



SOUTH WILTSHIRE CORONER'S INQUESTS



Rollestone

Thomas O'Connell – Australian Soldier

8th December, 1916

Bayoneted

Fatal Thrust at a Troublesome Soldier

An unusual story of a soldier's death whilst under arrest was related to the Coroner for South Wilts (Mr F. H. Trethowan) and a jury at the inquest held on Tuesday at Fargo Military Hospital.

It appeared from the evidence that Thomas Francis O'Connell (36), a native of Ballarat, Victoria, in the Australian Imperial Forces, stationed at Rollestone Camp, had been placed under arrest awaiting court martial. He broke out of the guard room on Monday afternoon, and defied the guard. Sergt. Lavender tried to drive him back at the point of a bayonet. Sergt. Prunty advised him to go quietly, but he said, "Not before I have settled Lavender." He raised a table-fork in a threatening manner, and on approaching Lavender received the point of the bayonet in his side. He then went into the cell and collapsed trying to take off his coat.

He was taken to Fargo Hospital, when Capt. Urquhart, R.A.M.C., found the wound had punctured the muscles of the heart. He lived only three quarters of an hour, death being due to internal hemorrhage.

It was stated in evidence that Sergt. Lavender had always conducted himself in a temperate manner and was only trying to do his duty on this occasion. Lieut. Deegan described O'Connell as a very troublesome and desperate customer. On November 13th he escaped from the guard room by cutting a hole in the floor, and was brought back a week later. When under arrest again he broke away and knocked out a sentry, but was eventually re-captured. He seemed under the impression that he was a martyr and that everyone was going on at him. The Coroner advised the jury to say that the wound was inflicted by Lavender in the execution of his duty without any intention to kill O'Connell, which amounted to a verdict of justifiable homicide.

The Foreman said the jury quite agreed.

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