

Worthing Gazette 19th February 1919 page

RAILWAY STATION TRAGEDY.

Army Officer's Suicide.

Victim of Shell Shock and Gassing

Evidence at the Inquest.

AFTER serving in the Army for nine years, and rising from the ranks to the position of Lieutenant, a young Artillery officer named Arthur Algernon Frankham shot himself with his revolver in the waiting room at the Railway Station on Monday morning, while on his way back to Shoreham Camp. Death was instantaneous.

An inquiry was conducted by the West Sussex Coroner (Mr. F. W. Butler) at the Central Fire Station yesterday afternoon, when it was shown that the deceased officer had been gassed and had had shell shock in France, and more recently had been run over by a motor lorry.

The Coroner, who sat without a Jury, had no hesitation in coming to the conclusion that the act was committed during a fit of temporary insanity.

The wife of the deceased was among those present, and Detective Inspector Hebborn watched the proceedings on behalf of the Railway Company.

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Returning to Camp.

Formal evidence of identification was given by GEORGE FRANKHAM, of 5, Park-street, Gosport, who deposed that the deceased was his brother, that he was 27 years of age, and that he was a Lieutenant in the Royal Garrison Artillery, stationed at Shoreham. Witness last saw him alive on Monday morning, at half-past five, when he left home to return to camp. He had come home for a week-end about midday on Saturday, and he had hardly been indoors ten minutes when he complained of pains in the head and the back of his neck. He had complained of these pains, witness believed, ever since he was gassed in France in June, 1916. He had also been run over by a motor lorry more recently. He had been very strange in his head at times, but he had never said anything to suggest that he thought of taking his life; he was the wrong sort for that. Apart from complaining of his head, he was in very good spirits during the week-end.

A Fellow Traveller.

Second Lieutenant WILLIAM ALEXANDER TWINE, of the Royal Garrison Artillery, stated that he was in the same battery as the deceased, and he met him at Fratton Station on Monday morning, travelling with him as far as Worthing by the 6.39 train. During the journey deceased remarked that he had had to get out and see about some coal for the Mess, and that he would come on by the next train. He was acting as Mess Secretary. He seemed quite jovial coming along in the train, and appeared to be in excellent spirits.

The CORONER: He did not give you the impression that he had anything on his mind?

WITNESS: Oh, no! Quite the contrary!

Answering further questions by the Coroner, WITNESS said he did not know whether the deceased had a revolver on him. If he had, he kept it out of sight.

At the Railway Station.

MARGARET ELLEN HALE, ticket collector at Worthing Station, stated that the deceased came off the train which arrived at Worthing at eight o'clock from Portsmouth. He showed a ticket from Portsmouth to Shoreham, and said he wished to go on by the next train. Witness did not see him go out of the Station, but in less than five minutes he came back and passed through the barrier on to the down platform. A few minutes after this he came through the platform doorway again, and witness thought he looked rather annoyed. She thought he was going down the steps to the up platform, but her attention was drawn elsewhere for the moment, and she did not see whether he actually went down the steps, or whether he returned on to the down platform.

JAMES ALBERT JINKS, a temporary employe at the Post Office, stated that it was part of his duty to meet the nine o'clock mail from London, and on Monday morning, finding he was a little bit early, he went into the general waiting room to read a paper. On opening the door he saw the deceased lying on the floor near the table, and on going a few steps further he noticed a pool of blood. He went back to the platform and asked a young man to get some assistance, and then went to the telegraph office and asked the lady there to wire for a doctor.

A Determined Act.

Constable ABBOTT deposed that when he was called to the Station he saw the officer lying on the floor of the waiting room. He was lying face downwards, in a pool of blood having been shot through the head. The wound went through the right temple and the brains were protruding. A six-chambered service revolver with a lanyard attached was underneath the body, and on examining it he found it contained four rounds of ammunition, one of which had been discharged. On examining the room he found the bullet produced had struck the east wall and rebounded to the west. On the waiting room table were two letters, produced. With the assistance of Constable Salmon he removed the body to the Mortuary.

Mr. HENRY WIGGINS stated that he was called to the Station, and found that the officer was quite dead. The body was quite warm, and death could not have taken place more than twenty minutes or half an hour at the outside before his arrival. The cause of death was a gunshot wound through the skull, the shot having penetrated the brain.

After-Effects of Gassing.

The CORONER: Have you had any experience of the results of gassing?

WITNESS: Yes; I was Medical Officer at Shoreham Camp for nine months.

Have you had any cases that have been affected mentally?—No, not from gas poisoning. From shell shock you might, but not from gas. Gas poisoning usually leaves bronchial and chest trouble.

The CORONER remarked that it was perfectly clear from the two letters which the deceased left behind that he contemplated taking his life. He did not wish to go into the deceased's private affairs, but it was evident that he had something weighing on his mind. It was nothing in regard to his accounts.

The deceased's BROTHER said he would like to add that his brother had had shell shock as well as gas.

The CORONER said he had no hesitation in coming to the conclusion that the deceased had a sudden impulse which he could not resist, and that he committed suicide whilst temporarily of unsound mind.