

TWO SOLDIERS KILLED BY EXPLODING MINE.

Beach Fatality at Mundeford

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I do not think we shall ever know exactly how this lamentable calamity occurred. The men were skilled men, doing their work in the proper manner, and it is quite possible that the axe used may have hit the mine, or that branches may have fallen, or one of the men may have stepped on the ground immediately over the mine and exploded it. This is the fault of no one and my verdict will be, in the case of William Henry Bainbridge, that cause of death was dismemberment, due to accidental bomb explosion whilst working in a mine field. In the case of Rex Proctor, cause of death was disintegration due to accidental bomb explosion whilst working on clearing a minefield."

These verdicts and summing up were recorded by the Southampton County Coroner, Mr. P. B. Ingoldby, at the inquest held in the Christchurch Town Hall on Thursday, September 14th, on Sapper William Henry Bainbridge (31) and Sapper Rex Proctor (21), both serving in a bomb disposal company.

Captain A. E. Bailey, M.B., C.M.B., a qualified medical practitioner in the R.A.M.C., stated that at 12.20 p.m. on Wednesday, September 13th, he received a report of an accident which had occurred on the foreshore of Avon Road, Mundeford. Upon his arrival on the scene at 12.45 he saw the remains of one body lying on a stretcher. From examination he formed the opinion that death was obviously due to the body being dismembered by an explosion, death being instantaneous. The body, practically blown to pieces, was that of Bainbridge. Proctor he had seen in the mortuary the afternoon of the inquest, saying that death was due to disintegration by high explosives. In Proctor's case, too, death was instantaneous. Answering the Coroner, he said that he did not know either of the two men.

Sgt. William John Button, G.C., said that on Wednesday, September 13th, the two deceased men were working under his orders. They were detailed to clear a lane through a minefield on the foreshore off Avon Road, Mundeford. He issued these instructions at 11.15. One of the men had a detector, and the other some tracing tape, in order to mark out the safe area. He last saw them approximately 4ft. from the crater of the explosion, which he visited later on. Their job was to sweep the ground with the mine detector, clearing any mines in the lane, 6ft. in width, and to mark it with tracing tape. The men had made no complaints concerning the detector, which had been tested since the accident and found to be in efficient working order. The deceased men had had a great deal of training for this job and were "good men."

Continuing, witness said that he heard an explosion, which he recognised as that of an exploding mine. He saw the dismembered body of Bainbridge and discovered several small pieces of human flesh in the opposite direction.

Replying to the Coroner witness said that the accident could have been caused by several reasons. They were at the time working thick underbrush, through which they had to cut a path with an axe. It was possible that one of the men struck the ground above the mine with the axe. The mine must have pressure on top of it to make it explode, and he agreed with the Coroner that they would never know what it was provided that necessary pressure.

Arthur Thomas Polden, a coastguard, living at 124, Stanpit, said that at 1030 a.m. on Wednesday morning he saw the two deceased men on the foreshore clearing a lane in the minefield. One of them was sweeping with a mine detector and the other marking the course with tracing tape. He saw them both crouch behind a bush, where they appeared to be chopping down a tree. He was sure of this as he saw one of them hand back a branch. They were working backwards and forwards.

He later saw the remains of one of their bodies lying in the vicinity.

Police Sergeant Groves and Lance Sergeant Henry- Arthur Nicholls also gave evidence.

The verdicts of accidental death, as previously stated, were recorded.