

Britain: Eyewitnesses reveal Jean Charles De Menezes shot without warning

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“I remember that his eyes were closed and I remember that he had ... you know, it’s a hard thing to try to explain but his eyes were closed and he looked almost calm, which again I hesitate to say that, but ... I guess he had a gun pressed, and there wasn’t very much he could do about it.”

This haunting recollection of commuter Anna Dunwoodie was one of several eyewitness accounts recently heard at the public inquest into the death of innocent Brazilian immigrant electrician Jean Charles de Menezes, which revealed more inconsistencies and contradictions in the official police version of his killing.

No commuters were called to give evidence at last year’s Metropolitan Police health and safety trial over the shooting. This is the first time they have told their stories in public. It is also the first time the two officers who shot de Menezes have given evidence. The inquest has been adjourned until December 1, when the coroner will begin summing up the evidence.

De Menezes was shot after being wrongly identified as a terrorist suspect on July 22, 2005, the day after the bungled terror attempt on the London underground, when four men left rucksacks packed with explosives on London’s transport network that failed to detonate.

The police followed a lead to the suspect Hussain Osman, who was believed to be living in the same apartment block as de Menezes. When de Menezes emerged the next morning to leave for work, he was suspected of being Osman and followed by surveillance officers onto two buses and finally down into the London underground. No attempt was made to apprehend him during his 33-minute journey, until he had already

descended into the busy station. Only then did armed officers chase after him. Directed by the surveillance team, they boarded his train, pinned him to his seat and fired seven bullets into his head at point-blank range and one bullet into his shoulder. He was killed instantly.

Police accounts portray de Menezes as a twitchy suspect wearing a bulky jacket who jumped up from his seat with his hands in a position suggesting he was about to detonate a bomb. Resisting arrest he was shot dead after police shouted they were armed.

Senior investigating officer Detective Chief Inspector Evans described how de Menezes “leapt” towards police officers, and firearms officer codenamed D9 explained how “The male suddenly stood up, tried to get away.”

Another firearms officer, codenamed C2, said, “I ran forward, I reached over the top of the surveillance officer, and I pushed him down. I shouted, ‘Armed police’, and I held my handgun to the head of the subject and I fired.” Officer “Terry” described how he reached the train shortly after C2 and said, “As I came into the carriage I could hear verbal challenges. I could hear ‘police’ and ‘armed police’ being shouted.”

This version of events is flatly contradicted by what the commuters remembered. Every one of them says Jean Charles was shot without warning. Some of them thought the police were part of a criminal gang or terrorists.

Dunwoodie told the inquest jury, “I think it was the man, who I now know to be a surveillance officer, (who) really seemed to be frightened or hyped up and when he was calling the other men they seemed... you know, when people are full of adrenalin and they move quickly and their movements are a bit jerky.”

She explained how, “Things just felt they were a bit out of control” with the police “shouting amongst themselves”—which, as Michael Mansfield, barrister for the de Menezes family pointed out, would surely have prompted Jean Charles to detonate a bomb if he was a suicide bomber.

Dunwoodie was asked:

Q. ...let me just ask you this: by the time that you heard the shots starting, had you heard anybody shout anything at Mr. de Menezes or in his direction?

A. No, I hadn't.

Q. Had you heard any shouts from the platform or the area of the platform containing the word “police”?

A. No.

Q. Had you seen Mr. de Menezes get up or move forward in any way?

A. No.

Q. As you very fairly say, your memory is one of snapshots?

A. My memory is one of snapshots, that's true. I would like to say, though, that the thing about whether or not I heard “police”, I am very, very clear on because I was—I absolutely had no idea who they were and I was looking for a clue as to who they might be, and if anybody had said “police”, I would have latched on to that, I think.

Similar exchanges occurred with Ralph Livock and his girlfriend Rachel Wilson who were sitting opposite de Menezes. After he described how four men moved down the carriage, Livock was asked:

Q. Did you have any idea who they were?

A. Absolutely not. They had no identifying—well, on the television you see people with police caps or jackets. There was nothing like that. They looked like—one of my initial thoughts was it was all a game and they were a group of lads who were just having a laugh, in a very bad taste laugh but just having a game on the tube because

they were just dressed jeans and T-shirts, but with firearms.

Q. Had you heard anything said about police?

A. No, certainly not. And I remember that specifically because one of the conversations that Rachel and I had afterwards was that immediately afterwards we had no idea whether these were police, whether they were terrorists, whether they were somebody else, we just—we had no idea.

Rachel Wilson explained how “first I thought they were messing around and then I thought they were terrorists and it was only when I left the carriage and the—somebody moved me gently out of the way that I figured they must be good guys, and apart from that I just didn't know who they were.” She also denied hearing anybody shout, “Armed police” saying “If I had heard that, I would have thought they were police, so no.”

The driver of the tube train, Quincy Akpesiri Oji, also believed the police were terrorists saying, “I saw one of the men with a large gun shooting and I thought they were fanatics and they were shooting at people on the carriage. I have run into the dark tunnel.”

“I stood there with my back against the wall for about 20 seconds. Someone flashed a light into the tunnel. I said, ‘Please do not shoot? I am the driver’.”

After hearing the evidence, Jean Charles's mother, Maria Otone, said, “None of the passengers heard the police give any warning or described Jean's actions as aggressive... It has been painful to me when police have implied he acted in a manner that contributed to his death.”



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