

Former Sask. Mountie Kevin Gregson a disillusioned police officer long before being charged with murdering one

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Kevin Gregson

Photograph by: Julie Oliver, Ottawa Citizen files

REGINA — Before he was accused of slaying an Ottawa police officer, suspended Saskatchewan Mountie Kevin Gregson had become a disillusioned and disgruntled member of the force he had once longed to join.

More details are emerging about the 43-year-old officer's turbulent history with the RCMP from trial transcripts recently obtained by the Leader-Post.

"I chose policing 'cause it's a good job. I want to help people. It's stable," Gregson testified when he was on trial seven years ago, accused of assaulting a prisoner during one of his early postings in northern Saskatchewan's remote Cumberland House detachment. Years later, he was still blaming the force's handling of those charges — on which he was ultimately acquitted — for tainting a promising career that had once earned him a commendation.

"It was unfounded, a third-party complaint (not launched by the alleged victim). And it followed me ... 'cause in this outfit if you get in trouble, even if you're acquitted, you're still — the taint is still there," he testified at a hearing in 2005. Those proceedings stemmed from an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to destroy firearms seized from Gregson's home and to prohibit him from having weapons.

During that hearing, Crown prosecutor Gary Parker argued Gregson's apparent conflicts with numerous officers and complaints against senior RCMP members "suggest a free-floating hostility or just a lot of pent-up anger."

"The criminal assault charge that arose out of Cumberland House was obviously difficult for him and caused him much grief, but I think his anger issues are more than just — have an origin which is more than just that incident. That's just a symptom, if you will, of the anger that exists. And, I think all you have to do is turn to his evidence and ask yourself, 'is there some significant public safety concerns?' " Parker asked.

Gregson is charged with first-degree murder in the Dec. 29 stabbing death of Const. Eric Czapnik. The 51-year-old officer was killed while writing up notes in his police cruiser, parked outside an Ottawa Hospital. The case was recently adjourned to April 6 in an Ottawa court.

Ottawa's police chief has alleged the suspect might have been seeking out a police officer to kill that day.

At the time of Czapnik's death, Gregson, who became a Mountie in August 1998, was under suspension from the force after threatening to stab a Mormon bishop in Regina in 2006 in a dispute over Gregson's church privileges. He pleaded guilty to the charge in 2007 and received a conditional discharge and probation, as recommended by the Crown and defence.

"I would have considerable reservations about doing that if it were not for the diagnosed medical condition," Judge Bruce Henning said at that time. The bizarre encounter was blamed on cysts on Gregson's brain. According to a transcript, Gregson told the bishop: "You don't know how many ways I have been taught to kill a man. I would rather fight you with this knife, than with a pistol ... I can take someone out so much faster with this."

In 2008, an adjudication board ordered that Gregson resign or be fired from the RCMP, but he appealed and remains with the force pending a final decision.

During his trial in 2002 on two assault charges, Gregson spoke of his longing to be part of Canada's national police force. He said he had gone to school for seven years so he could be a Mountie, had dealt with extremely violent psychiatric patients while working as an orderly, was also a "native community worker," and had a two-year college diploma as an addictions counsellor.

His first posting was to Kamsack, which he welcomed because it was closer to his grandfather on the Cote First Nation. Of Metis descent, Gregson grew up in Ottawa with the couple who had adopted him.

"I wanted First Nation police experience for my church. I'm a member of Church of Jesus Christ Latter-Day Saints, two years. As far as my aboriginal roots go, I'm an eagle feather keeper," he told

the court.

He arrived in Cumberland House in August 2000. Within months, the relationship between he and a fellow officer was so strained they refused to travel in the same vehicle together. Gregson blamed the strain on differences over work ethics, personal views and moral issues. But it wasn't a unique problem at that detachment, where several of the officers didn't get along, according to the court transcript. A district manager was sent in at one point to deal with the issues. In Gregson's words, "the first year we were there it was like being in hell."

The call on Jan. 27, 2001, which led to the charges against Gregson, was the first time in weeks the two officers had travelled in the same vehicle. The officers were called because a 19-year-old man was being drunk and rowdy in his family home.

Seated on a couch and smoking a cigarette when police arrived, the young man began mouthing off. Gregson heard the man say, "I'll kick your f---ing ass." The man ended up with a cut on his cheek when the officer pulled him from the couch and forced him to the floor. Back at cells, Gregson's partner heard a noise and turned to see Gregson pushing the man in the cell, then turn him over onto the floor and put his knee in the man's back.

Gregson said in the first instance, he believed the man was about to fight and was resisting arrest, and in the second, Gregson had been head-butted by the handcuffed man and was restraining him. Justice John Klebuc agreed and found Gregson not guilty.

The acquittal came at a steep price, financially and emotionally.

"I had to go to trial. I had to work there for two years, had no support. It cost me \$16,000. And it was just a mess. And so when I came out of the north, I was messed up. I was angry. I was frustrated," Gregson would later tell a judge.

According to Gregson, the RCMP's "solution was to stick me in the APO program or Air Protective Officer program, which is geared towards making a person aggressive." Testimony from his supervisor Sgt. Rhonda Harlos, at the Humboldt detachment, his next posting, suggested it was Gregson's decision to try to join the APO or Air Marshall program, and both Vancouver and Ottawa turned him down — adding to his frustration. He became embroiled in further workplace conflict at the same time his marriage was disintegrating. He blamed the RCMP for the breakdown, which ended in divorce.

After his rejection from the APO for a second time, he sent an e-mail in January 2005 to the commanding officer, saying, "f--- me, I guess I'm f---ed" and that he would have to handle the matter "in his own way."

It was the culmination of incidents that had concerned his supervisors — including failing to respond

to reports of a gun at a school, asking police to remove his then-wife and two children from their home because of his anger, and telling an anti-drunk-driving class that he had liked to get "physical" with psychiatric patients in his previous job and that "people should be smarter with their drinking and driving so they don't get caught."

On Jan. 13, 2005, out of concern for Gregson's mental well-being, he was placed on "administrative leave"; his service revolver, badge and office keys taken away; and police seized five long-barreled guns and a bow from his home.

Gregson told court he was diagnosed with "stress due to environmental factors." He had some contact with an RCMP psychologist, whom he referred to as "Dr. Two Names" because of a hyphenated surname, but suggested any treatment was minimal.

"My treatment consisted of what I call C.M.T — country music television. I did nothing for eight months except for sit on my butt and watch television, take my kids to school," he said, adding that he used the time to "relax and mellow out."

Fearing he might lose his job, Gregson went to Africa for five weeks to take a course in becoming a personal bodyguard.

But by 2005, at the time of the weapons hearing, he was working at the Lanigan detachment in a desk job, though he wasn't allowed to do front-line policing.

Some of his co-workers came to his defence in that hearing, with one officer calling him "a good cop."

The weapons application was ultimately dismissed. Provincial Court Judge Dolores Ebert concluded that while there were concerns about him within the ranks of the RCMP and in connection with the comments made during the drunk-driving course, no one spoke of feeling their safety was threatened. "Gregson has made many, in my view, inappropriate and perhaps foolhardy and clearly poorly conceived comments, but it appears from the evidence that many people take these as related to his personality type," the judge said, adding that Gregson seemed to have some difficulties with authority figures.

"There was no evidence of Gregson at any time actually losing control and endangering safety," Ebert added in her December 2005 ruling.

Five months later, an angry Gregson, armed with a knife, told the Mormon bishop, "You are just a civilian and I am a cop. I'm not like the rest of you people." He said that in his RCMP training, he was taught to "lock-up the bad things away in his head."

Gregson continued, "I'm messed up. You don't know how messed up I am. No one knows how messed up I am. I'm afraid all the time that I'm going to have psychological testing soon at work, and

I will lose my job."

He has been suspended from the job since September 2006.

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