

A SAD TRAGEDY

DEATH OF SERGEANT-MAJOR RIDAL.

FROM "Cumberland Argus" we take the following particulars of the sad death of Sergeant Major Ridal, who was well known and had many friends in Windsor and Richmond:—

On Monday, about 9 a.m., Parramatta was startled to hear what seemed like a real rumour (but which, in a few minutes, was proved to have had only too true a basis) that Staff Sergeant-Major J. W. Ridal had shot himself at the Lancer Barracks, Parramatta, a few minutes before.

The news was received by the police by telephone; and Senior-Sergeant Harkins and Constable Heckenberg went up immediately. Dr. Kearney also went up, in response to a message that he had received. It was found by them that the popular Staff Sergeant was lying half against the wall in the squadron storeroom, shot through the head. He was quite dead. The body was removed to hospital morgue, by the police, and at 2 o'clock an inquest on the deceased's body was held at the Courthouse.

From what could be learned at the time of the sad occurrence, it appeared that Sergeant-Major Ridal (who was a man in some respects of peculiar temperament—particularly in regard to metaphysical and psychic matters) had dreaded greatly his removal to another sphere of duty, which removal he had been led to expect might be announced at any time. On his arrival at the office on Monday, he saw the regimental orders notifying his removal from Parramatta; and he seems to have acted at once on a dread impulse—and taken a rifle out of its place in the storeroom, and, placing a cartridge in it, blown his brains out.

the place in the storeroom, and, placing a cartridge in it, blown his brains out without first saying a word to anyone or leaving a note to further explain his tragic action.

Sergeant Taylor states that Mr Ridal was in first class form when he reached his office that morning, and there was not the least suspicion of anything being the matter with him. He promptly got to work as usual, and it was when reading the latest regimental orders, which had arrived late on Saturday, that he noticed his own name. He remarked to Mr Taylor, "I see I've got to go," or something to that effect; and his comrade, knowing how sensitive he was on the matter, tried to cheer him up by remarking that it would no doubt be for the best. Ridal, however, became excited, and paced up and down his office. "I'm not gone yet!" he exclaimed and went downstairs.

Twenty minutes or so after that Sergeant Taylor heard the report of a gun, and it just flashed across his mind that it might be connected with Ridal's absence. His suspicion was confirmed. In the storeroom below he was horrified to see Ridal on the floor with a terrible wound in his forehead, and his face covered with blood. Mr Taylor considered that death had even then taken place. Deceased's hat was on the table, and a rifle and riding crop were lying across his legs.

In the centre of the ceiling above was a bullet hole, and a survey upstairs showed that the ball had gone through the two ceilings and made its exit through the roof. He had evidently

placed the gun upright on the floor, and bent down, resting his forehead on the muzzle, and with his right hand released the trigger with the aid of his riding crop.

crop.

It was stated at the barracks that Ridal's manner had been strange for some time. He declared over and over again, most emphatically, that he would never leave Parramatta. About a month ago he visited "The Argus" office, and asked, in an excited tone, that if news should reach us about his proposed removal to Sydney not to publish it in the paper.

Sergeant-Major Ridal was a popular member of the Lancer Regiment. He was also a well-read man; and in former times he had risen high in the ranks of the Freemasons. He was formerly in the Grenadier Guards (in the Imperial troops) and was then stationed at Colombo, Ceylon.

THE INQUEST.

The inquest was held on Monday afternoon at the Court House, Parramatta, before Mr W. Clarke, D.S.M., Parramatta District Coroner.

Dr. Kearney deposed that he found deceased in a storeroom on the ground floor of the building, in a half-sitting posture. A rifle and whip were lying across the deceased's legs. He was quite dead. Found a bullet wound in the forehead. The skull was penetrated; noticed a wound of exit at the back of the head. The bullet had gone, also, through the floor of the room above, and through the roof. He must have stooped and placed his forehead on the muzzle of the rifle and then pulled the trigger with the whip.

Sergeant Albert Taylor, of the New South Wales Lancers, deposed that he saw the body that afternoon; it was that of John William Ridal; he was Staff Sergeant Major, attached to the Lancers, Parramatta. Last saw him alive at 8 40 a.m. that day upstairs in the headquar-

a.m. that day upstairs in the headquarters' office. He was then in his usual health. He picked up a regimental order, that evidently he had not seen before. He made a remark about being shifted to Sydney. Witness said, "You don't mind; it won't make any difference to you." He said "I've not gone yet." He left the building then. About 20 minutes after that, witness heard the report of a firearm. Went downstairs to the storeroom. Found the deceased lying in the storeroom. He was in a half sitting posture. The rifle and crop whip were lying across his legs. There was a hole in his forehead, from which blood was coming. Went up and informed Sergeant-Major Watson. Came back and had a look at the deceased with Sergeant-Major Watson. The deceased had mentioned that he would not like to leave the Lancer regiment; he had been told, he said, that he would in all probability be shifted. Did not know of any other trouble that he had.

Edith Muir, residing at Kensington, deposed that John William Ridal was her uncle. He was 52 years of age, and born in Yorkshire, England. He was married, but left no family. He was a man of temperate habits. Last saw him alive a little after 8 a.m. that day. He was in his usual health. He read the paper, chopped some wood, and had breakfast, and then left for the barracks.

He had no trouble that she knew of—nothing to worry over.

Thomas Watson, Staff-Sergeant-Major of the Lancers, after corroborating Sergeant Taylor's evidence as to finding the body, said he did not think that the deceased had any trouble. He was transferred. He had been attached to the Lancers for nine years. The transfer

Lancers for nine years. The transfer was the only trouble. It was not a disrating; it was promotion. Witness would say that deceased was a man of temperate habits. His transfer would have taken him away from the Lancers altogether—to clerical work at the head office.

The Coroner found that the deceased died, at Parramatta, on July 8, from the effects of a rifle shot wound, self-inflicted.

THE FUNERAL.

The funeral took place on Tuesday afternoon, the remains being interred in the Western road cemetery. The funeral service was conducted by the Rev. North Ash, chaplain of the regiment. The pall bearers were Sergeant Majors Marsden and Milling, and other regimental comrades. The cortege was a large one, and included in the procession were many members of the military, besides Masonic brethren and many of the leading citizens.

(Contributed).

Jack Ridal was ever a popular fellow with his comrades in the Lancer Regiment. He was a typical soldier, minute and methodical to a degree. As an instructor he also had a good record, any recruits going through him generally coming out well. If they did not, it was not Jack's fault. Indeed, he would have no slouching. Everything must be done with precision to please him; but he would spare no pains to help the backward man. He never forgot that he was a gentleman, and that was why the boys all liked him. Then he was good company, and few men were blest with a sweeter voice than Jack. Next to being proud of the fact that he was a Yorkshireman, he was proud that he was an old Grenadier

was proud that he was an old Grenadier Guardsman; and next to these two he was proud of being a New South Wales Lancer. Taking him away from the Lancers was a sad blow to him. He loved them, and—well, he would not leave them. Though the regiment will feel a keen pang of regret that he “took his discharge” in the way he did, they will ever have a loving regard for his memory, and think of him only as the good old Jack Ridal that he ever was.—L.
