

The Aboriginal History Project

Newspaper Archive

Daily Mercury 7 March 1930

PALM ISLAND TRAGEDY.

GRAPHIC STORIES OF THE SHOOTING.

Inquiry at Townsville.

Graphic stories were told by witnesses at the inquiry conducted by the Townsville Police Magistrate into the death of Robert Curry, Edna Curry, and Robert Curry, jun., at Palm Island.

Lengthy evidence was given by Thomas Hoffman, assistant superintendent of the settlement. Hoffman said that on Sunday evening, February 2, he talked with Curry on the beach. The deceased then seemed to be all right. The only time he had words with Curry was just before Christmas, when Curry, said witness, insulted his friends, and remarked, "I was paid to shoot — Germans like you, and I will get you before long." He apologised two days later. That was the only disagreement they had ever had, and they were all right after it. Witness was awakened just on 12 o'clock on the night of February 2 by Curry, who said he was going down to the farm for Alley, and added, "The doctor (Dr. Pattison) has got me beat. He (Alley) has got to go to town. I thought I would let you know why the car was going out." Alley was a prisoner at the farm, having been sentenced the previous day for contempt of court. Alley was ordered to town to have a blood test made. Witness thought the launch was going earlier than usual, but attached no importance to it. Witness heard the car return about a quarter of an hour later.

About 10 minutes afterwards he heard an explosion and saw Curry's house afire. He ran to the house, forced the veranda door off its hinges, and saw that the ceilings and partitions had fallen on top of the beds and were ablaze. He heard scream-

ing at the back, and as he came out a bullet whizzed past him, followed by another shot. Two girls, Melambi and Aggie, were in the gaol. He and Hamilton forced a hole through the back wall and released them. Then he found his own house was on fire, and later the office, school, and store were set afire. After daylight witness saw Curry on the Esma, and then transfer to the Rita. After that was burnt he left for Fantome Island. Later in the morning Morecombe arrived from Fantome Island. Curry sent a message by him that he was going to get all the "Migelos," meaning whites. Later, at the doctor's residence, he saw some natives with firearms. The doctor said, "You are not going to let him land back here, are you?" Witness said, "No." The boys asked for small ammunition. They said they were not going to let him land.

Inspector Loch: Did you give them instructions to shoot in the event of Curry returning to the island?—No. They said they were not going to let him land. I said, "All right."

Inspector Loch: At what time were you informed they were returning?—About 4.30.

Continuing, witness said they shifted the women to the back of the bay, up behind a ridge, about half a mile back. Hamilton, the launch attendant, had a poisoned foot. He (witness) was the first there. He half-carried his wife. Ballard and