

ROINN COSANTA

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S 1,271

Witness

Patrick Dunphy,
Lisnafunchin,
Castlecomer,
Co. Kilkenny.

Identity

Captain "B" Company, 3rd Battalion,
Kilkenny Brigade.

Subject

Crutt, later "B" Company, 3rd Battalion,
Kilkenny Brigade, 1914-1921

File No. S 2578

Statement by Mr. Patrick Kunphy,
Newtown, Lisnafunshin, Castlecomer WS 1271

I was born on 4th February in the year 1880 at Coolade, Crutt, Castlecomer. I attended the National School at Chatsworth until I was 12 years of age and then for a further two years I went to school in Castlecomer. My father, who was a farmer, was in those years very interested in the Land League movement. I recollect that he was in the habit of attending Land League meetings in Kilkenny and, on that account; I believe he was the delegate or representative of the local branch to something like a county committee which held its meetings in Kilkenny. From him and from my grandmother, who was a native Irish speaker, I learned some of the Irish language, particularly how to say my prayers in Irish.

Tradition was then very strong around my native place and the principal topics of conversation amongst the old people were of the White Feet and Fenian movements, of Carrickshock, and of a battle which was fought near Castlecomer in June 1798 between British soldiers and a party of Wexford insurgents, all of which made me very interested in Irish history and, in a boyish way, I often wished that I had lived in those days.

My father died in 1897 when I was 17 years of age and, as I was the eldest son, I took over the management of the farm with my mother.

About the year 1910 or 1911 I attended night school conducted by a Mr. Lynch in Castlecomer at which I improved my knowledge of Irish and, about the same time, a branch of the Gaelic League of which I became a member, was started in Castlecomer. The late Con Horgan was our first Irish teacher in the Gaelic League and, at a later date, he was succeeded by Eamon Comerford who afterwards became Q.M. Kilkenny Brigade, I.R.A.. The late Patrick Mulhall and Jeremiah (Jerh.) Kelly of Castlecomer were then members of the Gaelic League branch. Both were staunch Irishmen with separatist ideas and they passed on to me any periodicals or books with Irish Ireland Ideals which came their way. "The Resurrection of Hungary", which one or other of them lent me to read at the time, made me think of my own country and of the value which freedom would mean to Ireland.

In May 1914, a company of Irish Volunteers was formed at Clogh about 3 Irish miles from my home in Coolade. With a neighbour named James Culleton, I attended a parade of this company one evening shortly after it was formed. On our way home Culleton remarked that, instead of going to Clogh, we should form a company of our own at Crutt. This we did and for a start we got about 17 members. We held no election of officers for, as Culleton was principally instrumental in forming the company, he was automatically looked upon as company captain and, as I was his companion and assistant, I was similarly accepted as the second officer or lieutenant of the company. For drill instructors we had at first two ex-British soldiers, both of whom were on the "Reserve", and both of whom were called up for service with the British army on the outbreak of the 1914-18 Great War. A member of the company named Brennan then took over the training.

With a view to getting some more recruits, we held a parade and marched to a dance at Chatsworth Cross. This resulted in bringing in an additional eight new members which brought our strength up to 25. We then got a local carpenter to make 25 wooden rifles which we used when drilling. From a small weekly subscription and from a collection made amongst the local people, we gathered together a sum of approximately £12 towards an arms fund. Culleton got into touch with the "O'Rahilly" in Dublin and sent him on this money. In return the O'Rahilly sent us four short Martini carbines and one long Martini carbine, but no ammunition.

When the split took place in the Volunteer movement, it did not affect us in any way. Culleton made a statement at a company parade at the time that we would have nothing to do with Redmond or the Redmondite Volunteers and this statement was not challenged. His word was final. We were then an isolated unit acting on our own. We continued our training, did route marches including marches to a mission which was being held in Ballinakill and engaged in some anti-British propaganda such as advising men who were likely to do so not to join the British army.

Sometime in 1915, Eamon Comerford, whom I have previously referred to, met me in Castlecomer. He mentioned that they (Volunteer officers) in Kilkenny had heard of our company in Crutt and were anxious to become closer associated with us. He inquired to know if it were true that we had some real rifles and, after some conversation, I gave him my own and Culleton's addresses and told him I would mention the matter to Culleton. Shortly afterwards we (Culleton and myself) were invited to an Irish Volunteer committee meeting in Kilkenny. I cannot now recall all who were present at that meeting, but I distinctly remember that the late Peter de Loughrey, Thomas Tracey, James Lalor, Leo Dardis, Martin Kealy and Eamon Comerford were there. From then until Easter of 1916, either Culleton or myself regularly attended meetings of this committee in Kilkenny and, occasionally, some of the Volunteer officers from Kilkenny attended the parades of our company in Crutt and on these visits, they talked to the members about the necessity of remaining loyal to the Irish Volunteers and they

emphasised the need for getting all the arms and ammunition possible. From the Volunteer committee in Kilkenny we got some ammunition for the five Martini carbines.

On a Sunday towards the end of January or early in February 1916, James Lalor of Kilkenny and the late Captain Ted Kelly, (a Volunteer organiser) visited a parade of our company which was held at Moyhora. They put us through field exercises including a mock attack on a farmhouse. After the exercises, Captain Kelly addressed the company. He appealed to any members of the company who were in the habit of taking intoxicating drink to take the pledge at once. He said that it was not for show that we were drilling; he stressed the necessity to continue our training and to secure all possible arms and ammunition, and he mentioned that in the very near future we might be called into action and that it was up to ourselves to be prepared. This talk by Captain Kelly gave us plenty of food for thought and, while we assumed that something in the nature of a rebellion was in the offing, we had no idea that the Rising was to take place at the following Easter.

The news of this parade at Moyhora and of Captain Kelly's address came to the ears of the local correspondent of some of the weekly papers which carried a report of it the following week. The report was written in a skittish contemptible manner of which we took no notice. The R.I.C. at Railyard did, however, take notice and a party of them under some pretext or another visited houses in Coolade, their object being to try and find out where the carbines were kept. They saw one of them at James Culleton's house, and another at the home of a Volunteer named Cahill. At the latter's house one of the R.I.C. offered to bring out a few rounds of ammunition some day to have a few shots, but his offer was not accepted for this was their method of trying to find out if the carbines were in working order or not.

A few days before Easter Sunday 1916, - It may have been on the Easter Saturday - James Culleton, the company captain, and Patrick Mulhall of Castlecomer were summoned to a Volunteer committee meeting in Kilkenny. On his return Culleton told me that the company was to parade on Easter Sunday afternoon with all available arms and equipment at Crutt and to await instructions from Kilkenny. At Mass time on Easter Sunday morning we mobilised the members, and that evening fifteen who were available paraded. We took no notice of the counter-manding order which we read in that day's issue of the 'Sunday Independent' but continued to await the further instructions which never came. That night, the company was dismissed with instructions to be ready for mobilisation at any moment and to secure what arms they had.

The names of the Volunteers who paraded at Crutt on Easter Sunday 1916 are as follow:

James Culleton,	Coolade	Company	captain
Patrick Dunphy	do.	Myself	
Patrick Clancy	do.		
Patk. Dunphy (Jnr.)	do.		
Thomas Maguire,	Crutt		
Patrick Carroll	do.		
John Brennan (Mike)	do.		
Patk. Brennan *	do.		
Thos .Brennan **	do.		
MI. Brennan "	do*		
John McDonnell	do.		
Jas. Dooley	Booleybawn,	Ballinakill	
Jas. Cahill	Chatsworth		
Jos. Cahill	do.		
Jas. Baylon	Loon,	Castlecomer	

Many of the Volunteer officers in Kilkenny city were taken into custody by the R.I.C. and British-military immediately after the Rising of 1916, but no member of our company was arrested at that time. Sergeant Graham and a constable of the R.I.C. from Railyard barracks did, however, come to Coolade to seize the carbines. At my home my mother told them that there was no gun in the house except the old 'crock' which hung as an ornament over the fireplace. They insisted on seeing me and, when I denied any knowledge of a carbine, they asked my mother to advise me to give it up or else I would be arrested by the British military. This threat had no effect nor had similar threats at other houses including Culleton's and Cahill's which they visited. They got none of the carbines which, together with some shotguns which we had securely dumped and cared for.

In 1917 we reorganised the Volunteer company in Crutt. We got some new members which brought the strength up to 32. About the same time a Sinn Fein Club was started and a Mr. John Cahill at Chatsworth gave us the use of a house which we used as a hall. All members of the Volunteer Company were members of the Sinn Fein Club which also included amongst its members some elderly men who considered themselves too old to be members of the Volunteer Company. I acted as secretary of the Sinn Fein Club. A weekly subscription of 3d or 6d was collected from each member and whenever money was required for Volunteer purposes it was drawn from the Club's funds. Concerts were also organised to raise funds. These concerts were held in a marquee, and the late Patrick Fleming of The Swan usually sent an armed Volunteer guard to do duty at them.

Also in 1917 James Culleton assisted by some of the Volunteer officers from Kilkenny organised Volunteer companies in Conahy, Coon, The Swan, Ballyouskill and Castlecomer. With the Crutt Company, these companies were formed into a battalion which became the 3rd Battalion of the Kilkenny Brigade. Culleton was- appointed battalion commandant and I succeeded him as captain of the Crutt Company. Organisation work continued during the years 1918 and 1919 and, by the end of the latter year, the battalion was fully organised and it then consisted of eleven companies. The battalion and company officers were then as follows:

Battalion Commandant	James Culleton
Battalion V/Commandant	Michael Delaney
Battalion Adjutant	Sean McEvoy
Battalion Quartermaster	John McKenna

A/Coy.	Clogh and The Swan	Coy. Captain	Loughlin Fleming
B/Coy.	Crutt	do.	Patrick Dunphy

C/Coy.	Ballyou skill	do.	Michael Gough
D/Coy.	Castlecomer	do.	John Corcoran
E/Coy.	Loon	do.	John Brennan
F/Coy.	Coon	do.	James Comerford
G/Coy.	Ballyraggett	do.	James Butler
H/Coy.	Coolbawn	do.	Martin Byrne
I/Coy.	Conahy	do.	Nicholas Maher
K/Coy.	Muchalee	do.	James Conway
L/Coy.	Newtown	do.	James Brennan

During the conscription crisis in 1918, to supplement our small supply of arms - the five carbines and some shotguns - I got a supply of pikes made. These were of the same pattern as those used by the Wexford men in the Rebellion of 1798, and were made free of charge by a blacksmith named Michael McDonald of Ballinakill.

Early in 1919 a member of the Irish Guards named Dan Delaney returned to his home at Graighunahoun on leave from the British army, bringing his rifle with him. I raided his house during Mass time on a Sunday and took his rifle and uniform, but despite a search of all likely places in the house, I could find no ammunition.

Another incident which I recall as taking place about this time was the arresting of a man named for an attack on a girl. He was tried by court of Volunteer officers and was identified by the girl. He was sentenced to be tied to the chapel gates at Clogh on the following Sunday where he would be seen by the people attending Mass.

The late Patrick J. Fleming of the Swan succeeded James Culleton as battalion commandant towards the end of 1918. This change was entirely in accord with Culleton's own wishes who, I believe, considered that Fleming was the best man in the area to take charge of the battalion, Culleton retained his interest in both the Volunteer and Sinn Fein movements and was one of the most active and trusted men in North County Kilkenny until the Truce in 1921, Paddy Fleming (as he was known) held the post of Battalion Commandant for only a few months. One Sunday when he had some of us on field training he staged a mock attack on the R.I.C. Barracks at Railyard and this led to his arrest and imprisonment. He was succeeded as commandant by George O'Dwyer of 'F' (Coon) Company. About the same time, Gerald Brennan (now Deputy Commissioner of the Garda Siochana) returned to his home in Castlecomer from London where he had been arrested on a political charge. He became a member of 'D' (Castlecomer) Company and soon afterwards he was appointed battalion adjutant.

During the latter months of 1919 and the early part of 1920 I was principally engaged in training my own company. An air rifle which I received from a brother of mine in Dublin proved a great boon as it enabled us to have some target practice. I was also busily engaged in acquiring as much gelignite and explosives as possible. The principal source of supply was the coal mines near Castlecomer. Coal miners, who were also members of the Volunteers, when coming off duty in the mines, brought out small quantities generally hidden in the turn-ups of their trousers. One miner named Carroll succeeded in bringing out over a period approximately 2 cwts. of gelignite. Others brought out quantities of blasting powder and fuse. Practically all of these explosives were forwarded to the brigade quartermaster in Kilkenny.

At Easter of 1920 when the General Order was issued for the destruction of evacuated R.I.C. barracks, my company was given the task of destroying Railyard R.I.C. Barracks. The windows were barricaded with steel shutters and to gain entrance we had to burst in the door with a sledge hammer.

The beds, blankets, furniture, books and two bicycles were in the barracks. I remember reading in one of the Day Books an interesting minute dealing with Captain Kelly's visit to Moyhora in 1916. Two coal miners named Carroll and Brennan, who had experience of the handling of explosives, bored holes about ten inches from the ground in the outer walls of the barracks and packed in explosives. Petrol or paraffin was splashed on the bedding and woodwork and was set alight. We made one mistake, by leaving the windows closed, as the blast from the explosive charges in the walls extinguished the fire. This necessitated a return visit a few nights later when we brought along ladders, smashed in the roof and set fire to the woodwork. When our task was finished only the four walls of the barracks remained.

During the summer of 1920, our principal activities in the company were raiding mails, collecting dog licences from people who had paid Dog Tax, and arresting jury-men who were summoned to attend the Assizes in Kilkenny. The jury-men were as a rule only delighted to be taken to what was termed an 'unknown destination' for a day or two as it provided them with an excuse for not travelling to Kilkenny to attend the Assize Court.

At this time, too, Sinn Fein Courts commenced to function in my area. The Courts were usually held in the Sinn Fein Hall at Chatsworth and occasionally in Clogh. Father McNamara, C.C., Moneenroe and James Culleton presided and the cases heard were mostly simple ones, such as trespass cases. Culprits found guilty of small criminal offences were sentenced to work at turf cutting, hay saving or harvesting work for so many days.

In August or September 1920 I secured about ten shotguns for the company from private persons living in the company area. This was at the time when the general order for the collection of all such guns was issued. In my area, I must say that the majority of the owners handed them over willingly and with good grace. These guns were, at first, handed over to reliable members of the company for safe keeping, but later on, when raids by British troops became more frequent, I got stout wooden boxes specially made for dumping the carbines and shotguns. These boxes were covered by a thick layer of tarred felt which gave perfect protection to the contents even though the boxes might be dumped in an open ditch for a week or two at a time. A supply of grenades which were sent to me from Dublin by the late Eamon Coogan, T.D., were stored in similar boxes.

In November or December 1920, a number of senior officers of the Kilkenny Brigade, including Tom Treacy, the brigade commandant, James Lalor, the brigade vice-commandant, and Peter De Loughrey were taken prisoner by British forces and at a subsequent Brigade Council meeting, George O'Dwyer, then commandant of our battalion, was elected Brigade O/C. He was succeeded as battalion commandant by Michael Fleming (brother of Patrick J. Fleming) of The Swan. This change in the personnel of the battalion commandant did not lead to any increased activity in our area. During that winter of 1920 and spring of 1921, our activity centred chiefly on the blocking and trenching of roads. It was noticed that the British troops usually came out from Castlecomer and Kilkenny to raid and search on Sunday mornings, so we usually trenched the roads on Saturday nights.

About this time, too, a rather unique system of signalling was introduced. It was the use as horns of bottles from which the bottoms had been removed, the sound of which could be heard for a distance of up to two miles. After use there was, of course, no difficulty in disposing of the bottles. I remember one occasion when the sounding of a warning on one of those improvised horns gave James Culleton ample time to get away before a raiding party of British troops reached his house.

Another innovation at this time was the introduction of a gadget for puncturing the tyres of lorries. It was a four-pronged piece of iron so designed or shaped that no matter what way it was thrown on the road one prong or spike pointed upwards. To be effective the wheel of the lorry would, of course, have to be driven straight on to it.

One evening in June 1921, I was cutting turf in a bog with a man named Maguire when James Culleton came to me and told me to mobilise the company and to get four members to volunteer for a proposed attack on a party of British forces next morning. He told me to bring the rifles and all available ammunition and grenades and to meet him that night at 11 p.m. at Father McNamara's house at Gazebo (now Mooneenroe). Maguire was a lieutenant in my company at the time and he assisted me in the mobilisation. When I asked for four Volunteers, about 10 or 12 members of the company volunteered to come with me, and I selected the following four: Thomas Brennan (Mike), Crutt; John Keenan (then a shop assistant at Cantwell's of Castlecomer), John Corrigan, Chatsworth, Patrick Clancy, Coolade.

These four I armed with the carbines and I took along myself the Lee Enfield rifle, which I got in the raid on Delaney's house, and I also had a revolver of small calibre. Those members of the company who volunteered and were not selected to take part in the proposed attack helped to carry the grenades.

Arriving at Father McNamara's house, I met Culleton as arranged. There were about 16 other Volunteers present. Father McNamara heard all the men's confessions and, after tea there, I learned that the place selected for the ambush was at Coolbawn about one mile from Castlecomer on the main road to Athy. It was about 1 a.m. when I reached the ambush position where I handed over the grenades to O'Dwyer, the brigade commandant. The flying column, composed mostly of 5th Battalion men from the Graiguenamanagh district, arrived on the scene about the same time. There were six or seven men, coal miners who were familiar with the handling of explosives busily engaged in trenching the road and laying a mine.

About 6 a.m. O'Dwyer gave me four men who were unknown to me and told me to go and take up a position near the Uskerty road about half a mile away and to intercept any British forces who might come that way. I did not like the idea of being separated from the men whom I had brought with me, but O'Dwyer was insistent and said to remain in the position until he gave the order to retreat, which he would do by megaphone.

About 11 a.m. I heard machine gunfire in the direction of the ambush position. As I knew that our forces had no machine guns, I knew at once that it was British forces who were firing. Owing to the large amount of shrubbery in the vicinity and the thick foliage on the trees, it was impossible to see what was happening, but bullets were whizzing by and cutting leaves from the trees over our heads. After about ten minutes, a few Volunteers came in our direction and told me that our men had been attacked in the ambush position. Shortly afterwards I was joined by three of the men whom I had brought with me and by James Delaney (now Colonel Delaney of the Irish Army, and then a member of the column). Delaney had a lot of grenades with him which we assisted him to carry. We retreated to Monteen Bog where we again met O'Dwyer who sent out scouts and kept us under cover in the bog all day. During the day a farmer who brought us refreshments told us that the British military had brought three dead men in a coal cart into Castlecomer. About 9 p.m. that night O'Dwyer told us to disperse and to make our way home as best we could, and that he was taking the column in the direction of Tolerton and Carlow. Eventually, I reached home at 6 a.m. the following morning.

This incident at Coolbawn occurred on Saturday, June 18th 1921. After Mass on the following day (Sunday) I got word from John Brennan, Captain of 'E' (Loon) Company that there were three members of the column in his area. I went there to meet them and took them to Dunne's Cross where we met Father McNamara who took them on to where the remainder of the column were billeted; It was from one of these men, Paddy Quinn, that I learned that the three men whom the farmer mentioned as being dead were John Hartley of Glenmore, Nicholas Mullins of Thomastown, and James Doyle of Graiguenamanagh, all members of the column. Only Hartley and Mullins were dead. Doyle was seriously wounded and captured.

Next day, I again met O'Dwyer, Culleton and Delaney and, at their request, I arranged billets for the column in the Knock district in Co. Leix. These billets were not occupied and this may have been just as well, for a day or two afterwards, that area was visited by a strong party of British forces.

About a week after the Coolbawn incident a Battalion Council meeting of the 3rd Battalion was held in a field near Crutt. George O'Dwyer, the brigade commandant, attended and at this meeting Gerald Brennan, the battalion adjutant, was appointed battalion commandant. I often thought that it was a great pity that he had not been appointed to this position at a much earlier date. With his ability and initiative I am sure the battalion would have played a much greater part in the War of Independence. As it was, during the few weeks which intervened between his appointment and the coming into operation of the Truce he prepared detailed plans for an attack on the barracks in Castlecomer. As the Bureau is interested in the collection of pamphlets and documents relating to the period 1913 to 1921, I have pleasure in donating the following which may be of interest

- (1) Pamphlet giving report of meeting held in New York on 15th May 1916, to protest against the execution of the leaders of the Rising in 1916.
- (2) Copy of *Sli na Saoirse (Leabhar Drille d'óglaigh na hÉireann)* issued in December 1917.
- (3) Irish Republican Army Handbook No. 1 "An Introduction to Volunteer Training".
- (4) Irish Republican Army Handbook No. 7 "Cyclist Training".
- (5) Irish Republican Army Handbook No. 11. "Night Fighting".
- (6) Circular letter dated 10th March 1921 from Liam T. MacCosgair (then Dáil Éireann Minister for Local Government) on the subject of The Republican Courts.
- (7) Circular letter of March 1921 and Questionnaire from the Dáil Éireann Minister for Local Government regarding the position of local authorities.

ADDENDUM TO STATEMENT BY MR. PATRICK DUNPHY, Newtown, Lisnafunshin, Castlecomer, Co. Kilkenny.

I wish to add the following information to the statement of evidence which I signed for the Bureau of Military History on 4th October, 1955, and which, I regret to say, I forgot to include when giving my evidence originally.

A branch of Cumann na mBan was formed in Crutt in 1919. It consisted of ten girls, and they were trained in first-aid by Doctor Farrell of Castlecomer. They assisted in organising the concerts and dances which were held in aid of the Company's arms fund, and, during the years of 1920 and 1921, they were frequently called upon to carry despatches. The McGuire girls, in particular, were very helpful, and they sheltered in their home many I.R.A. men who were on the run. Dan Breen and Sean Hogan were kept at their house for two days and two nights after Breen had been wounded at Professor Carolan's house in Drumcondra, Dublin. Our Company provided guards for him, day and night, and, when he was leaving the district, we escorted him to "C" (Ballyousskill) Company area.

In January, 1921, I saw an aeroplane circling over Coolade bog and landing in a field in Crutt at 9 a.m. one morning. It was snowing at the time, and after breakfast I again saw it motionless in the field. Seeing that it was a British army 'plane, I went to Commandant Culleton for instructions. He was on the run at the time, but he usually stayed about a mile away at Carroll's of Boleybawn. He was not there on this particular morning, but I found him at Nolan's, and he said, "We will arrest the pilot and burn the plane". I sent word to the nearest Volunteers to bring rifles and ammunition from the dump to a field near the grounded plane. When Culleton and I arrived there, a lone British army officer was limping around. We searched him and the plane, but found no arms. There were some neighbouring men and women in the field, but they left when we arrived. It was then about twelve noon.

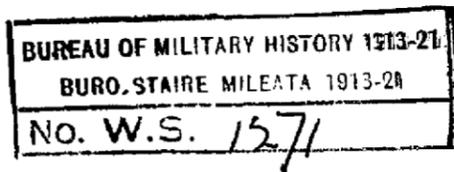
I was about to signal our men to come with the arms when I saw British troops coming towards us. They were coming from the direction of the Castlecomer road and they were about two hundred yards away when I saw them, so we departed while our men and rifles were safe. One of the occupants of the plane (the pilot) had made his way to Castlecomer during my delay in contacting Commandant Culleton. Had I taken action on my own, I could have burned the plane, captured the officer and pilot, placed them under guard until nightfall and then taken them some miles away into County Leix and released them.

In April of 1921, two members of my Company assisted Commandant Culleton at the blowing up of Dysart Bridge on the main Kilkenny-Castlecomer road.

DATE:

WITNESS:

J. Grace



SIGNED

Patrick Murphy