

Cst. Thompson J.T.



THOMPSON, JOSEPH T. - CST. Regimental No. 18200
December 18, 1961 - Selkirk, Manitoba Age: 27

Cst. Joseph Thompson spent the last four years of his life in a hazy netherworld of confusion. The suffering he experienced in those agonizing days of disorientation and pain proves that the worst fate a man can endure is to die a lingering death. What makes his case even more pathetic is the fact that it all came about because of a freak accident.

Thompson was a bright young officer with a rosy future. He possessed solid interpersonal abilities and had an inquiring mind that pursued a wide variety of interests. Raised in Gimli, Manitoba, one of the unique talents that he had nurtured was his ability to speak fluent Icelandic. Tragically, his potential was never realized.

On Thursday, September 26, 1957, Cst. Thompson and three other RCMP members were travelling by car from the detachment in Macleod, Alberta. They were going to Lethbridge to take part in the annual revolver practice shoot. Thompson was driving, Cst. Eugene Oleksuik was sitting beside him. Cpl. Harold Berry and Cst. Edward Mueller were riding behind them in the back seat. Although it was the heart of winter, the weather, visibility and road conditions all were good. The road surface was bare and dry.

Heading for the revolver range, Thompson steered the cruiser south on Highway #5 and was passing Lethbridge's Airport, Kenyon Field, around eight o'clock in the morning. As he drove, Cst. Thompson was unaware that a Trans-Canada Airlines DC 3 en route from Calgary was coming in for a landing on a flight path running perpendicular to Highway #5. For reasons that will never be known, the pilot brought the plane in too low and, as he flew over the top of Thompson's cruiser, his landing gear crushed the roof and the left door of the car. The damage was so severe that the forward part of the roof on the driver's side was compressed to a level even with the top of the seat. The collapse of the roof prevented the two officers in the back seat from getting at the keys of the ignition. Out of control, the cruiser careened down the highway for a distance of almost a half mile. Eventually it came to a stop in a small irrigation ditch.

Cst. Thompson was taken out of the car unconscious and it was later determined that he had sustained a fractured skull and a broken neck. Cst. Oleksuik was also unconscious and suffering from shock, but he soon came around. The two officers in the back seat were unharmed.

Cst. Thompson was taken to the hospital in Lethbridge and a neurosurgeon was brought in from Calgary to attend him. The severity of his cranial injuries required that he be moved to Colonel Belcher Hospital in Calgary where he remained unconscious for two and a half months. When Thompson finally came out of his coma, it was obvious that he had suffered irreversible brain damage. Eventually he was assessed as being "wholly incapable of

looking after himself...totally and permanently disabled." On his behalf, his mother and brothers successfully sued the airline for damages.

In May of 1958, Thompson was transferred to Deer Lodge Hospital in Winnipeg so that he could be closer to his family in Gimli. His progress here was extremely limited. In order that his needs could be better attended, Thompson was finally transferred to the Selkirk Mental Hospital where he spent the remaining days of his life.

Then on December 18, 1961, Joseph Thompson slipped away in his sleep, two days after his twenty-seventh birthday. In many ways, death was a blessing for the bright young constable whose mind had become so clouded. Finally at peace, he was buried among his Icelandic ancestors in the Community Cemetery of Gimli.