

A Caring Force

by R.V.J. Paradis, LO, London

Every so often, something happens in my line of work that makes me feel that it is all worthwhile.

In October, 1989, the Liaison Office in London, England, received a fax message from the RCMP Benefit Trust Fund containing the copy of a letter in frail handwriting, missives from the Force and the RCMP Veterans' Association and some blank forms. The letter was from the 79-year-old widow of a former member who had recently passed away. She had been notified that the substantial pension she had been receiving from the Force, had died with her husband. She explained that she was now reduced to welfare and that her income was approximately 18£ a week (roughly \$35).

The official correspondence stated that, at the time of his death, age 88, the ex-member was receiving a disability pension of \$1,094.28, payable only to the disabled person. The lady was now residing on an island off the coast of England and Ireland, and the Veterans' Association was now enquiring whether someone from the London office could travel there to interview her. There was some urgency in the matter because of the lady's advanced age and her financial situation, and judging from the official correspondence, it was clear that there was genuine concern.

I flew to the island, and with the assistance of the local police, arranged to

interview the elderly woman. She was charming and had obviously been looking forward to some company. She lived in a small bungalow, which in Canada would be considered a summer cottage rather than a house. Several photographs of a Mountie on horseback were displayed in the small living room, and she showed me an old newspaper clipping from the 1920s outlining the circumstances of her late husband's disability.

He had been stationed in the Far North, and one evening, another member accidentally refuelled the stove with gasoline rather than with kerosene. He died in the ensuing explosion and the lady's husband was badly burned about the legs. After hospitalization and treatment, he returned to England. His first wife had died some years back, and he remarried in the 1960s. There were no children from either marriage.

Under U.K. laws, persons who had not contributed to the old age pension plan were not eligible to receive a pension. As neither one of them had ever contributed to the scheme, the widow was left with no source of income. Her husband had mistakenly told her that should anything happen to him, she would be receiving his disability pension from the RCMP.

It was under these circumstances that the widow decided to write to the RCMP Veterans' Association.