

Day 16 – Friday, 4 December 1964

CHAIRMAN: We will now begin our session. The first witness will be the Commissioner of Police, Mr. Peter Owen. ©

PETER GRENVILLE OWEN is sworn in, and he states as follows:

RAMSAROOP: You are the Commissioner of Police?

OWEN: That is correct.

RAMSAROOP: We are primarily concerned with the disturbances which took place this year in the Wismar-Mackenzie and Christianburg area. First, I would like you to tell us, Commissioner, what was the strength of the Police Force in the area?

OWEN: The entire divisional establishment is 31 but at Wismar it is 13.

RAMSAROOP: Can you say how that number was made up in terms of rank?

OWEN: At Wismar, one corporal, one sergeant, and 11 constables.

RAMSAROOP: Did you carry out a review of the number of policemen in that area sometime this year?

OWEN: I began it in November 1962 at the request of government and I completed it in 1963.

RAMSAROOP: And in your review did you consider the number of policemen inadequate, and did you recommend an increase?

OWEN: I did recommend an increase.

RAMSAROOP: This increase should have been in what regard? How many recruits did you recommend?

OWEN: I recommended an increase of seven – one inspector, one corporal and five constables.

RAMSAROOP: Why did you consider the number of policemen inadequate?

OWEN: Largely because of the crime rate, a large population and bad communications and inadequate lighting.

RAMSAROOP: At the time of the review was there a Land Rover in use?

OWEN: Not at Wismar; only at Mackenzie.

RAMSAROOP: Did you make any recommendation about an increase in the number of vehicles?

OWEN: I recommended that there should be a second vehicle, preferably a Land Rover at Wismar.

RAMSAROOP: In addition to the regular Police Force can you say how many supernumerary constables were employed by the Demerara Bauxite Company?

OWEN: I think I am correct in saying that there were ninety-seven supernumerary constables.

RAMSAROOP: These constables are attached to the Demerara Bauxite Company?

OWEN: That is so. They are mainly employed for the purpose of looking after Demba's property.

RAMSAROOP: Could their services be requested in times of emergency?

OWEN: They have assisted us in the past in times of emergency.

RAMSAROOP: Can you say something as to the commitments of the police following the strike by the G.A.W.U. in February of this year?

OWEN: Yes. The trouble built up initially on the W.C.D. and by the 21st May we had employed on the W.C.D. 400 volunteers and policemen together with eight police officers.

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RAMSAROOP: Could you say when the first major incident occurred at Wismar?

OWEN: The first incident occurred on the night of the 21st or 22nd – a Thursday night. The second incident was reported on the same night.

RAMSAROOP: On that same night, the 21st, were there any incidents on the West Coast?

OWEN: Two persons were shot and four died.

RAMSAROOP: What was the position on the East Coast?

OWEN: We had fires there and clashes with the security forces.

RAMSAROOP: Now about these incidents at Wismar, Mackenzie and the East Coast, did you advise the Minister of Home Affairs to do anything?

OWEN: I did. My first request was to send the military forces to the trouble spots on the West Coast.

RAMSAROOP: Do you recall any particular incident in May at Buxton?

OWEN: Yes. There were several incidents at Buxton, but the one that stands out most was the shooting of a farmer and his wife at the back of village.

RAMSAROOP: Do you think that this incident was the cause for the violence in Georgetown?

OWEN: I think it was responsible for the violence we had in Georgetown Friday 22nd.

RAMSAROOP: On the 23rd of May were there any incidents at Wismar?

OWEN: On the night of the 23rd – it was a Saturday night – a grocery was invaded by a group of people who stole things from the shelves.

RAMSAROOP: On the Sunday night 24th May at 9.00 p.m. did you confer with the Assistant Commissioner (Administration) at Force Control?

OWEN: I did.

RAMSAROOP: Mr. Owen, could you say what was discussed at this meeting?

OWEN: The deployment of police personnel in the East and West Coast, and the possible means of strengthening the police at Wismar.

RAMSAROOP: Was anything further discussed?

OWEN: It was decided to recommend an embodiment of the Volunteer Force and in addition the police were to be in line, and the special constables were to be called in for full time duty.

RAMSAROOP: On Monday, 25th May, did you have a discussion with Mr. Hobbs about the Wismar-Christianburg-Mackenzie situation?

OWEN: I received the information from Mr. Puttock that there was trouble at Wismar about 8.30 a.m.

RAMSAROOP: Could you tell the Commission what type of trouble?

OWEN: I understand buildings were burnt, attacks were made on people and they were beaten at Wismar.

RAMSAROOP: Did you see Mr. Neil Isaacs on that day?

OWEN: I did. I directed him to go with Assistant Superintendent Lashley immediately to Mackenzie to assess the position and report to me.

RAMSAROOP: At the time of this discussion on 24th May was the Army alerted?

OWEN: The Army was alerted on the Monday.

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RAMSAROOP: Can you recall how long were there instances or looting and burning at Wismar-Christianburg area?"

OWEN: Not until the 29th May when there were no incidents reported.

RAMSAROOP: When did you receive the report from Mr. Neil Isaacs?

OWEN: I received the report during the afternoon of the 25th a few minutes before 3 o'clock.

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SHEPHERD: Was it a written report or oral report?

OWEN: An oral report.

SHEPHERD: What was the date?

OWEN: The 25th of May.

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RAMSAROOP: Can you say what was the nature of that report?

OWEN: Mr. Isaacs asked for reinforcements of British troops?

RAMSAROOP: Did he indicate how many troops would be needed?

OWEN: No. He said simply that the police and volunteers were insufficient to cope with the trouble at that time.

RAMSAROOP: Following this report, did you speak to the Minister of Home Affairs?

OWEN: I spoke first to the Commander of the British Guiana Garrison.

RAMSAROOP: Can you say what reinforcements were sent up following your request?

OWEN: I cannot give you the actual number of troops sent, but I am certain that the Commander will have this information.

RAMSAROOP: When you heard of the first report, did you hear anything that this Wismar situation was beyond the control of the forces?

OWEN: I know there was a potentially explosive situation at Wismar as compared with the East and West Coast of Demerara at that time.

RAMSAROOP: Can you say what were the statistics available at the police headquarters between the 21st and 25th May regarding the number of houses destroyed at Wismar and the number of people killed and the number of persons seriously injured?

OWEN: I received the first report on Thursday night. Commencing from early on Sunday morning and until the 28th May, the number of houses destroyed was 220, the number of persons killed including those shot by the police amounted to five. The number of persons seriously injured was ten, the number of cases of rape reported was six, the number of shots fired was four, the number of rounds of .38 ammunition fired by the Police was thirteen, the number of tear smoke shells used was four and the number of persons evacuated from the area under guard was 1,800.

RAMSAROOP: You said that Wismar was one of the general pattern at that time. Do you think it would have been a better protective measure if the British troops had been alerted in these different areas?

OWEN: As I have already pointed out that was a matter for the Garrison Commander. The Army had already taken over the operation on the West Coast of Demerara.

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SHEPHERD: The military took over the West Coast on the 23rd of May?

OWEN: There were many in the area on the 22nd and they took over officially on the 23rd of May.

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SHEPHERD: At which time the trouble started at Wismar, a grocery store was looted and within a few hours the whole place was ablaze. Is that so?

OWEN: That is not so. The store was looted on the Saturday evening the 23rd and the trouble started on the Monday morning the 25th.

SHEPHERD: So the military were on the West Coast was on the 25th?

OWEN: That was by the 25th.

SHEPHERD: By the 25th, the situation in Wismar was at its worst?

OWEN: 25th was the worst day.

SHEPHERD: So it wasn't possible to withdraw any police?

OWEN: I had deployed all available police by Sunday morning the 24th; that is why we asked for the Volunteer Force to be embodied.

SHEPHERD: Your force was extended to its full throughout British Guiana?

OWEN: That is correct. Throughout the country, and they included recruits of a few weeks' training.

SHEPHERD: And it was on Monday 25th you sent Assistant Commissioner Isaacs to assess the situation and report to you?

OWEN: To be correct, sir, I sent Mr. Lashley and four other policemen to assist in the Mackenzie situation.

SHEPHERD: You chartered an aircraft for that purpose which left Ogle on Monday, May 25th at about 1.00 p.m.

OWEN: That is correct.

SHEPHERD: Now this situation on the West Coast was building up since February?

OWEN: That is correct.

SHEPHERD: And this pattern spread to the East Coast?

OWEN: That is correct. That is why we transferred some of them to the West Coast and to Georgetown.

SHEPHERD: And violence indeed occurred in Georgetown on Friday, May 22nd?

OWEN: Yes. We had a small outbreak of violence in Georgetown on Friday afternoon the 22nd May, and the police had to fire on looters.

SHEPHERD: And you connected that outbreak in Georgetown with murder at Buxton of Mr. and Mrs. Sealey?

OWEN: That is so.

SHEPHERD: And on the 23rd did you write to the Minister of Home Affairs?

OWEN: I did.

SHEPHERD: Do you have a copy of the minute you wrote to the Minister?

OWEN: I have a note. [*Reads from note*]:

"Extract from letter from Commissioner of Police to Minister of Home Affairs, dated 23rd May 1964. The violence which erupted in Georgetown yesterday found a moderate echo in Wismar. This was the case last year and I am afraid that if violence is allowed to continue in the countryside the pattern will be repeated not only in Georgetown, but also in Wismar with increasing severity.

"The Buxton incident and racial violence generally throughout the country produced the same effect on Wismar-Mackenzie. At 9.00 p.m., an Indian owned house was destroyed by fire at One-Mile, Wismar, and at 11.40 p.m. an explosive device was set under the house of another East Indian at Silvertown,

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Wismar. It exploded doing damage and injuring three (3) persons, although not seriously. We both know how serious it will be for the small East Indian minority at Wismar-Mackenzie if the Africans start retaliation there as they did last year.”

SHEPHERD: Is that the end of your minute?

OWEN: This is an extract from the minute that I sent to the Minister of Home Affairs.

SHEPHERD: So there seemed on the 23rd May to be a distinct possibility of trouble although at the time you had only known of one or two incidents from Wismar?

OWEN: Two incidents.

SHEPHERD: And you felt it necessary to warn the Minister of Home Affairs that the pattern of 1963 might be repeated at Wismar?

OWEN: I did.

SHEPHERD: Was this the first time you warned the Minister about the danger of the violence on the coastal strip?

OWEN: I had done so on many occasions before.

SHEPHERD: Can you remember one such occasion when you warned the Minister whether orally or in writing?

OWEN: I cannot recall any specific date or time.

SHEPHERD: There were many occasions?

OWEN: Yes.

SHEPHERD: Was it only the Minister of Home Affairs to whom you issued this warning or someone else?

OWEN: I also mentioned it to the Premier.

SHEPHERD: And you mentioned this to the Premier before the 22nd May?

OWEN: Quite a long time before that.

SHEPHERD: During that time, was the tension building up?

OWEN: Probably since the month of April. I warned the Premier that if some settlement was not reached in the G.A.W.U. strike, we would have reaction in Georgetown and Wismar.

SHEPHERD: And what was his reply?

OWEN: I cannot recall his exact words.

SHEPHERD: This is one additional reason, Mr. Chairman, why I would like to have the Premier here to cross-examine him. Mr. Owen, do you recall giving similar warnings to other members of the Council of Ministers?

OWEN: Not that I can recall, but to the members of the civil service.

SHEPHERD: Such as?

OWEN: Permanent Secretaries and Assistant Secretaries.

SHEPHERD: You gave them warnings?

OWEN: They were at meetings.

SHEPHERD: Am I correct in saying that the emergency was officially declared on the advice of the Council Of Ministers? On the very day that the violence broke out in Georgetown the emergency was imposed by His Excellency the Governor on the advice of the Council of Ministers.

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OWEN: Yes, about that time.

SHEPHERD: You feared that reprisal was likely to occur in Wismar, but you did not consider it a matter of more pressing urgency as that of the threatened reprisals on the East Coast or in Georgetown?

OWEN: It was part of the pattern.

SHEPHERD: Now, Mr. Isaacs accompanied Superintendent Lashley with the party on Monday?

OWEN: Yes.

SHEPHERD: Did he give you a report?

OWEN: That is correct.

SHEPHERD: He later gave you on the 2nd June a confidential report which I will now hand to you. Mr. Chairman, perhaps you may wish to allow your learned counsel to see it, while I continue with the questions. On Sunday 24th May at about 8.30 a.m., did you have a discussion with Assistant Commissioner of Police, Mr. Puttock?

OWEN: I did.

SHEPHERD: Did you inform the Assistant Commissioner that you could spare no other police for service in the Wismar area?

OWEN: That is so.

SHEPHERD: What was the alternative?

OWEN: The only alternative was to ask that the Volunteer Force be embodied and to put the Police Force in the Wismar area "in line".

SHEPHERD: By that time had the Volunteer Force in Georgetown already been embodied?

OWEN: Yes.

SHEPHERD: And the decision was to ask the Volunteer Force at Mackenzie to embody twenty-four men?

OWEN: Yes sir.

SHEPHERD: Why was the number twenty-four hit on and not forty-eight?

OWEN: That is the approximate number in a platoon.

SHEPHERD: Did the "D" company comprise of one or two platoons?

OWEN: I think two or three platoons.

SHEPHERD: At the time the decision was made, was any representation made to you by Major Langham or Mr. Puttock that twenty-four men would be insufficient?

OWEN: Not at all.

SHEPHERD: The instruction to embody twenty-four members of the Volunteer Force was passed to Mr. Hobbs by Mr. Puttock about an hour later at about 9.30 a.m. on Sunday May 24th?

OWEN: I remember speaking to Colonel DeFreitas who commands the Volunteer Force, and subsequently to Superintendent Hobbs at Wismar.

SHEPHERD: Now, as a result of the report received from Mr. Hobbs on 25th, did you do anything with regards to the strengthening of the police at Wismar?

OWEN: On the morning of the 25th May at about 8.30, we asked for the immediate embodiment of the remainder of the Volunteer Force.

SHEPHERD: At what time? 8.30 on Monday morning?

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OWEN: Yes.

SHEPHERD: And how was this request conveyed?

OWEN: A report from Mr. Hobbs that there was burning, looting and violence in the area.

SHEPHERD: And your request, how was that made?

OWEN: In the normal way, through Colonel DeFreitas.

SHEPHERD: Would it be correct to say that Mr. Puttock was authorised to request Mr. Hobbs to request the officer commanding the “D” company to embody all the men of the Volunteer Force?

OWEN: Yes.

SHEPHERD: And you confirmed this action shortly afterwards?

OWEN: Yes, that is so.

SHEPHERD: This statement which I will hand to you is a copy of Mr. Puttock’s report, and I think it will serve very well.

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CARTER: Mr. Chairman, I think it would be best for the documents to be marked to show what part of the appendix they form.

CHAIRMAN: The statement does not form part of the appendix.

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SHEPHERD: Now on the 25th, that is Monday 25th May, was a meeting of the Security Council convened?

OWEN: Yes, at two o’clock at the Ministry of Home Affairs.

SHEPHERD: You had in your hand just now a note that you wrote to the Minister of Home Affairs. Did you write to her again on the 25th requesting the convening of this Council?

OWEN: I certainly wrote on the 25th.

SHEPHERD: Can you refer to your minutes as you have a note of it? If not, on the letter which I handed you just now. This was, of course, the Monday, and you say it was held two o’clock?

OWEN: There is no reference in my notes here regarding the minutes written on Monday 25th.

SHEPHERD: Was there then another minute or don’t you remember?

OWEN: I can’t recall now, but I attended the meeting.

SHEPHERD: Who was present at the meeting besides the Minister?

OWEN: The Permanent Secretary, the Garrison Commander, Colonel DeFreitas, and the Assistant Secretary of the Home Affairs who deals with police matters.

SHEPHERD: Now it was on that date what you wrote your minute that the situation had deteriorated. Was this before or after the meeting of the Security Council?”

OWEN: I wrote a security report to the Minister every morning before leaving my office at nine o’clock.

SHEPHERD: It would have normally gone before the meeting?

OWEN: Yes.

SHEPHERD: Just read from the notes you have of that situation report.

OWEN: [*Reads from report*] “The situation has deteriorated considerably. On the 24th May, at 9.00 a.m., I conferred with Assistant Commissioner, Administration at Force Control and gave instructions for

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twenty-four men of the volunteers to be embodied at Mackenzie for service at Wismar, all special constables there to be called out, and the policemen to go on to standby ("in line"). On Monday 25th, the officer in charge "E" division reported at about 9.00 a.m. that there was further trouble in Wismar and he was given instructions to embody the rest of the Volunteer Force. Assistant Superintendent J. W. Lashley who had been the officer in command of "E" division prior to Mr. Hobbs was despatched there to assist him and the Assistant Commissioner (Training and Operations) was sent to assess the position and report."

SHEPHERD: Very well. Now, the Minister has given evidence and I don't think there is any secret about it, that she at that meeting asked for British troops to be sent to the area. Is that so?

OWEN: That is correct.

SHEPHERD: Does it appear to you that the Minister fully understood the procedure involved in applying to the Imperial government for the assistance of Imperial troops?"

OWEN: I don't think so.

SHEPHERD: For the information of myself and possibly some of the Commissioners, describe that procedure.

OWEN: The requisition for troops is made by the Governor on the advice of the administration, but the requisition for troops doesn't necessarily mean their physical intervention. The physical intervention of troops can be made at the request of the administration or a police officer above the rank of Chief Inspector, but unless the urgency requires it, the Governor as Commander-in-Chief must be informed before hand wherever it is possible.

SHEPHERD: That is because the Governor is Commander-in-Chief and also because he is the Imperial government's representative in the colony?

OWEN: That is correct."

SHEPHERD: This cannot be done in a moment or in half an hour?

OWEN: No. The procedure should be gone through.

SHEPHERD: Is it correct to say that the Garrison Commander would insist before committing his troops for something in writing? I believe he calls it a "blood chit". Obviously, it is because his troops have to go into action; it is a term used in military context. Could this now be produced and shown to the witness, signed by Mr. Owen that was put in by the Garrison Commander, Colonel King?

OWEN: The Garrison Commander like myself wished to know the overall territorial position, and to have a true picture of events at Wismar before committing himself to sending troops there.

SHEPHERD: Were you in agreement with the Minister that the Imperial troops should be sent to Wismar?

OWEN: Before agreeing I wished to know what the true situation was like at Wismar.

SHEPHERD: At that time where was Mr. Isaacs?

OWEN: At the time of the meeting he was at Wismar.

SHEPHERD: What time did you hear from Mr. Isaacs on the telephone?

OWEN: A few minutes before three o'clock and this meeting was held at two o'clock.

SHEPHERD: When was the meeting adjourned?

OWEN: At about ten minutes to three o'clock.

SHEPHERD: You received your telephone report from Mr. Isaacs at about five minutes to three o'clock. Could you carry on from that?"

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OWEN: I telephoned the Garrison Commander and told him of the position and he agreed to the dispatch of British troops.

SHEPHERD: Did you inform him that you had chartered an aircraft?

OWEN: We had aircraft standing by from the first report in the morning.

SHEPHERD: About what time?

OWEN: Arrangements were made after we received a report from Mr. Hobbs.

SHEPHERD: What kind of aircraft was standing by?

OWEN: A Dakota aircraft was standing by for use.

SHEPHERD: Did you inform the Garrison Commander that the “blood chit” would follow?

OWEN: I told the Garrison Commander that I would send it along.

SHEPHERD: How long did this Security Council exist?

OWEN: I think for a number of years.

SHEPHERD: Is it a convenient means to effect to effect action during an emergency?

OWEN: That is correct.

SHEPHERD: How frequently were meetings held?

OWEN: I don't think that there were more than three or four meetings.

SHEPHERD: On this occasion could you recall on whose request it had been?

OWEN: I cannot remember.

SHEPHERD: Was the Minister satisfied with the view expressed by yourself and the Garrison Commander?

OWEN: No. She would have had British troops sent right away.

SHEPHERD: In the Senate the Minister of Home Affairs said that she had asked the Garrison Commander to bring in the military troops and that you refused.

OWEN: There is no truth in that.

SHEPHERD: When rapes, murders and burning of buildings were going on did the volunteers and police stand by and doing nothing?

OWEN: There is no truth in it.

SHEPHERD: Referring to paragraph 9 of the Minister of Home Affairs' statement that law abiding citizens have lost all confidence in the police and will not put themselves under the protection of the Volunteer Force and Police Force, you understand what this means?

OWEN: I do. There is no truth in this.

SHEPHERD: Isn't it a fact that 1,800 were escorted out of Wismar and Mackenzie by the police?

OWEN: That's correct.

SHEPHERD: Weren't a number of people rescued at the police station?

OWEN: Yes, that is so.

SHEPHERD: Did you have any complaints about the officers who were in charge?

OWEN: No.

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SHEPHERD: You yourself have given the figure of 1,800, and you also gave the number of casualties as four or five dead, and six raped. Ten percent of the East Indian population East Indians were safely evacuated by the police from Wismar?

OWEN: It was from the scattered area.

SHEPHERD: The Wismar-Christianburg settlement is not a neat tidy settlement which on the whole rises as you go inland from the Demerara River. It is a very difficult terrain?

OWEN: I believe so.

SHEPHERD: You have given us information about the expenditure by your own force – four rounds of .303 and thirteen rounds of .45. This is comparatively light. Would it suggest to you that your forces at least were engaged chiefly in conducting to safety the large number of evacuees?

OWEN: My instructions were that persons must be saved.

SHEPHERD: I am glad to hear you say that. As commanding officer would you consider that persons had to be saved rather than property or personal belongings?

OWEN: Certainly.

SHEPHERD: And was this policy of saving life rather than property confirmed by you personally or by Mr. Puttock?

OWEN: I cannot recall this particular action precisely, but at sometime I personally gave instructions that they should collect the people and lead them to safety.

SHEPHERD: You have told the Commission that four tear gas cartridges were fired by your force. This is a light expenditure of tear gas. Can you assist the Commission by indicating some of the advantages or otherwise in the use of tear gas in controlling and dispersing crowds?"

OWEN: This is left entirely to the officer on the spot. The improper use of tear smoke might in fact create the situation that it was intended to guard against, if it is fired right among the crowd. Great care has to be taken when using tear smoke that there is a sufficient concentration to achieve the aim which is intended. I imagine that it would be very difficult in the scattered area, Wismar-Christianburg, to obtain an effective concentration.

SHEPHERD: In Wismar-Christianburg, and you are familiar with the area. Do you know that the police met with this particular difficulty that when the crowd was gathering and the police approached, it would dwindle away and then it would form somewhere else, and as the police approached again they would disperse. It is a common phenomenon in British Guiana?

OWEN: It was the same thing that happened in Georgetown.

SHEPHERD: If tear gas were used would it be likely to assist in dispersing such crowds?

OWEN: I think it is more likely to exacerbate the crowd, because it is impossible to get a proper concentration to a small shifting crowd.

SHEPHERD: If the crowd merely scattered and got a whiff, would this make them more liable to control?

OWEN: It would probably mean that their feelings would become more violent.

SHEPHERD: Were you surprised at the light expenditure of tear gas shells by your force?

OWEN: I was not.

SHEPHERD: Would you explain the technical position for the use of tear gas?

OWEN: The ideal position for the use of tear smoke is where there is a reasonably enclosed space, and a large crowd intent on attacking either the security forces themselves, or a key position.

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SHEPHERD: One further point. Would it be in accordance with the general instructions given by you that the forces should open fire with their rifles into the middle of a curious and inquisitive crowd?

OWEN: Not unless there was an offence being committed in front of their eyes, or an attack on some individual or on the forces themselves. This is the practice so far as instructions were given to the security forces.

SHEPHERD: Now let us continue. Do you have any reason not to be satisfied with the conduct of the operation by your forces during the 22nd to the 28th May?

OWEN: I was not surprised, but I was certainly shocked at the extent of the violence and the determination of the looters on that day.

SHEPHERD: Do you consider, and in your position as Commissioner of Police, are you of the opinion that there was a detailed plan behind this outbreak?

OWEN: I am sure from subsequent reports that it was spontaneous.

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CARTER: So far as the Demerara Bauxite Company is concerned, they put a number of jeeps, about five, at the disposal of the police?

OWEN: That is correct.

CARTER: And they put the trade school and sports club at your disposal for the evacuees. Do you know of any other services?

OWEN: The hospital was available, several members of the constabulary assisted the police, and the general manager of Demba assisted me in arranging the evacuation and reception of the people affected.

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PRATAP N. SINGH: On the 25th May, at Wismar did you have a report that people were killed in the presence of the police? There were five killed at Wismar. What is your opinion? Do you think that more people were killed and more damage done at Mackenzie than the East and West Coast?

OWEN: I think on the West Coast and East Coast of Demerara there was more damage and more people were killed on the West Coast of Demerara.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Can you tell us how many rounds were discharged on the West Coast of Demerara?

OWEN: I don't know.

PRATAP N. SINGH: In connection with the Police Force and the Volunteer Force, did you hear anybody say that the deterioration of the situation on the West Coast was because of lack of confidence in the Police and Volunteer Forces?

OWEN: I heard several politicians say so.

PRATAP N. SINGH: It is true that policemen were shot at and injured on the West Coast on the night of the 22nd May?

OWEN: On the West Coast? Yes.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Yes. But no soldiers were shot at and injured on the West Coast?

OWEN: At that time the soldiers were not in operation.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Have any soldiers been shot at on the West Coast?

OWEN: Not to my knowledge.

PRATAP N. SINGH: You will agree with me that the policemen who were shot and injured on the West Coast were Africans?

OWEN: Of the two most serious, one was an African, and one was an East Indian.

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PRATAP N. SINGH: Now, why do you think that policemen were shot? You don't think that there was a lack of confidence in the police? Why were no soldiers shot?

OWEN: Because the soldiers had more fire power. People are more afraid of them.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Now, the two more senior men at Wismar before the 21st to 25th May this year were Major Langham and Superintendent Hobbs. Superintendent Hobbs was the most senior man then. Do you think him quite capable of assessing the situation at Wismar?

OWEN: Certainly.

PRATAP N. SINGH: What about after the morning of the 25th?

OWEN: Not until the morning of the 25th, judging from the reports, did I think that I should send a more experienced officer to the scene.

PRATAP N. SINGH: You got the news at 8.30 in the morning that the situation was very serious?

OWEN: That is correct. The report I had was about looting and burning.

PRATAP N. SINGH: When did you first get the information that the situation was very serious?

OWEN: At 8.30 in the morning.

PRATAP N. SINGH: That is the first time you got the report?

OWEN: Yes sir.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Did you ever receive information before the 25th that tension was running very high?

OWEN: We were not surprised.

PRATAP N. SINGH: That is not the question I asked you.

OWEN: We appreciated that tension was growing. No more specific reports came to my attention.

PRATAP N. SINGH: More specific reports! Do you know that on the afternoon of the 24th a request was made to embody twenty-four men?

OWEN: The request was made at nine o'clock on Sunday the 24th.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Do you know that information was sent to Georgetown that in the opinion of the commanding officer of the Volunteer Force at Wismar that the embodiment of only twenty-four men would not be enough. That was never brought to your attention?

OWEN: Never brought to my attention.

PRATAP N. SINGH: At sometime before the 25th of May powers were delegated to you to initiate the act in deploying British troops to assist the civil power?

OWEN: But I was to do this through the normal procedure.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Why is it that you received this information at 8.30 in the morning of the 25th that serious disturbances had erupted at Wismar, it was not until one o'clock that Mr. Isaacs was despatched to Wismar to make his assessment?

OWEN: Mr. Isaacs was on the West Coast at the time. We would not be able to send somebody else.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Now, Mr. Isaacs told us he arrived at eight o'clock in the morning. What was the cause for the delay?

OWEN: I cannot recall when I saw Mr. Isaacs in the headquarters, but it was after eight o'clock. If I remember rightly we had to arrange transportation for the party to go to Mackenzie .

PRATAP N. SINGH: You had in mind to send a more senior man to Wismar?

Transcripts – Day 16

OWEN: Yes.

PRATAP N. SINGH: When did you make up your mind? After Mr. Hobbs spoke to you at 8.30 in the morning? At that time had you anybody in mind?

OWEN: Mr. Puttock, if Mr. Isaacs was not available.

PRATAP N. SINGH: How it was only by accident that you saw Mr. Isaacs come into headquarters on the 25th? Did you take any steps when any other person was not available?

OWEN: No.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Why?

OWEN: Because I mentioned that if Mr. Isaacs was not available Mr. Puttock would have to go.

PRATAP N. SINGH: If Mr. Isaacs was heavily engaged in the West Coast why did it come to your mind to send him?

OWEN: Because he was available.

PRATAP N. SINGH: I thought you said he wasn't available?

OWEN: He became available.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Did the Minister of Home Affairs request you to send military forces to Wismar?

OWEN: She referred to this in the security meeting.

PRATAP N. SINGH: On Monday afternoon did she request it?

OWEN: To the best of my knowledge, she did.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Was it only after she requested the assistance of the military force you received the report from Mr. Isaacs?

OWEN: Yes.

PRATAP N. SINGH: When was this?

OWEN: At three o'clock in the afternoon.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Well, then at 8.30 in the morning you were fully aware of the situation at Wismar. That is why you decided to send Mr. Isaacs. Why is it that you waited until three o'clock in the afternoon to ask for assistance?

OWEN: It wasn't until three o'clock in the afternoon that I knew the extent of the disturbances at Wismar.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Now at 8.30 in the morning what report did you receive?

OWEN: To the effect that there was looting and burning.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Was any information given to you as to the extent of the looting and burning?

OWEN: Yes.

PRATAP N. SINGH: After having received information at 8.30 in the morning with respect to the seriousness of the situation at Wismar, do you think that if you had requested assistance from the military the situation might not have reached the proportion which it did reach?

OWEN: I do not think so.

PRATAP N. SINGH: At three o'clock that afternoon when you received your information from Mr. Isaacs did he tell you that the disturbances were then at their peak?

OWEN: No. He gave me a picture of a distressing situation.

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PRATAP N. SINGH: What did he tell you of the gravity of the situation?

OWEN: He said that we required more men on the job.

PRATAP N. SINGH: But did he tell you that the city was on fire?

OWEN: No. He said that houses were being burnt.

PRATAP N. SINGH: How many men did you request to assist the police?

OWEN: That would be a matter for the Garrison Commander. I merely asked for aid, but he would decide on the number to be sent.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Now the platoon went up on the night of the 25th?

OWEN: I think the second went up on the morning of the 26th.

PRATAP N. SINGH: At your request?

OWEN: This was a matter for the Garrison Commander. He was entirely in charge.

PRATAP N. SINGH: But he must have had a request from somebody?

OWEN: I do not know. It never came to my knowledge why and who requested the men.

—

SHEPHERD: I think Major Goodbody should be able to clear that up.

—

PRATAP N. SINGH: What system of communication had you at Wismar?

OWEN: Telephone and V.H.F. wireless.

PRATAP N. SINGH: So you were in direct contact with the Force Control?

OWEN: Yes.

PRATAP N. SINGH: These conversations with Mr. Hobbs, were they by telephone or by the use of V.H.F. wireless?

OWEN: I can't give a direct answer to that; it might have been by both.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Which would be more effective?

OWEN: V.H.F.

PRATAP N. SINGH: How did Mr. Isaacs get in touch with you?

OWEN: By telephone.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Now on the 24th, how many reports of houses burning were made to you? Were any reports made to you?

OWEN: I have no record of houses being burnt at any part of Wismar.

PRATAP N. SINGH: When Mr. Isaacs spoke to you by telephone on the afternoon of the 24th, you said you got in touch with the Garrison Commander?

OWEN: It was on the 25th.

PRATAP N. SINGH: I am sorry. Was it to request the assistance of the forces?

OWEN: Yes.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Did you communicate this to the Minister of Home Affairs?

OWEN: Yes, immediately afterwards.

Transcripts – Day 16

PRATAP N. SINGH: Now you said that you wrote to the Minister of Home Affairs telling her of the position of the situation at Wismar. Did she inform you that she was aware of the seriousness of the situation?

OWEN: I cannot recall. I was submitting a morning report.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Was any of your men who were on patrol provided with V.H.F. equipment?

OWEN: There was no wireless at all at Wismar.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Now are your forces equipped with walkie-talkies?

OWEN: I think we have two or three.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Where were they at the time of the disturbances?

OWEN: They were on the West and East Coasts of Demerara. I beg your pardon; I am not sure of the number, but we have not got many.

PRATAP N. SINGH: So there might be more than three?

OWEN: Yes.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Thank you.

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DRAYTON: Commissioner Owen, you did have – as counsel for the security forces has so admirably expressed it – as it were a “crystal ball” on the 23rd and you were able to predict in your minute to the Home Affairs Minister fairly accurately just what would have happened at Wismar area. You said, “We both know how serious it would be for the small Indian minority at Wismar if the Africans started to retaliate there.” What was the basis of your prediction? What was the objective basis for this prediction? Was it the security reports that you received from Wismar that enabled you to make this prediction?

OWEN: My prediction was based on the happenings of the previous year.

DRAYTON: Did you receive any security reports on the 21st, 22nd or 23rd about threats made against the tiny East Indian minority at Wismar?

OWEN: No, but I knew that tension was building up and there might be danger.

DRAYTON: So there was no security report that the incident at Buxton was being used at Wismar either at private or at public meetings or with small groups of people on the road as incitement to reprisal?

OWEN: I had no such security report.

DRAYTON: Was this minute of the 23rd based on any objective evidence from Wismar?

OWEN: It was based on the previous happenings of the previous year.

DRAYTON: Now on the morning of the 24th at about 8.30 a.m. you decided in conference with Mr. Puttock and a couple of other people that a company of the volunteers at Wismar should be embodied?

OWEN: Yes.

DRAYTON: Are you aware that although this meeting took place at 8.30 to 9.20, it was not until 11.00 that the officer commanding the B.G. Volunteer Force requested the partial embodiment of the volunteers at Mackenzie?

OWEN: I did not know that.

DRAYTON: That is the evidence of Major Langham; that it was by that telephone call at 11.00 a.m. that Colonel DeFreitas authorised partial embodiment. Now, after your meeting did Mr. Puttock get in touch with Major Langham?

OWEN: I don't know whether he got in touch with him.

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DRAYTON: I am telling you that he did.

SHEPHERD: I am sure that that is not the evidence.

DRAYTON: This was presented as a statement to the Commission, and what I am asking is whether Mr. Puttock had at any time on the Sunday afternoon told you that Major Laugham considered that the whole of the Volunteer Force and not just twenty-four should be embodied?

OWEN: No, I was with Mr. Puttock most of that day, and he said nothing to me.

DRAYTON: We come now to the night of the 24th. Did you at anytime receive a telephone call from Police Force Control about the rising tension in the Wismar-Christianburg area and that there were serious disturbances in that area?

OWEN: I have no recollection of any such message.

DRAYTON: Is it within your recollection that at sometime on the 24th around ten to eleven o'clock Colonel King, Commander of the B.G. Garrison, had received information from Police Force Control about the disturbances at Wismar?

OWEN: It is possible, but I don't recall it.

DRAYTON: Do you think, Commissioner Owen, that if Police Force Control had on Sunday received such reports that they would have got in touch with you immediately, you being the Commissioner?

OWEN: That is so.

DRAYTON: Although you cannot recollect it, if I tell you that Colonel Robert King gave evidence before us stating that on that night on the 24th, he received information from Police Force Control that there were disturbances at Wismar-Christianburg. You would say that you probably did get this information?

OWEN: It is possible.

DRAYTON: Do you know that Colonel Robert King considered that the report he had from Police Force Control on the night 24th to be so serious that he placed one platoon of the Devon and Dorset Regiment on one hour's standby notice as from 5.30 a.m. on the 25th May?

OWEN: I don't know this, but it is highly probable. I have no reason to doubt it at all.

DRAYTON: Is it normal that Colonel King and yourself worked in pretty close collaboration?

OWEN: We always did.

DRAYTON: So is it not probable that he did tell you that? He had out one platoon of troops on one hour's standby notice as from 5.30 a.m.?"

OWEN: I don't know if he told me at the time, but he certainly told me the following day.

DRAYTON: Let us come now to the 25th. I want to ask you a question which had been asked of you in a slightly different way just now. Did you have complete confidence in Superintendent Hobbs as a police officer?

OWEN: I have indeed.

DRAYTON: And again, did you have complete confidence in Superintendent Hobbs' ability to assess the situation on the spot?

OWEN: I have complete confidence in his ability.

DRAYTON: Is he less experienced than Inspector Isaacs?

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OWEN: Yes. Inspector Isaacs has had more experience than him. Mr. Isaacs has served throughout the disturbances. He also has military experience.

DRAYTON: Now, when Mr. Hobbs telephoned you, or spoke to you on the V.H.F. equipment at Wismar?

OWEN: No, not at Wismar. At Mackenzie.

DRAYTON: Anyway, he spoke with you about 8.30 on the 25th?

OWEN: Not with me; with Mr. Futtock.

DRAYTON: And you heard at second hand from Mr. Puttock that the awful prediction you had made had come true. What exactly did he tell you about the situation at Wismar?

OWEN: I cannot recollect what he told me.

DRAYTON: Well you must have had some kind of a report. What did Mr. Puttock tell you?

OWEN: I cannot recollect what he told me, but the report was to the effect that there was burning and looting at Wismar.

DRAYTON: Did he tell you that there was widespread looting and arson?

OWEN: I cannot recall precisely but he did say that it was a serious situation.

DRAYTON: You must have said to yourself, "Good gracious! The prediction that I had made to the Minister of Home Affairs has come true."

OWEN: Possibly.

DRAYTON: And you must have been terribly grieved that this prediction had come true. Why didn't you act on the basis of the reports given to you directly by Mr. Hobbs and immediately take advantage of the delegation of authority with regards to the calling in of British troops? Why didn't you immediately think of doing this? Did Mr. Hobbs tell you that he required more men on the ground?

OWEN: That is so.

DRAYTON: Did you think that the completion of embodiment of the Volunteer Force would have been adequate?

OWEN: Yes.

DRAYTON: It seems to me as though an assessment had been made by a man on the spot.

OWEN: It is a question of priority.

DRAYTON: How long did it take you to have the aircraft standing by?

OWEN: About eleven o'clock.

DRAYTON: So the troops could have been there by midday? Now, Mr. Owen, did the Minister of Home Affairs request you to ask for the physical intervention of British troops at Wismar?

OWEN: It was an expression of opinion, not a request.

DRAYTON: It was a firm expression of opinion by the Home Affairs Minister. Why didn't you act?

OWEN: Because we had different opinions.

DRAYTON: So the Minister made a suggestion and you still say it was an expression of opinion?

OWEN: We had to be certain before we acted.

DRAYTON: Suppose the request from Mrs. Jagan in her capacity as Minister of Home Affairs had been written rather than oral, would you have acted?

OWEN: Yes.

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DRAYTON: When you sent the Assistant Commissioner Isaacs into the area to assess the situation, what did you expect Mr. Isaacs to do?

OWEN: I expected him to view the situation on the spot and report.

DRAYTON: When he telephoned you at three o'clock do you know if he had discussed the situation with Mr. Hobbs?

OWEN: I do not know.

DRAYTON: Did you receive any report from Mr. Hobbs or any other officer?

OWEN: I cannot personally recall any messages.

DRAYTON: If Mr. Hobbs was at Wismar would he have been aware of the rapid build up of the situation?

OWEN: He would have been on the scene.

DRAYTON: Commissioner Owen, could you tell the Commission how many years experience in the force Mr. Hobbs has?

OWEN: I cannot say off hand. I believe he has about three years experience as a gazetted officer.

DRAYTON: Has he any military experience?

OWEN: Not to my knowledge.

DRAYTON: Would you say, Commissioner Owen, that in the long run when you decided to ask for the physical intervention of the British troops you made this decision on a second hand assessment of the situation?

OWEN: Not at all.

DRAYTON: I am not sure whether I have made myself clear but I will try again. When I said second hand, I meant that the observations which were passed on to you by Mr. Isaacs were not first hand. Did you know that?

OWEN: I did not know that.

DRAYTON: Mr. Isaacs did present evidence before us yesterday. He said that he had discussed the situation at Wismar with Major Langham and Mr. Hobbs, and on the basis of this he telephoned and asked that the British troops be sent up. Would you not call this second hand information?

OWEN: Not at all.

DRAYTON: In the morning there was Mr. Hobbs making an assessment of the situation and passing this information to you. This was a first hand assessment of the situation, and Mr. Hobbs continued sending situation reports to Force Control throughout the day. But when Mr. Isaacs went up there he did not make a first hand assessment of the situation. He got his information from Mr. Hobbs and Major Langham and then passed it on to you.

OWEN: Yes. But he was on the spot and could have made observations for himself.

DRAYTON: He could not find Major Langham and Superintendent Hobbs in Mackenzie, but he found them in Wismar. He got them in the police station and talked with them but he did not see anything for himself except perhaps some smoke in the air. He only saw the situation in the police station.

OWEN: He had seen a number of refugees.

DRAYTON: But couldn't this information have been given to you by Mr. Hobbs? I am trying to get at the bottom of why you thought it necessary to send up Assistant Commissioner Isaacs to make an on the spot investigation when you had an experienced police officer on the spot and in the thick of things and in constant communication with Force Control, Georgetown?

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OWEN: He could only get in touch with me from Mackenzie, and not from Wismar.

DRAYTON: I understand that the situation began to deteriorate during the course of the morning. So you would agree that this report was not based on first hand information?

OWEN: It was based on first hand information.

DRAYTON: But all he could have seen was what was around the police station and the bulk of his assessment would have been made on the basis of what he had heard from Major Langham and Superintendent Hobbs.

OWEN: What he gave me was a first hand appraisal and one of the means of getting the information was by talking to police on the spot.

MACDONALD: You mentioned that at the Security Council meeting of the 25th Colonel DeFreitas was there, but he told us in his evidence that he did not attend a meeting before the 28th or 29th of May. Now are you definite that he was there?

OWEN: I may be wrong but I know that he came to a meeting about the Wismar disturbances.

MACDONALD: Now with respect to the violence and determination of the looters, would you have received any reports from your subordinate officers at Mackenzie?

OWEN: I was not on the scene but I received reports of the damage.

MACDONALD: One problem is that we have evidence of a cross section of both the Volunteer Force and the Police Force who were on the spot and we think that the weight of the evidence is that none of them actually saw the looters. So it would be assessment by them rather than observation?

OWEN: My information is that one looter was shot dead by the police, but on no occasion did they have to break up a crowd.

MACDONALD: On this matter of requests by the administration or by the officers of the Police Force for assistance of the British troops, what channel would the Council of Ministers take in making such a request?

OWEN: Normally they would ask the Governor.

MACDONALD: Who would be the officer or member of the Council of Ministers responsible for taking this action?

OWEN: Normally the Minister of Home Affairs.

MACDONALD: Prior to May the 25th a memorandum came from the Minister of Home Affairs requesting you to take the initiative in requesting the British Force's assistance. Have you any recollection of this?

OWEN: Yes. It was a request for delegation of authority, not a resignation of authority.

MACDONALD: At anytime the Minister of Home Affairs could have superseded this?

OWEN: Yes.

MACDONALD: Have you any knowledge at all of any request sent by the Minister of Home Affairs on the authority of the Council of Ministers for the intervention of the British forces? This is taking a wider scope than is the 24th, 25th and 26th of May during the crisis. Do you have any knowledge?

OWEN: I can't say.

MACDONALD: You are, I suppose, made aware of all security matter in the country of British Guiana. At any time after May 24th was it brought to your attention subsequently that Mr. Robert Jordan – this is an official security report – have been reported to have been inciting the people at Wismar?

OWEN: Yes. I had knowledge.

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MACDONALD: This would have its source in the Wismar police station – the divisional police station?

OWEN: I have seen a report but there is no substantiation.

MACDONALD: I remember that Mr. Jordon was one of the first of the group who had been detained at Mazaruni, and I am wondering if this detention was made on the basis of such reports.

OWEN: Certainly, these reports were taken into account. The reports were made in 1963.

MACDONALD: But up to this time there has been no substantiation?

OWEN: None at all; if there had been, criminal action would have been taken.

CHAIRMAN: I know, Commissioner Owen, that it would be difficult to recall all your movements on the 25th May, but it is an important day having regard to what occurred. Were you in the Force Control room that day?

OWEN: No. I was in Police Headquarters all day apart from the meeting at the Ministry of Home Affairs in the afternoon.

CHAIRMAN: Were you at the Force Control room at any time?

OWEN: No. I did not think it was necessary.

CHAIRMAN: A state of emergency had been declared the colony and there were disturbances on the West Coast and East Coast and a little in Georgetown on Friday. With respect to these reports in the morning of the 25th serious trouble at Wismar, were you in constant contact with the Force Control, or did they have to contact you?

OWEN: They contacted me and I was available all the time.

CHAIRMAN: What time in the morning were you available?

OWEN: All morning.

CHAIRMAN: You see, there is evidence that the Minister of Home Affairs tried to contact you at about 11.30 but she could not. She spoke to Mr. Puttock and I wonder if you received that message.

OWEN: I have no record of such message, but I was around headquarters all morning.

CHAIRMAN: You had expressed an opinion, in a letter dated 23rd May to the Home Minister, in which you predicted that there might have been trouble at Wismar and it would have been very bad for the minority population there. Taking into consideration that prediction plus the situation reports of Mr. Hobbs at 8.30 and throughout the morning of the 25th, and the opinion expressed by the Minister of Home Affairs, you still thought it best to await the report of Mr. Isaacs?

OWEN: Yes. This is the accepted procedure of the Army and Police Force and it was necessary to take into account all the factors. We were warned about the trouble at Wismar already, but we had already taken into account the trouble there.

CHAIRMAN: Now taking all the factors into consideration, plus the report and probably other reports, still the force was not strengthened?

OWEN: They were strengthened by the volunteers.

CHAIRMAN: You still think that your action was right in not sending British troops right away?

OWEN: Yes.

CHAIRMAN: Before the Army was sent to West Coast, was anyone sent to the area?

OWEN: Mr. Isaacs and Mr. Puttock were there and I went over to the West Coast on an average of every two days.

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CHAIRMAN: With respect to transportation, was any request made to the Governor that the matter was serious at Wismar and you required the immediate use of a plane?

OWEN: Demba Bauxite Company provided a plane for Mr. Isaacs.

CHAIRMAN: What time was the plane made available?

OWEN: I cannot remember, I think that at eleven o'clock the Dakota was available and at about one o'clock Mr. Isaacs left Ogle.

CHAIRMAN: So the Dakota was made available at eleven o'clock. Was it used by Mr. Isaacs?

OWEN: No. It was used by the British troops later in the day.

CHAIRMAN: Considering the numbers indulging in activities at that time did you get a report as to how many people were indulging in all activities?

OWEN: Not in actual numbers, but the proportion was high.

CHAIRMAN: In what activity?

OWEN: In breaking of shops and setting fire to houses.

CHAIRMAN: This report that you got from the police at Wismar, did it contain any information that people were seen breaking into shops?

OWEN: Yes.

CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

SHEPHERD: It is the accepted procedure usually to await the report of a senior officer sent earlier to appraise a situation?

OWEN: Yes.

SHEPHERD: You knew that he could get in touch with you by telephone?

OWEN: Yes. We had a preferential telephone line on that day.

SHEPHERD: At eleven o'clock a Dakota was available?

OWEN: Yes, maybe before eleven o'clock.

SHEPHERD: At 2.00 p.m. there was a meeting with the Garrison Commander and the meeting lasted until ten minutes to three o'clock. Ten minutes after the adjournment, the appraisal came through from Mr. Isaacs. By 4.30 the platoon was told to move. They had already been in readiness some twelve hours before. So the time lag between your receiving the appraisal from Mr. Isaacs and the order to the British troops to move was under two hours?

OWEN: Yes

SHEPHERD: Now looking back, would you say without ruining all the usual procedural steps that the time lag could have been reduced?

OWEN: I do not think so, but I am not qualified to speak. I think that the time lag was reasonable.

SHEPHERD: So there was no break down in the communication system?

OWEN: No sir. All services were alright.

SHEPHERD: Transport services were alright?

OWEN: Yes, the delay in the Dakota was in fact a semi-arrangement to enable the troops to go to Mackenzie, otherwise they would have had to go by river or road. It was an arrangement with the B.G. Airways.

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SHEPHERD: Now it seems from the evidence that the date of the proclamation of a state of emergency by His Excellency the Governor was on Friday and there were troops being flown out from the U.K. on the Saturday – troops which in fact took part in quelling the disturbances?

OWEN: Yes.

SHEPHERD: I think it is fair for me to put it to you that probably if the proclamation of a state of emergency had come a month earlier the whole situation might have been somewhat different so far as the deployment of policemen and troops was concerned?

OWEN: We would have had more troops available.

SHEPHERD: I think your difficulty was the lack of availability of police and troops.

OWEN: Lack of availability of man-power.

SHEPHERD: If the Council of Ministers had advised His Excellency the Governor earlier, the situation might have been different?

OWEN: The 2nd battalion might have been here earlier.

SHEPHERD: What was the name of that battalion?

OWEN: The battalion of the Queen's Own Buffs, Devonshire and Dorset.

SHEPHERD: When did they arrive?

OWEN: They arrived around the 20th or 21st May.

SHEPHERD: Is it true that the Council of Ministers was being urged prior to the 21st May to give the necessary advice to His Excellency the Governor?

OWEN: I myself urged the Minister of Home Affairs to advise His Excellency.

SHEPHERD: Constitutionally, was it not possible for His Excellency to declare a state of emergency?

OWEN: Yes, but he had to be advised.

SHEPHERD: When did you first advise the Minister that the Council should advise the Governor to declare a state of emergency?

OWEN: Just before the Wismar disturbances.

SHEPHERD: So the Minister or Council of Ministers had been advised before May?

OWEN: I had done so verbally.

SHEPHERD: When did you first advise the Minister in conversation?

OWEN: Probably the beginning of May when things were getting serious on the West Coast.

DRAYTON: Who would be in charge of transport arrangements for British troops during the state of emergency?

OWEN: That would be a matter for the Garrison Commander.

DRAYTON: So that when the Garrison Commander puts a platoon on an hour's standby notice he would have to himself make all necessary transport arrangements for them to move?

OWEN: He would have to.

DRAYTON: When Colonel King put his men on an hour's standby notice you said he might have told you about it. Do you know if he had made any arrangements for their transport to Wismar?

Transcripts – Day 16

OWEN: I do not know, but two obvious ways to Wismar are by road on the Mackenzie trail and by boat along the Demerara River.

DRAYTON: Would he not have had to make more expeditious transport arrangements?

OWEN: I do not know, what I do know is that every platoon has to make its own transport arrangements.

DRAYTON: So that we could assume, Commissioner Owen, that Colonel King would have made some kind of transport arrangements to get them to Mackenzie.

OWEN: Yes.

DRAYTON: So that on the morning of the 25th at about eight to nine o'clock when Superintendent Hobbs spoke to you about the situation, if you had decided then that you wanted British troops they could have made their way to Wismar. In short I am suggesting that the question of the Dakota not being ready is not really relevant. The troops had been standing by since 5.30 a.m. and I feel that transport must have been available to convey the troops if the gravity of the situation had been noted?

OWEN: Yes, I imagine so.

DRAYTON: So that in the long run the delay in sending British troops was simply because you did not consider the on the spot investigation made by Mr. Hobbs to be adequate. You had no confidence in Mr. Hobbs?

OWEN: I had every confidence in Hobbs but he is a junior officer and I wanted the assessment of a senior officer.

DRAYTON: Do you agree that the delay was because you did not have confidence in Mr. Hobbs' assessment of the situation?

OWEN: He was not in my judgement sufficiently experienced and I did not accept his assessment. I wanted a senior man to look over the situation and report. I accepted that there was burning and looting, but I wished to know the extent of it. That is why I sent a senior man.

DRAYTON: At 8.30 Superintendent Hobbs warned you through Mr. Puttock about the potentialities of the situation. Now, when he sent you the report second hand, the potentialities of the situation had already developed. So that one would be forced to ask the question: why you did not take into account the potential explosiveness of the situation at 8.30 on the morning of the 25th?

OWEN: That was taken into account and the rest of the Volunteer Force was embodied forthwith to deal with the situation.

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CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Commissioner. That is all.

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CHAIRMAN: The next witness in Mr. Puttock, Assistant Commissioner of Police.

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IAN LIONEL PUTTOCK is sworn in and he states as follows:

RAMSAROOP: What is your full name?

PUTTOCK: Ian Lionel Puttock.

RAMSAROOP: What are you?

PUTTOCK: Assistant Commissioner of Police, Administration.

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RAMSAROOP: Can you recall any discussion with the Commissioner of Police on Sunday 24th of May at about 8.30 a.m. of the Wismar-Mackenzie-Christianburg situation? What was the nature of that discussion?

PUTTOCK: I discussed with Assistant Superintendent Hobbs to the partial embodiment of the Volunteer Force at Mackenzie to assist the police in patrolling the Wismar area.

RAMSAROOP: You were on duty at Force Control in Georgetown?

PUTTOCK: I was not at Force Control had I gone to speak to the Commissioner.

RAMSAROOP: And so this instruction passed on to Mr. Hobbs?

PUTTOCK: Yes. At about 9.30 a.m. on Sunday the 24th I again spoke to Mr. Hobbs on the telephone and I told him that permission had been given for the embodiment of twenty-four members of the Volunteer Force at Mackenzie.

RAMSAROOP: And approximately at about 8.30 a.m. on Monday, 25th of May, did you have occasion to speak to Mr. Hobbs again?

PUTTOCK: He spoke to me on the telephone, and told me that the situation had deteriorated and asked my permission to embody the remainder of the company of the Volunteer Force at Mackenzie.

RAMSAROOP: Did you confirm this with Major Langham?

PUTTOCK: I confirmed with Mr. Hobbs shortly afterwards that permission had been given for total embodiment.

RAMSAROOP: At what time was that?

PUTTOCK: Between 8.30 and 9.30.

RAMSAROOP: You told Mr. Hobbs that policemen should accompany members of the Police Force wherever possible?

PUTTOCK: On Sunday the 24th of May, I told him as this had been the system we had been using on the West Coast of Demerara.

RAMSAROOP: Were there any other arrangements for the Volunteer Force to be aided by those who were recommended later in that day, the 25th of May?

PUTTOCK: I gave instructions for the whole of the company to be embodied at Mackenzie.

RAMSAROOP: At 9.30 a.m. on Monday morning the 25th of May did you see Mr. Isaacs?

PUTTOCK: Yes, in my office. The Commissioner of Police was also present and it was decided to send Mr. Isaacs to assess the situation at Wismar.

RAMSAROOP: At about 1.00 p.m. on the 25th of May you saw Mr. Boodhoo of the Guyana Airways Corporation?

PUTTOCK: I didn't see him. He telephoned to say that a Dakota was standing by at Atkinson Field to fly the troop reinforcements.

SHEPHERD: After you spoke to Mr. Hobbs to inform him that the whole of the company should be embodied at Mackenzie, did you sneak with Major Langham?

PUTTOCK: No.

SHEPHERD: On the same day, Monday the 25th, did you make arrangements for the Dakota to stand by?

PUTTOCK: I personally didn't make it.

SHEPHERD: I thought that you mentioned at 1.00 p.m.?

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PUTTOCK: That was the time when Mr. Boodhoo telephoned to say that the plane was available. Later that afternoon the Guyana Airways Corporation telephoned me again to enquire the time at which the aircraft would be required. I cannot recollect what time, but it was around 2.30 p.m.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Did you speak with Major Langham on Sunday the 24th?

PUTTOCK: I have no recollection if I spoke to him on the 24th.

PRATAP N. SINGH: He spoke to you on Sunday, the 24th of May. I have a record of that, and he advised you that twenty-four men were inadequate to deal with the situation. He advised against partial embodiment; he was of the opinion that the whole company, officers and men, should be embodied?

PUTTOCK: Major Langham never told me that.

DRAYTON: Mr. Puttock, you did not speak to Major Langham on Sunday, the 24th?

PUTTOCK: I cannot remember speaking to him.

DRAYTON: Did you recollect Mr. Hobbs saying anything to you about the inadequacy of twenty-four men of the Volunteer Force on the 24th May?

PUTTOCK: No. He seemed satisfied on the 24th.

DRAYTON: Mr. Puttock, were you at Force Control on Sunday night, 24th May?

PUTTOCK: At sometime.

DRAYTON: Did you receive any information while you were there about disturbances at Wismar-Christianburg?

PUTTOCK: No.

DRAYTON: On Sunday, did you have any discussion with Colonel King, Commander of the B.G. Garrison?

PUTTOCK: I cannot remember.

DRAYTON: Did you know Colonel King had received information from Police Force Control on the Sunday night about 10.30 concerning the situation at Wismar and that he considered the news to be so serious that placed one platoon of troops on standby from 5.30 a.m. on the 24th of May? Did you know anything about this at all?

PUTTOCK: No, nothing at all.

DRAYTON: When Mr. Hobbs told you on the telephone on that morning of the 25th of May at about 8.30 that serious disturbances had erupted at Wismar, were you surprised?

PUTTOCK: Yes.

DRAYTON: Did you know that on the 23rd of May your Commissioner had warned the Minister of Home Affairs about the possibility of an attack on the tiny Indian minority at Wismar?

PUTTOCK: I saw a copy of that minute.

DRAYTON: Now, on that morning it was Mr. Hobbs to whom you gave permission to embody the rest of the Volunteer Force?

PUTTOCK: Yes, on the Monday.

DRAYTON: Was Mr. Hobbs quite satisfied with this total embodiment to deal with the situation that had developed that morning?

PUTTOCK: Well, he appeared to be at that stage.

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DRAYTON: Did he suggest then that British troops might be necessary?

PUTTOCK: No sir.

DRAYTON: Do you know that although it was shortly after 8.30 on the 25th that you confirmed with Mr. Hobbs the total embodiment of the Volunteer Force, it was not until 11.00 a.m. that Major Langham received a telephone call from Colonel DeFreitas authorising complete embodiment?"

PUTTOCK: I am unaware of this, but I assumed that Mr. Hobbs had spoken to him before that day at 8.30.

DRAYTON: What exactly did Mr. Hobbs say to you on the telephone at 8.30 that morning? How did he describe the situation?

PUTTOCK: As far as I can remember the situation, he said that it was deteriorating and there were fires, and it appeared as if the fires were spreading and there was some looting.

DRAYTON: Did he tell you that it looked as if the East Indian minority was in serious danger?

PUTTOCK: No sir, he didn't mention this to me.

DRAYTON: He didn't mention that there were reports of beatings?

PUTTOCK: He may have told me about the beatings. I cannot remember the exact gist of the conversation I had with him.

DRAYTON: We come to the question of Mr. Isaacs. Now, he was present that morning of the 25th when yourself and the Commissioner had a discussion, and it was decided that Mr. Isaacs should go up to Wismar-Christianburg to assess the situation on the spot. Was this because, as far as you can remember, you were not completely satisfied with the assessment made on the spot by Superintendent Hobbs?

PUTTOCK: It was a natural thing to get a senior officer up there, so that we could get a better assessment.

DRAYTON: You were not satisfied, in other words, that the Mr. Hobbs was sufficiently senior for you to place complete confidence in his assessment?"

PUTTOCK: Not necessarily. I think it was a good thing to have a senior officer at Mackenzie.

DRAYTON: So that it is a question of a possible lack of experience on the part of Mr. Hobbs and more experience on the part of Mr. Isaacs?

PUTTOCK: We make an assessment.

DRAYTON: This was 9.30 in the morning. At what time did you make a request to Demba to place their other aircraft at the disposal of the police?

PUTTOCK: I do not know, sir.

DRAYTON: You had a job to do at 9.30 and you had decided to send Mr. Isaacs to make on the spot examinations. Who would be responsible for getting in touch with B.G. Airways or Demba asking for an aircraft?

PUTTOCK: It would be one of the many officers. I do not know actually who authorises the aircraft. I do not know who is responsible for it.

DRAYTON: You were present with the Commissioner and Mr. Isaacs when the decision was made so you must have made some arrangement. What was the arrangement?

PUTTOCK: Well, the arrangement was to send Mr. Isaacs by aircraft, the first available one.

DRAYTON: Who is the officer who was told to make this arrangement with the Airways?

PUTTOCK: I cannot remember who was actually told. It may have been the Commissioner himself.

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DRAYTON: With regard to the Dakota aircraft, do you happen to know what time B.G. Airways was contacted and asked to make an aircraft available?

PUTTOCK: I do not know, sir.

DRAYTON: But you do know that at 1.00 p.m. you were informed that Mr. Boodhoo of B.G. Airways had said to somebody in your forces that the aircraft was now ready for the transport of British troops?

PUTTOCK: Yes, at 1.00 p.m.

DRAYTON: And then he telephoned you again at what time?

PUTTOCK: About 2.00 or 2.30.

DRAYTON: Did you know of any arrangements made in the morning of the 25th for transport of British troops?

PUTTOCK: No sir. I had no knowledge of it.

DRAYTON: Did you know when you met with Commissioner of Police, Mr. Owen, and Mr. Isaacs at 9.30 a.m. on the 25th that four hours previously Colonel King had requested the platoon of the Devon and Dorset Regiment to be on one hour's standby for possible transport to Mackenzie?

PUTTOCK: No sir.

DRAYTON: Thank you, Mr. Puttock.

—
SHEPHERD: You are Assistant Commissioner, Administration. You are not in charge of training?

PUTTOCK: Yes. Not in normal circumstances, but in the last year I had to do all sorts of things.

SHEPHERD: You were not in Force Control at 10.30?

PUTTOCK: No.

SHEPHERD: Do you do any other work besides being in the control room?

PUTTOCK: I work in an office.

SHEPHERD: Thank you. That is all.

—
CHAIRMAN: Thank you Mr. Puttock. You may step down. Call Mr. Lionel Hobbs.

—
LIONEL OSCAR HOBBS is sworn in and he states as follows:

RAMSAROOP: You are Assistant Superintendent of Police, and where are you stationed?

HOBBS: At Leonora as from the 25th July, 1964.

RAMSAROOP: In May this year were you in charge of Mackenzie police station?

HOBBS: I was in charge of Division E, which includes Wismar and Mackenzie.

RAMSAROOP: On 22nd May, could you recall any incident at Wismar?

HOBBS: Yes. Between 9.45 and 10.00 p.m. on 22nd, a house of one James Karim was completely destroyed by fire. About 11.30 that same night, there was an explosion outside the house of one Ibrahim Khan at 131 Silver Town, Wismar. Three persons were injured – Ibrahim Khan, Janet and Farida Khan. Damage was done to the floor, windows and furniture in the house. On 23rd at 12.05 a.m. there was an explosion at one Walter Narine at 248 Silver Town, Wismar. No one was injured; pane of the glass was broken from the windows. About 2.30 the house of one Kennard Seonarine of Cholmondely Alley, Wismar, was destroyed by fire. Between 3.00 a.m. and noon, the unoccupied house of one Edoon in the Valley of Tears, Wismar, was completely destroyed by fire by an unknown origin.

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RAMSAROOP: What did you do to assess the situation at Wismar-Christianburg-Mackenzie?

HOBBS: I realised there was an increase of incidents between 22nd and 23rd. On the night between the 22nd and 23rd there was an attack on the hotel and restaurant of C. Lam of Front Road, Wismar. Extensive damage was done to the building. This incident was between the 22nd and 23rd and the normal police patrols were operating as a result of the looting which took place at Lam's. Immediately after the fire at 3.00 a.m. on the 23rd May I made a survey of the area and returned to Wismar station. Around 12.30 and one o'clock on Saturday 23rd I decided that the normal patrols I had operating were not sufficiently effective, and I contacted the Assistant Commissioner (Administration), Mr. Puttock, by telephone. I told him of the incidents which had taken place between the 22nd and 23rd of May and requested that the Volunteer Force at Mackenzie be embodied for duty with the district police. Mr. Puttock said that my request would be considered.

RAMSAROOP: What about the 24th of May? Were there any incidents?

HOBBS: On the morning of the 24th of May, Mr. Puttock spoke to me on the telephone and informed me approval had been given for the embodiment of twenty-four members of the Volunteer Force at Mackenzie to be available for duty with the police at Wismar as from that night. He said that I should communicate this information to Major Langham, Officer in Charge of the Volunteer Force at Mackenzie, and that the order would be confirmed by Colonel DeFreitas subsequently. As a result, I spoke to Major Langham on the telephone and informed him of what Mr. Puttock had said. He agreed to make available twenty-four members of the Volunteer Force for duty with the police as from 7.00 p.m. that night.

Some unknown persons had set fire to two buildings in the district, one on top of the hill and the other at One Mile, Wismar. The house at One Mile, Wismar, was completely destroyed, but the police patrol succeeded in putting out the fire when it was set in the second house in the same yard.

RAMSAROOP: When did the members of the Volunteer Force actually arrive?

HOBBS: On the night of the 24th.

RAMSAROOP: Did you give them any particular instructions?

HOBBS: I informed the volunteers and policemen of the increased number of incidents of arson and that it was necessary for an increased number of patrols. I instructed them that their main duty was to prevent any damage to property by arresting any person who was seen attempting to do such damage and, in the event of any individual failing to stop they would open fire. A policeman accompanied each patrol of volunteers.

RAMSAROOP: No further incidents on the 24th of May?

HOBBS: They were on the night of the 24th at 11.25 p.m. One Roshan Ally of Silver Town was threatened that he would be shot. While he was in his house, another man, Cyril Ragnauth, and his wife living at Blueberry Hill, Wismar, were also threatened. One Desmond Singh was wounded about his face and hand and was later admitted to Mackenzie Hospital.

RAMSAROOP: Would you say that these incidents increased rapidly day after day? The 22nd to the 24th?

HOBBS: I won't say rapidly. There was an increase.

RAMSAROOP: Now, what request did you make for persons to assist you to enhance your forces following these incidents?

HOBBS: I had an increase of patrols as I mentioned before.

RAMSAROOP: That is by whom?

HOBBS: By the volunteers.

RAMSAROOP: Following the volunteers, was there any other measure taken to stem this tide?

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HOBBS: Up to the morning of the 25th, I used the twenty-four volunteers and normal police patrols. As a result of the further happenings on the night of the 24th, I had cause to go back to Wismar at about 5.45 a.m. and made a survey before returning to the station. I contacted Major Langham some minutes before 8.00 and discussed the further happenings of that night and I advised him that I was going to request the embodiment of the remainder of the Volunteer Force.

RAMSAROOP: Were they embodied?

HOBBS: At that stage I advised Major Langham to have his men alerted and then contacted Mr. Puttock by telephone. I told him the events of the night and that. I considered it necessary to have the remainder of the volunteers available for patrol duty on the Monday night, that is, the 25th. He advised me to tell Mr. Langham that he should alert the remainder, including officers of the Volunteer Force, and that he would take up this matter with the Commissioner of Police and Colonel DeFreitas.

RAMSAROOP: Did you see Superintendent Isaacs?

HOBBS: That is very much later in the day. About 8.40 a.m. on the 25th, while I was at Mackenzie I received a report by telephone from Wismar police station informing me that there was a serious outbreak of violence at Wismar and that African were beating the Indians. I then went down to the station at Mackenzie and contacted Mr. Puttock again informing him of the severity of the situation and that I was leaving for the scene with other policemen from Mackenzie. He said that he would make arrangements to have five policemen who had been removed from my district for emergency duty on the West Demerara withdrawn from West Demerara if he could get Demba to get a plane to bring them up. Immediately after my conversation with Mr. Puttock, I got in touch with Demba management who agreed to have the other aircraft standing by at Ogle airstrip. I then returned to Wismar.

RAMSAROOP: What happened next?

HOBBS: On arrival at Wismar I saw a crowd along the road opposite the store of one Bissoon. I joined the police vehicle with the police and went towards the crowd. But this crowd dispersed as I arrived. I spoke to the owner of the store, after which I left and went towards the Valley of Tears where I saw a huge cloud of smoke. On arrival at the Valley of Tears I saw two houses immediately in front of me on fire. The police petrol which was operating under my command had difficulties in getting water to put out the fire.

RAMSAROOP: That day there were fires and beatings?

HOBBS: Yes. I was dealing with the second fire when I heard a report that an Indian man was beaten and was lying in the yard. I went over and saw the body of a man by the name of Paul Nirgin which I took to the Mackenzie mortuary. I continued operating further into the Valley of Tears where there were more fires. As we went along, an Indian woman came up to me and told me that a number of Negro men had rushed to her house, chased her out, and her four children could not be found. Shortly after the house went up in flames. I called on the police to search for the children. They were found in a neighbour's house. On the roadside of the Valley of Tears we went further down and there we saw the house of one Kishore Mohamed on fire. The police went into operation and put it out.

RAMSAROOP: I suppose that was the trend of events during the whole of that day – the police helping to put out fires and assisting in escorting people to the station? Around 2.40 p.m. on 25th did you see Mr. Isaacs and Mr. Lashley?

HOBBS: I did, sir.

RAMSAROOP: Do you know why they had come to Mackenzie?

HOBBS: Mr. Isaacs said he was sent by the Commissioner, I don't know why. He asked me for a breakdown of the situation.

RAMSAROOP: What was your break down?

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HOBBS: I told him what had happened. He asked me for Major Langham who was at that time doing rescue operations in the Mackenzie area. Mr. Isaacs told me he would like to see myself and Major Langham at the Mackenzie police station at three o'clock.

RAMSAROOP: At the end of the day of the 26th May this year could you give us the report of persons who were admitted to the hospital?

HOBBS: The number of persons admitted were thirty. Thirty-one were treated and sent home. Two male East Indians were killed. A number of persons were shot by the police – two Negroes. Four tear shells fired by the police, two grenades, thirteen revolver shots and five rifle shots. Then there were a number of policemen, two officers, three subordinate officers and seventeen constables. Number of volunteers on duty at Wismar, three officers and fifty-four ranks.

RAMSAROOP: When did the British troops arrive?

HOBBS: About six o'clock on the 25th.

RAMSAROOP: On the arrival on the British troops did any other incidents occur?

HOBBS: The largest building in the area was burnt, that of Lalta Paul.

RAMSAROOP: On the 25th did you order four policemen to confine themselves to indoor duty? What are their names?

HOBBS: Lall, Mangra, Persaud and Mangroo. I told them to stay inside because I overheard a conversation by a woman saying, "They got the bitch Lall along with them; is he we want." As a result of that, I kept them in for safety.

RAMSAROOP: On Tuesday 26th May, 1964 a curfew was imposed and the police and U.K troops patrolled the area?

HOBBS: Yes sir.

SHEPHERD: Did you report the happenings to your superior officer?

HOBBS: Yes

SHEPHERD: Now, Mr. Hobbs, you have told the Commissioners that volunteers and police were under your command. Would it be permitted for members of the Police and Volunteer Forces to fire into an idle or inquisitive crowd? If they had, would it have improved the situation?"

HOBBS: I expect it would have worsened. Whatever action was taken by police or volunteers we had to hear in mind at all time the available strength of the force.

SHEPHERD: Were patrols under your control permitted to use tear gas? You yourself went on patrol. Did you find any occasion when the use of tear gas would have been advisable?

HOBBS: No, not at all.

SHEPHERD: When the crowd assembled and your men approached them did they disperse?

HOBBS: Yes.

SHEPHERD: If you had used tear gas don't you think it would have been effective?

HOBBS: I would not have advised the use of tear smoke in that situation.

SHEPHERD: What were your instructions about the dispersal of crowds?

HOBBS: My men were told that the first thing to do was to warn them to disperse and only if they failed to do so was tear gas was to be used.

SHEPHERD: Two tear gas grenades were used on that day?

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HOBBS: I don't know.

SHEPHERD: Do you know one Samuel Ramlochan? Is this the extract from his criminal record?

HOBBS: Yes, We have a record of him behaving in a disorderly manner and one for using indecent language.

SHEPHERD: Samuel Ramlochan said that on Sunday the 24th he approached you and asked for protection. Would you be surprised at that?

HOBBS: I would not be surprised at that. I had a request on the same day for assistance by Senator Christina Ramjattan.

SHEPHERD: Did anybody else ask you for protection?

HOBBS: Many people asked me for protection.

SHEPHERD: About how many people on Monday?

HOBBS: On Monday hundreds of people asked me for protection. I spoke to them and told them that they must take it easy and that they were not enough police available to offer protection to buildings and property. Many of them said that they wanted to recover their beds, machines and other property, but I told them that the situation was one in which we would have to concentrate trying to save lives, Some people were pleased when we advised them but some were highly indignant. It was simple impossible for us to save property because we were trying to save lives.

SHEPHERD: You would not be surprised if Mr. Ramlochan and many others approached you on Sunday or Monday?

HOBBS: No.

SHEPHERD: If my notes are correct one Ramlochan alleged that he asked you for assistance to rescue two of his children without success. He appealed to three British soldiers who took them to safety in a jeep.

HOBBS: Any request for the rescue of men, women or children were dealt with as soon as police or volunteers were available.

SHEPHERD: This was on Tuesday morning.

HOBBS: Rescue operations continued throughout the week.

SHEPHERD: Now, Christina Ramjattan is of course the ex-Senator and she lived at Wismar for some years?

HOBBS: So I am told.

SHEPHERD: On the 20th, which would have been before the declaration of emergency, Wednesday, did she draw your attention to a contemplated attack on the Indian community?

HOBBS: No. I was requested by the Ministry of Home Affairs to instruct Mrs. Ramjattan in the use of a revolver.

SHEPHERD: Had you been instructed by the Ministry in any previous occasion to give instructions in the use of firearms to the Ministers?

HOBBS: No.

SHEPHERD: Did you give Mrs. Ramjattan instructions in the use of a revolver?

HOBBS: Yes; as a result of which I had frequent contact with Mrs. Ramjattan. In the course of her last visit, Mrs. Ramjattan discussed the situation in the district.

SHEPHERD: And who possessed this revolver?

HOBBS: It was police property. I do not know if she has as yet obtained one.

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SHEPHERD: On Sunday the 24th did she ring you up?

HOBBS: No. I spoke with her. I visited the scene of an incident that day which was immediate behind the Senator's house, and she came out and told me that she was fearful for the safety of her husband as she was due to leave the district that day. I assured her that she need not be fearful because patrols would be around her house. She suggested that I provide a policeman to give individual protection to her husband.

SHEPHERD: Did you agree to that?

HOBBS: No, I rejected it, and pointed out to her that it was not possible.

SHEPHERD: By this time looting and burning was taking place?

HOBBS: No, this was on Sunday morning. I undertook to give her the protection she needed to get from her home to the launch. Sergeant Chalmers escorted her.

SHEPHERD: And she seemed to be concerned that her house would be burnt down?

HOBBS: No, at that stage her concern was for her husband's safety.

SHEPHERD: And what did you do about her husband?

HOBBS: I instructed patrols as was customary to pass around the area and ensure that all was well. On the Monday morning I made my early morning visit, and was assured that Mr. Ramjattan had been in the house alright.

SHEPHERD: And as far as you know both the ex-Senator and her husband have been unharmed to this day?

HOBBS: Later on Monday, after the violence developed to some extent I personally detailed police personnel to go and fetch Mr. Ramjattan from his house to the station. That was done and he remained in my office until he was escorted over to Mackenzie and put on the boat for Georgetown. I took this personal interest because I know that Mr. Ramjattan was somewhat sickly.

SHEPHERD: Did you take this personal interest in any other person in Christianburg?

HOBBS: No.

SHEPHERD: You have heard of George Woolford. He is employed by the P.P.P. He lived at Wismar?

HOBBS: He is the district organiser.

SHEPHERD: On Wednesday, 27th May, at 9.30 a.m. he telephoned you and asked for protection?

HOBBS: I spoke to many people on the telephone around that time, but I remember speaking to him on one occasion.

SHEPHERD: What did he say?

HOBBS: He asked me if he could be escorted to his house at Wismar. I told him that when he was ready I would arrange for him to be escorted but I have not seen him since.

SHEPHERD: Do you know Hackim Khan of 38 Silver Town? What is his business?

HOBBS: He keeps a hotel of ill repute.

SHEPHERD: Was Hackim known to the police? Does he have a criminal record?

HOBBS: Yes. [*Criminal record of Hackim Khan is tendered and is marked "Exhibit Y"*]

SHEPHERD: Do you know Richard Bholai Singh?

HOBBS: I know him as Richard Lowe.

SHEPHERD: How long had you been superintendent at Wismar prior to May 25th?

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HOBBS: Four months.

SHEPHERD: How long was Sergeant Chalmers there?

HOBBS: Long before.

SHEPHERD: Does Richard Lowe have a criminal record?

HOBBS: Yes. [*Criminal record of Richard Lowe is tendered and is marked "Exhibit Z"*]

SHEPHERD: Do you know Kamal Singh otherwise known as Sonny Boy? Do you know if he has a criminal record?

HOBBS: No, I don't know him. I only saw him here at this Commission.

SHEPHERD: Were you present in Harris' drugstore when Robert Jordan and others were planning an attack on the East Indians?

HOBBS: I know nothing of that. That is absolutely untrue.

—

CHAIRMAN: At this time we will adjourn this session for the day.

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