

Messrs. Kirk and Atkinson not acting as agents but principals?—I want to explain to you distinctly that I take upon myself the responsibility of the change from agents to vendors. When I took that responsibility on myself I took it in this way: The Minister having approved the expenditure of £3,000 on the Polhill Gully rifle-range, I, as Under-Secretary, carried out the details. I did so, and, in doing so, Messrs. Kirk and Atkinson came into the position of agents or vendors. I accepted that position on my own responsibility. I did not do that until I had consulted Mr. Mackay, the Government expert, on the price. Mr. Mackay's minute distinctly states to me that he does not consider the price unreasonable.

217. Your offer to Messrs. Kirk and Atkinson was made a month before Mr. Mackay's valuation was received?—I do not see how you can make anything else out of it.

218. What I wish you to answer distinctly now is whether the change from agents to vendors, accepted in your second letter, was made on your own responsibility, and without the authority of the Minister?—My own personal impression is that I took it down to Captain Russell. He might have said, "I see no objection to this," and let it pass on; but I am not prepared to say, or even vouch for it. I did not attach any importance to the change from agents to vendors. I thought it was a desirable purchase when backed up by Mr. Mackay. I suppose the Commission will take the evidence of the Property-tax Commissioner upon it. The Property-tax Department's valuation ought to be taken about that.

219. I want you to answer my question. Then, what I understand now is that you made that offer on your own responsibility?—Yes.

220. Did you ever inform Captain Russell of the change?—No.

221. Were you in the House when he stated he did not know of it?—No; I have since seen it in *Hansard*. I never noticed it until you pointed it out to me. If Captain Russell said so in the House I will say it is strictly true.

222. Then, you never heard him express any indignation about the employment of Kirk and Atkinson as principals. In his communications with you he expressed no indignation at the change?—I do not understand the question.

223. You see the strong indignation expressed by him in the House?—Yes.

224. Does not that show that you never put Kirk and Atkinson's letter before him?—Probably.

225. *Mr. Baker.*] Were you aware when the change was made that Kirk and Atkinson had an interest in the land themselves?—No; I knew Mr. Blair had an interest.

*Mr. Kirk:* One question. Captain Humfrey says he knew Mr. Blair had an interest in the land. I wish to ask him if he did not know that from the fact of my telling him that Mr. Blair was interested, but we were able to control the sale of it.

*Captain Humfrey:* Mr. Blair's name was mentioned. No doubt that took place.

226. *Mr. Baker.*] You remember Mr. Blair's name being mentioned. Was it mentioned when the first letter was written proposing the change from agents to vendors?—There was no mention of it.

Colonel Fox examined.

227. *The Chairman.*] You are Colonel Fox?—Yes.

228. You appear here as an expert, to give evidence as to the value—or is it suitability—of the range?—Yes, suitability.

229. You have personally inspected it?—I received a letter this morning saying the Commission wished me to inspect the range, and appear here at 2 o'clock. Before saying anything on the subject, I wish to point out that, not having received that letter until this morning, I therefore had very little time given me to come to any conclusion as regards the suitability or otherwise of the range.

230. You would like more time?—That depends upon the evidence you require me to give. I am quite willing to give evidence at once, if you allow me leave to refuse to answer any question which I consider I have not had time to consider.

231. Have you been able to ascertain what land has actually been purchased?—I went over the ground, but, if I had had the plan or the papers here, it would have helped me to a great extent. I was told in the Government Buildings that the Government plan of the range was here, and I could not get it.

232. Will you give the Commissioners your opinion now as to how far you think the range suitable—the land now occupied by the Government?—I consider both ranges, under certain conditions, passably safe; but if the land outside is not held they are absolutely unsafe for any firing. The smaller range—the left-hand one—which extends to about 300 yards, is backed by a hill somewhere about 70 yards from the targets, and I see from the plan in front of me that it does not belong to the Government, and I understand there are no firing rights—that is, the section I am now looking at, marked 5.

233. *Mr. Baker.*] The Government at the present moment hold a lease over that?—Then, I withdraw my former statement. I think firing (so long as the road marked on the plan does not come into existence) over the smaller range is fairly safe.

234. *The Chairman.*] But we really want your opinion of it more as it stands now?—At the present moment, with the leasehold behind, it is a fairly safe range to fire on. As regards the 600 yards range, the land on the right is not held by us at all. There certainly ought to be a margin of 80 yards at least on that side held by us, and we should have firing rights over the land in the rear of the targets. Here we have no rights at all, unless the Government acquire it. Before that range is safe to use you ought to establish your firing right over your neighbour's land—that is, you should take the leasehold at a nominal rent of so much per acre. Without that right I think at any moment the Government might land themselves in great difficulties.

235. You think that both the land on the right-hand side of the larger range and the land