

RYDE SOLDIER'S FALL FROM STEAMBOAT

Tragedy after Leave

Extremely sad circumstances marked the death of Sergt. **John Lloyd MERKEL**, R.A., of 2 Somerset-road, Ryde. Sergt. MERKEL had spent a short leave with his wife and two children and was returning to his unit on Saturday when he accidentally fell overboard from the steamer Merstone just as the vessel was entering Portsmouth Harbour. Shortly afterwards his badly injured body was recovered from the sea. Sergt. MERKEL was a native of Newport, but for 20 years prior to the outbreak of war was employed by the Ryde office of the I.W. Electric Light Company and was held in high regard by management and staff. Deep sympathy will be felt for the widow and family in their sudden and tragic loss.

On Tuesday the Portsmouth Coroner inquired into the sad circumstances.

Sergt. Sidney George CORNELIUS, Army Fire Service, deposed that deceased was sitting on a seat at the port side of the upper deck, just forward of the bridge and paddlebox. Suddenly he got on the handrail, probably intending to look at something astern of the vessel, overbalanced, and fell. He made a definite attempt to grasp the handrail and witness tried to seize him, but was too late. Witness shouted to the captain, who immediately stopped the vessel and it remained stationary for five minutes in the hope that MERKEL would float and be rescued. This did not happen and the body was subsequently recovered from the water between Haslar and H.M.S. Vernon.

Percival KENT, captain of the Merstone, said deceased fell about 15ft and must have either struck the sponson superstructure or the outer casing of the paddle wheel in falling.

Dr. A. C. TAYLOR, who made a post-mortem examination, described deceased's injuries as of a multiple nature, including a fractured spine and left arm, with excessive hæmorrhage, which was the cause of death.

Recording a verdict of "Accidental death," the Coroner said there was definite evidence that deceased's fall was the result of misadventure.

The remains were brought to Ryde for burial and the first part of the service was held in the Elmfield Congregational Church on Thursday. The Rev. E. H. LEWIS officiated and the hymns "Abide with me" and "The King of love" were sung. Deceased was accorded military honours and the coffin was carried by N.C.O.s. The mourners were Mrs. MERKEL (widow), Miss MERKEL and Mrs. MATTHEWS (sisters), Mr. and Mrs. ORCHARD, of Brighstone (father-in-law and mother-in-law), Mr. C. COOPER, Mr. and Mrs. ROBINI, Mr. and Mrs. J. H. PERKIS, and Mr. C. ORCHARD (brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law), and Miss M. ORCHARD (cousin). Mrs. MERKEL (mother) and Messrs. Charles and Sidney MERKEL (brothers) were unavoidably prevented from attending. The floral tributes included wreaths from his fellow employees at the Ryde office and works and employees of the I.W. Electric Light Company.

