



ACCIDENT TO A VOLUNTEER OFFICER.

A FATAL DIVE. A distressing accident occurred in the St. Clair Baths early on Sunday morning, as the result of which Lieutenant **Kerkham**, a subaltern in G- Company (Dunedin City Rifles), O.R.V., lost his life. It appears that. Mr **Kerkham**, who was an expert swimmer, persuaded one or two of his brother officers to go down to the St. Clair Baths, which are only a short distance from the camp, for a swim. They did so, and Mr **Kerkham** began to amuse himself by diving off the edge of the baths into some 6ft of water. The third time he failed to come to the surface, and Lieutenant Jackson and others present brought him out. It appears that he had struck the bottom of the baths with great force, inflicting what "looked like a severe scalp wound. He had evidently fractured his skull, and as he was being brought out he said, I am done," and relapsed into unconsciousness.

The ambulance was sent for, and he was taken at once to the Hospital, where examination showed that the spinal cord had been badly lacerated, and recovery was practically impossible. He remained unconscious throughout the afternoon, and expired at 8.30 on Sunday night.

Kerkham the son of the Rev. J. R. **Kerkham**, who some years ago lived in Roslyn, but is now in England. He has a brother, in Western Australia, and another brother borne time ago went to India, as a missionary, where he died during the present year.

Lieutenant **Kerkham** was employed in the office of the National Insurance Company, and was a popular officer in the battalion to which he belonged. His death will be deplored by all ranks.

THE INQUEST. An inquest was held at the Hospital on Monday afternoon by Mr C. C. Graham, coroner, and a jury of six, of whom Mr John Duthie was chosen foreman, concerning the death of Roger **Kerkham**, who, while diving at the St. Clair baths on Sunday morning, struck his head on the bottom, and died from the effects of the blow in the evening.

Alan Mair Jackson, civil engineer, identified the body shown to the jury as that of Roger **Kerkham**. He was a clerk in the National Insurance Company's Office, and was senior subaltern in the City Rifles. He was with his company in camp at Kew on Sunday. He was single man. Witness accompanied deceased to the St. Clair baths on the Sunday morning, and they went for a bathe. Deceased dived in twice and swam ashore, and in diving in for the third time from the concrete parapet, about 7ft above the water, he rose again to the surface. Witness noticed that his face was in the water and that there was blood on his head. Witness went into the water, got hold of deceased, and assisted him ashore. Deceased was then carried up to the main Bathing box. He

was conscious, and complained of a peculiar sensation in his cheek, and could not feel anything in his legs. He expressed regret at giving trouble.

The bathkeeper was asked to send away for medical assistance, and he sent for Dr Coughtrey, who was on the spot inside 30 minutes. During that time deceased was carried into the bathkeeper's house and covered up. Dr Coughtrey examined deceased, and then went back to his house and telephoned for the ambulance in order that deceased might be removed to the Hospital.

The water was about 6ft deep where deceased dived in, and the bottom was of rock. Deceased was an expert in the water. Witness did not think deceased slipped when he dived in. His legs were doubled up when he made his last dive, and the knees striking the water would cause him to go straight downwards instead of outwards. To the Police: There were no notice boards showing the depth of the water in the baths. To the Coroner: Deceased had his hands over his head when he left the parapet. Stuart Beauchamp Ussher, clerk in the National Insurance Company's Office, said deceased was 32 years of age. Witness confirmed the evidence given by the previous witness, and added that deceased made a running dive. On the way to the Hospital deceased said he could not remember pulling his legs up, and could not account for the accident. He did not remember missing his footing, but said he might have done so. The accident occurred about 7 o'clock in the morning. To the Foreman: Deceased made a big spring in the air before he dived, and must have been 10ft in the air when he turned over to dive. Dr Coughtrey stated that on Sunday morning about 7 o'clock he was called to attend an accident at St. Clair baths. He found deceased on a sofa in the bathkeeper's residence. There was no bleeding from the scalp, but witness soon recognised a much more serious state of matters than a scalp wound. Deceased had evidently sustained extensive injury to the spinal cord, a bleeding into its membranes causing complete loss of power in the lower limbs, and almost complete loss of power in the upper limbs, together with interference with the respiratory movements. Having ascertained this witness went back to his residence and summoned the ambulance. He returned to deceased before the ambulance arrived, and injected morphia to release deceased from the pain he was suffering, and personally saw to his removal to the ambulance waggon. The witness desired to say that this was the third accident that had taken place in connection with these baths, and besides he had had numerous minor accidents during the last few years to people swimming there to attend to. He had heard complaints as to liability to accident in diving owing to the jagged nature of the rocks, especially in the neighbourhood of the diving end. He had known of a person's shoulder being injured there in the same way, and was not aware of any precautions being taken to prevent accident. To the Coroner: He did not think 5ft of water sufficient for diving. A greater depth of water could be obtained by blasting there. The caretaker had done all he could in connection with the present case. Dr Brown, resident surgeon at the Hospital, deposed that deceased on being brought to the Hospital was completely paralysed in the lower limbs. He had a scalp wound on the top of his head, and complained of severe pain in the neck. He gradually lost the use of his arms, and suddenly became unconscious about halfpast 12 o'clock. He gradually sank, and died about a quarter to 9 o'clock. He told witness lie had been diving, and had struck his head on the bottom of the baths. He did not attribute blame to anyone. Death was probably due to laceration of the upper part of the spinal chord, with subsequent haemorrhage, the result of the blow to the head on the bottom of the baths. Witness could not discover any fracture of the skull, but most probably one of the vertebra was fractured. Wm. Farquharson Chisholm, keeper of the St. Clair baths, said he leased the baths from the Ocean Beach Domain Board. There were no regulations as to clearing out the baths at any particular time; but he generally did it twice a year. The last time he did it was about a month ago. There was nothing in the baths in the shape of kerosene tins or anything of the kind. He picked the bottom of the baths at the diving place, made it as deep as he could, and took the stones out. There never had been a board showing the depth of the water at any time. To the Foreman: There had been no previous accidents so bad as this. His (witness's) boys dived off there, and never came to harm. Had been in charge of the baths for five years. The Coroner said that was all the evidence. The jury's task was a very easy one so far as the accident itself was concerned. They could have no difficulty in arriving at the conclusion that the cause of death was accidental. The only thing further was whether the jury had any recommendation to make as to the baths themselves. The Jury returned a verdict that deceased met his death accidentally, and added a rider that with all public baths it be imperative that the depth of the water be shown by diving posts placed in them for the purpose. The deceased will be accorded a military funeral on Wednesday afternoon.