

Bren Gun Proposal Discussed

Factory Seen Before Inglis Contract

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OTTAWA, Sept. 28—(C.P.)—Four months before Major J. E. Hahn made his first proposal to the Department of National Defence, an officer of the Department discussed the gun with the manager of a rifle factory, Mr. Justice H. H. Davis, Royal Commissioner on the Bren gun contract was told today.

The officer was Lieut. M. P. Jolley of the ordnance branch. The name of the factory was not given, but Lieut. Jolley on the witness stand, said so far as he knew it was the only one in Canada. It was producing small sporting rifles.

Lieut. Jolley was questioned about his visit to the factory by Lieut.-Col. George Drew whose criticism of the contract under which the John Inglis Company, headed by Major Hahn, led to the inquiry.

Machinery Found Unsuitable

He said he visited the factory in making surveys of industrial establishments to ascertain their capability of producing supplies of various kinds. He showed the manager a picture of the Bren gun and explained it. They discussed the possibility of producing it in the factory, but both were agreed the machinery there was unsuitable.

"At least we may say that the equipment was as good as the equipment Major Hahn had at that time," remarked Col. Drew.

Mr. Justice Davis said he would be glad to hear the manager of the rifle factory if he wished to come forward and give his version of the conversation. He asked how large the factory was.

Lieut. Jolley said he thought it employed between 100 and 200 men.

To Col. Drew he said he would not dispute a suggestion that the factory produced high-powered sporting rifles as well as small ones or that it had a capacity of 20,000 rifles a year.

Hon. J. L. Ralston, Government counsel, said that Lieut. Jolley's duties did not involve making decisions or deciding policy and Mr. Justice Davis said higher officials would have to speak as to that.

"I imagine General Caldwell (Major-General A. C. Caldwell, Master General of the Ordnance) can answer such questions," said Col. Drew.

Col. Ralston said Gen. Caldwell was ill in hospital and Col. Drew hoped he would be present later

as he would be an important witness.

Lieut. Jolley said he checked various estimates on the cost of producing Bren guns in Canada against costs of production in England. He was working on estimates all the time and had no comparable Canadian figures.

Cross-examined, Lieut. Jolley told Col. Drew he had visited the plant of the Inglis Company in Toronto last May, when he saw Major Hahn and other company personnel.

Building Equipped With Machinery

He had seen several buildings equipped with heavy machinery that had been recently reconditioned and put into working order. Some work was passing through the heavy machine shops.

A smaller building had been set aside for the projected manufacture of the Bren gun. The first carload of Ross rifle machines had arrived the day before.

Lieut. Jolley said he had visited the Ross rifle factory at Valcartier, Que., in 1936, examining each machine with regard to type and condition. None of the machines were newer than 1915, he thought, and some looked if they had been made in 1900.

He estimated, however, there were enough rifling machines in proper condition to take care of rifling the Bren guns. About five or six such machines would be so employed.

"On the basis of your experience in England you said the Inglis plant appeared satisfactory?" asked Col. Drew.

"To a certain extent," said Lieut. Jolley.

"I'm glad to know it was only to a certain extent," said Col. Drew.

"How many profiling machines would it take to produce 50 guns a week?"

"I couldn't say."

Lieut. Jolley asked permission to make a statement. He said he had studied the Inglis plans and ascertained they had been prepared on the basis of the Enfield production in England. He had learned the Inglis company had actually obtained its plans from the Enfield factory.

"Yes, but that was after the contract was signed," said the Commissioner. "You did not know that before the contract was signed."

"That is correct," he said.

No Machinery In Bren Building

Lieut. Jolley stated that he visited the Inglis plant in August, 1938, and there was no machinery in the building in which the Bren guns were to be made. He had made no memorandum on his visit.

"Did you not report to any superior officer?" asked Justice Davis, "or did you consider the fact the machinery was not there was of no consequence?"

"In any case four months and one week after the contract was signed there was no machinery in the building in which those guns were to be made," said Col. Drew.

Lieut. Jolley had studied copies of the original contract, but had made no memorandum on it.

Prior to meeting Major Hahn in 1936 he had visited one other factory in Canada which manufactured .22 calibre rifles and parts for shot guns. He thought this plant, which he felt he could not name, might have a capacity of 5,000 such rifles a year. He would not be prepared to deny that that capacity might be 20,000 a year.

Machines Not Suited To Plan

He had shown a photograph of the Bren gun to the plant manager, described it and asked the possibility of making it in his plant.

It was obvious to him and the manager that his machines were not suited to that type of production.

The manager was not particularly interested in producing anything beyond what his own plant produced, witness said.

He did not go back to this plant after he found that Bren guns were to be manufactured in Canada, Lieut. Jolley said.

Justice Davis interposed to say that witness was not an official who dictated policy. Lieut. Jolley said there were about 100 or 200 men at work in this factory.

"If the manager of this unknown company reads this evidence in the press and desires to come and make some comment on it, no doubt we will be glad to have him," said Justice Davis.

Lieut. Jolley examined no other factories with a view to determining their suitability for the manufacture of Bren guns.