meeting.

Most of these 16 cases happened before I was born. I say this because we are operating in a limited window with regard to information. Sometimes the information on the outstanding cases goes back 40 or 50 years. We have a short window in which this information can come forward. This closing window makes it critically important to have the information.

Would Mr. Knupfer accept that he has received support for his efforts from former IRA activists thus far? Would Mr. Knupfer accept that they were genuine in their efforts to help? Mr. Knupfer referred to the legislation that provides for immunity for information received but how important does he think this is in the broader campaign undertaken by the commission?

With regard to the continuing efforts to locate the remaining victims, Mr. Knupfer alluded to who those people are. Perhaps the witness could expand on what measures are currently being taken. This may offer the commission another opportunity to make an appeal for any information.

Mr. Geoff Knupfer: We have received a very significant degree of support from members of the republican movement over the years. I believe they suffer from the same problem we do in that what they can glean is incomplete. Having said that, I am sure there are individuals out there who do know the whereabouts of these remains or who have relevant information and could provide it.

It is important to say that we genuinely believe that we have never knowingly been misled by any of the information that has been passed to the commission. It has all been passed with the best of intentions, albeit it has been inaccurate. This, however, is entirely understandable given the timescales involved.

One of the other problems we have is that people who may have been involved in these events 40 years ago have now moved on with their lives. Their relatives and families may not be aware of the part they may have played in these events many years ago when they were young. We have had to tackle this problem. There are issues and there is no two ways about it, but we have had genuine support also.

Reference was made to the consequences for passing on information. This is not a general amnesty; it is a limited immunity. I believe we would all agree that it has worked remarkably well. Nobody who has passed information to the commission about missing victims has ever been interviewed, arrested, charged or appeared in court for anything related to that information. We are comfortable that the legal structure works very well and I believe that the people we engage with are satisfied this is the case. As the years go by, more victims are found. Nobody has ever been questioned by the legal authorities about it.

Vice Chairman: I will move on. Three other members have indicated and if any other members would like to come in I will take the questions in twos or threes.

Senator Frank Feighan: I welcome the witnesses here today to discuss this very difficult subject. The setting up of the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains has been one aspect of the Good Friday Agreement that is working in a lot of ways with a dif-

difficult task.

I attended Kevin McKee's funeral in St. Peter's in Belfast, in a personal capacity. It brought back the awfulness of the tragedy of his murder and the secret burial which left his family grieving for many years. That he was buried with his mother in Lisburn many years later brought back that fact that this young man was 17 years of age when he was abducted with Seamus Wright who was 25. Across the Border we found it very difficult to comprehend these unfortunate times.

Three victims' remains have not yet been found, namely, those of Joseph Lynskey, Columba McVeigh and Robert Nairac. Can Mr. Knupfer tell the committee if there is a reluctance, a selectivity, a hierarchy, a cunning or a disrespect involved in the fact that Robert Nairac was from a British army tradition? Is this why information is not coming forward about him? I watched the "Prime Time Investigates" interview with Robert Nairac's friend Fr. William Burke. The victim was a British soldier, but he was a Catholic and he deserves a funeral. He deserves that respect.

People speak about parity of esteem but there must be parity of esteem for these victims. I understand there has been great co-operation but once again I appeal to anybody out there with information. Robert Nairac came from a British army tradition but, should information be forthcoming, he must be treated the same as all the other unfortunate victims who are the disappeared. Is the commission saying that information is not coming forward from some quarters?

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: When we look down the list it brings back the horror of what it was all about. My colleague referred to thugs and murderers. Nowadays we would probably say "radicalised young men who did some horrendous things."

I cannot begin to imagine what it meant to the families for whom the long wait was resolved when the bodies of victims were recovered to at least have the remains of a body and a place to go to.

I have to hand a list of names, which appears to be a rather cold document. We are referring to people, for the most part young men, who were taken from their homes to some dark and lonely corner knowing all the time that their lives were going to be extinguished at the end of the trip. I frequently think back on these people. Every time I hear mention of the commission's work, the horror of it all comes back. I cannot begin to express my appreciation for what the commission has done.

To those who were the perpetrators of these atrocities and came forward to assist the commission, I will use whatever bit of charity I have and say "Thank you". I thank them for ending the families' long suffering. To lose a child, brother, sister, husband, wife or, as happened in some cases, mother is traumatic, but these families do not know where their loved ones are. The commission has recovered bodies in bogs and dark, lonely and desolate places.

I agree with my colleague. Robert Nairac was a serving British soldier. Some say that what happened was fair and people were entitled to shoot him because it was war. Maybe they were, maybe they were not. I will not get into that today. However, his parents were entitled to his body.

Deputy Brendan Smith: Nobody is entitled to shoot anybody.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: I agree. His parents were entitled to his body. They were

entitled to see his grave. He is entitled to a headstone.

I cannot begin to express the level of distress that reading this list causes me. It brings me back to where this country was, when the orders of some individual unknown to me, the witnesses or anyone else could sentence another person to death and have him or her taken somewhere to never be found.

I compliment the commission on its work. I pray to God that it will find whatever bodies are left, thereby giving some closure to the mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers who to this day wonder what happened to their loved ones. The commission has found a number of bodies. Finding remains has not been easy for the families, but at least it has given them closure. At least they know that is it and the story is over. Now they can go and pay their respects on a daily, weekly or other basis. Nothing fills the vacuum left by the pain of losing a child but, for the most part, parents have somewhere to go. I pray that those who were radicalised, carried out these acts and may be living with their consciences today come forward and clear their own minds because, if there is a God - it is not for me to say whether there is or what form he or she may take - they will have to meet him or her some day and face final judgment. Come forward and give the commission the material it needs to finish the job it has started.

Mr. Paul Maskey: I do not intend to speak for too long on this issue, as I am speaking as a cousin of one of the people named in the document. Thankfully, the body of that individual - John McClory - is one of those that has been found. I know the hurt that this causes families. It is upsetting. That is why I do not intend to speak for too long on it.

I thank the commission for the work it has done. I also thank everyone who came forward with correct information that allowed the return of people's bodies to their loved ones. There is nothing as important in people's lives as being able to bury their loved ones and go to their graves to pay their respects. Unfortunately, in the case of three individuals, their families are not able to do that.

I echo some of the comments that have been made at this meeting. I appeal to those who have any information. As mentioned, it does not matter how small it is - they should come forward with it as a matter of urgency. I sincerely hope that the three individuals who have not been returned to their loved ones can be returned and that information on them comes forward. Without such information, their families continue to suffer to this day. I hope that people will come forward with information to alleviate that suffering and put this part of our past behind us. I want families to be able to go to the graves of their loved ones and pay their respects. That is what I do in respect of members of my family who are dead. I urge people to come forward with the relevant information to allow other families to do the same.

Mr. Mickey Brady: I thank the witnesses for their presentation. I also thank them for their work. Seamus Ruddy was a good friend and neighbour of mine. I grew up with him. Just before he went to Paris, I spoke to him briefly by telephone. He went to Paris because, although he had been accepted to a course in Trinity College, he could not get a grant. We were trying to get something sorted out. Unfortunately, he ended up in France and we know what happened.

I am aware of what the Ruddy family went through. Before she died, Mrs. Ruddy, God rest her soul, had his name put on a headstone in the hope that his body would be recovered. Thankfully, it was. I am aware of the hurt, not just of the Ruddy family, but of our community in Ballybot, which is one of the oldest parts of Newry and is very historical. We grew up together, played football together, went to the old carnivals together and had some good times together.

I reiterate everything that has been said and ask those who have any information on the three remaining bodies to come forward. Knowing what the Ruddy family went through, no other family needs to go through that.

The commission has received information and discovered and recovered bodies for other families, which was important for them. I thank it for the work it has done.

Vice Chairman: I am the only contributor remaining, so I will say a few words before asking whether the three witnesses wish to comment on the other contributions and bringing the meeting to a conclusion.

Speaking as a schoolteacher, anyone with a result of 13 out of 16 would be considered to have done an excellent job, but that is no good for the three unresolved body recoveries. As many of those present know, the area within three miles of where I live is where most of the bodies have been found - Iniskeen, Carrickrobin, my home village of Knockbridge, Ravensdale and Jonesborough. Today is about recognising the importance of the return of the three gentlemen - Joe Lynskey, Columba McVeigh and Robert Nairac.

On behalf of the committee, I compliment the commission on its professionalism and sterling efforts in recovering the bodies. When I met the witnesses outside, I told them of my first-hand experience of the commission's work when one of the bodies was recovered within 300 yd. of where I live.

Of most importance has been the confidentiality shown by the commission. The message needs to go out loud and clear that the three remaining families need closure. As was mentioned, that closure can only be brought about with information.

Will the witnesses comment on the rumour that one of the three persons whose body has not been recovered was not buried? Without indicating what their information is, has this rumour been brought to their attention? It was one of the main local rumours that did the rounds in the Border area. I ask anybody who has information to please come forward, as others have asked, as it would give families an opportunity to bury their loved ones and put an end to this sorry saga.

In conclusion, I was 22 years of age when the body of Mr. Simons, whose case was not part of the commission's work, was discovered. Coincidentally, his body was found within 300 yd. of my bedroom at my home. Like others here in this room, who have experienced the hurt of violence and been about to bring closure, such discoveries have been tremendous for the families affected. I appeal to anybody with information who is listening today to give the remaining families that closure by conveying information through the commission's confidential post-office box number and telephone lines. I wish the commission well in the future.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: I ask the Vice Chairman to ask the Oireachtas social media to share the postal box number and telephone details following this committee meeting today, if appropriate.

Vice Chairman: I am quite sure the information is all available on the Oireachtas media. The witnesses may respond to the questions and comments.

Mr. Geoff Knupfer: I believe we were talking about the case of Robert Nairac. We have not received any information on his case at all. So far as reasons go, we guess this might be because he was a British soldier and, of course, because of the damaging allegations that have

been made or connected with his name in more recent years. That is why we have taken the unique step of trying to research his background to see whether this was fact or fiction. At the end of the day this is not about Robert Nairac; it is about his loved ones. It is too late to show compassion for Robert Nairac, unfortunately; this is about his family. We would ask anybody who has any information to please pass it to us.

The Vice Chairman mentioned that there was a strong rumour that his body had been destroyed in a meat processing plant in the area. We are assured by people who would know that this is actually not the case and the rumour was spread to distract attention, shall we say, at the time.

Vice Chairman: Does anybody else wish to comment or make a concluding remark? Are the witnesses happy enough to have given their evidence?

Sir Kenneth Bloomfield: This is one of the most moving exercises in which I have been involved, in a very long public career. I remember days when people like me would have felt not very welcome in Crossmaglen. I have been to Crossmaglen several times. I have been entertained in the Crossmaglen Rangers clubhouse. There is now a wide agreement across the community - left, right and centre - that this really is a blur on the history of our island and that really it is the duty of everybody to come forward and help us if they can.

I will repeat what we have said already. We are not a court of law. We are not a court of morality. We just have a simple end in mind and that is to bring solace to those families that have been bereaved for so many years.

Mr. Frank Murray: People have sometimes asked us how they can get in touch with the commission if they are uncomfortable using the post office box, which has been very successful, or the confidential telephone line. They can always avail of other possibilities such as contacting a public representative, a clergyman or somebody of some standing in the community. We do not seek to get anybody into any personal difficulties or anything like that. Our sole purpose and remit is to find the bodies of the disappeared of which three cases remain - nothing more, nothing less. No court case will arise out of anything that is given to us or said to us. All we need is some focused information that might lead us to the right place. Perhaps people who have come to us before and given information might think again on whether there is any additional piece or factor they overlooked when they gave information before? Such information might be highly significant.

At the risk of embarrassing Mr. Knupfer, can I mention his involvement in the Manchester moors murder case? I will let him tell the story himself of how Myra Hindley, when she was brought to the site, gave a piece of information that had not been given before or, maybe, had not been deemed to be of great value. Her information led to breaking the mystery surrounding the whereabouts of the remains. I will hand over to Mr. Knupfer. I am referring to information that may not be relevant directly but indirectly.

Vice Chairman: A little bit of information may be significant.

Mr. Frank Murray: It is amazing how important a small piece of additional information, which people may have thought insignificant, can be of huge importance.

Mr. Geoff Knupfer: Very briefly, we were looking for the remains of one of the moors' murder victims - a young lady called Pauline Reade. We had a fairly broad location for her burial in a piece of peat bog. We knew she had been murdered and buried on a summer's eve-

ning. We looked at this outcrop of peat. Of course the question immediately arose whether the site could be seen from the road. If it could be seen from the road, then clearly people could not have buried her in daylight. If they had buried her in the dark then her body could be anywhere.

We had a facility to return to the office each evening and speak, on a one-to-one basis, with the offender, Myra Hindley. We chatted about this and asked her whether she could remember if it was still daylight or had it gone dark by the time her co-offender, Brady, had buried the body. She said she remembered it was just going dark; that it was just dusk really. She said “I recall it because I remember looking across the valley and seeing the ‘V’ of the hills coming down into the valley on the other side of the valley we were in.” We said: “Okay, fine. Thanks very much indeed.” We went back the next day and realised there was only one point on that piece of peat bog where one could see that “V” in the valley opposite and of course that led to the recovery of the body of Pauline Reade. A little titbit of information made all of the difference in the world.

Mr. Frank Murray: It would be remiss of us not to acknowledge the work done by the dedicated professional team who work for us on a contract basis. They never cease to amaze and impress me with their dedication to the task in hand. I have visited them working on site in different places. I refer in particular to our archaeologists, Ms Niamh McCullagh and Mr. Aidan Harte, and to our contractor, Mr. Aidan Boyle, and his staff. They are all tremendous people and they do not work in the most ideal of conditions, to say the least. Queen’s University Belfast has provided us with architectural expertise. We also have Dr. Tim Clayton as our DNA expert, who comes from Birmingham or somewhere in the midlands in England. Behind us there is another team of people without whom we could not have had the successes we have enjoyed to date.

To reiterate where we started, if somebody has given information before, perhaps they might have a rethink. Is there any other little bit or fiddly detail? The detail might seem fiddly but it could be important and lead to the recovery of remains.

Bragan Bog amazes me. I have walked around the bog several times and it is vast. We have searched all of the areas that we have been told to search yet we have not found the remains. Therefore, a little piece of the jigsaw is missing. If somebody thinks they might be able to point it out to us then I urge him or her to please come to us in whatever way he or she chooses, directly or indirectly. All we want is the information that will lead us to the right place. We have no interest in any other dimension. We are not in the business of preparing files for prosecution. That is not our bag. We are only focused on finding the remains wherever they are - nothing more, nothing less.

Vice Chairman: I thank all three gentlemen. On behalf of the committee I thank both of the commissioners and Mr. Knupfer for appearing before us today and giving us comprehensive answers to our questions. I wish the commission well in bringing closure to the three families who have not had it to date. I appeal to anybody who has information to furnish it to the commission in the hope that the bodies can be returned to their loved ones. I thank the witnesses and appreciate their attendance. I thank those in the Public Gallery who have an interest in the issue.

I propose we go into private session to deal with some housekeeping issues.

The joint committee went into private session at 3.10 p.m. and adjourned at 3.31 p.m. until 2.15 p.m. on Thursday, 8 February 2018.