

## **S/Sgt. Bossange G.H.**



**BOSSANGE , GEORGE H. - S/SGT. Regimental No. 979**

**June 21, 1919 - Spirit River, Alberta Age: 56**

George Henry Leopold Bossange was born in France. In 1883, he left Paris and came to this country with his parents. At the time he was 21. He stood five foot seven inches, weighed 130 pounds and was determined to become a Mountie. He was engaged at Winnipeg in December 1883 and fought in the Riel Rebellion on 1885. During the next 34 years, he left the Force twice. The first time was in 1886 when he returned to France to farm. When that didn't work out, he re-engaged from 1887 to 1890. Then he tried the retail business in Edmonton until his store burned down. Bossange signed on again in 1903 and he served at a number of posts in Saskatchewan and Alberta, receiving several promotions along the way. He and his wife, Emma, raised three girls and one boy. In 1917, his son was killed in action during the First World War.

S/Sgt. Bossange died at 56, making him the second oldest Mounted Policeman to be killed in the line of duty. On Saturday, June 21, 1919, S/Sgt. Bossange rode out to the home of Ivan Yaremko near the village of Spirit River in the northwestern corner of Alberta, to interview him regarding his alleged activities as a Bolshevik agitator. At 5:00 pm, after the interview was concluded, the officer mounted his horse and started for home in a heavy downpour.

At 9:30 pm the same day, a local farmer, John Zahara, was driving his wagon and team home on the road allowance between Sections 25 and 26. About eight miles east and north of Spirit River, he found S/Sgt. Bossange and his horse both lying dead on the trail. Apparently they had been killed hours before because rigor mortis was setting into the policeman's body and the horse was grossly bloated. Bossange was dressed in uniform and slicker and was wearing his Sam Brown belt and holster which held his unloaded .45 calibre revolver. Parts of the officer's body appeared to be burned and one of his legs was still trapped under the horse's body.

Zahara ran to the farm of George Shirk and sent him to the Spirit River Detachment to notify the police. Then Zahara went back to remain with the policeman's body. When Cpl. W. Allen of the Alberta Provincial Police heard of the incident, he hired a car and drove out to the scene. He found that Bossange's face was black, his hair singed and his eyes were open. Bossange's pouch contained a number of live shells and all his papers and money seemed to be intact. Cpl Allen found a gold locket containing a photograph and a wisp of hair lying near the body. The watch in the top pocket of the sergeant's jacket was stopped at 5:40. The metal of the watch was melted and the crystal broken. The butt plate on Bossange's revolve was melted and, about one-half inch from the muzzle, the steel barrel was melted. On the inside of his left boot near the spur was a small hole. When the boot was removed, Cpl. Allen could see that the sock was burned and there was a small puncture in the foot. His right boot was under the horse's body.

The Corporal noted that the horse was branded No. 543. The swollen animal lay on its right side and there was a small puncture in the seat of the saddle. When the saddle was removed, the saddle blanket had four small burn punctures in it. Zahara didn't know what to make of it all, but Cpl. Allen did.

"He's been hit by lightning," the corporal said. "It looks like the bolt of lightning hit his revolver, went through him into the saddle and came out the horse's body into the man's spur. You'll notice there's no sign that either the man or the horse struggled."

Zahara nodded his head in agreement, but he wasn't sure that he could see that.

Cpl. Allen then remarked, "Pretty obvious that death was instantaneous ... for both of them."

The Corporal asked Zahara to help him get the policeman's body into the car and he transported it back to the morgue in Spirit River. He then notified the officer in charge of the RNWMP detachment and contacted the coroner at Grande Prairie.

In due time, S/Sgt. Bossange's body was shipped to Calgary for burial. The strange fluke of his death was a shocking blow to his wife, Emma, and their children. In the 45 years that the Mounties patrolled the prairies on horseback, this in the only time a member was killed by lightning.