

AN OFFICER'S SUICIDE AT RYDE

Failed To Surrender To Bail On
Serious Charges

Within a few minutes of warrant being issued for his arrest for having failed to surrender to his bail on charges under the Defence Regulations **Charles Drury FULLER**, aged 50, of independent means, of George-Street, Ryde, shot himself with a service rifle and died shortly afterwards at the County Hospital. Deceased came to reside in the town a short while ago after having lived in Newport and Calbourne, where he was well known.

On Thursday the Deputy-Coroner (Francis A. JOYCE, Esq.) conducted an inquiry at Ryde into the tragic circumstances.

Norman Berwick FULLER, on the unemployed list of H.M. Officers, living at London, S.W.1, brother of the deceased, gave evidence of identification and said he had not seen him for some time.

Mrs. Constance BUDD, of Clifton Villa, George-Street, Ryde, deposed that on July 17th deceased a stranger to her, arranged for accommodation at her house for three months. He arrived on the 20th and in conversation said he had been suffering from malaria, which affected his heart. On Sunday he came down to breakfast saying he had had a bad night owing to his heart. On Monday he went out at about 10.30.a.m., but returned shortly afterwards and went to his room. She was cleaning a back bed-room and saw him leave his room with a gun, which he said he was going to clean in the conservatory. Hearing a report she went downstairs and in fun, said to the deceased "are you trying to shoot yourself?" and he replied "No, I didn't know it was loaded." As he was returning to his room she saw a black patch over his left temple. She asked if she should bathe it, but he said "No, it's all right." Deceased returned to his room and when he came out again and went to the conservatory she heard another report. She did not go downstairs but called out "are you having another go?" As deceased had spoken to her quite rationally she went on with her work, not thinking anything serious had happened. A few minutes afterwards a Mr. WHITE told her the police were coming. Still not thinking anything serious had taken place, she said "You are making a fuss about nothing." When she suggested going up the stairs and knocking on deceased's door Mr. WHITE advised her not to do so. She did not realise deceased was intending to commit suicide or injure himself.

Frederick Charles WHITE, a caterer, of 6 The Esplanade, said he was at the bottom of George-Street, when he heard two shots fired. On looking up to the window of Clifton Villa he saw deceased, whom he had known as Major FULLER for four years, sitting on the window-sill facing inside the room with a gun in his hand, and thought he looked insane. He went home and got a service rifle, which he possessed as a member of the L.D.V., informed Mrs. BUDD of his suspicions, and advised her to take her mother out of the house. He also informed P.C. COOK of the position and together they went upstairs and tapped the door. After the constable called out to deceased they heard the report of a gun. Witness stood by while the constable went for a doctor and on their return the door was found locked. Witness knocked the door in with the butt of his rifle and found deceased lying on the floor with a gun between his legs, the muzzle pointed towards his head. He had known deceased to get moody occasionally.

Dr. Walter SHANKS said when the officer called out to deceased he recognised the name as that of a patient and called out "It is Dr. SHANKS speaking," but there was no response. He found deceased suffering from a severe gunshot wound in the left frontal region of the forehead and had him quickly removed to the County Hospital. He first attended deceased for his heart on July 14th when he was living in High-Street and advised to find accommodation on the sea front to avoid hill climbing. He explained to deceased the serious condition of his heart, but he did not appear unduly dismayed. On the 17th he visited him again and he seemed very much better. From their conversation he did not obtain any indication that he would be likely to end his life. On the

contrary, he wanted to serve again.

Dr. Alferetta KEITH, house-surgeon at the County Hospital, said deceased died shortly after admission from a severe guns-shot wound.

P.S. LOCK stated that on July 20th, with Lieut. BRISCOE, he interviewed deceased and told him he was making inquiries with reference to complaints received that he was a pilot officer in the R.A.F., that he was attached to the Ministry of Information with head with headquarters locally, also that he was spreading a story that there was grave unrest with aero mechanics. Witness cautioned him and asked him if he would answer a list of questions which he had prepared, and he agreed to do so. After reading the documents the Coroner asked the witness if he thought deceased was responsible. Witness replied that deceased appeared to be under perfect control when he answered the questions. He afterwards arrested him and at the Police Station he made a very good statement in quite a reasonable manner. There was no indication during the time deceased was in his custody, which was several hours, that he would commit such an act. He did not appear upset, and was quite confident that he had an explanation that would more or less refute the charges. He left the station thanking them for what they had done and on the best of terms. Deceased had served in the Forces as a squadron-leader for three years. He had applied for a commission in another regiment, but when it was granted he did not take it up. That is how he became known as the "Major."

The Coroner: Was he addicted to drink? Witness replied that he used to have his regular drink, but there was no evidence at all to show he was addicted to drink.

The Coroner: You had charged him, hadn't you? Witness: I arrested him for falsely representing himself to be in the service of His Majesty in the performance of essential duties, contrary to the Defence Regulations.

The Coroner asked whether it occurred to the witness that there might not be a lot in it. P.S. LOCK said deceased had represented himself as something which he was not, contrary to regulations, he must answer to the magistrates.

The Coroner: It is difficult for me to say what's in my mind about these things.

Sergt. LOCK: We have a number of statements from people in very good positions supporting these allegations. They are not idle stories.

The Coroner: I should say the man was under the influence of drink when he answered those questions.

Sergt. LOCK: He hadn't left the house, so he could not have had any drink.

The Coroner: You considered it consistent with your duty to arrest him?

Yes.

By deceased's brother: Deceased answered his questions quite openly, but he was not in a position to say whether honestly,

Sergt. LOCK said deceased was charged before Ald. ANDREWS and released on bail to appear on Monday, but did not answer his bail. While in court, witness received a communication in consequence of which he visited the house and found the following note, addressed to Inspector ROGERS, left on the mantelpiece in deceased's room. "Ok. I'm out now. Can't face your show. Thank you for being a Sahib to me. My heart is awful. I had better finish up. Your sergeant wants ticking off."

The Coroner read the letter which deceased had written to his sister the same day, in which he spoke of the condition of and pain he suffered with his heart.

Inspector H. ROGERS said for some time the police had made inquiries into the matter and on that day it was decided that deceased should be interviewed and arrested on the charges. He was brought before the magistrate and having heard his explanation, witness got into touch with the superintendent at Newport, who agreed that he could be admitted to bail and he was instructed to convey that to the magistrate. Deceased seemed very comfortable at the Police Station. Replying to deceased's brother, the Inspector agreed that he answered any question readily.

The Coroner said the case was a very sad one. There seemed to him to be a dual reason for it. Deceased did not want to appear on the summons before the magistrates, his heart was very bad,

and he thought the two together caused him to commit suicide. The police had a very difficult part to fulfil in carrying out various laws which had not long been in force. In the case of that poor unfortunate man it might have been idle talk or it might have been more serious, but apparently the duty of the police was to arrest him. Possibly he might have been dismissed under the charge or not. Undoubtedly the two things caused him to take the course he did. He found that deceased committed suicide by shooting himself whilst in an unsound state of mind.

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