

THE PERVERT MURDERS

Researched and written by Patrol Sergeant Mark Hodgson

In 1925 Michael Angelo VESCIO was born in Port Arthur, Ontario (now Thunder Bay). He was the youngest of eight children born to an Italian immigrant family. Michael was said to be the favourite of his mother and well-liked by the family. Michael led a very uneventful childhood, except for the devastation of his mother dying when he was fourteen.



Michael Angelo Vescio

In 1942 VESCIO joined the Royal Canadian Army and was assigned to the Army Service Corps as a driver. VESCIO bounced around Manitoba as a transport driver at different army posts for two years. Then in early 1944 two events occurred that would appear to have no bearing on each other, but would eventually cause two of Winnipeg's most frightening murders.

The first event was that Michael VESCIO was permanently transferred to the Fort Osborne Barracks in the Fort Rouge area of Winnipeg. Secondly in the John INGLIS Factory in Toronto a 9mm Browning Automatic Pistol bearing serial number C.H. 9847 was completed and shipped to the Canadian Army. In late 1944 VESCIO took up residence at 115 Rose Street. The home of Mr. and Mrs. Sidney WRIGHT. The WRIGHTs described VESCIO as a different lad. Mr. WRIGHT said "He kept to himself. Very occasionally he would go out with other Army boys. As for girls he never bothered with them. He was very shy and would sooner run a mile than face a girl." The WRIGHTs noted that VESCIO was never home late and always kept his room tidy. They also noted that he was a big reader.

VESCIO's Army life was quite a bit different. Though the newspaper would later portray VESCIO as a normal soldier. VESCIO's direct superior was a Sgt. Thomas MOIR, who described VESCIO as not his idea of a soldier. He was constantly late, wasn't smartly dressed and didn't act like a soldier. VESCIO's co-workers described him as a little off-beat as well. Pte. Ernest KOLESAR and Pte. Joseph WINZOSKI described him as a bit of a gun nut.

In the summer of 1945, as the war was in its last stages, VESCIO was given the assignment to drive a load of supplies to Grassmere Ditch prisoner-of-war camp just outside of Winnipeg. This was June 8th, 1945. VESCIO was at the prisoner-of-war camp and spotted an unattended Browning 9mm automatic pistol left by a latrine by an unnamed Sgt/Major. When the Sgt/Major returned for the gun, it was gone and so was VESCIO with his new prize. Being wartime and the large number of weapons in the country being lost or misplaced every day, the report of one lost pistol didn't raise many eyebrows with the RCMP.

VESCIO was very proud of his newly acquired prize and was not bashful about showing it to other members of his platoon. On at least four occasions VESCIO showed other members the weapon. On one occasion, while on a convoy VESCIO caused a minor accident by leaving his truck in gear while he got out and began shooting his prize. His truck rolled and hit another truck. This event went unreported.

On the 22nd of September 1945, the first signs of VESCIO's deviant behaviour appeared. On this night a thirteen-year-old boy played near his home at 573 Warsaw Avenue. A male the boy would later describe as 21 years, 5'8", thin, clean-shaven, with black hair combed straight back and wearing a fawn raincoat approached. The male was none other than Michael VESCIO. He coaxed the boy into taking him to the 'B' Division police station. In the lane between Jessie Ave. and Warsaw Ave., VESCIO began choking the boy and forced him to take his pants off. The boy was then sexually assaulted by VESCIO. While the assault took place, VESCIO attempted to speak with a fake German accent. This was very disturbing to the Fort Rouge community when details of the assault were released.

On the 19th of November, an eleven-year-old boy who lived at 699 Mulvey Ave. was forced into a garage by a man meeting the description of the earlier attacker. He was also sexually assaulted and the attacker spoke in a fake German accent. Saying 'We Germans do not get much meat. You Canadians have fat little bums'.

On Christmas Eve 1945 at 9:10 p.m. another boy age 14 of 21-501 McMillan Avenue was behind the apartment block where he lived. A man meeting VESCIO's description coaxed him into a garage on Gertrude Street. There the attacker produced a handgun and forced him to take his clothes off and then sexually assaulted him. The attacker then bound the boy's feet and fled. At this point, police were working feverishly to obtain information about the sex fiend in the Fort Rouge area. Police were alerting families to watch their young children after dark. This third event would send hysteria throughout the city.

On January 4th, 1946 at 7:00 p.m., Roy Ewan MCGREGOR, 13 years of 149 Clarke and Ronny FLOWERS (son of Constable Victor FLOWERS) age 13 of 866 Fleet Avenue attended the Rialto Theatre for a movie. After the movie, the boys took the Parkline Streetcar and got off at River Avenue. Before parting the boys attended the Dutch Maid ice cream parlour. At 11:00 p.m. MCGREGOR and FLOWERS left the parlour and began walking south. At Gertrude, FLOWERS caught a streetcar home. He last saw MCGREGOR speaking with a school chum, Frank BOATES. According to BOATES, MCGREGOR wanted him to walk home with him. But BOATES insisted on taking a streetcar. BOATES was the last to see MCGREGOR alive.

From this point on one can only speculate as to what chain of events lead to the death of Roy Ewan MCGREGOR. From police and coroner reports it appears MCGREGOR met VESCIO in the rear alley of Clarke Street near where number 3 Donald Street is now. It appears VESCIO lured MCGREGOR into Moore's Coal and Wood yard which was situated at the end of Clark Street, near where Donald Street and Stradbrook Avenue

now intersect. It appears MCGREGOR began struggling with VESCIO, when VESCIO's intentions were revealed. It appears from MCGREGOR's first wound that he broke away from VESCIO and began running towards his home a mere 50 yards away. As he ran VESCIO shot MCGREGOR in the back. It appears MCGREGOR was still conscious and began to crawl in an attempt to getaway. The second and fatal wound was delivered to the back of MCGREGOR's head while he was crawling. MCGREGOR died instantly from the wound. This fatal shot was delivered at approximately 11:23 p.m. next to CNR boxcar #413063. Then VESCIO dragged MCGREGOR's body to coal bin #9, 60 feet from where he delivered the fatal wound.

The shots from VESCIO's gun were heard throughout the neighbourhood. No less than six people admitted to police that they heard the shots, but none contacted the police. Most believed it to be a car backfiring. At midnight Allister MCGREGOR, father of the deceased boy phoned the home of Ronny FLOWERS. Victor FLOWERS informed MCGREGOR that Ronnie had been home since shortly after 11:00 p.m. He then phoned the Fort Rouge police station and asked police not to list Roy as missing, because he was probably staying at a friend's home.

At 8:15 a.m. on January 5th, 1946 Roman KLIBAK of 109 Scott Street and Paul ROSS of 1085 ½ Main Street were going about their daily tasks at Moore's Coal and Wood yard. KLIBAK screamed for ROSS to come to coal bin #9. KLIBAK and ROSS stared at the limp body of Roy MCGREGOR. It was a horrifying sight, the body of a boy with his pants down and his underwear flap unbuttoned, with blood everywhere. ROSS ran to the office and phoned the police.

At 8:22 am, Sgt. W. COGHILL, Constable MASON and Constable PAYNE attended to the coal yard. Upon arrival MASON interviewed employees and COGHILL notified the Detective Division. At 8:35 am, Inspector of Detectives W. MCPHEARSON, Detective Sergeant A. MACDONALD, Detective Alf PRICE and Detective R. YOUNG arrived.

Shortly after the detectives, Dr. I.O. FRYER arrived and pronounced the death. The body was removed to Mordue's funeral home at Broadway and Edmonton Street. As per usual, the boy's clothing was seized by Detectives and the crime scene was secured.

Shortly after arriving, Detectives had two empty 9mm automatic cartridges, but no bullets, which would be necessary for ballistic testing. Photographs were taken off the scene by Government photographer L.B. FOOTE. At 9:20 am Deputy Chief of Police Chas. MCIVOR attended the scene. Detectives believed that the crime must have been the work of the Ft. Rouge sex maniac. For the next two days, there would be no sleep for the Detectives. The area was combed for witnesses, suspects and the elusive two bullets which killed Roy MCGREGOR.

On January 7th the weekend murder was splashed across both major newspapers. A reward of \$1000.00 was offered by the Police Commission and the Free Press for information leading to the capture of the murderer of Roy MCGREGOR. The news

threw the city into a sense of fear for their children. Children were not allowed outside after dark by many parents and reports poured into the detective office from the general public.

With the pressure on, the police had no suspects, only a description. The paper even reported that the culprit was a man dressed in women's clothing. What made things even more frustrating was that police had still not found the elusive bullets. This was complicated by the hard snow-covered ground. On the 9th of January, the first break occurred. A suggestion was developed by a member of the Winnipeg Police Department that would be proclaimed as a major breakthrough in investigative techniques and adopted by every police department in North America and eventually shown to J. Edgar Hoover of the F.B.I. by a member of the Winnipeg Police Department. This technique was the use of an army mine detector to find the elusive bullets. Several members of the department laid claim to the idea, but the credit went to Detective George BLOW (later Chief of Police).



According to BLOW he had read some material on mine detectors, then discussed the idea with two of his co-workers, Detective YOUNG and Detective C. SKURZANSKI. At 4:30 p.m. on the 8th, two 9mm bullets were recovered from Moore's coal yard by a mine detector. These two bullets would turn out to be the piece of evidence that found Michael Angelo VESCIO. The bullets were seized by Detective BLOW and with the casings were taken to Sgt. A MASON-ROOKE, the RCMP ballistics expert in Regina. Meantime police continued to search for the elusive killer. Fearing the killer may discard his weapon, police never released to the press that the bullets were found or what type of gun had been used till after VESCIO's arrest.

Secretly Chief George SMITH sent a letter to every major police department in Canada, asking them to hold any 9mm automatic pistols for ballistic testing. SMITH also asked other departments to check their sexual pervert files for the same modus operandi. Winter turned to spring and spring turned to summer with no new leads to the identity of the Fort Rouge sex maniac. The whole time VESCIO was living his normal life at 115 Rose Street in heart of Fort Rouge.

By September 1946 most had forgotten about the Fort Rouge sex murder and it appeared that life in Winnipeg was returning to normal after a hot Winnipeg summer. On September 18th, 1946 George SMITH, age 13, of 585 Home Street left his home for a scout meeting at Home United Church, Home Street and Portage Avenue. This would be the last time SMITH's parents would see George alive. When the meeting broke up at 9:30 p.m. George SMITH, John BROWN, Bruce LEIBROCK and Albert TAIT left together and played for a few minutes before heading home. At 9:45 p.m. the boys headed north up Home Street. At St. Matthews Avenue and Home Street, George left the group and began walking north on the west side of Home Street. The last George's buddies saw of him, he was wearing his skull cap and his blue raincoat.

From approximately 10:00 p.m., it is only speculation as to what transpired. But per VESCIO's normal modus operandi, he somehow by force or trickery got George SMITH into the alley between Arlington Street and Home Street. VESCIO took SMITH to a house under construction at 595 Arlington Street, not more than 45 yards from SMITH's home. Like Roy MCGREGOR, VESCIO had George SMITH half undressed and his intentions were clear when George began to struggle. Between 10:00 p.m. and 10:10 p.m., VESCIO shot George SMITH in the back. It appears from the angle entry and exit, SMITH was bent over forward when he was shot. SMITH, who was still alive was dragged to the alley and left to die by VESCIO. SMITH bled to death of the wound less than 45 yards from his back gate.



George Smith's clothing (circled) at the rear of a house under construction.

At 7:10 a.m. on September 19th, Frank ZEPHOFER of 638 Home Street went to his garage to take his car out. At the rear of 626 Home Street, ZEPHOFER saw the half-naked body of George SMITH with his feet bound by his coat belt, laying in a pool of blood. ZEPHOFER informed his neighbour William RESTAL and asked RESTAL to phone the police. At 7:15 a.m. the call was received at the Rupert Street station. At 7:20 a.m. Constable F. GIBSON 23/A and Constable A. JAMIESON 204/A arrived on the scene and the area was secured. The boy was immediately identified as George SMITH, who had been reported missing at 1:30 a.m. Shortly after Detectives PRICE, BLOW, SIMS, MANNING and MULHOLLAND were on scene.

Right away the detectives recognized the work of the sex maniac from Fort Rouge. As in the MCGREGOR murder, the bullet was found with the aid of the mine detector and was sent to Regina for testing. It was no surprise when MASON-ROOKE confirmed the bullet that killed SMITH was fired from the same gun that killed MCGREGOR. Again as in the MCGREGOR murder, several people heard the gunshot, but it went unreported to police. Only a man named Morley HOUSTON recognized anything unusual when a thin man about 5'8 tall wearing a fawn raincoat ran out the alley onto Ellice Avenue and headed toward Burnell Street. This just reinforced the police frustrations. Police knew what the murdered looked like, what he sounded like what sort of weapon he used and how he operated, but they had no suspects. Michael Angelo VESCIO went back to his everyday life never attracting attention to himself.

Detectives scoured the Winnipeg underworld for the phantom sex slayer. For the rest of 1946, Winnipeg police ran into dead end after dead end. VESCIO wasn't making things easier for police. He was discharged from the Army in February of 1947 and in May returned home

\$7000.00 REWARD

Is now authorized to offer the following rewards for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the slayer of GEORGE RUDOLPH SMITH, 13 years of age, killed in this City around 5:00 p.m. September 18th, 1946:

The Council of the City of Winnipeg	\$5000.00
The Board of Commissioners of Police	\$2000.00
The Winnipeg Tribune	\$1000.00

The Winnipeg Tribune announcement of reward, March 24th, 1947.

The body of the Smith boy was found in a large rear lot home at 7:40 a.m. on September 19th. He had been at a Boy Scout meeting in a school hall the previous evening and left at 9:25 p.m. to go home. When found his body was stripped of all clothing except his pants and shoes. The missing articles were found about forty feet from the body.

The boy had been shot from behind, the bullet going through his heart. Evidently he had put up a battle with his assailant and was trying to run away. The stick was also produced by Smith.

This reward was committed by the precinct who shot and killed ROY EWAN MCGREGOR, 13 years of age, on the night of January 4th in the current year, for whose arrest and conviction rewards totaling \$10000.00 are still outstanding and are not a part of the above reward.

DESCRIPTION OF SUSPECT
 23 to 25 years of age, 5'7" to 5'9", thin build, dark complexion, thin face, black hair, fairly thick and wavy, dark hair. Goes without a hat. Low, soft voice. His nationality is uncertain - white man, large eyes, of him as having a German accent, robust make he had no accent.

Men who have been by various ways for a long time to show their ability to get through the law. When getting their way, a law is a useful thing to attack them. He is a man who is a lawbreaker and a lawbreaker. He is a man who is a lawbreaker and a lawbreaker. He is a man who is a lawbreaker and a lawbreaker.

The Chief Constable of the City of Winnipeg shall be the sole agent to whom the reward may be paid and in what proportion if there is more than one claimant.

GEORGE SMITH, Chief Constable, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

October 12th, 1946

to Port Arthur with his prized Browning 9mm automatic. VESCIO could have probably gone on the rest of his life as a phantom killer, but his undoing occurred on June 30th, 1947. On that date, VESCIO and his friend Frank George GUARASCI robbed the Palm Dairy in Port Arthur with VESCIO brandishing his 9mm automatic.

In an attempt to avoid the law VESCIO and GUARASCI planned to take a train to Winnipeg leaving at midnight. The escape was foiled when two figures appeared in front of VESCIO. They were Detective Omni HARTY and Detective Herman SCARNATI of the Port Arthur Police Department. After a short conversation, VESCIO and GUARASCI took the Detectives to a locker and removed three bags. VESCIO identified the smaller bag as his property. As HARTY began to open the suitcase, VESCIO stated "You will find something in there that does not belong to me." HARTY handcuffed VESCIO and SCARNATI opened the suitcase. Inside SCARNATI found clothing and at the bottom, the prize, a Browning 9mm automatic pistol bearing the serial no. C.H. 9847. The gun was handed to HARTY, who found it was loaded and a round chambered. Immediately VESCIO asked the Detectives "WHAT DO YOU DO WITH THE GUN? DO YOU SEND IT TO TORONTO?"

The group returned to the Port Arthur police station. VESCIO and GUARASCI confessed to the armed robbery of the Palm Dairy. When asked where he got the gun, VESCIO said he stole it from Joe CUSHMAN in Winnipeg. VESCIO again asked if police were going to send the gun to Toronto for testing. After charging VESCIO with the armed robbery, HARTY and SCARNATI turned the gun over to Chief of Police George TAYLOR. SCARNATI and HARTY told TAYLOR how nervous VESCIO was about the gun. TAYLOR instructed SCARNATI and HARTY to search VESCIO's home. There, police found a large quantity of 9mm ammunition and VESCIO's fawn raincoat which he was wearing during the robbery.

On July 12th, 1947 VESCIO plead guilty to armed robbery and was sentenced to three years at Stony Mountain Penitentiary. On July 16th HARTY test-fired VESCIO's weapon per a request from the Winnipeg Police. The rounds were then sent to Sgt. MASON-ROOKE in Regina. Sgt. MASON-ROOKE had examined over 1000 bullets and cartridges trying to match the bullets that killed George SMITH and Roy MCGREGOR. On July 18th, 1947 MASON-ROOKE received the three cartridges and bullets from the Port Arthur Police. After examining the bullets it was determined that they were also fired from the gun that killed MCGREGOR and SMITH. This information was immediately conveyed to Winnipeg Police and Port Arthur Police.

On July 29th VESCIO's gun was brought back to Winnipeg by Sgt. Of Detectives G. BLOW. BLOW then took the weapon to MASON-ROOKE in Regina. After a final test on August 7, it was confirmed that the weapon used by VESCIO was the same weapon that killed MCGREGOR and SMITH. On August 8th Detective Inspector D. NICHOLSON, Sgt. Alf PRICE and Sgt. Of Detectives G. BLOW armed with a warrant for Michael VESCIO for the murder of George SMITH attended to Stony Mountain Penitentiary. At 12:05 p.m. Michael VESCIO was at the Rupert Street Station. When cautioned by NICHOLSON, VESCIO stated "I had a feeling come over me that night I did it". Then

VESCIO made a statement admitting to the murder of George SMITH and to stealing the weapon from Grassmere Ditch prisoner-of-war camp. On August 9th, 1947 police announced to the press the details of the investigation and the name of the man who had murdered Roy MCGREGOR and George SMITH. This hit the press all over North America. On August 12th, 1947 VESCIO again confessed to both murders to his brother and sister while police were present.

On October 8th through 21st of 1947 VESCIO's preliminary trial took place. VESCIO was committed to stand trial for the murder of George SMITH first. On November 17th through 24th, VESCIO stood trial with Harry WALSH and J.L.ROSS K.C. appearing for VESCIO and Mr. O.M.M.KAY K.C. appearing for the Crown.

On November 25th, 1947 his Lordship Justice E.K. WILLIAMS read VESCIO the verdict of guilty and passed sentence. WILLIAMS stated "The jury have found you guilty of murder and I must now pass upon you the sentence which the law prescribes. The sentence of the court is that you be taken to the jail of the Eastern Judicial District at Headingley, in Manitoba and that you be confined as the law requires until Wednesday, the 18th day of February 1948 and on that date between the hours one and six o'clock in the morning you be taken from your place of confinement to the place of execution and that you be then and there hanged by the neck until you are dead. And may God have mercy on your soul."

VESCIO received five stays of execution while Harry WALSH fought to have his conviction overturned. But on November 19th, 1948 at 1:01 am VESCIO mounted the gallows at Headingley Gaol. At 1:17 am Dr. Roy MARTIN pronounced VESCIO dead thus ending the life of Winnipeg's greatest sex murderer.