

# [Dyer testimony mark-up]

THE DISORDERS INQUIRY COMMITTEE

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## EVIDENCE

TAKEN BEFORE THE

### Disorders Inquiry Committee

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VOLUME

III

AMRITSAR



[ "When the heir of all the ages 'has the honour to remain,'  
When he will not hear an insult, though men make it ne'er so plain,  
When his lips are schooled to meekness, when his back is bowed to blows --  
Well the keen-aas vogels know it -- well the waiting jackal knows.



Build on the flanks of Etna where the sullen smoke-puffs float --  
Or bathe in tropic waters where the lean fin dogs the boat --  
Cock the gun that is not loaded, cook the frozen dynamite --  
But oh, beware my country, when my country grows polite!"

-Rudyard Kipling, "Et Dona Ferentes" ]

CALCUTTA  
SUPERINTENDENT GOVERNMENT PRINTING, INDIA  
1920

"Evidently those who came believing the British 'Raj' was at an end were themselves not very innocent . . . I fired and continued to fire . . . If more troops had been at hand the casualties would have been greater in proportion."

Brigdr.-Genl. R. E. H. DYER.

[Continued.]

plans and leaving a reserve for emergencies I marched with the piquetting parties and a special party consisting of 25 rifles, 1-9th Gurkhas, 25 rifles, 54th Sikhs, F. F. and 59th Rifles, F. F. and 2 armoured cars. There were also 40 Gurkhas armed only with "kukris" with the special party. These were all the troops available after providing for the piquets, reserves, and duties. I proceeded through the city towards the Jallianwalla Bagh at the usual pace, dropping my piquetting parties as I marched. The gathering in the Jallianwalla Bagh must have received ample warning of my coming, and I personally had ample time to consider the nature of the painful duty I might be faced with. I passed with my infantry through a narrow lane into the Jallianwalla Bagh and at once deployed them to the right and left of the entrance in the square. The armoured cars remained outside the square and never came into action as the lane was too narrow to admit them.

I was faced by a dense mass of men evidently holding a seditious meeting. In the centre of the square was a raised platform and a man on it was gesticulating and addressing the crowd. The crowd appeared to be a mixed one, consisting of city people and outsiders. I did not see a single woman or child in the assembly. Many villagers were, I understand, induced to come to the Bagh by a promise that their taxes and land revenues would be abolished as the British "Raj" was at an end. Evidently those who came believing the British "Raj" was at an end were themselves not very innocent.

I had heard a great deal about the *Danda Fauj*, I was aware of the dastardly acts of cruelty which had been committed on the 10th.

Messages written and verbal were momentarily coming in to me on the 12th and 13th April telling me of fresh acts of violence and of the growing seriousness of the situation (*vide* Appendix V).

Amritsar, from a military point of view, would soon be completely isolated if matters were allowed to continue as they were doing. Communications by rail, telephone and telegraph had already been once severed.

The "*hartal*" continued in Gujranwala, Lahore, Lyallpur and other large cities until the news of the firing and the consequent opening of the shops at Amritsar on the 14th spread and then the news (exaggerated) of the measures taken against the mob at Amritsar reduced their *moral*, and they did not carry out their plans of loot and murder.

My work that morning, in personally conducting the proclamation, must be looked upon as one transaction with what had now come to pass. There was no reason to further parley with the mob, evidently they were there to defy the arm of the law.

The responsibility was very great. If I fired I must fire with good effect, a small amount of firing would be a criminal act of folly.

I had the choice of carrying out a very distasteful and horrible duty or of neglecting to do my duty, of suppressing disorder or of becoming responsible for all future bloodshed.

We cannot be very brave unless we be possessed of a greater fear. I had considered the matter from every point of view. My duty and my military instincts told me to fire. My conscience was also clear on that point. What faced me was, what on the morrow would be the *Danda Fauj*.

I fired and continued to fire until the crowd dispersed and I consider this is the least amount of firing which would produce the necessary moral, and widespread effect it was my duty to produce, if I was to justify my action. If more troops had been at hand the casualties would have been greater in proportion. *It was no longer a question of merely dispersing the crowd*; but one of producing a sufficient moral effect, from a military point of view, not only on those who were present but more specially throughout the Punjab. There could be no question of undue severity.

Immediately after ceasing fire, the troops returned to the Ram Bagh and at once, on arrival, the men's

pouches were examined. It was noted that 1,650 rounds had been fired. The ammunition used was .303" Mark VI, the ordinary ammunition issued by arsenal and used throughout the army. Fire was directed on to the crowds and not on to individuals. No military parties visited the Bagh subsequent to the firing either that night or the following morning.

The necessity was very great indeed and the means have been justified by the end.

A reference to a proclamation by the Governor General in Council, dated 14th April will show that my estimate of the situation was correct:—

Open rebellion reigned in Amritsar and it was my duty to suppress it.

Many inhabitants subsequently thanked me and recognized that I had committed a just and merciful act. In later days I was thanked by thousands and the press on one occasion was greater than the Circuit House grounds could hold.

I then estimated the crowd to number 5,000 but now learn that there were probably from 25,000 to 30,000 collected there and every man who escaped from the Jallianwalla Bagh was a messenger to tell that law and order had been restored in Amritsar.

It may be asked whether after the shooting was over, I offered help to the wounded. I did not offer help because the military situation had to be considered throughout the incident. The crowd was so dense that if a determined rush had been made at any time, arms or no arms, my small force must instantly have been overpowered and consequently I was very careful of not giving the mob a chance of organizing. I sometimes ceased fire and redirected my fire where the crowd was collecting more thickly. By the time I had completely dispersed the crowd my ammunition was running short. I returned to the Ram Bagh without counting or inspecting the casualties. The crowd was free now to ask for medical aid, but this they avoided doing lest they themselves be proved to have attended the assembly. They asked if they might bury their dead, and to this I consented. A proclamation was issued that evening and military law and restrictions were relaxed to enable them to do this (*vide* Appendix VI).

It was now necessary to arrest the wrong-doers, and in this I was most ably and energetically assisted by Mr. Rehill, Superintendent of Police, and by one, Ashraf Khan, City Inspector of Police. I fear Ashraf Khan has made many enemies in consequence and I would here put on record my appreciation of his work.

To restore things to their normal conditions and to prevent looting and bribery, I initiated the following:—

- (1) I organized all the pleaders and barristers in the city as special constables. The city was divided off into sections and special constables, assisted by military patrols, appointed to maintain law and order. These special constables reported to me thrice daily at the Ram Bagh and they were made responsible for immediately suppressing and reporting to me the committal of unlawful acts. They did their work, with few exceptions, very well indeed (*vide* Appendix VII).\*
- (2) I placed a large picquet of Gurkhas at the Kotwali to help the Police in carrying out their normal duties.
- (3) I invited those who knew of acts of bribery or corruption, to report to me personally, and they were informed that I was eager to make an example of culprits.

The city very quickly assumed normal conditions and was soon a pattern of law and order.

Military patrols visited the various quarters night and day.

Blackmail may possibly have been levied but no cases of this were reported to me.

Had prompt measures not been taken on the 13th and had the Punjab Government not expressed their (*vide*

\* Page 214.

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