

POLICE GALLANTRY - THE KING'S POLICE MEDAL

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Most people know the highest award for gallantry in the British Commonwealth is the Victoria Cross. This award was created in 1856 by Queen Victoria to honour the bravery of her soldiers and sailors and later the men of the Air Force.



*The King's Police and
Fire Service Medal*

King Edward VII obviously felt that police officers and firemen also faced great danger and displayed exceptional gallantry in the course of their duties similar to the military. In 1909, His Majesty expressed his desire that they should be recognized as well with a separate medal that would be limited to these two professions. It was decided that the same medal could also be awarded to recognize long and conspicuous devotion to duty in those services.

After much study, "The King's Police medal" was approved on July 7th, 1909 and published in the London Gazette on July 9th, 1909. The medal was abbreviated as the 'KPM' although the recipients were not entitled to use the letters after their name.

The name of the original medal only made mention of 'police' but the regulations which accompany the medal clearly showed that it was intended for "recognized police forces" and "properly constituted fire brigades". An amendment in 1940 removed any confusion when the name of the medal was changed to "The King's Police and Fire Service Medal". Now the abbreviation became 'KPFSM'.

The face of the medal bears the effigy of the reigning monarch while the reverse has the design emblematic of protection from danger. This is a guardian resting his right arm on a sword while his left hand holds a shield. Written on the shield are the words "TO GUARD MY PEOPLE". The name of the recipient and his department is engraved on the rim of the medal. The medal is presented in a red box bearing a gold crown and symbol of the reigning monarch.

The original ribbon the KPM was one and three-eighths inches wide, deep blue with a narrow silver stripe on each side. In 1916, the ribbon was changed to include a silver stripe of equal size down the middle of the ribbon. There was nothing to indicate if the award was for gallantry or distinguished service until 1933, when another amendment was passed to provide for a thin red stripe in the middle of the silver stripes to denote "gallantry".

The purpose of this article is touch on just a few of the awards in Canada without going into great detail. This is a very rare award since only 52 medals were awarded here. This number made up of 36 gallantry and five distinguished service for police and ten gallantry and one distinguished service to firemen. There were four posthumous awards to the police.

It would appear that Canada was not aware of the existence of the medal for some time as the first application was not made until 1911. This award was requested for long and distinguished service to Chief Constable Charles SLEMIN of the Brantford Police Force in (CACP) and was hosting the 1912 Annual Convention. It took a lot of paperwork which had to be proceeded through the Attorney-General of the province to the Under-Secretary of State in Ottawa. If approval was granted, it was then sent on the Secretary of State for the Colonies in London, England where it again had to be approved before it was presented to the King for his signature.

The awards were normally made only once a year on the King's New Year Honour List. The original regulations allowed for only 120 awards per year which were divided so that up to 40 awards were made for the British Isles, 50 to the Empire of India and 30 to the Colonies, which included Canada.

Chief Constable Slemin was granted the award in the 1912 Honour List which was published in the London Gazette on January 2nd, 1912. The presentation was made at the CACP convention on July 5th, 1912, by Sir John Gibson, Lt. Governor of Ontario.

There were three medals awarded to Canadians in 1913, one for distinguished service and the other two were the first for gallantry. All of the 1913 awards were to members of the Winnipeg Police Force.

The distinguished service award was to retired Chief Constable J.D. McRae who served from 1881 until 1911. He was the third Chief Constable of the Winnipeg from 1887 to 1911. He made numerous improvements in the force as it grew in leaps and bounds with the building boom years. Chief McRae had also survived a shooting in his early years. On his retirement both City Council and the Police Commission praised his accomplishments and recommended this award to the Attorney General of Manitoba.

The gallantry awards were approved for Constable Hugh James BROWN and William Patrick TRAYNOR for an occurrence in 1911. At that time, the city was being plagued with numerous break-ins in the Elmwood area. On August 23rd, a report of two suspicious men was being investigated by Constable Traynor who was on motorcycle patrol. He observed the men by the Louise Bridge and they fled through the Brown & Rutherford Lumber yard and across Sutherland Avenue to Rachel Street. The men took refuge in a known house of ill-fame. Several other beat constables came to the assistance of Constable Traynor including Constable Brown, and the officers surrounded the house. Constable Traynor positioned himself behind a small tree at the front of the house as he was the only armed officer.

When the desperadoes came out of the house armed with revolvers in each hand, Constable Traynor fired one shot at them and they opened fire on him with one bullet striking his chest. As the desperadoes ran towards Main Street, Constable Brown gave chase, running through yards and climbing over fences. The desperadoes fired a number of shots at Constable Brown, but he continued, stopping only to pick up stones to throw at the desperadoes. They managed to get

to Main Street and boarded a streetcar, but the conductor threw away his control lever and pulled the cable from the overhead wire so the streetcar could not move. The desperadoes then ran and grabbed a horse and buggy, but before they could get away, several other policemen and some citizens arrived. As a citizen grabbed the reins of the horse, one desperado fired his gun at him but missed and the shot killed the horse. The desperadoes were overpowered and arrested.

The prisoners gave false names but were identified as Frank and Harry Mecum, violent escaped prisoners from the U.S.A. They had almost killed a guard in their escape. They were sentenced to 17 years for the attempted murder of Constable Traynor. They were too hard to handle at Stony Mountain Penitentiary and while being transferred to maximum security at Kingston penitentiary, they escaped after severely beating their escorts in Toronto. They were immediately captured by some police officers who happened to be nearby at the time. This assault and escape earned them another 10 years to be served consecutively for a total of 27 years. They were then to be deported to face the attempted murder charge in Iowa.

Constable Traynor survived the shooting but succumbed to typhoid fever in 1913 just three weeks before he was to receive his medal. It was later presented to his widow but the officials in London were disturbed that it had not been returned with a recommendation that it be awarded to the wife as only they had the power to decide. It was not recalled. Constable Brown had resigned from the department in 1912, but was there to receive his medal.

The medals of Chief Constable McRae and Constable Traynor are presently on display at the [Winnipeg Police Museum](#).

The next KPM was not awarded until 1915 and it was quite controversial for several reasons. The award was made to retired Chief Constable Nicholas POWER, who had served many years with the Halifax Police Department in Nova Scotia. His career began in 1864 and he had actually retired in 1907. He initiated the recommendation himself in 1912 in a six page letter to the Secretary of State outlining his desire to receive the King's Police Medal for his long and faithful service to King and Country.

The application was turned down several times because Chief Power had retired before the medal was even created and because it had not been recommended through the proper channels. This did stop Chief Power from submitting letters along with recommendations from people like the Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia. His main claim to fame was an incident in 1883 involving the arrests of two men in possession of explosives suspected of planning to blow up the HMS Canada in Halifax Harbour. At the time, Prince George, who would later become King George V, was serving on that ship. Chief Power later described the incident as "*probably the most important arrest made in Canada in the past forty years*" and "*which probably save the life of His present Majesty King George V.*"

After being turned down several times, he wrote a letter on June 17th, 1914, drawing attention to the dynamite incident and expressed his opinion that if King

George V knew of his desire for the medal, "*His Majesty would not hesitate to grant me the King's Police Medal for my long service.*"

Chief Power's determination and tenacity paid off when he was awarded the medal in the New Year's Honour List on January 1st, 1915. That KPM is now on display at the Halifax Police Museum.

There were two awards for Distinguished Service in 1919 and 1920 and then an award in 1921 for Gallantry. This award was to Constable Bertie John MERRITT of Ontario, Canada. It took some time to find the details of this award without knowing when the incident occurred and where in the Province of Ontario. Constable Merritt spot-checked two young men who were armed and violent. One man shot the constable three times. One bullet to the chest hit his notebook and cigarette package and saved his life. One of the men was knocked unconscious by the constable and held while the other escaped. The constable survived and the youth went to Kingston for 15 years.

The only Distinguished Service Medal awarded to a firefighter was made in 1923 to Chief John Howe CARLISLE of the Vancouver Fire Department. There were no other awards in Canada for many years, although there were a number of recommendations sent to the government, at that time it was felt that the award should only be for gallantry. Canadian officials tried to have the wording of the regulations changed accordingly, but this could not be done as the award was for police and firemen throughout the commonwealth.

The pending files applying for distinguished service awards were closed and the departments were advised of the new regulations, where the paperwork had been complete. The incomplete files were left as they were and no action was taken.

Several recommendations had been submitted in the early 1930's for members of the RCMP for distinguished service as well as one for exceptional gallantry. In 1938, the Commissioner of the RCMP advised the Under-Secretary of State "*in view of the length of time which has elapsed since the recommendations were originally made, it is felt that these applications should be cancelled.*" Unfortunately, the officer recommended for the gallantry award was included in the list submitted and that constable was never properly recognized for his courage. The officer had chased a stolen car on his motorcycle in Ottawa near Parliament Hill and continued the pursuit while suspects fired shots at him. He was struck by one bullet which hit near his breast pocket but glanced off under his arm punching holes in his jacket and shirt and burning his arm. He shot back at the fleeing car and forced it off the road where the occupants escaped but were later arrested. This officer had already shown his courage in the First World War where he earned a Military medal and Bar for gallantry. He was also one of the original RCMP members of the 1st Canadian Provost Corps serving in World War Two.

Canada resumed sending recommendations for gallantry awards to London in 1939, after the reconstituted Royal Warrant was in effect. In 1940, five KPM's were awarded to police officers. In 1941, a single award was made to a police officer and

in 1942, there were six awards with two going to firemen and the other four to police officers for a single incident in Sarnia, Ontario. 1943 saw seven awards made, with one to a fireman and the other six to police officers.

The two awards for 1944 went to firemen. There were no awards in 1945, but in 1946, there were a total of fourteen. Although the regulations had limited any single year to twelve awards in Canada, it appears that this was varied this year so that three awards could be included for recommendations that had originally been submitted for incidents in the years before the 1930s and one was a posthumous award which can be made at any time if approved by the King.

There were only two awards to police officers in 1947, one award in 1948 to a fireman and in 1949 one award to a police officer. The last awards were made in 1951 to three police officers, including one posthumously.

The total awards made in Canada were only 52, forty-one to police and eleven to firemen. This article will not touch on the awards to firemen; although, I would like to emphasize that all of those recipients showed great bravery and were very worthy of the medal. What I will do is give some interesting examples of the police awards.

There were two other KPFSM's awarded to Winnipeg Police officers. Constables Leonard J. DAVIES and James Stephen GRAY received the honour in 1946. The incident actually occurred on February 25th, 1937 when the constables pursued a suspicious auto over very icy streets until it went out of control and struck a stop sign and then ended up in a snow-bank. The car was stolen and the two occupants had committed a number of break-ins. They were armed with a rifle. One man escaped while the other exited the car with the rifle pointed at Constable Davies. When Constable Gray came around the car to assist, the gunman swung the gun at him and fired with the bullet going through the officer's leather coat without touching the officer. Constable Gray grabbed the suspect and wrestled him to the ground but the gunman got up and pointed the rifle at the officer once again. Constable Davies managed to get his gun out and fired one shot, which struck the gunman in the head killing him instantly.



*Constable
Leonard James Davies*

The recommendations were forwarded to Ottawa in 1939, after the moratorium but for unknown reasons were not acted on. Further enquiries in 1941 and again in 1946 finally got the paperwork moving and the medals were approved by the King. The KPFSM of Constable Davies is presently of display at the Winnipeg Police Museum.

There were only two gallantry awards to Vancouver City Police Constables, one in 1940 and another in 1949. Both awards were made as a result of the officers responding to bank robberies at the same bank which has to be unusual considering the size of Vancouver.



*Constable
James S. Gray*

On October 24th, 1938, Constable Donald MAXWELL, on patrol alone, responded to the report of two suspicious men. He arrived at the Canadian Bank of Commerce, at First Avenue and Commercial Drive, to find two armed men exiting the building. The men jumped into a car but before they could drive away, the constable drove his cruiser against the car to block it. The officer then got out and held the men at gunpoint until help arrived. It was found that the two men had sawed-off rifles in their car. They were sentenced to long prison terms. In the recommendation, it said in part *"it should be noted that Maxwell is a junior constable"*.

On April 8th, 1949, Constable Cecil William PAUL, on motorcycle patrol, observed a crowd at the corner of First Avenue and Commercial Drive. He stopped his motorcycle and got off and then noted that there was an armed and masked man in the crowd. The man had just robbed the same Canadian Bank of Commerce and shot and wounded two of the employees. He grabbed an elderly lady to use as a shield as he exited the building to get to his stolen car. He fired another shot outside to scatter the people and then he saw Constable Paul approaching. He tried to grab another woman as a shield but she managed to push free so he grabbed a 5 year old boy and lifted him up. The gunman then fired at the constable as he continued approaching. Constable Paul fired one warning shot in the direction of the gunman but when he did not put the child down, the constable fired again with this bullet striking the gunman in the head, instantly killing him. The gunman's Browning automatic still had five live rounds, and there were 32 more rounds in his pocket.

There were four medals awarded to officers of the Sarnia Police Force in Ontario in 1942 as a result of a shooting during an armed robbery which resulted in the deaths of one officer and two criminals in 1936. What made this particular crime so sensation was the fact that one of the gunmen was Norman "Red" Ryan. Ryan was known as a career criminal who had been sentenced to life in prison. The "Red" Ryan gang had terrorized southern Ontario for some time. He supposedly changed his ways and became a model prisoner as well as a spokesman for prison reform. He not only convinced the public that he was a changed man, but a number of senior politicians came to Kingston Penitentiary to visit him. They eventually were able to win a parole or 'tick-of-leave' for him. He went to Toronto and continued his

life of crime and was suspected of other holdups and a murder shortly before the bungled robbery. When officials realized how they had been made to look like fools, they tightened the parole system so much that fewer prisoners than normal were released.

Detective Frank McGIRR, Patrol Sergeant George SMITH and Constable William F. SIMPKINS received their medals first while enquiries were made to see if a King could grant the award posthumously and this was done later in 1942. This was the first official posthumous award in Canada since the 1913 Winnipeg award had not been previously arranged by authorities.

The second posthumous award was made in 1946 as a result of a shooting on October 24th, 1945 which resulted in the death of Detective Thomas D.W. STONEMAN of the Ottawa Police Department. Detective Stoneman was responding with other officers to a report of three suspicious men who were found to be responsible for the theft of a number of weapons from the Canadian War Museum. The three men separated and when Detective Stoneman approached one man, he was shot down without warning. All three were captured and the weapons were recovered.

The last posthumous award was made in 1951, which was the last year that awards were made in Canada. On May 25th, 1950, the constable left the bank to go home for lunch. As the officer passed the Bank of Toronto on Dorchester Street, that bank manager ran out shouting that a holdup was taking place. The suspect exited at the same time by another door and fired at the manager wounding him. Without hesitation, Constable Gammon rushed at the suspect even though he was unarmed and had just witnessed the suspect shoot down the bank manager. The officer was shot in the chest as he got near the suspect who managed to escape. The killer was later arrested and executed for this crime.

In 1951, the regulations governing the King's Police and Fire Service medal were changed so that the award for gallantry would only be made posthumously in the event that an officer performed an exceptional act which resulted in his death. Other acts of gallantry in which the officer survived would be considered for the award of the George Medal. The distinguished service award of the KPFSM would continue in the Commonwealth, but Canada had already removed them from the Canadian regulations in the reconstituted Royal Warrant for Canada in March, 1938.

There were only three awards of the George medal to Canadian police officers before the next changes came into effect. One medal went to a Toronto constable and the other two went to RCMP constables. All officers were shot and wounded in robberies. One officer was hit eight times and survived.

The next change that came along was the awarding of the distinctive Canadian Cross of Valour and Medal of Bravery in 1972. A number of police officers across Canada have and continue to be awarded these medals each year.