

CHARLES GILLIS

THE MURDER OF CONSTABLE CHARLES GILLIS

Researched & written by Jack Templeman



Constable Charles Gillis

On January 24th, 1936, shortly after 7:00 p.m., Ian Murray Bryson, 22 years, of 466 Burrows Avenue, walked onto the Prairie City Service Station lot at the southeast corner of Donald and St. Mary's Avenue.

The manager, Thomas Christie was outside checking the gas storage tanks while his 15-year-old helper Willys Doran was shovelling snow on the lot. Bryson approached Doran with a gun in his hand and ordered him over towards Christie. Then he ordered both inside the station and when they moved too slowly, he fired a shot into the ground.

Once inside he demanded the money from the till and was told there was none. He told them that he had been watching the station and saw them sell a gallon of gas and demanded the 30 cents. Again he was told there was no money. He then demanded their own money and was told neither had any which upset him and he pulled the trigger of the gun while it was pointed at Christie but it misfired.

When Bryson was herding the employees into the station, a passer-by, Harry Fuller, saw what was going on and waved to Christie to indicate he had

seen them. Fuller then rushed to Betty's Cafe a block over at Hargrave and St. Marys Avenue and phoned the police at 7:16 p.m.

A cruiser car manned by Constable Charles Gillis #128A and George Blow #163A (later Chief Constable) received the hold-up report only two blocks from the scene and arrived almost immediately and pulled right onto the lot.

At the time the gun misfired, Bryson saw the cruiser come onto the lot and he headed for the office door. He got just outside as the cruiser stopped and the officers got out to pursue him on foot. Constable Gillis was behind him and Bryson turned with the gun in his hand and fired once. The bullet struck Gillis and knocked him down.

Constable Blow kept running at the suspect who was having difficulty with his footing as he turned and tried to continue running. Blow ran right into him knocking the gun from his hand and sending both of them sprawling on the snow-covered ground. Blow was able to regain his footing first and without ceremony or hesitation disabled the suspect with a direct kick in the face. As Blow handcuffed the suspect, Constable Gillis came over to assist and picked up the .38 cal. Iver Johnson revolver. Blow asked Gillis if he had been hit as he was holding his left side and he replied yes.

Charles Gillis

Gillis then went into the office and was helped by Christie and a young lady, Frances Payea, who had been walking by.

CHARLES GILLIS IN CRITICAL CONDITION; BULLET LODGED IN ABDOMEN; SUSPECT HELD

A taxi driver, Robert Webster, stopped to assist Constable Blow and Blow told him to get his partner to a hospital as quickly as possible. Webster loaded Gillis into the taxi and Miss Payea accompanied them as they rushed to Misericordia Hospital. Webster rushed as he damaged his car pulling into the Misericordia lot.

Everything happened so quickly that after the initial call at 7:16 p.m., the next call was at 7:19 p.m. from Christie at the service station reporting a policeman shot and asking for an ambulance and help. Two more cruisers attended along with Patrol Sergeant R. Fisher. When the police ambulance arrived there was only the injured prisoner to convey to General Hospital. He received treatment to his face before he was conveyed to the Rupert Street Station where he was detained after giving a statement.

Bryson's first statement claimed he had been drinking all day and he admitted seeing the man (Fuller) wave and knew he would call the police. He claimed he couldn't remember anything after the car pulled onto the lot. The following day Bryson made another statement telling where he kept the gun stashed by the William Whyte School and also admitted to the armed robberies of four small stores in the previous months.

Constable Gillis lay in Misericordia Hospital in critical condition from the bullet that punctured his bowel in three places and lodged itself near the base of his spine. At 6:45 a.m., on February 7th, 1936,

two weeks after the shooting he died as a result of septic poisoning from the wounds.

Constable Gillis was born in Montrose, Prince Edward Island on August 27th, 1888. He joined the Winnipeg Police Force on November 18th, 1912 and served until May 31st, 1915 when he joined the army and fought in the First World War with the 90th Battalion, Winnipeg Rifles. His bravery in combat earned him the Military Medal and entitled him to the letters MM after his name. He returned to Winnipeg and rejoined the Force on July 7th, 1919.

Constable Gillis was survived by his wife Annette and 15-year-old son George and 13-year-old daughter Eleanor. They lived at 169 Morley Avenue. He was 47 years of age.

The funeral for Constable Gillis was held on Tuesday, February 11th, at 11:00 a.m. from St. Ignatius Church with burial at St. Mary's cemetery. The church was jammed with friends and fellow officers of this very dedicated and respected officer. Pallbearers were Chief Constable George Smith, Deputy Chief Charles McIver, Sergeant James Burton and Constables Angus MacDonald, Robert Still and George Blow.



Bryson was committed for trial and was convicted on June 9th, 1936 and sentenced to hang. His execution was carried out at Headingly Jail on November 20th, 1936.

Gillis's combined service with the city was just over twenty-three years that entitled his widow to a payment from the Police Pension fund of \$2,355.00 plus a refund of his pension contributions with 4% interest. The Workman's Compensation also provided for a pension of \$40.00 a month for her and \$12.00 for the eldest child and \$10.00 for the other child until each was 16 years of age. What four years of war could not do was done by a young man with a gun in a split second.