

Cst. Harrison G.C.



HARRISON, GEORGE C. - CST. Regimental No. 10946
Oct. 8, 1935 - Banff, Alberta Age: 29

"Seven Dead in Police Fight Crime Wave Takes Heavy Toll of Life"

These were the headlines in the Edmonton Bulletin on Wednesday, October 9, 1935. Three of the dead men to which the caption referred were members of the RCMP. All three died at the hands of the same killers in a trail of blood that extended over six days and almost 800 miles through the three prairie provinces.

The carnage began on Friday, October 4 in Benito, Manitoba, a small town near the Saskatchewan border. Town constable William Wainwright and Cst. John Shaw from the RCMP Swan River Detachment questioned three young men who were riding in an unlicensed open touring car that had been seen in the vicinity of a recent robbery. All three were sons of Saskatchewan farmers who were Russian Doukhobors. This was a religious sect that had fled persecution in Russia and was known for its strict abstinence from liquor and tobacco. All three were good looking young men, well-dressed in three piece suits. The police identified them as 21 year old John Kalmakoff, 20 year old Joseph Posnikoff, and Peter Woiken who was 18. The dapper trio and their car were searched and, since no weapons were found, they were allowed to leave.

But in further discussion, Csts. Wainwright and Shaw thought that the three might be wanted by the Pelly Detachment for a recent crime committed in Saskatchewan. They decided to find the trio, take them into custody and transport them to Pelly for interrogation.

It was after four in the morning when the police located the three men in their touring car. They had just let two girls off at a farmhouse after a dance. A friend named Paul Bugera was riding with them. The trio was ordered out of their car and, without being searched, they were ushered into the back seat of the police car. Bugera was to drive the touring car home.

The police car zigzagged its way along the country roads heading for the Pelly Detachment. When it got on the straightaway on Highway #49, one of the men in the back seat attacked Wainwright with a knife, slashing his head and his neck. Shaw, who was driving, tried to fend the others off and was cut on the hand and the cheek. They quickly overpowered Wainwright and took away his .38 revolver. Then one of the three shot Wainwright in the eye with his own gun. Another of them used his own .32 and shot Shaw through the back of the head three times. During all this, the police car careened into a ditch. They dragged the bodies out and threw them into a muddy slough by the side of the road. After stripping the dead policemen of their identification and valuables, the trio drove away in the unmarked police car.

When Shaw and Wainwright didn't show up by noon on Saturday, the RCMP organized a local search for the missing unmarked car. Unknown to the police, the automobile was heading west and, by Saturday night, the killers had made it as far west as Kelvington, Saskatchewan.

Monday morning, October 7, a farmer, John Kollenchuk, discovered the mutilated bodies of Shaw and Wainwright in the slough at the side of the road. As soon as the police were advised, they alerted a number of detachments and a man-hunt was organized across the prairie provinces. By this time the fugitives were in Alberta.

At 3:00 pm on Monday, October 7, the three fugitives stopped at a diner in Canmore, Alberta, 60 miles west of Calgary. The waitress saw that they barely had enough money to cover the meagre cost of their food. An hour later the trio stopped to register at the east gate of Banff National Park. Not having the \$2.00 entrance fee, they headed back east. At Exshaw, 11 miles east of Canmore, they bought \$1.00 worth of gas. That small purchase sealed their fate. The attendant's wife, Lucille Zeller, had been listening to the radio and identified the missing car by its Manitoba licence plate number 29-812.

Although the bodies of the policemen had been found Monday morning, this information would not be communicated to the Alberta police or radio stations until 7:00 pm that night. Until that time, police and radio listeners further west thought they were simply looking for a missing car. Nevertheless, Lucille Zeller called Canmore RCMP and advised them that the wanted car was heading west. Canmore, in turn, alerted the Banff Detachment. In Banff, Sgt. Thomas Wallace and Cst. G.E. Combe, who were off duty and in civies, joined forces with uniformed officers George "Scotty" Harrison and Grey Campbell. They started east in one car, hoping to meet the missing police car on the highway. Campbell was driving, with Wallace beside him. Harrison was in the back seat behind Wallace with Combe to his left.

In the meantime, on that same highway, the fugitive trio had stopped a car and robbed Mr. And Mrs. C.T. Scott of their cash and valuables. Then, moronically, they continued to drive west behind the Scott car. About four miles east of the east gate of Banff National Park, the Scott car stopped beside the on-coming police car and told the officers that they had just been robbed by the three men in the car behind them. Sgt. Wallace and Cst. Harrison got out of their car and began walking towards the tailing car. Both policemen were three feet away from the front bumper in the glare of the headlights when two shots ripped through the windshield glass. One hit Cst. Harrison in the throat, the other got Sgt. Wallace in the chest. Harrison was able to shoot out both headlights before he collapsed in front of the Manitoba car. Wallace kept firing as he backed up and called for more ammunition. Then he too collapsed on the roadway under a wild exchange of gunfire between the fugitives and the other police officers. When another police car arrived from the east, the three killers ran for the bush.

Cst. Campbell loaded Sgt. Wallace and Cst. Harrison into his police car and sped away to get them medical help at the Canmore hospital. The doctors there, seeing how badly the two policemen were wounded, called for ambulances to transport them back to Calgary.

Meanwhile, back at the site of the gunfight, Cst. Combe had spotted something moving at the edge of the thick bush and, when he turned his light on it, decided it was a man with a revolver in his hand. He opened fire. When the suspect stopped moving, Combe advanced to discover that his adversary was dead. He had shot him clean through the head. The body

was that of Joseph Posnikoff, with Cst. Wainwright's .38 Special Model Colt revolver in his hand.

Once again, outraged citizens volunteered to help the police catch the killers. Now they and the police were arriving on the scene by the car load. Some of the police officers were armed with hand grenades, one had a gas gun. The highways in the area were closed and all cars were checked. The police searched all trains between Calgary and Banff. A trained RCMP police dog was brought in, and it would be the first time in the history of the Force that such an animal would see service under gunfire. Even though the weather was cold and raining, and turning to hail and snow, Sgt. John Cawsey's dog, Dale, sniffed around and soon picked up the trail of the wanted men. It wasn't long before they found the tracks of Woiken and Kalmakoff in the mud.

At 10:30 am on Tuesday, in an area known as Seven Mile Hill, one of the small groups of the search party was fired on from the bush. Tragically for the fugitives, that group included a crack shot named William Neish, who was a Banff Park Warden. Neish called for the two men to surrender, but was answered with a fusillade. He immediately returned fire and heard a loud scream and then silence. Peter Woiken had been hit. Then Neish spotted the glint of a rifle barrel pointing at him from over a distant log. They opened fire again and this time took out John Kalmakoff with several well-aimed volleys. The battered Kalmakoff was found with a .303 Winchester rifle in his possession. Both Woiken and Kalmakoff were badly injured and driven to Banff Mineral Springs Hospital. So severe were their wounds that they soon lapsed into unconsciousness and died later that day.

The two police officers also died that same day. Sgt. Wallace, with his wife at his bedside at Colonel Belcher Hospital, passed away at 6:45 in the morning. Although Cst. Harrison was unconscious most of Tuesday, he hung on until 5:45 in the afternoon, and then succumbed to his injuries in the same Calgary hospital.

Cst. Shaw was buried with military honours in Birchwood Cemetery in Swan River, Manitoba. He had separated from his wife and she had returned with their two daughters to her family in England. Shaw was a decorated veteran of the British Expeditionary Force and had been a pilot with the Royal Flying Corps in the Great War.

Sgt. Wallace and Cst. Harrison were afforded a massive military funeral in Calgary, attended by the Calgary Highlanders Band, a firing party, RCMP members and veterans, war veterans of the Canadian Legion, members of the Masonic order and a host of civilian mourners. Sgt. Wallace was a veteran of the Great War, having been a sniper with the Gordon Highlanders. He had been a policeman in Alberta for over 14 years. The sergeant was survived by his wife, Helen. He was interred at the RCMP plot in Calgary's Union Cemetery. Cst. Harrison was buried in the Banff Cemetery. His funeral procession included a piper and a trumpeter from the Lord Strathcona's Horse. Harrison's coal black charger that he often rode on his local patrols followed his hearse to the grave, saddled, with boots reversed in the stirrups. Cst. Harrison was a single man, survived by his mother in his native Scotland. He had served in the RCMP for a little over four years. John Kalmakoff was buried in an unmarked grave in a Saskatchewan wheat field. The bodies of Joe Posnikoff and Peter Woiken were never claimed by their families. Strong local sentiment in Banff and Canmore refused their burial in those communities. They had to be taken further east before an unmarked place could be found for their remains adjacent to the Wesley Cemetery at Morley, Alberta.

