

Thomas Mills

Portsmouth Evening News Wednesday, December 22, 1926

MILITARY MOTOR FATALITY.

Tender Overturns.

ISLAND CORONER'S COMMENTS ON SPEED.

The Deputy Coroner for the Isle of Wight (Mr. F A. Joyce) held an inquest at Parkhurst Barracks on the death of Lce.-Corpl. Thomas Mills, R.A.S.C., stationed at Parkhurst, and living at Newport with his wife and family, who was killed by the overturning of a R.A.S.C. Crossley motor tender, in which he was riding from Freshwater to Parkhurst on the previous Thursday night.

Walter Henry Johnson, civilian electrician employed at the Barracks, said that deceased, who was in charge of the party, and Driver Ede, had been to Freshwater delivering goods at the Forts. When they left Golden Hill about 6.30 to 7 p.m. they went to the "Red Lion" Inn, Freshwater, where they remained for about an hour. They had four rounds of drinks, he having four half-pints of ale and the others beer. The driver did not have as much as the others. None of them were under the influence of drink that evening or in any way intoxicated. When the Coroner pointed out that the accident happened only four miles away, at 9 o'clock, witness said they might have left half-an-hour later. He was rendered temporarily unconscious by the accident and had no recollection of what occurred immediately before the accident. When he regained consciousness the deceased was lying in the road by his side, and the car was over-turned on the other side of the road.

By Superintendent Salter: He did not think the driver joined in the last of the four rounds of the drinks.

Edwin A'Court Smith, of Brook, said he and his brother were walking home from Newport, when near Westover Lodge, Calbourne, they saw the Crossley car meeting them. They walked in single file close in to the gutter, and the car passed about 2ft. away from them. Immediately afterwards there was a tremendous crash and, running back, they found the car had overturned after striking the bank.—Pressed by the Coroner as to the speed of the car, witness said he could not say, as he was no judge of speed. His brother James, who was with him gave similar evidence, and said as to the speed he could only say the same as his brother.

Roy Harvey, farmer, of Westover, who, on hearing the crash ran to the scene, said Johnson was in a dazed condition. The driver was sober.

Dr. Drummond, of Yarmouth, said the deceased man was suffering from serious head injuries, and he arranged for his removal to hospital in a passing motor, but nothing could

be done for him. Driver Ede asked him to examine him, and he did so, and could detect no traces of him being under the influence of intoxicants

Driver Richard Wm. Ede gave evidence that they left the "Red Lion" about 7.30 or a little later. At the time of the accident he was driving at not more than from 15 to 20 miles an hour. A bend in the road prevented him from seeing the two pedestrians—who had given evidence—until he was almost upon them. They were walking well out in the road and abreast, and he had to draw over so far to pass them that his near wheel got on the grass by the roadside and eventually into the ditch, and the soft ground prevented him from pulling the car out, with the result that it struck a culvert and overturned. He was not under the influence of drink. Witness was very much affected when giving evidence and completely broke down at the end.

The Coroner said the two most essential witnesses who saw the accident had failed to help the jury as to the speed of the car, and had proved unsatisfactory witnesses. He thought 15 to 20 miles an hour at that spot was a dangerous speed.

The jury returned a verdict that deceased died from injuries sustained accidentally by the overturning of the car, but there was insufficient evidence to show whether the lorry was being driven at an excessive speed or whether it had to swerve to avoid pedestrians in the road.

Sympathy was expressed with deceased's wife, who, it was stated, had given birth that day to a child, and was thus left with three children.

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