

RCMP still feeling repercussions from Samson blast

By NICK AUF DER MAUR
Canadian University Press
reprinted with permission
from The Last Post

(Mr. der Maur is a Quebec editor of The Last Post and was recently elected to Montreal City Council.)

A dynamite bomb blast in the early morning hours of July 26 outside the suburban home of a wealthy Montreal supermarket executive opened a new chapter in the Byzantine Quebec tale of intrigue involving the underworld, terrorism, the police, strikebreakers and official corruption.

It could have been one of the innumerable small acts of violence that occur in Montreal and go by unnoticed except for brief newspaper stories, except Robert Samson, a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's elite, secret Security and Intelligence (S&I) Squad was injured in the explosion.

Samson's involvement raised serious implications concerning, at the very least, the important Montreal detachment of the highest-level security force in the country. The Samson case and related events pointed to underworld connections with all levels of the police agency charged with intelligence work and the protection of "national security". They also raised questions and suspicions about the methods of "anti-subversive" police operations.

Shortly after the 1:30 a.m. bomb explosion, Montreal Urban Community (MUC) police alerted hospitals to be on the lookout for someone suffering from serious hand injuries possibly caused by the explosion. At the site, they had found much blood and torn clothing.

About 3:00 a.m., 29-year-old RCMP Constable Robert Samson, accompanied by his friend Fernand Barre, showed up at Verdun General Hospital with the fingertips on his left hand in shreds, cuts and shrapnel in his neck and chest, and severe damage to his left eye. Since he was an RCMP agent and said he had been injured while fixing car, the hospital where doctors noticed the similarity between his wounds and those described in newspaper reports about the mysterious bombing.

MUC police promptly moved in and claimed him as a prime suspect.

But before any charges could be laid, the Quebec Justice Ministry appointed a Fire Commission to launch an inquiry into the case. The Quebec Fire Commission Act, unique in North America, allows for an unlimited, wide-ranging public inquiry which can force anyone remotely connected with an incident to testify. Civil liberties of witnesses are virtually suspended. It has been used to probe FLQ bombings and, recently, the blowup at James Bay.

Opposition and union leaders were already claiming Samson had been an agent provocateur.

After his release from hospital, a month after the bombing,

gloves and picked up the package, which, he noticed, contained a bomb. It went off. Suffering serious injuries and shock, he stumbled off, hailed a taxi and went home to his mother. His mother called his friend Fernand Barre who took him to hospital.

Then followed a parade of witnesses, almost all of whom contradicted Samson's story. Various MUC and RCMP officers testified that he had told them various versions while in hospital. The main version was that a loan shark named 'Louis' paid him a thousand dollars "to scare somebody."

He said he met Louis in a bar and Louis said he had heard that Samson had burned down his summer cottage for the insur-

banker, and Camille Gervais, a transport company operator, convicted of drug possession and awaiting sentencing for a 1973 conviction for conspiracy in a bank fraud. Gervais also owns a private hunting and fishing club and is an Obront associate.

Robidoux said he knew Samson for about two years and he was around his house "all the time," partly because he was going out with his 17-year-old daughter. On the trip back, Gervais noted that Samson went through customs very quickly when he showed his identification while he, Gervais, was searched thoroughly "as usual".

After one day of testimony, the RCMP placed Samson under arrest for "conduct unbecoming an RCMP officer." Several days later, Fire Commissioner Delage told Samson he didn't believe a word of his testimony and, after giving him a few days to think it over, sentenced him to 60 days for contempt.

Regular readers of the Last Post will recall an article last September in which evidence was presented linking segments of the Montreal police with the underworld. There were also questions raised regarding the role of the police, government, the underworld and the FLQ during the October Crisis in 1970.

The Samson case and related events also raise disturbing facts and curious coincidences that add to the generally murky picture emerging so far. So before further exploring the Samson-Steinberg connections, it will be useful to have a look at an earlier RCMP problem.

On December 6, 1973, two senior non-commissioned officers of the RCMP's S&I branch in Montreal, Staff Sergeant Donald McCleery, 40, a 21-year force veteran, and Sergeant Gilles Brunet, 39, a 17-year veteran, were paraded separately before Superintendent Roger Shorey and fired.

RCMP sources said that all the reasons for the firings would never be made public for "security reasons." The two men, one of whom used to be Robert Samson's superior, said they were fired for failing to terminate a friendship with Montreal businessman Mitchell Bronfman, a nephew of Sam-



Samson was brought before Fire Commissioner Cyrille Delage. He said he had a simple explanation. An anonymous caller told him he would find something interesting on a street in the Town of Mount Royal, a rich residential area in the north of Montreal.

He went there and found a package beside the home of Melvyn Dobrin, president of Steinberg's Ltd., the company that owns Miracle Mart stores, a string of supermarkets in France and a large development company, aside from the Steinberg's supermarket chain.

Samson said he put on his

ance money. Louis said if he was on the take, he should take a couple of hundred to beat up a loan defaulter. He did. Then came the bombing.

At one point, Samson had decided not to talk any more about it and asked his RCMP partner to take off his hand bandages and "leave me alone with a .38 and go."

Other testimony linked Samson with two underworld characters. These were Leo Robidoux, chauffeur for William Obront, the Montreal meat dealer identified by police as a Mafia "untouchable" and underworld