

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, April 18, 1994

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: I believe there is unanimous consent to have a statement by the Minister of National Revenue. Has that been agreed to?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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CUSTOMS OFFICERS

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank in particular the hon. member for Mission—Coquitlam for allowing me to step in before continuing with her motion.

It is certainly with a heavy heart that I rise in the House today on behalf of Revenue Canada and the government to express my deepest sympathies for the families of the two customs officers who died in a tragic accident over the weekend in New Brunswick.

The two officers killed were Inspector David Moore and Superintendent Jim Finnamore, both of Perth—Andover.

They were swept to their deaths Saturday night by a sudden rise in the flood swollen waters of the Aroostook River.

I want to stress that they died not because of carelessness, error or mistake. They died by reason of their high concern for the safety of other customs officers under their command.

Briefly, the facts as far as they are now known are as follows. The customs office at Tinker's Road, which is some 15 kilometres from the Perth—Andover office, was threatened by rising flood waters on Saturday evening. Although the two men had spoken to the customs inspectors who were on duty at Tinker's Road and had been told that the situation was satisfactory, Mr. Moore and Mr. Finnamore decided to check the situation personally. I want to stress that is the type of men they were, dedicated professionals determined to do everything in their power to ensure the safety of their staff.

A short distance from the Tinker's Road office they met an RCMP officer and several provincial government employees who were monitoring the rising flood waters. The customs officers were in fact joined by an RCMP officer for the remainder of the short trip.

Once they arrived at Tinker's Road office, Mr. Moore and Mr. Finnamore met with the two customs inspectors who were working there. After reviewing the situation the four men agreed that there was no immediate danger of flooding at that particular customs post. The two men then left with the RCMP and started back on the road to Perth—Andover, the same road they had travelled less than a half hour before. It was at this point that tragedy struck.

● (1105)

An ice build-up on the river suddenly released and a torrent of water swept over the river bank and the adjacent roadway just as the vehicle of the three men was traversing a low point in the road. The vehicle was swept to the side of the road, nose down in the ditch, and was almost totally submerged. All three men were successful in climbing on to the roof of the vehicle. The two customs officers tried to reach land while the RCMP officer stayed with the vehicle. Tragically, they failed to reach the shore.

Shortly after a search was launched for the missing three men. The RCMP officer was located and taken to hospital at midnight. The search continued in the darkness for a further three hours without success.

Yesterday morning at daybreak the search resumed. The body of Mr. Moore was found first and the body of Mr. Finnamore was recovered shortly after.

Coping with such a loss is always difficult, but it is so much more difficult when the loss is sudden as a result of a series of events that cannot be explained.

David Moore is survived by his wife Kelly. James Finnamore is survived by his wife Frances and their three children, Tamara, Brent and Peter.

Yesterday I spoke with both widows to express my most profound sympathy for their loss and to tell them that the department will do all that it can to support them and to help them through this very difficult time.