

Witness Name: Edward Harriman

Statement No: WITN00696001

Exhibits: **WITN0696002-3**

Dated: 29 April 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF Edward Harriman

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 16 November 2018.

I, Edward Harriman, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Edward Harriman; I prefer to be addressed as Ed. My date of birth is **GRO-C** 1943. I am a US Citizen resident in the UK since 1965. I live in London. I am an investigative journalist. I intend to speak about my experience researching the blood business in Belize and the writing of my article in the New Scientist, which featured on 13 March 1980. Vol 85 No1198. The title of my article was '**Blood Money**'

Section 2. Professional Background

2. I am a television producer/ director making documentary films for all of the UK's main terrestrial channels, including many 'investigative' films for **World In Action** where I was on the staff of **Panorama** and **Dispatches**, since the 1970s. I also write investigative pieces in the British press when I have the time.

3. I have a Masters Degree in International Relations and a Ph.D. in Sociology from the London School of Economics.
4. I attached my full CV and produce this as Exhibit **WITN0696002**.

Section 3. New Scientist Article, 1980

Background

5. On a trip to Central America in the latter part of 1979, to research possible **World in Action** programmes, I travelled to Nicaragua where the dictator **Anastasio Somoza** had recently been overthrown. I had heard that he had an interest in a blood business, **Plasmaferesis**, exporting blood to a company in Miami.
6. I had also been told that before Somoza was overthrown, La Prensa, the main (opposition) newspaper in Nicaragua, run by Pedro Chamorro, had run a piece about Somoza's blood business.
7. The current Wikipedia entry for Somoza refers to this:

Anastasio Somoza and his son were both part owners of Plasmaferesis. The company collected blood plasma from up to 1,000 of Nicaragua's poorest every day for sale in the United States and Europe. According to El Diario Nuevo and La Prensa, "Every morning the homeless, drunks, and poor people went to sell half a liter of blood for 35 (Nicaraguan) cordobas.
8. See also: <https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/Company-of-US-backed-Somoza-Sucked-Nicaraguan-Blood--Literally-20160719-0022.html>

This article, published in 2016, states the following:

'The company collected blood plasma from up to 1,000 of Nicaragua's poorest every day for sale in the United States and Europe.

*While Nicaragua suffered scores of human rights abuses under the decades-long Somoza dictatorship in the leadup to the **Sandinista Revolution** in 1979, the Somoza family was also simultaneously involved in a little-known but shocking business venture exploiting poor Nicaraguan people: literally sucking their blood to sell for hefty profits in the United States.*

The aptly-named company Plasmaferesis was launched in Nicaragua in the 1970's by Pedro Ramos, a right-wing Cuban doctor who left the country after

the Cuban Revolution brought Fidel Castro to power. The company bought blood on the cheap from poor and desperate Nicaraguans, separated and froze the plasma, and sent it to Europe and the United States, raking in huge profits.

The Somoza regime was directly linked to the shady business. Anastasio Somoza — the last of the Somoza dynasty to rule the country before his overthrow in 1979 — and his son were both part owners of Plasmaferesis, according to historical accounts of the era published in the 1980's. The firm also ran its operations on Somoza-owned property in Managua.

Adding to the controversy, Somoza was peddling Nicaraguan blood abroad at a time when the poverty-stricken country needed donations most after a devastating earthquake hit Managua in 1972. The disaster left some 6,000 people dead, 20,000 injured, and over 250,000 homeless. Medical supplies, including blood transfusions, were in short supply.

Leeching Off Intense Inequality

The Nicaraguan newspaper La Prensa, the most prominent opposition voice that criticized the Somoza dictatorship, broke the scandal in 1977 in a series dubbed the "Vampire Chronicles." According to the Nicaraguan newspaper El Diario Nuevo, founded in 1980 by a breakaway group of La Prensa staffers, the Plasmaferesis exposé was among the dictatorship-era coverage that most repulsed the society and "devastatingly impacted Somoza."

"It was a dark business," former La Prensa journalist Roberto Sanchez Ramirez told El Diario Nuevo in 2008. "Every morning the homeless, drunks, and poor people went to sell half a liter of blood for 35 (Nicaraguan) cordobas." In 2016, 35 cordobas is less than US\$1.25.

Sanchez Ramirez added that the business only existed in Nicaragua and Haiti — the two poorest countries in the Americas.

According to reports published at the time, Plasmaferesis' health standards were dismal, and the clinics would take blood from the same person up to twice a week if they showed up to sell. While health experts suggest that blood plasma is replaced in a matter of days, the body needs more than 30 days to recuperate a normal red blood cell count.

Late Philadelphia journalist Jack McKinney reported in 1990 that the business "thrived on the social inequities of Somoza's economy" and in the process, made a killing in profits.

"Ramos was the single most prosperous exporter of human blood plasma in the Western Hemisphere," wrote McKinney. "His donors were desperately poor people, who were paid a pittance for their blood at a private clinic the locals referred to contemptuously as La Casa de Vampiros, or 'The House of Vampires.'"

According to Douglas Starr, author of "Blood: An Epic History of Medicine and Commerce," Nicaragua was "the developing world's largest plasma collector" in the 1970's, taking blood from up to 1,000 people per day at its peak.

A Bloody Legacy — In More Ways Than One

Less than three months after the Plasmaferesis scandal broke thanks to a mother who went public after her son didn't return home from a trip to sell his blood, La Prensa editor Pedro Joaquin Chamorro — previously jailed several times over his opposition to the dictatorship — was assassinated by unidentified gunmen on Jan. 10, 1978.

Somoza claimed Ramos, the chief owner of Plasmaferesis, was the mastermind behind the killing. But Chamorro's family and other members of the opposition held the dictatorship directly responsible.

Chamorro's murder — possibly ultimately tipped off by the Plasmaferesis exposé that dealt a blow to both Ramos and Somoza after the editor long claimed there were plans to assassinate him — added fuel to the fire of the mounting resistance against the dictatorship. His funeral, attended by some 30,000 people, erupted in riots in the streets of Managua.

The growing movement ultimately led to the overthrow of Somoza by the Sandinista National Liberation Front, or FSLN, on July 19, 1979. Chamorro's wife Violeta Barrios de Chamorro was a member of the Sandinista-led junta during the the first years of the U.S.-backed Contra War from 1979 to 1980. She later became the country's president in 1990.

Meanwhile, Somoza, whose regime oversaw widespread human rights abuses in his attempt to crack down on the Sandanista rebellion — including torture and extrajudicial killings — fled to Miami, and later to dictator Alfredo Stroessner's Paraguay, where he was assassinated in 1980.

Ramos, on the other hand, took refuge in Miami, where he died. He was tried in absentia and found guilty of murder after the Sandinista Revolution, but he never returned to Nicaragua to face his bloody past'

9. In 1979, I had also been told that Chamorro's paper had run a story about allegations that members of the Nicaraguan military had been draining blood from corpses of people who they had killed, and that this was also a major source of Samosa's commercial blood supply.
10. Chamorro was assassinated in 1978, which is widely considered one of the sparks that fuelled the revolution against Somosa, who fled the country in July 1979.
11. I met with Violeta Chamorro, Pedro's widow, at their home, along with some members of their family. They confirmed most of what I had been told. My interest was to find out to whom and where

Plasmaferesis sold and exported the blood, and what had happened to the company.

12. They told me that the company had tried to set up in several Caribbean countries but was only welcomed in Belize, from where it was running its business. Violeta and her family put me in touch with people who had worked for or knew people who had worked for Plasmaferesis in Nicaragua and they confirmed that the business had moved to Belize.
13. I flew to Belize. The blood business was located on a street down from Barclays Bank. Next-door was a multi-vitamin store. Donors would have to wait a week before they could give blood again. *'A' I was told.*
14. Down the road was a bar/café for which donors would receive a chip for food. They also received money. Across the street from the blood business was a bar. Sitting there were many people who were drunk and/or on drugs. I was told that these were local people who commonly spent their blood donation payments on alcohol and drugs. GRO-C
15. They were dishevelled and dirty. Their clothes looked as though they had not been washed for 6 months. I was told that these were regular blood donors, waiting out the time until they could again give blood.
16. There were advertisements on the local radio that I heard, and a government minister's family was financially involved in the business. A discount was offered on the multi- vitamins shop next door for anyone who had given blood.
17. I went to the hospital to enquire about the hospital's blood supply for operations and other medical needs. Hospital staff told me that there was often a shortage, and that the hospital supplies had been particularly effected by the radio advertisements about the blood business. I was told that the blood business was shipping the blood to a man in Florida, Pedro Ramos.
18. I was told that I should come back the next day to speak to a surgeon, which I did. On my return I was told by someone on the staff that no one was prepared to speak with me.
19. At the time I was staying in a cheap motel and that evening there was a knock at the door. A man had been instructed to tell me to take the first plane out the following morning. I took this as a warning and left the next day. I flew out to NR *USA.* GRO-C
20. I produce a copy of the New Scientist piece as Exhibit **WITN0696003**.
21. On returning to the US, I phoned Pedro Ramos, of Daco Distributors, in Florida.

22. As I described in the **New Scientist** article, he told me he did a good business exporting blood products to Europe including the UK, as well as selling in the United States, and mentioned some of those with whom he dealt.
23. I asked him about supplying blood specifically to the NHS. He didn't give me names of the specific companies and government entities in the UK, nor of companies based elsewhere in Europe that he supplied which may have been selling his blood products on to the NHS directly or through commercial intermediaries.
24. I returned to London. My television colleague and I were soon busy. So I wrote the piece for New Scientist and got on with making World in Actions.
25. I don't believe I have any documents I collected at the time, now some 40 years ago.
26. I was not able to complete my investigation, because I wanted to track down exactly to whom Ramos sold his blood products in the UK both directly to the NHS and through intermediaries. But I had no time then to pursue the matter further.

Section 4. Pharmaceutical Companies

27. I would have liked to and I believe it is still possible to find out who his UK clients were, both corporate and NHS. Four places I would look:
28. To export blood products from the US requires, I believe, an export license and often other official paper work. These, I believe, are held by the US Department of Commerce. I would phone the Department of Commerce and request copies and any other relevant information. I am not sure whether this would be accessible through Washington DC or the State of Florida.
29. I would also ask the Federal Drug Administration and the Center for Disease Control about these licenses and related official paperwork, how to access them for Daco Distributors, and who and what organisations have investigated the contaminated blood business in the US. They should still be on file.
30. I presume, but I do not know, that the British government, as well as other governments in Europe require licenses from importers of blood products. I would try to get hold of these and all related paperwork which, again, should still be filed somewhere and be available.

31. I would investigate the company registration files of any companies that come up, and any information as to whether they have had and/or still have business dealings with Daco Distributors or its agents, as well as any business dealings they have had with the NHS directly and with whoever was the NHS's supplier of blood products at that time.
32. I presume and would hope the enquiry is empowered to obtain documents relating to this. I would also be looking to see if specific NHS units or regions which purchased, or was supplied with Daco products had cases of patients developing adverse reactions and other consequences associated with contaminated blood.
33. I would, further, search news reports, company documents, public filings, legal databases, etc. regarding Daco Distributors and Pedro Ramos in the US, not least to discover whether they have or had been involved in litigation or criminal action regarding the blood products.
34. I would explore what the International Red Cross has said/is willing to say about its business with Ramos.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed

GRO-C

Dated

29/4/19