

Cst. Counsell F.G.



COUNSELL F. GORDON - CST. Regimental No. 11298

May 22, 1940 - Parkland, Alberta Age 31

On the night of Tuesday, May 21, 1940, the RCMP detachment at Claresholm, Alberta was notified that a 60 year old man named Charles Hanson had gone to his son George's farm and shot him five times and left him for dead. When the police went out to investigate, they were told that George had been taken to hospital at Claresholm and that his father had run away and was probably heading for his own farm. This was four miles north of the village of Stavely on the highway between Lethbridge and Calgary.

When the police went to Charles Hanson's farm, he opened fire on them, forcing them into a hasty retreat. RCMP Cpl. William Wilson called for reinforcements and kept the farmhouse under surveillance until they arrived. By one the next morning, officers had arrived from the Alberta detachments of Macleod, Ridley, Vulcan and Barons. Lethbridge sent them eight men in two cars. Among them was Cst. Gordon Counsell. S/Sgt. G. Harvey took command of the entire party and after a considerable wait, he ordered tear gas to be used to flush Hanson out of the house.

After windows were broken and the dwelling was heavily gassed, there was still no sound from Hanson nor any sight of him. The police waited. Around three o'clock, a small party of officers cautiously entered the building and searched the first floor. Then Cst. Counsell and another officer worked their way upstairs. On the second floor the gas was very dense - especially in a stairwell that led to the attic door. When Counsell began to climb those stairs, Charles Hanson suddenly threw open the attic door and fired at him. One of his shots hit Counsell in the middle of the forehead and the constable dropped to the floor, mortally wounded.

Cst. Counsell had fallen in such a vulnerable position that the police were unable to get to his body and remove it from the house. Under these circumstances, they withdrew and pulled back to a safe perimeter. From time to time they saw Hanson moving across the windows of the third floor attic. The order was given to shoot him on sight. Not long after that, Cst. John Bull, who was positioned in the barn at the back of the house, caught a glimpse of Hanson in his gun sight. He fired and saw Hanson throw his arms up and fall backwards. Then they heard the report of a pistol inside the house.

After a long wait, they re-entered the farmhouse and found Cst. Counsell dead at the foot of the attic stairs. Charles Hanson was dead in the attic, with a rifle wound to his chest and a self inflicted revolver wound to his temple.

Later information revealed that Hanson had a very troublesome past. As a young man in Minnesota, he had been imprisoned for killing his own mother. After his release from jail, he had come to Canada during the land rush of the early years of the century. His neighbours

had always considered him to be a bit "strange" and they thought that recent world events in Hitler's Germany had aggravated his derangement.

Cst. Counsell had shown great promise as a police officer. Born in Vancouver and a carpenter by trade, he joined the RCMP at Ottawa in 1932. He served at posts in Banff, Alberta and Field, British Columbia before coming to Lethbridge more than three years previously. He had recently married Audrey Blake, the daughter of RCMP S/Sgt. G.E. Blake.

His funeral was conducted in St. Augustine's Anglican Church in Lethbridge. In attendance were hundreds of police officers and civilians as well as dignitaries from the Federal and Provincial Governments. Cst. Counsell was buried in the RCMP plot in the Lethbridge Anglican Cemetery.