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Leo Ryan in Guyana

On November 18, 1978, Leo Ryan and four co-workers were shot and killed in Guyana. In order to understand the cause of these murders, it is necessary to look into the background of the story. Leo Ryan began the path to his death when he heard of a society called “Jonestown” in Guyana. Jonestown was said to be holding people against their will, and was rumored to be rehearsing for a mass suicide. Ryan’s investigation began when he joined forces with a group known as the “concerned relatives.”

When Ryan arrived in Jonestown, Jim Jones, the leader, tried to make sure that nothing negative would come out of Ryan’s visit. While Jones was being interviewed, Ryan spoke with multiple members who wished to leave the town. Later that night, Ryan heard from local Guyanese about beatings within Jonestown, and of a “torture hole” on the compound. Trouble began the next day when Ryan attempted to evacuate fifteen members who wished to leave. A member of the People’s Temple, Don Sly, attacked Ryan with a knife. Despite being uninjured, Ryan decided to cut his trip short and leave Jonestown. As Ryan and his group were boarding the plane to leave, a tractor owned by the People’s Temple pulled up and the people in the back opened fire on Ryan’s group. Leo Ryan, and four others were killed, and six others were seriously wounded.

Back at Jonestown, Jim Jones realized the trouble he was in. He told members, “It was time to meet in another place.” This resulted in a mass suicide, in which 913 people killed themselves. Jim Jones was found shot through the head. Sadly, Ryan’s suspicion of the cult-like society was finally confirmed.