

The 2nd World War



Researched and Written by Jack Templeman

CHIEF GEORGE SMITH, 1934 - 1947

The year 1936 began with tragedy when officers responded to the hold-up of a service station at Donald St. and St. Mary Avenue and Constable **Charles GILLIS** was shot and critically wounded. He succumbed to his injuries three weeks later. His partner, Constable **George BLOW** managed to arrest the gunman who was later convicted and executed.



for many more years.

One of the most appreciated things to happen at this time was the replacement of high-necked tunics with the open-neck style in the summer of 1937. The high-necked tunics remained as winter dress

In the late '30s, the members were able to win back some but not all of the pay cuts they had taken and the department finally started to hire additional men.

In 1939 Winnipeg hosted a visit from King George and Queen Elizabeth shortly before the outbreak of World War Two.

The year 1940 saw the death of another member of the Force when Constable **John McDonald** was shot to death during a stake-out. His partner, Constable **Norman M. Stewart** was wounded. The

officers were inside a building on Fort Street when three safe-crackers entered and began to attack the safe. The officers tried to arrest them but one man, Mike "The Horse" Attamanchuk opened fire hitting both officers. Attamanchuk killed himself a couple of days later when trapped by police officers and the other two men were arrested and imprisoned.

The death of Constable McDONALD led to claims of incompetence in the department, favouritism and low morale. These charges made in City Council lead to the appointment of a Royal Commission. The report of the Donovan Commission cleared the department of these charges.

The outbreak of World War Two in September of 1939 created the same problems faced during the First War with qualified officers taking leave to join the military services. This time the number was not as high but the shortage of manpower required that the department suspend their standards and hire men who were over-age or did not meet the height requirement. These men were all hired as "Special Constables for the duration of the war" and were called the "war babies". This war was fought much differently than the first trench war and therefore the casualties were not as bad. Five officers gave their lives in the service, one in the army and four in the air force.

Major crimes did not increase noticeably during the war years although one stood out because it



was the murder of a young girl by a man, Albert Westgate, who had already been convicted of an earlier murder. In 1927 Westgate killed a woman and was convicted and sentenced to death. His appeals not only got the sentence commuted but he only served 15 years and was released. Soon after he struck up an affair with the young girl that resulted in her death. This time when he was convicted and sentenced to death the penalty was carried out.

Shortly after the war two sex-pervert murders terrorized the city and baffled the detectives for some time. An innovative idea was tried out when the detectives borrowed an army mine detector and were successful in locating bullets from both murders. These turned out to be army ammunition fired by a Browning automatic. This information was withheld from the media but was given to all police departments in the event they seize a similar gun. Michael VESCIO, an ex-soldier, who had stolen the gun returned to his hometown of Port Arthur and was arrested for a robbery using the gun. It was sent to the RCMP lab in Regina and found to match. VESCIO was convicted and executed. This unusual procedure at that time was written up in police journals and once again the Winnipeg Police Department was recognized as a leading Force.

Chief George SMITH retired in 1947 with over 42 years of service. He was awarded an M.B.E. by King George in recognition of his valuable service against subversive agents during the war.