

Soering: Coercion caused confession

By Leslie Postal
Staff writer

BEDFORD — Jens Soering, on the witness stand for the first time, said Friday he implicated himself in the Haysom murders because he thought



Beever

if he did not cooperate with police his girlfriend would be harmed. Soering, both eager to explain his views and apologetic that his accent was difficult for the court reporter to understand, said everything he told police in June 1986 was said under duress. Authorities have said that in those interviews, held over a four-day

period, Soering confessed to the 1985 stabbing deaths of Derek and Nancy Haysom.

But Friday, Soering, a 23-year-old West German national, said investigators "railroaded" him into making incriminating statements by threatening his girlfriend, the Haysoms' daughter, Elizabeth, and denying his repeated requests to speak with an attorney.

"My concern for Elizabeth caused me to waive my right to remain silent and my right to talk with a lawyer," Soering said. "I tried to avoid answering what I could, but I wasn't very good at it."

Even under cross examination from Commonwealth's Attorney James W. Updike Jr. — a polite exchange that belied the frustration each has probably caused the other during the last several years — Soering insisted he had no

choice but to confess to some involvement in the Haysoms' deaths to protect his girlfriend.

The second day of a hearing to determine whether Soering's confessions should be admitted during his upcoming trial revealed few details from those statements, made while he and Haysom were in custody in a London police station. Instead Friday's testimony, like Thursday's, focused



Wright

on what police officers told Soering before and between the interviews.

With five hours of taped statements

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still to listen to, Circuit Judge William W. Sweeney decided the hearing would resume this morning.

Soering's attorneys requested the hearing, saying the confessions should not be admitted during trial because they were coerced and because Soering's rights were denied.

The police officers, however, who spoke with Soering deny they threatened him, that he requested an attorney or that they violated his rights under American or British law. British custody records for that week show he never asked for an attorney nor complained about his treatment, they said.

During cross examination, Updike told Soering he wasn't coerced but instead chose to speak with police because "you felt you were smart enough to handle it yourself."

A former honors student at the University of Virginia, Soering was bright enough to understand his rights and exercise them, Updike said. And in one interview, instead of protecting Haysom, Soering appeared to be trying to implicate her, he added.

According to Soering, the first two times he was questioned on June 5, 1986, about the Haysom murders, he refused to answer questions and asked to speak with his attorney. After the second interview he was returned to a holding cell where he was visited by British Detective Inspector Kenneth Beever, who conducted the interviews along with another British officer and Bedford sheriff's investigator

he had not spoken in two weeks. Standing at a small window in the cell door, called a wicket, he said Beever said, "She's a very pretty girl all alone in that cell block. It would be an awful shame if she fell and hurt herself."

Soering said Beever raised his eyebrows when he said that and then continued, "I think you should talk to us lad, and you don't really need that lawyer do you?"

Shocked by Beever's comments, Soering said he concluded that he had to cooperate.

"I loved Elizabeth very much at that point in my life," he said. "I would have said practically anything to avoid Elizabeth getting hurt." He said that during later interviews Beever would again raise his eyebrows and point to the floor. Soering said he thought the raised eyebrow referred to the earlier conversation and the pointed finger to the holding cells downstairs where Haysom was likely being kept.

British investigator, Detective Constable Terry Wright, testified Friday that he never threatened Soering and said Soering's charges were "ridiculous."

During Wright's testimony, Soering shook his head and smiled and a few times appeared to be laughing to himself.

According to a transcript of an early interview, at one point Soering told police, "I'd like to chat about Elizabeth's involvement," Updike said.

"All this concern you have about your girlfriend, Elizabeth, and you want to talk about her involvement in these murders? This is only page 9 in all these recorded statements," he said.

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