

THE FATALITY AT THE ECHUCA BUTTS.

VERDICT OF ACCIDENTAL DEATH.

ECHUCA. THURSDAY.

An inquiry into the death of the young man David Snell, who was accidentally shot at the butts yesterday morning, was held this morning, by Mr. J. H. Morphet, J.P., at the court house. A jury of four was sworn.

Peter Swanell, captain of the E Company of Rangers, detailed the instructions given to firing parties; the "marker" was not to come out of the mantlet except to mark a shot. The deceased was a good and careful marker.

Sergeant-Major M'Manus, of the permanent staff, corroborated the evidence of Captain Swanell, adding that when the red disc was against the firing party they were to cease firing. The deceased and Sergeant Jacoby, who fired the fatal shot, were the best of friends. The whole of the party who were at the butts on Wednesday morning were careful men and good shots.

Senior-sergeant Hill, of the E Company, said that he was one of the party who went out to practice firing at the butts. There were Sergeants Haig and Jacoby and Privates Ponsford and Snell. He (witness) was "look out man," and, observing a trolley coming down the railway line, hauled down the danger flag, which, however, clung to the pole, and thus would be rendered indistinct to the firing party. Sergeant Jacoby was then firing, and deceased was marking. When the third shot was fired the trolley was just in line of range. The shot was a "miss" flag, and the marker went out of the mantlet with the "miss" flag in his hand, and remarked to witness that there was a trolley coming. Snell was then standing outside the mantlet. With his left hand on the target, he turned round with his face to the firing party. While watching the trolley pass witness heard a shot fired, and on turning quickly round saw Snell fall. He at once ran to the target, where he found Snell lying on his back quite dead, with a bullet wound over the left eye. About a minute elapsed between the third and fourth shots—it did not come with the usual regularity. On discovering what had occurred, witness sent for Surgeon-Major Eakins and Captain Swanell. He (witness) believed the shot was accidentally fired.

Sergeant Haig gave similar evidence. At the time of the accident Sergeant Jacoby was firing from the 400 yards range, and was lying down. After the third shot had been fired, witness instructed Jacoby how to fire. His rifle was then pointed to the butts, but had not been brought to the shoulder. Could not say how the danger flag or the red disc was at that moment. The gun went off, and on looking at the target saw Snell fall. Then ran up, and when he had proceeded about 20 yards saw that the flag was down and the disc against the firing party.

William Ponsford was one of the party who went to the butts for practice. The accident occurred between 5 and 6.30. Snell had shown the "miss" signal, and immediately afterwards he went into the mantlet. After taking the score, saw all was clear for firing. Did not notice the flag, and remarked to Jacoby, "You are off the target," and gave him some instructions how to fire. The rifle then went off, but he could not say how the discharge was caused. The shot was fired quicker than usual. On glancing at the butts saw the disc was against firing and Snell fall. It would be possible for the marker to come out of the mantlet without altering the disc, but to do so he would have to

alter the disc, but to do so he would have to creep under the lever.

Sergeant Jacoby said that after he had fired several shots, the last of which was marked a "miss," the marker returning to the hut, he then loaded again and brought the rifle to his shoulder to take aim. While doing so someone standing by suggested to change the position of his fingers on the lock. In doing so he leaned over, resting on his elbow. It must have been the awkwardness of the second finger touching the trigger that caused the rifle to go off. He was just drawing the rifle to his shoulder to take aim. As soon as the rifle went off he looked up and saw the marker fall. Could not say in what position the signals were; the rifle went off accidentally before he had "sighted" on the target. The marker must have come out of the mantlet whilst the person was speaking to him (witness). Was not aware that Sergeant Hall had lowered the danger flag.

Charles Snell deposed that the deceased was his son, and was between 17 and 18 years of age. He had no reason to believe that the occurrence was other than purely accidental.

Dr. Eakins deposed that death was caused by a bullet, which had entered the skull over the left eye, passing through the brain and out at the back of the head.

The rifle was here tested as to the "pull." It was ascertained to be 8½ lb., which was a heavy "pull off," the altering of the finger would make a difference of 4 lb.

The jury returned a verdict of accidental death, and added a rider recommending certain alterations in the management of the danger flag and signals.

This afternoon the deceased youth was accorded a military funeral. The funeral cortege was the longest ever witnessed in Echuca, persons coming from all quarters to attend it.