

Cpl. Moriarity M.



MORIARITY, MICHAEL - CPL. Regimental No. 6352
April 26, 1935 - Drumheller, Alberta Age: 48

Like Insp. Lorne Sampson, Michael Moriarity was a victim of the Great Depression. He died serving a summons to a prairie farmer who was having his land repossessed because of the Depression and the devastating drought of the 1930's.

Cpl. Moriarity had a long history of service as a policeman. Born in Castle Gregory, County Kerry, Ireland, he served with the Glasgow City Police from 1908 to 1911. He was a London Bobbie from 1911 to 1913. After migrating to Canada, he joined the RNWMP in 1914 and then left the Force to become a member of the Alberta Provincial Police in 1918. When the police force was incorporated into the RCMP in 1932, Moriarity was re-engaged as a Mountie.

Moriarity met his death in the spring of 1935 when he and Cst. Roy Allen attempted to serve a summons on a 40 year old semi-recluse former, David Knox, who lived 15 miles west of Drumheller near Rosebud, Alberta. Knox lived alone on a pension that he received for his partial loss of a leg in the Great War. He had never caused any trouble in the past, but was now being charged with the unlawful use of a firearm. He had pulled his rifle and threatened to shoot a Sheriff/Bailiff who had approached him with an eviction notice.

On April 26, Cpl. Moriarity and Cst. Allen drove out to Know's place and stopped at the farm gate which was closed across his laneway. Moriarity got out to open the gate and let Allen through. While the corporal was closing the gate with his back to Knox's house, a shot rang out that hit Cpl. Moriarity in the back shoulder and tore through his chest.

Cst. Allen tried to remove his badly wounded comrade from the scene, but was hampered in his efforts by a steady hail of gunfire from the house. At least nine shots from a high powered rifle whizzed past his head as he attempted to get the corporal's body into the car and away. Eventually Cst. Allen managed to do that, but Cpl. Moriarity died in the car on the way to the doctor.

As soon as possible, Cst. Allen reported the incident to his detachment and called for reinforcements. Five RCMP responded along with a well-armed farmers' posse which returned with Allen to Knox's farm in order to arrest him. When they spotted him walking across the fields away from his house, the police pursued him in two vehicles. They cornered him in a frame granary near a large haystack on the farm of Peter Hamer, four miles away. As soon as the police approached, Knox opened fire again and a prolonged gunfight ensued that lasted for over two hours. Finally, there was a long pause in the rifle fire and one of the officers drove close to the granary using the car as a shield. After cautious investigation, the policeman found Knox dead. Realizing escape was impossible, he had shot himself in the head with his 30-30 rifle. The Winchester was still in his hand.

The whole incident was puzzling and the only conclusion that the police could come to was that his normally placid and untroubled farmer had somehow snapped under the weight of his economic problems. When the authorities came to take away his farm, he became homicidal ... and then suicidal.

Cpl. Moriarity was an unmarried man who had no relatives in North America, except a brother in Buffalo, New York. This brother asked that the corporal's body be shipped there by train and made arrangements to have Cpl. Moriarity buried in the presence of a trumpeter and a firing party at Holy Cross Cemetery in Lackawanna , N. Y