

The Wismar Commission Report

Day 10 – Friday, 27 November 1964

CHAIRMAN: This session is now called to order.

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B. RAMSAROOP: Mr. Chairman, I am appearing for Mr. Sugrim Singh as counsel for the Commission.

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CHAIRMAN: Call Colonel King.

SHEPHERD: Mr. King is supposed to be here at 9, and if it pleases the Commission, Colonel De Freitas is here.

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RAMSAROOP: I have no objections to Colonel De Freitas.

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COLONEL CELSO LIMA DE FREITAS is sworn in, and he states as follows:

RAMSAROOP: Your full name is Celso Lima De Freitas, and you are the commanding officer of the British Guiana Volunteer Force?

DE FREITAS: Yes.

RAMSAROOP: What is the authorised strength of the force?

DE FREITAS: The authorised strength is 600.

RAMSAROOP: What is the composition of your battalion?

DE FREITAS: The battalion is made up of a headquarters company and four rifle companies, of which one is stationed at Mackenzie and another at New Amsterdam.

RAMSAROOP: What are the duties of your forces?

DE FREITAS: To assist the police whenever called upon to do so; to provide armed escort and patrols; assist in the restoration of law and order.

RAMSAROOP: Colonel, I will remind you of some disturbances that began at Wismar. Did His Excellency advise you to embody some of your forces?

DE FREITAS: Yes, he did on the 24th May, to embody a small number of men, 22 in number.

RAMSAROOP: (*Shows witness a letter*) Is this a copy of the letter from His Excellency the Governor?

DE FREITAS: I have one here. I think it is in my file.

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SHEPHERD: No objections.

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DE FREITAS: I will read the copy.

—

CHAIRMAN: The letter will be Exhibit "N".

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RAMSAROOP: At the time of the embodiment what was the strength of the company?

DE FREITAS: Ninety-five officers and men. There was one Major and three were subalterns; ninety one other ranks.

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RAMSAROOP: On the 25th May you were requested by the Commissioner of Police to order the embodiment of the entire Volunteer Force?

DE FREITAS: Yes sir.

RAMSAROOP: What time was that?

DE FREITAS: In the morning.

RAMSAROOP: And was Major Langham in charge then?

DE FREITAS: He was in charge of the embodiment, but they came under the operational command of the Superintendent of Police.

RAMSAROOP: Can you say that on the 24th May this year the platoon of the British army arrived at Wismar and was in force?

DE FREITAS: On the 25th.

RAMSAROOP: What time was that?

DE FREITAS: It was 4 to 5 in the evening.

RAMSAROOP: Did you, Colonel, receive a report subsequently from Mr. Langham.

DE FREITAS: Yes, I did.

(The report is received and submitted as Exhibit "O").

RAMSAROOP: On Thursday 28th May did you visit Mackenzie?

DE FREITAS: I did.

RAMSAROOP: Thank you. On Thursday 28th you paid a visit to Mackenzie. You went because of a series of complaints against the Volunteer Force. What were these complaints?

DE FREITAS: There were allegations that were made during the disturbances, that the police and volunteers were there and they did not stop the confusion in the area. Do you mind, if I call the names of four of the persons from my file. There was Rahaman, but I do not think I can remember the names of the others.

CHAIRMAN: Yes, one Mr. Rahaman.

DE FREITAS: Mr. Rahaman met Captain Stevens who was appointed at Mackenzie. Mr. Rahaman alleged that members of the Volunteer Force had stood idly by while people were being raped and beaten. Mr. Rahaman said that Captain Stevens had requested volunteers to accompany him to Wismar to rescue these people. Rahaman said that Mr. Grundy and Mr. Slater were there also when Stevens asked the volunteers to accompany him across the river to rescue two girls who had been beaten and raped. When I arrived at Mackenzie I got in touch with Major Goodbody who was in charge of the British troops there. I also asked Captain Stevens if Mr. Rahaman was in his company when he requested the Volunteer Force. I also saw Mr. Grundy and Mr. Slater. I made an investigation there, and I have their statements. My report was submitted to His Excellency the Governor.

CHAIRMAN: From whom were the other allegations?

DE FREITAS: There was a Seegobin and a Mr. Low. Their allegations were of a different nature.

SHEPHERD: What was your evidence in respect to these complaints?

DE FREITAS: I found that it was false. Rahaman was not in company with Captain Stevens. He may have been in the same crowd with Captain Stevens. He told us it was not true because Slater and Grundy were

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not there at all. The allegations were that Captain Stevens had asked a number of volunteers to accompany him to the other bank to rescue the girls who were being raped. That wasn't so. There were two volunteers in the vicinity at that time trying to hold back the unruly crowd while they made for the boat. The other was occupied in keeping back the crowd from getting to the Esso installations there.

SHEPHERD: What is this volunteer's name?

DE FREITAS: I haven't got his name.

SHEPHERD: Was this volunteer praised by Captain Stevens?

DE FREITAS: Yes. They were trying to get into the Esso bulk installation for what reason I don't know.

SHEPHERD: What might have been the reason?

DE FREITAS: We were put there to see that no one interfered with the bulk station.

CHAIRMAN: What were the other complaints?

DE FREITAS: Mr. Low complained that Sergeant Roberts and other members of the Volunteer Force had stood by while fire was being set to a building.

SHEPHERD: What were your findings there?

DE FREITAS: That a house was being set afire and no one did anything at all was a false statement. At no time during the disturbances did any rank of the force see fire being set. The burning of the houses was well organised. There were 95 houses on fire on the night in question. Low's building was already blazing furiously by the time the volunteers arrived on the scene. Numerous houses which have been set afire were extinguished shortly after they appeared. Hakim's hotel was extinguished three times in the presence of Major Langham. The volunteers could not open some of the houses to put out fires. The most they could do was to break into the house at an early stage of the fire. They did this in a number of cases. On seeing a fire in that area the party rushed to the spot but on arrival found the building blazing and beyond salvage.

SHEPHERD: Was there a fourth complaint from an anonymous person?

DE FREITAS: Yes, there was. It was a complaint that members of the Volunteer Force stood idly and watched a man being beaten until both his legs were broken while his wife was beaten and raped. There appears to be no record of such an incident but there was a man named Prashad who was beaten he was also injured superficially. He was given first aid treatment and sent away. He did not have either of his legs broken. I found no evidence that any member of the Volunteer Force stood by.

SHEPHERD: So you investigated the complaint and found no cause for disciplinary action against your officers.

DE FREITAS: No.

SHEPHERD: Is your force normally used as a military force?

DE FREITAS: Yes.

SHEPHERD: Was there a request by the police for assistance?

DE FREITAS: A request was made on the 24th.

SHEPHERD: What time?

DE FREITAS: About 9.00 a.m. It might have been later.

CHAIRMAN: And the request was for 24 volunteers to be placed under the control of the police?

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DE FREITAS: Yes.

SHEPHERD: Volunteers like soldiers carry arms. Their first duty is of course to protect their arms. They are responsible for their arms and cannot lay them down to care for fire fighting.

DE FREITAS: Not unless they leave a man or guard over the arms.

SHEPHERD: What are their fire orders? What are their orders on taking life? In other words, are volunteers expected to shoot at sight any suspicious person?

DE FREITAS: Certainly not.

SHEPHERD: Are they expected to prevent serious crimes?

DE FREITAS: Yes, if they see them occurring.

SHEPHERD: Are they permitted to open fire on crowds because they look suspicious?

DE FREITAS: No.

SHEPHERD: Subject to your direction, Mr. Chairman, I think I should like to see this file. I have no account of the ammunition expended.

DE FREITAS: I beg your pardon. I have the records.

SHEPHERD: I am sorry. I think I should give it to your counsel.

(The record is submitted and marked Exhibit "P").

SHEPHERD: Would it be correct to say that in the circumstances the duties of your volunteers was to rescue life?

DE FREITAS: It was so.

SHEPHERD: Is it true that your volunteers were operating with the police or were they operating alone?

DE FREITAS: Yes, they were operating with the police.

SHEPHERD: Did they save many lives?

DE FREITAS: They literally saved hundreds of lives. From the records I have 77 families were rescued. I have 478 names of persons rescued.

SHEPHERD: Have you a record of persons rescued?

DE FREITAS: Yes, I have

SHEPHERD: I think it is proper and fitting for the Commissioners to see. I will hand your file to your learned counsel. Reviewing the situation as officer commanding the Volunteer Force, are you satisfied with the work of your company during the disturbances?

DE FREITAS: I am.

SHEPHERD: Do you command the volunteers from your headquarters in Georgetown?

DE FREITAS: I do.

SHEPHERD: When there is a meeting of the Security Counsel do you normally attend?

DE FREITAS: No.

SHEPHERD: Did you attend a meeting on the 23rd?

DE FREITAS: No. I attended a meeting on the 28th after I returned.

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CHAIRMAN: It is a pity that this evidence was not available before so that the people's names mentioned here could have been called to give evidence to the Commissioners.

SHEPHERD: It is merely a record. That is why I put it forward so tentatively. I may say so that Major Langham and certain volunteers will be here.

CHAIRMAN: They will be here?

SHEPHERD: They will come to give evidence.

RAMSAROOP: They will probably give the evidence.

CARTER: I just want to ask one question so I can follow the evidence. You said there were seventy-seven families identified. By that you mean there were more persons who were unidentified rescued by the volunteers. I understand that there were other rescue operations in which the persons rescued were not identified by the volunteers.

DE FREITAS: That is correct. These are only the identified ones.

CARTER: So that it will be more than seventy-seven families rescued? Almost double that figure?

DE FREITAS: I couldn't say.

CARTER: Thank you,

PRATAP N. SINGH: Yes, the people who made these reports concerning the Volunteers Force, did you actually see them?

DE FREITAS: No. That record was given to me by Major Langham who was in charge and he got this from the records in the company's diary as well as from the police station.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Did you make any request before that they should be brought to you personally?

DE FREITAS: From the people? No. No one ever approached me with any complaints.

PRATAP N. SINGH: You said that you hadn't that complaint made personally by the three men. Did you request that they brought before you?

DE FREITAS: The men? They were not in the area; at that time they had already left.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Now, when you investigated these complaints, was Major Goodbody there?

DE FREITAS: Major Goodbody was there. I spoke to him about it.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Had he knowledge of these complaints?

DE FREITAS: Yes.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Lieutenant Thomas – was he present?

DE FREITAS: Well, I don't know who Lieutenant Thomas is. Those for the commanding unit were present.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Thank you very much.

DRAYTON: Is it usual for you when your men fire a round of ammunition to make a report immediately of this particular incident and why it was fired?

DE FREITAS: The moment they arrived back to headquarters they must be accounted for and the statement is placed in the diary and recorded.

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DRAYTON: Who records it?

DE FREITAS: There was always an orderly present and the moment the troops return if there are any incidents they must be recorded.

DRAYTON: What is the total number of volunteers in this company?

DE FREITAS: Ninety-five, including officers.

DRAYTON: It looks as though only nine volunteers used any rounds of ammunition.

DE FREITAS: That is possibly so.

DRAYTON: And only on five occasions in Wismar from this report?

DE FREITAS: Yes, I gather that most of the rescuing of families who were being beaten or molested and also putting out fires was done by volunteers.

DRAYTON: Thank you.

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MACDONALD: Did you say that the British Guiana Volunteer Force has four or five companies?

DE FREITAS: Five companies. Headquarters company and four rifle companies.

MACDONALD: There was one at McKenzie and one at New Amsterdam. Could you tell me where the other two were?

DE FREITAS: In Georgetown. If you would like the details I could give you them.

MACDONALD: I would be very glad.

DE FREITAS: They were on duty from Skeldon to Mackenzie. On that Sunday 24th and Monday 25th the Berbice company was stretched from Skeldon down to New Amsterdam. It was guarding the Canje Bridge and all the essential places along the Corentyne and the Canje. The Georgetown companies were posted from Vergenoegen right down to Versailles in the West Coast, guarding the smaller police stations. I also had a platoon at Mahaica and one at Mahaicony and it was part of their duties to relieve the police. I had very few scattered guards and others patrolling with the army.

MACDONALD: Could you tell me, Colonel, the two companies from Georgetown and headquarters – were they entirely committed along the East Coast and West Coast?

DE FREITAS: Yes, in Georgetown we have a number of scattered guards – the first one at Government House, the law courts, the fire brigade station and the defence of the area. In fact we had them posted in the whole area to help the police in Georgetown. The companies were entirely committed except for a small reserve.

MACDONALD: Were any of your men sent from Georgetown to Wismar?

DE FREITAS: No.

MACDONALD: Would it be correct then that on Sunday 24th of May, except for “D” company, the other four companies were embodied and entirely committed?

DE FREITAS: Except for a small reserve in Georgetown.

CHAIRMAN: Except for “D” company the other four companies were embodied and entirely committed, or were there some that could possibly be reinforced?

DE FREITAS: Yes.

MACDONALD: One final question. From the headquarters company and the two Georgetown companies, were any of your men sent to the Wismar-Mackenzie area before or after the 25th?

DE FREITAS: No, none.

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MOOTOO: Where were your men from – those from “D” company?

DE FREITAS: The majority were from the Mackenzie-Christianburg area.

MOOTOO: What is the ethnic composition of your men?

DE FREITAS: Predominantly, they were Africans; only one or two East Indians.

MOOTOO: You said that the setting of fire to houses was so well planned that the volunteers didn't actually see fire being set. If these men were residents of the area, don't you think that they would have known of these plans?

DE FREITAS: I am not in a position to give an opinion like that. All I know is that every volunteer that is embodied comes under the strictest discipline and he is to carry out his duties, but I cannot really say if they knew of it before.

MOOTOO: But you said it was planned.

DE FREITAS: I cannot give an opinion on that. When I mentioned well-planned, it seems to me that the burnings of the buildings may have been organised in certain areas, but I don't think that the volunteers had any knowledge of these plans.

MOOTOO: When these people accused the volunteers of standing by idling, there might have been a possibility that some of them stood by, because only a few did shoot people who were looting and setting fires.

DE FREITAS: They were out on patrols.

MOOTOO: Did you find out if any stood by idling?

DE FREITAS: No, there were only two volunteers at the time. One was keeping back a mob, and the other was protecting a building.

MOOTOO: But if they were patrolling there may have been others in the area.

DE FREITAS: They didn't patrol on the Mackenzie side. They went across to the troubled areas.

MOOTOO: Is this on the Mackenzie side?

DE FREITAS: Yes.

MOOTOO: Thank you very much.

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CHAIRMAN: Colonel, you say that at 9.00 a.m. on the 24th the Commissioner of Police requested the embodiment of 24 members of the Volunteer Force?

DE FREITAS: On the 24th, I received a telephone call from Mr. Puttock informing me that the Volunteer Force must be alerted as there was a possibility of violence at Mackenzie.

CHAIRMAN: This is on the 24th.

DE FREITAS: Yes, but only at Mackenzie.

CHAIRMAN: Now, the information communicated to you was that the situation at Mackenzie was getting tense and that there had been a report of burning houses.

DE FREITAS: Yes. I had no details about fires. It was imply in regard to rising tension.

CHAIRMAN: And it was not until the 25th that the major part of the violence erupted. Would you say the Monday?

DE FREITAS: Full embodiment took place on the 25th.

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CHAIRMAN: I am speaking of the violence at Wismar.

DE FREITAS: On the 25th.

CHAIRMAN: There was a period between the 23rd, 24th, and the 25th. Would you still say, therefore, that there may have been a spontaneous outburst or there was a gradual build up of feeling? Which caused violence on the 25th?

DE FREITAS: I think that it began to snow-ball and began on the 24th and things seemed to have got out of control.

CHAIRMAN: You mean violence?

DE FREITAS: Yes. There was tenseness on the 23rd, and violence began on the 24th. It snow-balled and became really bad in the 25th.

CHAIRMAN: So, really from the 23rd to 25th there was time enough to have the Volunteer Force at Mackenzie alerted?

DE FREITAS: The Volunteer Force could have been alerted in time, whether it was on the 20th or 24th.

CHAIRMAN: Another point – when the Volunteer Force was embodied, was that around 3.00 p.m.?

DE FREITAS: The final man came in later but a large number had already reported by midday.

CHAIRMAN: Your instructions to your men, that they should only fire when persons are actually seen committing some criminal offence. According to Exhibit “P”, I see here that shots were fired at rioters escaping from custody at First Alley, Wismar, and to disperse crowds attaching Bissoon’s shop. We have had evidence that the volunteers are very efficient and comparable with boys of the British Army with whom they had the opportunity to work alongside. There have been quite a number of shots fired, and only two persons were injured. Can you say if they were firing shots in the air or the looters were being fired at?

DE FREITAS: I think Major Langham would be in a better position to give evidence. I have not got these reports.

CHAIRMAN: You don’t know if they were in the air.

DE FREITAS: I hardly think they would have fired in the air.

CHAIRMAN: And you say that instructions to the Volunteer Force were that they are not fire on anybody acting suspiciously.

DE FREITAS: No, they should be warned and challenged.

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DRAYTON: Just one more question. What was the extent of military training of the Volunteers in “D” Company?

DE FREITAS: I think some had several years of military training and few of them had one year.

DRAYTON: Who was responsible for their training?

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SHEPHERD: Please, Dr. Drayton, I don’t think you should ask a history of the training of these volunteers.

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DRAYTON: I am not asking the history. I am only interested in the “D” company. During the time they were embodied at Wismar were any shot-guns lost?

DE FREITAS: No, the volunteers have never lost any rifles before. Several weeks after the disturbances they lost a sten gun.

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DRAYTON: They never reported any lost?

DE FREITAS: None at all.

DRAYTON: But during the disturbances did you find any ammunition?

DE FREITAS: No, I am not aware.

DRAYTON: What about the 25th May, 1964,

DE FREITAS: On the 25th May they were very busy and they had no time to search for any ammunition.

DRAYTON: Would you fire at an unruly crowd?

DE FREITAS: No, only in the air to disperse the crowd.

DRAYTON: Now this incident at Kara Kara where one of your men fired at an unruly crowd, would you say this was contrary to discipline?

DE FREITAS: Yes. In fact this was what happened.

DRAYTON: Thank you.

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SHEPHERD: Can I ask you three other questions concerning the questions that were put forward to you by counsel. Was there anyone present with you during the investigations of the complaints?

DE FREITAS: Yes. Major Goodbody was present.

SHEPHERD: You know the complaints that were mentioned in the papers?

DE FREITAS: Yes. I find no proof of them

SHEPHERD: With reference to the preconceived plan to burn houses, would you say that you have no knowledge of any such preconceived plan of burning and. looting at Wismar?

DE FREITAS: I had none.

SHEPHERD: Thank you.

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JOHN LANGHAM is sworn in, and he states as follows:

RAMSAROOP: What is your name?

LANGHAM: John Langham.

RAMSAROOP: Are you the commanding officer of the "D" company stationed at Mackenzie?

LANGHAM: Yes sir.

RAMSAROOP: On Monday 25th May around 10.00 a.m. were there disturbances at Wismar?

LANGHAM: Yes sir.

RAMSAROOP: Could you say the nature of these disturbances?

LANGHAM: There were fires and people being assaulted.

RAMSAROOP: On Monday 25th did you receive any instructions to embody your ranks?

LANGHAM: On the 24th: instructions to embody 25 men.

RAMSAROOP: From where did your authority come?

LANGHAM: I received a telephone call from Superintendent Puttock.

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RAMSAROOP: Major, this was about 3.00 p.m. on Sunday 24th May?

LANGHAM: That is correct.

RAMSAROOP: By that time was it difficult to get in touch with the Volunteer Force?

LANGHAM: Yes.

RAMSAROOP: Why did you say it was difficult?

LANGHAM: The first thing we had to do was to get what men you could find, and get them to bring in others. Some of them were employed by the bauxite company and some at other firms.

RAMSAROOP: You however were able to get around 60?

LANGHAM: By three o'clock these 60 men were actually committed and the rest were still coming in.

RAMSAROOP: Major, the situation in that area was somewhat difficult to control that day.

LANGHAM: I would say so.

RAMSAROOP: And were your services directed to the rescuing of these Indians.

LANGHAM: Undoubtedly.

RAMSAROOP: Major, why was this so?

LANGHAM: There were two things we could do, rescuing persons or save their properties.

RAMSAROOP: What was your choice?

LANGHAM: As far as I am concerned, there was no choice.

RAMSAROOP: Major, were many persons arrested?

LANGHAM: I know of one person who was actually shot in the hip, and other persons were shot at.

RAMSAROOP: Major, were your patrols able to find those people who set fire to the buildings?

LANGHAM: No.

RAMSAROOP: Major Langham, is it true that your company had rescued no less than seventy-seven identified families?

LANGHAM: My record shows that over seventy-seven families were rescued comprising well over four hundred persons.

RAMSAROOP: Thank you.

SHEPHERD: Normally, Major, the forces you command are employed as military forces. Normally they are soldiers?

LANGHAM: They are trained as soldiers.

SHEPHERD: In matters like this, they are embodied to set in support of the civil powers?

LANGHAM: Correct.

SHEPHERD: And when they set in support of the civil powers they have the duties and powers of the policemen.

LANGHAM: Yes, they do.

SHEPHERD: During the state of emergency were your troops fully armed?

LANGHAM: Yes.

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SHEPHERD: Were they instructed in the proper use of these arms?

LANGHAM: Yes.

SHEPHERD: Are they expected to account for ammunition expended?

LANGHAM: Yes, and they are checked when they come in from patrolling and all ammunition is handed back.

SHEPHERD: With respect to the proper use of arms in the face of danger, can you explain to the Commission what instructions were issued to your men on the use of arms?

LANGHAM: In normal circumstances this is a matter of fire discipline. A man does not fire a weapon unless he receives a fire order, but this was not normal circumstance at all and I gave a blanket fire instruction.

SHEPHERD: What is a blanket instruction? Explain what type of instruction you gave your men.

LANGHAM: I told the troops to charge their magazines, put one round of ammunition in the breech, and apply the safety catch.

SHEPHERD: Would it have been the proper use of ammunition to open fire on a crowd that had assembled and were doing nothing?

LANGHAM: No.

SHEPHERD: Would it have been the proper use of ammunition to have opened fire on a person who looked suspicious?

LANGHAM: Certainly not.

SHEPHERD: If, however, people showed signs of trouble, would it have been proper to open fire?

LANGHAM: Yes.

SHEPHERD: By the time your troops were committed, Major, was it to rescue both property and persons in the situation?

LANGHAM: It was possible but highly improbable.

SHEPHERD: Would it have been possible to rescue more than four hundred persons in the area, if primary attention was paid to the saving of property that is houses, etc.?

LANGHAM: Absolutely not.

SHEPHERD: So you had a choice between saving houses and shops from destruction and saving lives, and your orders were to save lives?

LANGHAM: Yes.

SHEPHERD: After the operations were finished, were you satisfied with the discipline of your force?

LANGHAM: Absolutely.

SHEPHERD: Did you, however, receive complaints from members of the public?

LANGHAM: Yes.

SHEPHERD: Did you investigate them?

LANGHAM: Yes.

SHEPHERD: In the light of your investigations are you still satisfied?

LANGHAM: Yes.

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SHEPHERD: Now, Major, this may be personal. A great deal of property was destroyed by fire. Have you any knowledge of pre-conceived plans to set fire to houses?

LANGHAM: No.

SHEPHERD: Thank you.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Did you at any time come to the conclusion that it was planned?

LANGHAM: I don't think it was possible to have come to such a conclusion.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Was Major Goodbody at any time on patrol duty in Wismar?

LANGHAM: I believe he may have been over there on 26th or 27th.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Not before?

LANGHAM: I don't know.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Was he at any time in Mackenzie?

LANGHAM: I cannot answer that question.

PRATAP N. SINGH: When did you first realise the gravity of the situation at Wismar?

LANGHAM: From the 24th May.

PRATAP N. SINGH: When did you receive instructions to have your men embodied?

LANGHAM: At 10.00 a.m. on the 24th.

PRATAP N. SINGH: When did you receive instructions for the full embodiment?

LANGHAM: That was on the 25th around 10.00 a.m.

PRATAP N. SINGH: How many men were embodied on the 24th?

LANGHAM: Twenty four men and one sergeant.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Did you think at that time that all the men should have been embodied?

LANGHAM: I believed so.

PRATAP N. SINGH: When you received instructions to partially embody your men, did you advise that all of them be embodied on the 24th?

LANGHAM: Yes, I did.

PRATAP N. SINGH: What reply did you receive?

LANGHAM: I was given instructions to embody twenty-four men and one sergeant.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Was any reason given?

LANGHAM: I have no authority to ask for reasons.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Who instructed you to embody twenty-four men?

LANGHAM: Instructions came from Superintendent Puttock.

PRATAP N. SINGH: So you were instructed to embody twenty-four men only although you had advised otherwise?

LANGHAM: Yes sir.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Was Mr. Puttock ever at Mackenzie or Wismar during this period?

LANGHAM: No sir.

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PRATAP N. SINGH: Did you ever peak to Mr. Neil Isaacs while you were up there?

LANGHAM: Yes sir.

PRATAP N. SINGH: When did he arrive?

LANGHAM: I think it was about midday or shortly after midday on the 25th. I would like to state the situation on the 25th was such I have not kept a count of time.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Well, let me get this? Was he in the area on the 24th?

LANGHAM: No sir.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Now, was anybody in the area, any military personnel or police personnel above your rank?

LANGHAM: I can't answer that question. I was the most senior person there so far as the Volunteer Force is concerned.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Could you let us take for example – suppose there was a sudden flare-up at Mackenzie, could you embody your men without receiving orders from the authority?

LANGHAM: No.

PRATAP N. SINGH: You can't? Why?

LANGHAM: Because that is the way we operate to embody or disembody.

PRATAP N. SINGH: So if there was a sudden flare up and thousands of lives were involved, you would have to wait on authority to embody?

LANGHAM: Yes sir.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Now, these twenty-four men that were embodied on the 24th of May, where were they stationed at the time of commitment.

LANGHAM: These twenty-four men were, I might say, they were handed over to the division commander of the Police Force.

PRATAP N. SINGH: And where were they stationed?

LANGHAM: I think that evidence will have to come from the officer in charge of the division.

PRATAP N. SINGH: You don't know where these men were.

LANGHAM: They were committed in Wismar.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Having been committed did you have any more control over them on the 24th, 25th and 27th?

LANGHAM: Yes I had. We came together as a company, that is, commencing on the midday of the 25th.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Were any of your men at any time posted to Wismar, for example, places like Silver City and Valley of Tears.

LANGHAM: We weren't posted anywhere. We cannot post people anywhere. We patrolled the entire area from one end to another.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Were any of your men equipped with walkie-talkie?

LANGHAM: None of them were equipped with walkie-talkie.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Did you see any of the force equipped with them?

LANGHAM: At a later stage the U.K. troops; they were equipped with them.

PRATAP N. SINGH: When did the British troops arrive?

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LANGHAM: May I refer to my records? Seventeen thirty, half past five on the 25th.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Now to your knowledge, before the arrival of the U.K. forces were any helicopters in operation?

LANGHAM: Not to my knowledge.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Were any reports made to you that your men were standing around doing nothing while people were being attacked, and houses were being burnt?

LANGHAM: No sir.

PRATAP N. SINGH: I should have asked Colonel De Freitas this question but it slipped me. You may be able to assist me. Did you sit at this enquiry? Was that the first time that you heard these complaints?

LANGHAM: Yes, it was. Before I say yes, I would like to know what complaints you are referring to.

PRATAP N. SINGH: While their houses were being lit afire and women were being beaten the volunteers stood idly around.

LANGHAM: These I have heard.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Do you know from what source these complaints came to the attention to Colonel De Freitas?

LANGHAM: I understand that a number of individuals submitted the complaints to some official source. They were then passed to Colonel De Freitas.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Now, were any fire-arms lost by your men during the disturbances or subsequent during the 24th or 25th?

LANGHAM: No sir. A stem gun was lost some time later.

PRATAP N. SINGH: When.

LANGHAM: I shall have to refer to my records. Yes, on June 29th.

PRATAP N. SINGH: The gun was lost?

LANGHAM: I don't know what you mean by lost, but usually we say lost or stolen.

PRATAP N. SINGH: I should like to know from where was that gun lost or stolen.

LANGHAM: It was stolen or lost from the company headquarters building of "D" company of the Volunteer Force.

PRATAP N. SINGH: And there are guards?

LANGHAM: Yes, a guard.

PRATAP N. SINGH: I suppose they work on a shift system?

LANGHAM: That's right.

PRATAP N. SINGH: And yet this gun was stolen or lost?

LANGHAM: Yes.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Any ammunition lost?

LANGHAM: No sir.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Any ammunition or firearms found?

LANGHAM: Not by my company.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Were any searches made where these buildings were burnt?

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LANGHAM: Yes.

PRATAP N. SINGH: By whom?

LANGHAM: By the police and by ourselves assisting the police.

PRATAP N. SINGH: And none of your men reported that they found any ammo.

LANGHAM: A quantity of ammo was found in a burnt out building. I can't recollect who found it.

PRATAP N. SINGH: But was it found by one of your men?

LANGHAM: To the best of my recollection, I think not. I think it was found by the police, but I may be wrong.

DRAYTON: Major Langham, prior to the 24th May, were you aware of rising tension in the area?

LANGHAM: Yes sir.

DRAYTON: What evidence was there of rising tension?

LANGHAM: Well, several days before 25th there were incidents of attempted arson.

DRAYTON: Since you became aware of this around the 21st May, did you have any conversation with the commanding officer of the Volunteer Force, telling him about the rising tension and perhaps advising him that the members of the Volunteer Force should be embodied?

LANGHAM: The people in authority in that area are the police. If the police feel that the situation is out of control and they require some additional members, they would communicate with the Volunteer Force headquarters, and some state authority would be given to mobilise the situation.

DRAYTON: That may be the procedure, but you as a human being living in that area – for how long?

LANGHAM: For six or seven years.

DRAYTON: You must have felt concern about this tension and you must have had informal conversation with Colonel Celso De Freitas about the possibility of trouble in that area?

LANGHAM: It is a difficult question to answer. We were having incidents which were reported, but it was not for me to foresee that there was going to be a sudden eruption.

DRAYTON: But in the course of those conversations you must have mentioned that there was rising tension?

LANGHAM: Yes.

DRAYTON: Why did you think it necessary to advise Mr. Puttock that the whole of the "D" company should be embodied?

LANGHAM: It was my personal opinion at that stage; that the troubles had changed. This thing had suddenly developed into a large scale affair.

DRAYTON: Even on the 24th?

LANGHAM: Yes.

DRAYTON: There was a distinct difference between the 23rd and the 24th. Now, when you spoke to him on the 24th and advised the total embodiment of the "D" company, what did he say to you?

LANGHAM: I do not recollect his words.

DRAYTON: What did he say to this? Did he say, "I do not think the whole of the "D" company should be embodied."

LANGHAM: Words to that effect.

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DRAYTON: Now, Major Langham, in your opinion if the whole of the “D” cCompany had been embodied at the time that you had suggested, do you think that the calamity on the 25th might have been averted?
LANGHAM: I cannot say that it could have been averted, but it may have been substantially reduced.

DRAYTON: Had Mr. Puttock visited this area at anytime prior to the 24th?
LANGHAM: Yes. Mr. Puttock had been out there from time to time. I cannot remember the dates.

DRAYTON: But he was not there on the 23rd, the 24th, 25th or 26th?
LANGHAM: I cannot remember.

DRAYTON: Where were you on the day in question?
LANGHAM: At Wismar-Christianburg.

DRAYTON: You were there from what time to what time?
LANGHAM: I gave my instructions as far as I can recall at about 11 o'clock or midday.

DRAYTON: When were those records prepared? This record that Colonel De Freitas tendered.
LANGHAM: These records came from number of sources. We keep notes in books.

DRAYTON: Was there a single book at the station? Were these things recorded at the company headquarters? Were they recorded on the day in question?
LANGHAM: No.

DRAYTON: This is what Colonel De Freitas told us. The record was reconstructed long after the 25th.
SHEPHERD: I must object. I think that Colonel De Freitas did not say so. I don't remember him referring to that but he did say that reports had to be made.

DRAYTON: There is no such book Major Langham?
LANGHAM: On the 24th we had a partial embodiment. A group of men who left and reported to the B.G. Police Force were committed to the Wismar-Christianburg area. Whatever they did or found out was reported to the police station at Wismar. Further, the company headquarters as such at the centre was about the last thing that I was going to consider at a time like this. On the 25th we got our orders for a total embodiment. On the 25th May we were informed by several people that the volunteers were not cooperative, and I have in my diary a few statements some of which are in the police station at Wismar.

DRAYTON: Was it not contrary to fire in an unruly crowd?
LANGHAM: Yes. They had to receive orders from the superior officers to fire at the unruly crowd.

DRAYTON: Could you not fire at such a crowd?
LANGHAM: No sir.

DRAYTON: You see, Major Langham, the unruly crowd was burning and looting the houses.
LANGHAM: You could not shoot in the crowd or at the individual person or there might have been several injured in the crowd.

DRAYTON: How serious was the situation?
LANGHAM: The crowd was walking.

DRAYTON: I am suggesting to you that you could have fired at the unruly crowd and several houses could have been saved from burning.
LANGHAM: We could not fire except orders were given to us.

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DRAYTON: But if you had fired in the air the crowd would have dispersed.

LANGHAM: I think so, but orders were not given to shoot.

DRAYTON: Did you, Major Langham, prepare a long statement?

LANGHAM: Yes sir.

DRAYTON: Major Langham, at eight o'clock on the 25th, from your records, on your initiative you called in your un-embodied officers and told them to make preparations pending receipt of authority from headquarters for free embodiment. So your judgement of the previous day had been confirmed by eight o'clock on the 25th for quick embodiment. Did you try to get in touch with Colonel De Freitas?

LANGHAM: Yes, I tried to get in touch with Colonel De Freitas.

DRAYTON: Immediately after your meeting?

LANGHAM: Yes, I tried to get a call to Georgetown but I didn't get through.

DRAYTON: How many times did you attempt to do this?

LANGHAM: I don't recall.

DRAYTON: More than once.

LANGHAM: I believe twice.

DRAYTON: When you give instructions here for quick embodiment, what period of time do you require?

LANGHAM: You must be ready for quick embodiment.

DRAYTON: How long does this thing take?

LANGHAM: It takes about two to three hours.

DRAYTON: But yet from your own records it wasn't until seven o'clock that night that that total embodiment in your company was ready.

LANGHAM: That was quite right. Seven o'clock. The last came in that time just for the last couple hours from five, six, seven o'clock. Three men were still outstanding.

DRAYTON: Just one other thing, Major Langham. Where did this meeting take place with Neil Isaacs?

LANGHAM: At the police station.

DRAYTON: You were across at Wismar at eleven o'clock.

LANGHAM: Yes.

DRAYTON: So you received a telephone call from Colonel De Freitas at Wismar?

LANGHAM: No, at Mackenzie. I received the phone call before I went to Wismar.

DRAYTON: You went across there. You came over at what time?

LANGHAM: I can't say what time I came across.

DRAYTON: But at three o'clock you were at the Mackenzie side because you were present at the conference and you remained on the Mackenzie side, and you were there all night.

LANGHAM: Yes sir.

DRAYTON: Thank you.

—

SHEPHERD: Now I want to clear a few points too. Would you look at Exhibit "O"? Was this your record of a rescue operation that you submitted to your commanding officer? So you have a copy of it with you?

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LANGHAM: Yes sir.

SHEPHERD: I noted that in two cases attempts were made to put out fires and your volunteers were seen breaking down doors or breaking windows of premises. Would that be a conclusion to put out fires or save lives?

LANGHAM: It would be both. On many occasions we heard screams and we smashed our way into the houses, and that was the first attempt to try to put it out and we extinguished a few that way.

—

DRAYTON: Did you at anytime prepare a lengthy statement?

LANGHAM: Yes.

DRAYTON: Where is the lengthy statement?

LANGHAM: This is the major part. I have taken out of it appendices which were the information from the chief medical officer of the Demerara Bauxite Company and also information received from the police station. In other words, my initial report was comprehensive and which were supplied by other persons.

DRAYTON: Did your lengthy report contain statements of opinion?

LANGHAM: I have written to the commanding officer on this comprehensive statement.

DRAYTON: I am just asking for the benefit of the Commission if you could let us have a copy of the comprehensive statement that you tendered to the British Guiana Volunteer Force.

LANGHAM: I haven't got it. It is with the commanding officer.

DRAYTON: Could you make that statement available?

—

SHEPHERD: I don't quite understand what the statement is for. What is the purpose of this question? Do you want all the records? It is quite impossible to get to the file cabinet and work upwards. You have a perfect right to get to the truth but it is not to examine all the records.

DRAYTON: Major Langham prepared a very lengthy statement. We would like to see it.

SHEPHERD: For what?

DRAYTON: I am not here to be cross examined,

SHEPHERD: I am here to understand what is going on.

—

DRAYTON: I am speaking clear English. You have prepared a very lengthy statement of the events?

LANGHAM: Yes.

DRAYTON: And this statement you have tendered to the Commissioners is culled from the lengthy statement? Did you admit this just now?

LANGHAM: Yes, but I don't remember saying this.

DRAYTON: How many pages were there?

LANGHAM: Seventy-six, sir.

DRAYTON: Do you care to tender it to the Commissioners?

LANGHAM: I do not have it. It is not in my possession.

DRAYTON: What happened to it?

LANGHAM: Colonel De Freitas has it.

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DRAYTON: Oh, Colonel De Freitas has it.

LANGHAM: I am saying that you have got the statement in front of you and summary of operations.

DRAYTON: We have got the bulk but I personally as a member of this Commission would like to have the complete statement that you tendered to Colonel De Freitas on the disturbances.

—

SHEPHERD: I should like to know why. Why do you want everything?

DRAYTON: Because as a member of this Commission, I feel this is relevant.

SHEPHERD: The witness is here. He can give you everything.

—

DRAYTON: Mr. Chairman, I can't understand this hesitancy to produce this report. I am quite anxious to get the truth; therefore, I must press that the entire statement be tendered.

—

CHAIRMAN: At this stage the court should have an adjournment for lunch.

—

[*Inquiry resumed*]

DRAYTON: Major Langham, what is the extent of your military training? How many years?

LANGHAM: Eighteen years.

DRAYTON: What is the extent of the training of your men who were under your command?

LANGHAM: Varying from three years to one year.

DRAYTON: Well, by that you mean that the men had one year to three years?

LANGHAM: Some have one year and others three years.

DRAYTON: Thank you very much. Now with respect to the British Guiana Volunteer Force, how many days training they had?

LANGHAM: Two afternoons per week.

DRAYTON: For how long?

LANGHAM: Two hours every afternoon,

DRAYTON: Was this training enough for the disturbances at Wismar?

LANGHAM: They had no training for such things like riots.

—

MACDONALD: Was this the actual orders you gave your men, not to save any properties but to save lives?

LANGHAM: Yes sir. I told them not to bother to save properties but to save people's lives.

MACDONALD: How long did this rescuing operation go on for?

LANGHAM: All day and all night.

—

MOOTOO: I understand that a member of the Volunteer Force, Lieutenant Wishart, shot a man who was looting. Do you know if this man was killed?

LANGHAM: He was wounded.

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MOOTOO: Could you tell us a little more about this incident?

LANGHAM: There were some people who were looting. They were told to stop. They didn't stop, and three persons opened fire. Of those three, somebody shot him and the bullet went through his middle and came out the other side. I didn't see who shot him. All I know is that he was shot. Afterwards, the father of the boy went to Mrs. Wishart and threatened her life.

MOOTOO: She was threatened only by the boy's father?

LANGHAM: Yes. That is all I understand.

MOOTOO: This man – was he actually looting?

LANGHAM: Some people were looting and he broke away.

MOOTOO: Did you know where he was looting?

LANGHAM: I don't know.

—

DRAYTON: What time did Assistant Commissioner Isaacs arrive in the area?

LANGHAM: To the best of my recollection, around three o'clock on the 25th.

—

CHAIRMAN: Major Langham, what training did the members of the Volunteer Force receive in dealing with riotous crowds?

LANGHAM: No training at all.

CHAIRMAN: The atmosphere on the 23rd, was it different to the one on the 24th?

LANGHAM: Yes.

CHAIRMAN: Did you have any talk with Mr. Hobbs? Had you at any time told him of the necessity to embody the entire Volunteer Force?

LANGHAM: I may have had.

CHAIRMAN: If the police are doubtful of the situation at Wismar, they would contact their headquarters, and if they couldn't help they would contact your headquarters?

LANGHAM: Yes sir.

CHAIRMAN: Did you ask Mr. Hobbs if he could contact his headquarters so that you could get the necessary powers to embody the whole of your Volunteer Force?

LANGHAM: It is difficult to answer that question.

CHAIRMAN: Did you ask him?

LANGHAM: I am pretty sure I suggested that my men should be used.

CHAIRMAN: Did you suggest that to Mr. Hobbs?

LANGHAM: I believe I did.

CHAIRMAN: Nevertheless, you were given permission on Sunday 24th to embody only twenty-four.

LANGHAM: Yes.

CHAIRMAN: About what time would you say you had another twenty-four?

LANGHAM: We got another twenty-four to thirty about three quarters of an hour after the first batch. The last few came in about five o'clock.

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CHAIRMAN: When did you go across to Wismar?

LANGHAM: Shortly after three o'clock.

CHAIRMAN: You worked in conjunction with the police but you were in full control of your force?

LANGHAM: Yes.

CHAIRMAN: Did you have any discussions with the senior police?

LANGHAM: There was no time to discuss the situation.

CHAIRMAN: Did you plan any course of action between the police and yourselves?

LANGHAM: I naturally did not think that there was any point in planning a course of action. It was clear and obvious what was to be done. It was a rescue operation, and while rescuing was being carried out any individual seen setting fire to houses would have been shot.

CHAIRMAN: At ten o'clock when you went over, was violence at its height or was it still building?

LANGHAM: It was high enough.

CHAIRMAN: The only form of operation that was possible was to bring in the injured people?

LANGHAM: That was primarily what we did.

CHAIRMAN: What preventative measures were taken by your force in conjunction with the police?

LANGHAM: Wherever we found a crowd we dispersed them.

CHAIRMAN: How?

LANGHAM: By addressing them.

CHAIRMAN: Did it become apparent that the arsonists could not be caught?

LANGHAM: Yes.

CHAIRMAN: Did you take any measures?

LANGHAM: The only method was to try to disperse the crowd.

CHAIRMAN: Your soldiers had rifles?

LANGHAM: Yes.

CHAIRMAN: What were your means of communication?

LANGHAM: By mouth.

CHAIRMAN: Do you know of any company in the Volunteer Force equipped with wireless sets?

LANGHAM: I do not know. We have not got any.

CHAIRMAN: Do you think it is necessary to the efficiency of the force?

LANGHAM: Very desirable.

CHAIRMAN: At eleven o'clock on Sunday you felt that the force was inadequate to deal with the situation. What did you do?

LANGHAM: I spoke to my senior and in answer he told me that they were authorised to embody twenty-four men.

CHAIRMAN: Did you try to get in contact with him again?

LANGHAM: It was impossible. The telephone lines were engaged.

CHAIRMAN: Is there no other means of communication with your force?

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LANGHAM: No sir.

CHAIRMAN: Now, in dealing with the unruly crowd I heard that Lieutenant Wishart fired a shot that injured someone. He was threatened as a result?

LANGHAM: I understand so.

CHAIRMAN: Did the volunteers make use of tear gas and shells.

LANGHAM: No.

CHAIRMAN: Were they used by the police?

LANGHAM: Yes.

CHAIRMAN: How many were used?

LANGHAM: I don't know.

CHAIRMAN: You are testifying on your oath. It would help us further if your long statement could be tendered.

—

SHEPHERD: I have no objections.

—

CHAIRMAN: The statement that Major Langham prepared is very vital.

—

SHEPHERD: If he has it there is no objection why he should not produce it. Where is the statement?

LANGHAM: Colonel De Freitas has it but I have kept a copy of it in the file which as at Mackenzie, and all the information is contained therein.

—

CHAIRMAN: Yes?

LANGHAM: There were several casualties and injuries which were taken to the hospital,

—

DRAYTON: In that event could Colonel De Freitas be contacted and he be allowed to tender the statement?

—

CHAIRMAN: [*To the witness*] This can be solved between yourself and the Colonel so that you can be able to produce it.

—

CARTER: Well, I believe that on Tuesday I may be able to bring Major Langham back and he can produce the necessary statement.

—

CHAIRMAN: If there is no more question, Major Langham can be excused.

—

MR. SHEPHERD: I am very puzzled. I would like to know why the statement is necessary.

—

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PRATAP N. SINGH: I have just noticed Mr. Hobbs in the hearing of the court. Is he giving evidence? I do not think that Mr. Hobbs who will be giving evidence should be in the court, as all the other witnesses are out of court.

—

SHEPHERD: I would like someone to guide me, as I need a solicitor. Mr. Hobbs is my solicitor and I think that he would be in court beside me to instruct me and act as my solicitor.

—

CHAIRMAN: I think that this question has already been raised and no one mentioned anything or raised any objection. The Commissioner gave Mr. Hobbs permission to sit in the building.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Well then, in the circumstances I think that no evidence should be allowed to be taken from Mr. Hobbs.

(The Inquiry is adjourned for a few minutes.)

DR. WINFRIED FRIES is sworn in and she states as follows:

RAMSAROOP: Doctor, are you a registered medical practitioner?

FRIES: No, I am doing my internship.

RAMSAROOP: On the 26th of May were you an intern at the Georgetown Hospital?

FRIES: Yes.

RAMSAROOP: Doctor, on the 26th May of this year did you examine one Ivy Ramnarace.

FRIES: I can't remember.

—

CHAIRMAN: Have you no notes to check?

FRIES: I was only notified yesterday that I had to appear in court today, so I had no time to look up my notes or records.

—

RAMSAROOP: Mr. Chairman, I am wondering if this witness would be available for court on Monday. I can appreciate the difficulty he is having in not being notified.

CHAIRMAN: My instructions were that they should be instructed to give evidence. I remember distinctly preparing lists of evidence. The doctors should have been here yesterday. Why were they only notified yesterday? Dr. Fries, I am afraid you will be of no use to the Commission without your notes. You will be served with a summons to give evidence on Monday at 8.30. Colonel King should be giving evidence at 12.30.

—

SHEPHERD: Colonel King was called to a conference. Possible he has been detained but as soon as he arrives I will inform the Commission.

[The Inquiry is again adjourned for a few minutes until the arrival of Colonel King.]

COLONEL ROBERT KING is sworn in and he states as follows:

CHAIRMAN: What is your name?

KING: Colonel King

CHAIRMAN: Your first name?

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KING: Robert.

CHAIRMAN: You are the commanding officer the British garrison.

KING: I am the commander of the British garrison, the same thing.

RAMSAROOP: Colonel, during the night of the 25th May this year were you told of anything in relationship to there being incidents?

—

CHAIRMAN: That should be the 24th.

—

KING: On the night of the 24th I had information that some troubles had started in the Wismar-Christianburg area.

RAMSAROOP: Yes? What was the source of your information?

KING: It was from the police.

RAMSAROOP: Would it be from the Commissioner of Police?

KING: No. It was from the Force control.

RAMSAROOP: Following that information did you on the 25th of May this year put one to two of your companies at one hour's notice to move to Mackenzie?

KING: I did.

RAMSAROOP: The necessary orders were given by whom?

KING: They were given by me.

RAMSAROOP: They were given by you? At what time, Colonel, did you expect troops from England that had not arrived yet?

KING: Some troops had arrived and some were arriving that day.

RAMSAROOP: Commander, at around 2.00 p.m. on the 24th May this year did you attend a Security Council meeting?

KING: Not on the 24th; on the 25th.

RAMSAROOP: On the 25th May commander you attended a meeting or the Security Council at the Ministry of Home Affairs.

KING: That is so.

RAMSAROOP: Commander, was the Wismar situation discussed at that meeting?

KING: It was.

RAMSAROOP: Was there any request by anyone present at that meeting?

KING: There was a suggestion.

RAMSAROOP: By whom?

KING: By the Minister.

—

CHAIRMAN: Yes?

—

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RAMSAROOP: Without a formally signed request, is the military empowered to go into action?

—

CHAIRMAN: I don't want to interrupt, but may we have this suggestion? What was that suggestion?

KING: The suggestion was that the British troops should come to assistance of the police and other security forces in Wismar.

—

RAMSAROOP: Is it necessary for there to be a formally signed request before the military is put into action?

KING: Yes.

RAMSAROOP: Did you returned to headquarters around 3.00 p.m.?

KING: Yes, I did.

RAMSAROOP: And on your return did anyone ring you in connection with the Wismar disturbances?

KING: Yes.

RAMSAROOP: Who is that person?

KING: The Commissioner of Police.

RAMSAROOP: Can you say that exactly he told you?

KING: He told me he had further news of the disturbances at Wismar, and he requested that British troops be dispatched there. He said he would send me a formal signed request for British troops to come to the assistance of the police.

RAMSAROOP: Did he also tell you that a Dakota was requisitioned for a troop lift?

KING: He told me that he had arranged for that.

RAMSAROOP: Were the arrangements confirmed?

KING: It was. I was told it would be standing by. From sixteen hours – from 4.00 p.m.

RAMSAROOP: Is it true that Demba offered their aircraft to take troops from Ogle?

KING: They did.

RAMSAROOP: Did you give orders to the commanding officer of the Queen's Own Buffs for a platoon of Company C, Devon and Dorsets, to be alerted?

KING: I did.

RAMSAROOP: A platoon of "C" company of the Devon and Dorsets moved to Mackenzie and around 5.00 p.m. of that date, the aircraft was loaded with your company and put off from Atkinson for Mackenzie, arriving there at 5.30 p.m.

KING: Correct, about that time.

RAMSAROOP: You mentioned that after a briefing with the police, Lieutenant Thomas sent three patrols across the river to Wismar where they began operation at approximately 6.15 p.m.

KING: That is so.

RAMSAROOP: About 8.00 p.m. on the 25th May did you give orders to "O.C.C. Company," "1 D" and "D"? What would that be?

KING: Officer commanding "C" Company, First Devon and Dorset Regiment.

RAMSAROOP: You gave orders around 8.00 p.m. to move to Mackenzie with the tactical headquarters?

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KING: Yes, that is a small headquarters.

RAMSAROOP: And another platoon to Mackenzie?

KING: Yes.

RAMSAROOP: And for this purpose the Demba launch “Pobris” was being sent to Mackenzie and that launch was scheduled to be at Atkinson stelling about 8.00 p.m.

KING: No, about 12.00 midnight.

RAMSAROOP: These troops left at 0030 hours. What would be that be?

KING: That is thirty minutes after midnight, on the 26th of May.

RAMSAROOP: And they arrived at Mackenzie at 0400 hours.

KING: That is four in the morning of the 26th May.

RAMSAROOP: And patrols from these reinforcements were operating by 0530 hours?

KING: That is 5.30 a.m. on the morning of the 26th.

RAMSAROOP: At the time of the Sun Chapman incident following the disturbances at Wismar-Christianburg-Mackenzie, can you recall what was the strength of your troops at Mackenzie?

KING: There was a company of about ninety British troops.

SHEPHERD: Is it a fact that troops were flown out from the U.K. on 24th and were in action at Wismar on the 25th?

KING: No sir. Not quite. Troops were flown on the 23rd and they arrived on the 24th.

MR. SHEPHERD: The 24th was a Sunday?

WITNESS: Yes sir.

SHEPHERD: It is true that there were other British troops in the action in other parts of B.G.?

KING: That is true.

SHEPHERD: These troops, the “C” company of the first battalion of the Devon and Dorset Regiment, were most conveniently dispersed for you in the Wismar area?

KING: That is right, because the remainder of the British troops were sent flying across. With the exception of some British troops in Georgetown there were no other. And the first battalion of the Devon and Dorset Regiment has just come in from England.

SHEPHERD: And they were already at Atkinson Field, and it was on the 25th that the Commissioner of Police told you that there was transport to take them and the transport was in fact the Dakota.

KING: Yes. That is correct.

SHEPHERD: Is it correct that the British troops are trained primarily as soldiers not as policemen?

KING: That is so.

SHEPHERD: But is it practice to give aid to the civil power to quell disturbances?

KING: That is so.

SHEPHERD: In this case following the meeting of the Security Council on the 25th you had a request from the Commissioner of Police to give aid to the civil power. Have you the request in writing?

KING: I have a photostatic copy of that request.

The Wismar Commission Report

SHEPHERD: I suggest that the record be submitted to serve as exhibit. When only one platoon had been sent ahead apparently they were indisposed. Is that so?

KING: Not necessarily the case every time.

SHEPHERD: When the officer commanding the "C" company arrived personally at Wismar he took them to operations?

KING: Yes, he did.

SHEPHERD: Thank you. No further questions

PRATAP N. SINGH: No questions.

DRAYTON: Colonel King, you say that on the night of the 24th you received a message from the Police Force control.

KING: No sir. We always get in touch with the Police Force control. We always keep in touch with the men of Force control at the police station. In case any report should come in about the trouble area, we could be able to send the troops right away.

DRAYTON: What time was it?

KING: I think it was about 10.00 to 11.00 p.m. I was told before of that.

DRAYTON: How long before?

KING: About an hour.

DRAYTON: About 9.00 p.m. somebody told you that they were disturbing at Wismar, and that the situation was tense, but you heard from the Police Force control at about 10.00 p.m. on the Sunday the situation was grave, so you immediately dispatched the first company of the Devon and Dorset Regiment. Do you always do that?

KING: That's the normal thing we always do.

DRAYTON: After you received the report, you thought there might be trouble and you automatically shortened the notice. You foresaw trouble?

KING: I thought it might be trouble.

DRAYTON: Did you have any discussion with the Commissioner of Police between 10.00 p.m. on the Sunday and the Security Council meeting on the 25th?

KING: I believe I did. The Commissioner told me that he had sent one of his policemen to Wismar to see what the situation was at the time. During the night of the 24th he didn't have the report from Mr. Isaacs at the time.

DRAYTON: What time was this?

KING: About nine o'clock in the morning.

DRAYTON: But the reports have come in about the disaster the previous night. Was the Commissioner aware of this?

KING: I assume he was aware.

DRAYTON: Who were present at the meeting on the 25th May?

KING: The Minister, Commissioner of Police, myself and the Permanent Secretary of Home Affairs.

Transcripts – Day 10

DRAYTON: When the Minister made the request that the British Army should come to the assistance of the police and Volunteer Force at Wismar, did you remember what the situation had been?

KING: I thought the situation was not fully known.

DRAYTON: How long did the Security Council meeting last?

KING: I think about forty-five minutes.

DRAYTON: About 3.00 p.m. you arrived at the headquarters and within minutes of your return, the information suddenly became available about the extreme gravity. You had the report from Wismar and it was necessary to ask for the assistance of the British forces. Did you happen to know the time Assistant Commissioner Isaacs arrived at Mackenzie?

KING: No.

DRAYTON: At the Security Council meeting, after the Minister made a suggestion, why wasn't it taken up? Did you comment on it?

KING: I made no comment on the matter.

MOOTOO: You said that your troops did not leave at 3.45 from Atkinson Field?

KING: Because there was no aircraft available until four.

MOOTOO: You said the Commissioner of Police rang you up and said that your craft would be ready at four o'clock, and that it was standing by. Why didn't you take off at that time?

KING: We had to load food, ammunition and radio sets. All this takes time, and the troops were told to stand by because they were given one hour's notice.

MOOTOO: Do you always wait this long?

KING: It depends. Sometimes soldiers are kept longer than necessary when they are not fully equipped.

MOOTOO: Why did you not put them on thirty minutes alert?

KING: The aircraft was not ready, and they would not have been able to leave in thirty minutes.

CHAIRMAN: A formal request for assistance to the civil power had to be from the Commissioner of Police?

KING: The Minister informed the Governor if the troops were required to give assistance to the civil powers.

MOOTOO: She appointed the Commissioner of Police so she could have directed you?

CHAIRMAN: The Minister could have directed him?

KING: Yes sir. In this circumstance she had appointed the Commissioner of Police as her representative.

CHAIRMAN: Only in these circumstances?

KING: It was on the 22nd May that the Minister advised the Governor that she wished the Commissioner of Police initiate the intervention of troops under my command if it became necessary.

CHAIRMAN: Could you say if she had completely delegated the powers to the Commissioner of Police?

KING: No sir. She could have delegated the powers herself.

The Wismar Commission Report

CHAIRMAN: I have my notes and I will read them for you. "Wismar was first discussed. I asked if it was necessary now to send the troops to the area. Commissioner of Police felt that things were in hand and that he did not want to do anything because no trouble had been reported. I expressed fully my interest in the Wismar situation and I expressed fully that the officer in charge should report."

You were also informed that the Volunteer Force had been embodied and had been working in conjunction with the police?

KING: I believe so.

CHAIRMAN: Around about eleven minutes to eleven o'clock you received a telephone call or a wireless message?

KING: It was a telephone call.

CHAIRMAN: Now the "C" company was at Atkinson Field having arrived about twenty-four hours before, that is, Sunday. They were posted for duty at Diamond Estate on the East Bank?

KING: I don't think so.

CHAIRMAN: The evidence of the lieutenant is that he left Diamond after your information at ten minutes to eleven on the night of the 24th. Was there a change in the stand-by order?

KING: I did not do it at that time because there were occasions of beatings. In actual fact I told them that they would leave at one hour's notice from five o'clock that morning.

CHAIRMAN: That was for Mackenzie?

KING: This was not known to them but I had Mackenzie in mind.

CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

DRAYTON: Would you say that the Minister of Home Affairs had power to sign a request suggesting this and that you would have been obliged to act on it?

KING: Yes sir. I would have had to inform the Governor of course. In fact if I had not a letter from the Governor previously on 22nd May and had received a directive from the Minister of Home Affairs I would have had to refer the matter to the Governor's Office.

DRAYTON: When the Commissioner of Police issued a directive, were you obliged to obey it? Yes or no?

SHEPHERD: Colonel King is a commanding officer and cannot give a direct answer.

KING: No government can order me. They can only request my assistance.

DRAYTON: So, in fact, neither the Minister of Home Affairs nor the Governor could have insisted on your making troops available to the areas?

KING: Only the Governor.

DRAYTON: So in fact you would say that if the Minister of Home Affairs at the Security Council meeting made her suggestion and this suggestion was turned down by the Commissioner of Police you could have refused to go on duty?

KING: I could have.

PRATAP N. SINGH: So, in fact, did you say if the Minister of Home Affairs at the Security Council suggested that at the meeting on the 24th and 25th – was it suggested? The suggestion was turned down by the Commissioner of Police?

Transcripts – Day 10

KING: Yes.

PRATAP N. SINGH: With information at your disposal would you have refused to accept it?

KING: At that time I don't know. I must take advice from the police.

PRATAP N. SINGH: And not act on the Minister of Home Affairs.

KING: Yes. It had been made not at that time. Yes, Mrs. Jagan had been to the people and had come to the conclusion and had signed as the Minister of Home Affairs.

PRATAP N. SINGH: You could have tendered it and not to accept Mrs. Jagan request.

KING: I would tell you exactly what I would have done. I would have got an aeroplane and flown to Mackenzie and then had a look at the position for myself.

PRATAP N. SINGH: But you could not have dispatched British troops on information of the Minister at that time.

KING: No because the information was not there.

PRATAP N. SINGH: Thank you.

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CHAIRMAN: You said you received a letter from the Governor on the 22nd May which more or less stated that if you received a request from the Home Affairs Minister or the Police you could be able to act on the advice of either of them.

KING: Yes sir.

CHAIRMAN: Could we have a copy of that?

KING: Yes, you may indeed.

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PRATAP N. SINGH: A photostatic copy.

CHAIRMAN: Yes. Proceed Mr. Shepherd.

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SHEPHERD: On the 22nd May, the day of the conference meeting, was it stated?

KING: Of course it was stated, sir.

SHEPHERD: Did you ask for the evidence or not.

KING: I did not request anything, sir. I don't know the nature of the evidence.

CHAIRMAN: You did not request it?

KING: No, I do not because if I did not have evidence. It would begin to fall into place. I stated that the emergency was declared by the Governor acting on the advice of the Premier or acting on the advice of the Council of Ministers.

SHEPHERD: You say that the Governor sent you the minutes asking to post your troops to support the civil power.

KING: The governor of course is Commander in Chief.

SHEPHERD: You replied as garrison commander in British Guiana.

KING: This is so.

SHEPHERD: So you may move with orders not otherwise.

KING: Yes.

The Wismar Commission Report

SHEPHERD: The Governor had, of course, authorised you to act on support of the civil power and you were in another situation.

KING: Yes.

SHEPHERD: And you will have to act on the discretion of people and you would not act especially in writing by a representative of the local government or the Council of Ministers. So far as you are aware internal security is the responsibility of the Council of Ministers?

KING: That is so.

SHEPHERD: The defence of British Guiana upon the other hand of the imperial power is represented by the governor.

KING: Right, sir.

SHEPHERD: I am formally asking the Commission to call the Premier so I can question him about the Council of Ministers and its role in an immediate emergency in British Guiana; and that would be the formal request. I imagine the Commission can grant it because I want to hear it from the lips of the Premier. The emergency then, Colonel King, had been in course just two days prior to the Security Council?

KING: Yes.

SHEPHERD: The troops who were ready at your disposal were those who had just arrived. The Devon and Dorset at Atkinson were sent?

KING: They were the only troops there.

SHEPHERD: Would it be right to say that the troops had been flown two days before action?

KING: Yes.

SHEPHERD: There would have been enough troops from elsewhere and they would have been ready for removal.

KING: Definitely. It would have meant moving the troops elsewhere.

SHEPHERD: If the troops had not arrived would that have involved jeopardising the position?

KING: Yes. Certainly.

SHEPHERD: No further questions.

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CHAIRMAN: Thank you Colonel King.

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SHEPHERD: If Colonel King would now be relieved we will be pleased because he has many things to do.

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CHAIRMAN: Gentlemen, we will resume court tomorrow at 9.30 and continue until 12.30 in order to get through with the volunteers.