

Bill Baluk: pioneering forensics police work

In this day and age of DNA testing, sophisticated fibre testing and satellite monitoring, crime solving often seems an awesome scientific or technological process. It wasn't always so. In fact, less than 50 years ago, the gathering of evidence for criminal prosecutions was in its infancy in Ontario.

Retired Ontario Provincial Police Corporal Bill Baluk was only the third forensic constable in Ontario. From his Cramahe Township home, using his 32 years of work diaries for reference, he talked of the challenges, memories good and bad, of his work.

By Mandy Martin

When Bill was sworn in as an OPP constable June 1949, his annual salary was \$1,840 - before income tax.

"The force was paid once a month and it was a hell of a long month when it had five weeks to it," he recalls.

"My first two months' pay was \$135.50 per month because they deducted \$17.50 each month in case the uniform or revolver were lost. This was a bit of an insult because the revolver I was issued, a Webbley & Scott, probably cost between \$5 and \$12 on the war surplus market."

And he had left a \$240 a month plus overtime at General Motors to join the force.

The work week was established at 48 hours minimum. Frequently, the men were called upon to work longer hours with no overtime monetary or time compensation.

As a matter of fact, if you happened to have to attend court on your day off or annual leave, that day was lost," Bill recalls. "You did not get another day in lieu of the days lost.

"Periodically, you got involved with an investigation of some sort, or perhaps an escort at the end of your shift at 2 a.m. and you did not get home until 7 a.m. or after. The District Sergeant at the time was not very sympathetic when anyone complained about being overworked and underpaid. 'Then quit, son,' he'd say. 'We have 10 men waiting to take your place!'"

Bill's active and intensive work in gathering evidence for proving crimes had been committed continued from his home base of the Cobourg OPP detachment until November 23, 1963. That was the day he reported to Timmins OPP detachment as Sergeant. While there, the famous Windfall Mine scam broke. Texas Gulf prospecting was on, fuelled by, as it turned out and shades of recent Bre-X scandals, false core sample reports.

April 1, 1965, Bill transferred to Orillia Detachment as Commander with 24 uni-



LEFT: Bill Baluk at his Shiloh home today demonstrates the fingerprinting techniques used in the 50s and 60s.

PHOTO BY MANDY MARTIN

BELOW: On April Fool's Day, 1965, OPP Sergeant Bill Baluk was transferred from Timmins to the Orillia OPP detachment as Detachment Commander. There were 24 uniform officers and two civilian stenographers at the Orillia office.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BILL BALUK



formed and two civilian stenographers, February 14, 1970, he transferred to the Oak Ridges Detachment as I/CII (second in command) of the attachment with 68 uniformed officers, three civilian radio operators, three stenographers and two janitors. It was a busy spot. There were 14 cruisers, five motorcycles and nine different shifts. More shifts were added in the years following.

"At my retirement in April 30, 1980, there were 48 uniform officers, four civilian radio operators, four stenographers and two custodians of buildings (formerly called janitors)," Bill remembers.

He had 31 years and 47 weeks of service. His pension was augmented because he was allowed to buy back his three years of RCAF wartime service.

It is the Cobourg years that have the most numerous and memorable cases and events of his forensics involvement. Having studied his work calendars from those years, Bill has compiled a chronological listing of the cases many readers may recall or recall having heard about. We outline some of the cases - by no means all! - below.

■ January 5, 1950: assisted Criminal Investigation Branch Inspector Scotty MacLeod investigating a double murder of a husband and wife in Oshawa. Many of the witnesses spoke Ukrainian or Polish, Bill (also capable in Russian) served as translator.

■ February 10, 1950: assisted Port Hope

Police Department with photos for a violent rape case in Port Hope. Later, Bill attended Supreme Court Assizes (April 2, 1951) when a man was convicted to 20 years for the crime.

■ October 14, 1950: theft of over \$8,000 from a Roseneath farmer. Five men were apprehended in various parts of Ontario, Bill flew to Winnipeg to escort one of the suspects (en route to Vancouver) back to Cobourg. The man had been apprehended by the RCMP at Bill's request.

■ December 14, 1950: arrested three Brantford men for theft of auto. The Brantford Police Department was very pleased when they heard the news. Annually, three brothers stole a car and drove to the Maritimes to visit. Several weeks later, the car would reappear several blocks from where it had been stolen. It wasn't all cute, though. The arrest involved a high speed chase across Northumberland County on Highway 2, culminating at Trenton after shots were fired.

■ April 11, 1951: arrested three men for passing counterfeit bills at a small store run by Ed Barlow at Wicklow.

■ August 30, 1951: investigated the theft of a steer from a farmer west of Cobourg. The case was unsolved, but the pressure of the investigation resulted in the farmer eventually receiving a phone call telling him where he could retrieve the steer. Low and behold, a steer missing from the previous year, as well as the 1951 steer were both recovered.

"Some weeks later, I met the farmer in Cobourg and refused a \$5 reward he offered to me for recovering his steers," Bill relates. "I explained to him that he was already paying my salary in his taxes. About five minutes later, I spoke to a neighbour of the farmer who said to me, 'I hear you just refused to take five dollars!' How thankful I was that I had refused the five dollars. If I had taken it, talk would have been slightly different."

■ March 16, 1951: murder investigation with CIB Inspector Don Nicol of Toronto.

■ March 27, 1951: bank robbery at Colborne. Jackson, Jackson and Boyd hit town. A Mr. Rutherford was whacked on the head because he wouldn't get down. Inspector Nicol handled the investigation.

In 1951, there was also a chase for a man that had gone berserk at Dalrymple Lake. Some 30 officers were called in to bring the man in. When he was encountered, it required eight men to hold him down.