

# A Legend of the Yukon Passes on: Goodbye to G. I. Cameron

by Dr. William Beahen, RCMP Historian

On April 29, 1996, the Yukon and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police lost one of their finest with the passing of Gordon Irwin Cameron. At the age of 96, any person can be said to have led a full life, but "G.I." or "Cam" as he was known, surpassed the norm in this regard. Spending almost 60 years serving the people of the Yukon, first as a Mounted Policeman, and then as a Territorial Government official, Cam's genial helpfulness made him a legend in the North. In the letter of condolence to his family, Commissioner J.P.R. Murray said "that by understanding what was needed to keep people safe and secure and by acting accordingly, he exemplified the spirit of the RCMP's current philosophy of community policing."

G.I. Cameron was born on January 23, 1900, at Trois-Rivières, Quebec, the son of an engineer in the logging business. When he was only 12, his father died and Cam moved with his family to Ottawa, Ontario. Joining the Cadet Corps, he got a taste for the military life. In 1916, with his Nation in the thick of battle overseas, Cam lied about his age and joined the Canadian Army, hoping to be sent to France to serve with his older brother. However, Cam's true age was discovered and he remained in Canada, discharging from the Army in 1919.

Immediately upon leaving the military, Cam engaged in the Royal Northwest Mounted Police and received Regimental Number 8681. After training at Regina, he

was posted to "E" Division, British Columbia, along with many other recruits because postwar labour problems were expected to bring disorder in the area. However, action was not forthcoming and a posting to Esquimalt Detachment brought a taste of the mundane duties that service in the Force could sometimes entail. At one point, Cam was awarded extra pay for 18 days spent whitewashing, painting and repairing woodwork at the Detachment stables. He applied for Arctic service and was recommended for it by Insp. Vernon Kemp, who observed that Cam was "a big strong man, even-tempered, quiet. Cheerful."

Despite the positive report, the transfer did not take place and when his engagement was up in 1922, Cam took his discharge.

This sojourn out of the service was brief. Cam wandered to California for a while, trying his hand as a welder in the oil fields. Upon his return to Canada in 1923, Cam reengaged in the RCMP. In 1925, he realized his goal and was transferred to the Yukon, where he was initially employed on plainclothes duty because as a new man in the Territory, his face was not known to those who were violating the provisions of the *Liquor Act*. After two months Cam was moved to Dawson City and to uniformed duties, where he found that not all of these responsibilities were routine.

In January 1927, word was received at Dawson that a reclusive trapper had shot at a neighbour at Sulphur Creek and was