

Cst. Wood H.T.



WOOD, HERSCHEL TAYLOR - CST. Regimental No. 14757
July 16, 1950 - Glacier Park, Montana Age: 25

Herschel Taylor Wood had a rich heritage with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. His brother John Taylor Wood, was a member of the Force. They were the third generation of the Wood family to serve with the Mounties. Their father was RCMP and their grandfather, Zachary Taylor Wood, served in the NWMP and the RNWMP from 1885 to 1915 and rose to the rank of Acting Commissioner of the RCMP. This same Zachary Taylor Wood, was the great-grandson of Zachary Taylor, the twelfth President of the United States, as well as a nephew of Jefferson Davis, the President of the Confederacy.

At the time of Herschel Taylor Wood's death, his father, Stuart Taylor Wood, was serving Commissioner of the RCMP. Herschel's brother, John, retired from the Force in 1988 with rank of Superintendent.

Cst. Herschel Wood was quite an accomplished man in his own right. Born at the RCMP Barracks in Regina, he moved around the country with his family as his father was assigned to various posts. In Ottawa, he graduated from Lisgar Collegiate in 1943 and then served with the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve until October 1945. A year later he joined the Mounties. While serving in the Force in Ontario, he earned a Bachelor of Arts from Queen's University in 1949. Not long after graduating from Queen's he was posted to Cardston in southern Alberta. Just prior to his death, he had been accepted into graduate work at the University of Alberta. Herschel Wood appeared to be a young man with a promising future. All his promise came to an untimely end on a foggy night in northern Montana.

On Saturday, July 15, 1950, Cst. Wood was on patrol with Cst. W. A. Shaw. They were on their way back from Montana to their detachment at Cardston and had been travelling for 13 hours. Cst. Shaw was in charge of the patrol and he had done most of the driving. While motoring through Glacier Park, Shaw stopped the car so that Cst. Wood could take over the wheel. As Cst. Wood drove away, Cst. Shaw dozed off in the seat beside him. Shaw remembers waking when the car hit a bumpy section in the road. He could see they were going through patches of fog. Then he dozed off again.

It was while Shaw was sleeping that the accident occurred. In Montana, about 18 miles south of Cardston, for some undetermined reason, the police car angled off the road. It went over an embankment, plunged into a narrow creek bed and rammed into a concrete abutment. The impact was crushing and both officers were badly hurt. Shaw had a broken leg and suffered a number of cuts and abrasions. Wood was crumpled behind the steering wheel and his injuries were so severe that he was eventually transported more than 150 miles by ambulance to Colonel Belcher Hospital in Calgary. He died there the next day.

On the same Saturday that the accident occurred, Herschel Wood's mother and father and his two sisters arrived in Calgary from Ottawa to attend the Calgary Stampede. It was Commissioner Wood's first visit to the Stampede since 1912. He and his family planned to vacation in Alberta before returning to Ottawa. When they were told of Herschel's death, the prospect of their trip took on a much darker hue.

All the family, including Herschel's brother, John, were in attendance when he was interred with full military honours at the Regina RCMP Cemetery. His flag-draped coffin was borne from the RCMP Chapel on a gun carriage drawn by two teams of horses. His casket was followed by the rider less horse with boots reversed in the stirrups. The funeral cortege included the 36 piece RCMP band, a firing party, a 90 member marching squad and rows of dignitaries and friends. It was a ceremony befitting his ancestry.