

Cst. Hooley C.S.



HOOLEY, CLAUDIUS S. - CST. Regimental No. 181
July 24, 1880 - Belly River, North-West Territories Age: Unknown

Claudius Hooley was a teamster, driving a four-horse rig, and travelling with some esteemed members of the NWMP at the time of his death. The group included Commissioner James Farquharson Macleod; the Commissioner's nephew, Norman (called Norrie) Macleod; the Commissioner's orderly, Cst. Alfred Stewart; Insp. C. E. Denny; and the famed scout, Jerry Potts.

These six men set out from Fort Walsh for Fort Macleod on a bright summer's day in July of 1880. Commissioner Macleod and Jerry Potts led the way on saddle horses while the other four followed in Hooley's wagon. When they arrived at the swollen St. Mary's River, the saddle horses and the teams had difficulty fording the stream at a place called the Whoop-Up crossing. Their problems at Whoop-Up slowed their progress, and dusk was falling when the group arrived at their next ford, known as Slide Out, on the fast flowing Belly River.

Commissioner Macleod and Jerry Potts rode into the boiling water and cautiously worked their way over to the far bank. Finding the water too deep for the wagon, they called back to the others not to cross. The Commissioner shouted that he and Potts were going on to Fort Macleod, and that they should make camp where they were and attempt their crossing in the morning.

After some arguing, Hooley insisted that he could get his wagon across at a place he knew further upstream. But when he got there and drove into the water, he realized it was too dangerous. He was barely able to turn the horses around before being hit by the full force of the treacherous current. With difficulty, he managed to get his wagon safely back to shore.

So the four made camp. They pitched a tent, lit a fire, and Hooley hobbled his four horses. After a bite to eat, the four weary travellers turned in for the night. They all had a terrible time getting to sleep because they were tormented by a plague of mosquitoes. During the night, two of the hobbled horses managed to work their way across the river. At daylight, Hooley rode one of the other horses over and brought them back. Then, confident that he could get the team and wagon across, he urged the three others to skip breakfast and make an early start for Fort Macleod. They reluctantly agreed and helped to pack up their gear and harness the horses.

About the middle of the river, the lead horses were caught in the current and started to swerve downstream. This caused them to drag the wheel team along behind them, making the wagon tilt. Sensing the danger, Insp. Denny and Cst. Stewart jumped clear and swam to the opposite bank. While Norrie Macleod was unlacing his shoes in order to swim, Hooley asked him for his knife so that he could cut the horses loose. But Norrie didn't hear him and dove into the water. Now the horses and wagon were caught in the stream and began drifting away with the current. Hooley, who couldn't swim, hung on to the submerged wagon

and called for help. As he thrashed about frantically, the wagon turned over, wheels up, and Hooley went under. Denny, Stewart and Norrie Macleod watched helplessly from the bank. Within minutes, the struggling horses, the wagon and Cst. Hooley disappeared around a bend in the river.

Young Macleod borrowed a horse from a nearby rancher, Jim Bell, and rode off to Fort Macleod to report the accident. Denny, Stewart and Bell walked along the bank of the river and, a good distance downstream, found the wagon and the horses on a sandbar in the middle of the stream. All the horses were drowned. There was no sign of Cst. Hooley. A boat soon arrived from Fort Macleod by wagon. The dead horses were disentangled, the wagon and harness brought ashore, and a vain search for the missing driver was begun. One month elapsed before his body was found 12 miles downstream from the site of his fatal accident.

Although Hooley's birth date is unknown, he had just signed on for his second five year term with the NWMP and is thought to have been in his early thirties. He was buried with military honours in the Protestant plot of the Union Cemetery at Fort Macleod.