

Cst. Giesbrecht A.G.



GIESBRECHT, ALLEN GARY CST. Regimental No. 30318

January 13, 1985 - Vegreville, Alberta Age: 32

Vegreville is a quiet town of 5,200 located 60 miles east of Edmonton on the Yellowhead Highway. At 5:30 pm on Sunday, January 13, 1985, The RCMP detachment at Vegreville received a complaint from a local man that he had been threatened with a shotgun by his neighbor, Tom Zaiec.

Forty-four year old Tom Zaiec was known to the police for his strange and erratic behaviour. He often disputed minor issues and was unpredictable in what he would say and do. One of his neighbors described him as a "cracked up pot". He had been known to take wreaths from the graveyard and hang them on his front door and light candles on them. He would also put big signs in his front window that made disparaging remarks about the RCMP. One sign said: "RCMP are Pigs".

The Vegreville Detachment suspected Zaiec could be dangerous and, when they responded to the caller's complaint, they sent four officers - all of them wearing protective vests. When Cpl. C. (Kees) Kikkert and Csts. Allen Giesbrecht, Bob Pike and Kimberly Connell knocked on the locked doors of Zaiec's stucco house, nobody answered, though they could plainly see Zaiec's elderly mother sitting at the kitchen table. Because of the severity of the complaint, the officers broke in with an axe and carried out a room to room search of the house. They soon determined that Tom Zaiec had locked himself in a darkened bedroom at the back of his home. While they tried to talk him into coming out of the room, his 80 year old mother moved aimlessly around the kitchen uttering unintelligible words.

As the police yelled for Zaiec and called for him to come out, Cst. Giesbrecht made the mistake of peering around the corner into the darkened room. Without warning, Zaiec fired his .270 calibre rifle and hit Cst. Giesbrecht in the stomach. Normally the policeman's body vest would have withstood such a gunshot but this bullet struck Giesbrecht on the right side of the vest in the gap between the two protective panels. He staggered back into the kitchen and fell to the floor mortally wounded. This precipitated an exchange of gunfire with Zaiec where Cpl. Kikkert too was wounded. Because of the threat of Zaiec's firepower, the police had a difficult time removing Cst. Giesbrecht from the scene. They did the best they could and, around six-thirty p.m. were able to get him into an ambulance. He was rushed to St. Joseph's Hospital in Vegreville. There the doctors determined that Cst. Giesbrecht was bleeding internally. However, there was little they could do to help him because there was no blood plasma available at the 70 bed rural hospital. Since Cst. Giesbrecht required major surgery, the doctors had no choice but to risk the 45 minute ambulance trip to University Hospital in Edmonton. Cst. Giesbrecht arrived there at 8:45 pm and died about 30 minutes later from trauma and loss of blood.

In the meantime, at Zaiec's house, Csts. Connell and Pike had contained the scene and called for more police assistance. By now, Tom Zaiec occupied the house alone. His

mother had left during the first phase of the gunfight. When the eight-man RCMP Emergency Response Team arrived from Edmonton, they cordoned off the area and evacuated residents from the surrounding homes. They repeatedly tried to make contact with Zaiec, but he wouldn't respond. It wasn't until after midnight that Zaiec broke his silence and police were able to establish a telephone link-up with him in his bedroom. Although he refused to surrender, negotiations with him continued throughout the night. He repeatedly wanted to know if he had killed Cst. Giesbrecht.

Around nine o'clock the next morning, a loud bang was heard from inside the house. No more contact could be made with the suspect and, at 12:30 pm, ERT sent in a televised robot to survey the interior of the house. It revealed that Zaiec was lying motionless on a bed. When the RCMP tactical squad went in, they found him dead from a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

The experience of this violent episode was most disturbing to the Vegreville community. They particularly mourned the death of Cst. Giesbrecht who left behind his wife, Susan, and their two small sons, both under the age of three. Cst. Giesbrecht was only three months away from completing 12 years of police service.

His funeral was the biggest police funeral ever held in the Province of Alberta up to that time. To honour the fallen officer, 1800 Canadian policemen and 750 civilians descended on the small community of Slave Lake in Northern Alberta. The crowd was so huge that the service had to be piped into two auditoriums in Roland Michener High School. Sadly, it was a glowing tribute to another policeman who had lost his life in the performance of his duty ... the victim of a senseless killing.