



Ministry of Justice
Coroners Service
Province of British Columbia

File No. :2014:0380:0001

VERDICT AT CORONERS INQUEST

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS AS A RESULT OF THE CORONER'S INQUEST PURSUANT TO
SECTION 38 OF THE CORONERS ACT, [SBC 2007] c 15, INTO THE DEATH OF

PLANTE

SURNAME

Gaetan Gilbert

GIVEN NAMES

An Inquest was held at The Burnaby Coroners Court, in the municipality of Burnaby

in the Province of British Columbia, on the following dates June 22, 23, 24, 2015

before: John Knox, Presiding Coroner.

into the death of PLANTE Gaetan Gilbert 61 ☒ Male ☐ Female
(Last Name) (First Name) (Middle Name) (Age)

The following findings were made:

Date and Time of Death: January 17, 2014 2233 hrs

Place of Death: Royal Columbian Hospital New Westminster, BC
(Location) (Municipality/Province)

Medical Cause of Death:

(1) Immediate Cause of Death: a) Perforating Gunshot Wound of Chest

Due to or as a consequence of

Antecedent Cause if any: b)

Due to or as a consequence of

Giving rise to the immediate
cause (a) above, stating
underlying cause last. c)

(2) Other Significant Conditions
Contributing to Death:

Classification of Death: ☐ Accidental ☒ Homicide ☐ Natural ☐ Suicide ☐ Undetermined

The above verdict certified by the Jury on the 24th day of June AD, 2015

John Knox

Presiding Coroner's Printed Name


Presiding Coroner's Signature



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PARTIES INVOLVED IN THE INQUEST:

Presiding Coroner: Mr. John Knox
Inquest Counsel: Mr. Rodrick MacKenzie
Participants/Counsel: Mr. David Kwan, counsel for the Attorney General of Canada on behalf of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police
Court Reporting/Recording Agency: Verbatim Words West Ltd.

The Sheriff took charge of the jury and recorded seven exhibits. Sixteen witnesses were duly sworn and testified.

PRESIDING CORONER'S COMMENTS:

The following is a brief summary of the circumstances of the death as set out in the evidence presented to the jury at the inquest. The following summary of the evidence as presented at the inquest is to assist the reader to more fully understand the Findings and Recommendations of the jury. This summary is not intended to be considered evidence nor is it intended in any way to replace the jury's Findings and Recommendations.

Gaetan Gilbert Plante, 61, was raised on a farm in Quebec with thirteen siblings. He worked as a general tradesman and construction supervisor. He was reputed to be quite strong for his relatively small stature. Later in life he married, had three daughters, and was a proud "Pappy" to five granddaughters. The jury heard of his love of family, his generosity, and his passion for hiking, hunting and fishing.

Mr. Plante was not without personal problems. He had separated from his wife several years prior, and he lived alone in a Surrey basement suite at the time of his death. Family members testified that they saw signs of depression and alcoholism, and that he was struggling financially as a consequence of limited employment opportunities.

On the evening of January 17, 2014, Mr. Plante placed telephone calls and sent text messages to family members which caused them to believe he was suicidal. Two of his daughters called 911. Surrey RCMP members were dispatched to check on his well-being. The first member to arrive found Mr. Plante's basement suite unsecured and made his way inside. The member located a handwritten note on the kitchen counter with a farewell message addressed to family and friends. His search of a spare bedroom revealed a locked gun safe, ammunition and several cases for long guns. Mr. Plante was nowhere to be found.

Additional RCMP members arrived at the residence shortly thereafter. One of these was a Corporal from the Lower Mainland District Integrated Police Dog Service. He was wearing the standard issue uniform for RCMP dog handlers: black cargo pants; a black jacket with black embroidered RCMP shoulder flashes; and a black toque embroidered with the word "POLICE" in white lettering.

It was decided that the Corporal would use his dog to attempt to locate Mr. Plante. A fellow member's offer to accompany the Corporal was declined. The Corporal and his dog initially tracked eastward,



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finding nothing. They reversed course and made their way westward to the end of the street, which terminates in dense bushes and chain link fencing.

Conditions this January evening presented with very poor visibility; it was fully dark and extremely foggy. The Corporal testified that his dog was leashed approximately six to eight feet ahead of him when it stepped from the street into the bushes. He stooped under some branches to follow the dog in, and heard a shotgun blast from somewhere in his immediate vicinity. He drew his service pistol and activated the flashlight mounted to its barrel. He saw a man, later determined to be Mr. Plante, on the ground in a seated, semi-reclined position. The dog had latched on to Mr. Plante's left leg with its teeth. The Corporal believed that he saw Mr. Plante racking a pump-action shotgun and aiming it towards him. The Corporal fired his pistol at Mr. Plante twice while moving backwards. He testified that he then got on top of Mr. Plante to wrestle the shotgun away and place him in handcuffs.

Other RCMP members testified that they heard gunshots but did not witness the shooting. They rushed to the end of the street after determining it was safe to do so. Finding Mr. Plante injured, they called for an ambulance and provided emergency first aid until its arrival. Paramedics found Mr. Plante unresponsive with multiple gunshot injuries. Vital signs were absent. Resuscitation attempts were made at the scene and also during transport to the emergency trauma centre at Royal Columbian Hospital. An emergency room doctor testified as to the hospital's efforts to save Mr. Plante. These efforts were not successful. The doctor confirmed death at 2233 hours.

The forensic pathologist who conducted the autopsy of Mr. Plante testified that his body was struck by at least two bullets. The cause of death was a perforating gunshot wound in which a bullet entered at the lateral upper left chest, passed through both lungs, two major coronary arteries, and exited the right side below the armpit (hereinafter "the fatal injury").

He testified that the wound track of the fatal injury confirmed Mr. Plante was turned away from the Corporal at the time that shot was fired.

A bullet was found lodged in the right upper arm. The pathologist said it is possible this is the same round that caused the fatal injury. If this were indeed the case, he testified that the locations of the corresponding exit and entry wounds suggested the arm was extended outward from the torso at the time of the fatal injury.

Another bullet entered Mr. Plante's body at the outside of the left thigh, just above the knee; it travelled through the left leg and was recovered at autopsy from the left buttock. The pathologist also found severe, complex groupings of dog bites to the left shin and ankle; skin and muscle were torn away leaving a segment of shin bone fully exposed. Neither the gunshot wound to the leg nor the dog bites were found to be significant contributing factors in the cause of death.

The pathologist could not conclusively determine the sequence of Mr. Plante's gunshot wounds and dog bite injuries.



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Postmortem blood, urine and vitreous fluids were obtained from Mr. Plante's body during autopsy and forwarded to the Provincial Toxicology Centre for analysis. Mr. Plante was found to have a blood alcohol concentration of 0.14% at the time of his death. The pathologist testified that he would expect this concentration to cause moderate intoxication in an average adult male. That said, he also testified that an experienced drinker with a higher tolerance may be less impaired by this concentration than others.

The primary investigator from the Independent Investigations Office (IIO) of British Columbia testified about his agency's mandate to investigate critical incidents involving police officers. The jury heard that a team of IIO personnel collected forensic evidence, interviewed RCMP members and civilians, and performed other investigation tasks. Despite multiple searches of the area, none of the Corporal's shell casings were recovered. The IIO could not conclusively determine how many shots the Corporal fired. The IIO canvassed residents living near the scene for eyewitnesses and found none. Several residents indicated they heard gunshots, specifically, one loud 'bang' followed by a few smaller ones. Other residents provided somewhat differing accounts.

Several police officers who attended the scene were interviewed by IIO investigators. The Corporal who shot Mr. Plante exercised his rights under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and did not supply the IIO with an account of the incident.

The primary investigator confirmed that the Chief Civilian Director (CCD) of the IIO is responsible for reviewing that agency's investigative findings. If the CCD concludes that a police officer may have committed an offence, he will forward the matter to Crown Counsel for consideration. In this case, the CCD did not reach this conclusion.

The jury also heard expert opinion evidence from a retired Vancouver Police Department (VPD) Inspector on the subject of police use of force. This evidence included testimony about the potential impact that "police presence" and communication has on the perceptions and actions of members of the public.

The Inspector also testified about VPD's general approaches to a variety of policing scenarios, including interactions with people in distress or mental health crisis; deployment of police dogs and their handlers to locate people who may be lost, injured or dangerous; the staging of Emergency Response Teams to support general duty constables responding to calls involving firearms; and measures to de-escalate potentially dangerous interactions with the public.

An Inspector from the RCMP "E" Division provincial headquarters testified about that agency's internal policies relating to police dog service members, including the requirement and rationale for all-dark uniforms; and the deployment of police service dogs to locate and / or apprehend subjects. He also testified that multiple levels of command are involved in the decision to authorize ERT deployment, and each scenario is considered on an individual basis. Conversely, the jury heard that a general duty RCMP member can call in air support from an RCMP helicopter as the need arises, but this is subject to availability as there are only two RCMP helicopters in service in the Lower Mainland.



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Pursuant to Section 38 of the Coroners Act, the following recommendations are forwarded to the Chief Coroner of the Province of British Columbia for distribution to the appropriate agency:

JURY RECOMMENDATIONS:

TO THE COMMANDING OFFICER OF THE ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE "E" DIVISION:

1. TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF THE FIRST AID KITS CURRENTLY PROVIDED TO GENERAL DUTY MEMBERS TO ENSURE THEY ARE BETTER EQUIPPED TO PROVIDE INTERIM EMERGENCY MEDICAL ASSISTANCE FOR SERIOUS TRAUMATIC INJURIES PRIOR TO THE ARRIVAL OF PARAMEDICS.

***Presiding Coroner's Comment:** Surrey RCMP members provided emergency first aid to Mr. Plante after he sustained gunshot wounds. Police radio transmissions from the time of these efforts included one member's request for a "supervisor first aid kit," further stating, "These little ones don't have what we need."*

The jury heard that most Surrey RCMP general duty members – i.e. those responding to 911 calls – are supplied with basic first aid kits that are not particularly helpful in situations involving serious traumatic injuries and / or major blood loss. The jury also heard that Surrey RCMP supervisors for each of the city's five policing districts are supplied with larger first aid kits with a broader range of medical supplies, but there are very few supervisors on the road at any given time.

2. TO INCREASE ACCESS TO ASSISTED VISION TECHNOLOGY FOR THE PURPOSE OF IMPROVING SAFETY FOR OFFICERS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC IN LOW LIGHT CONDITIONS.

***Presiding Coroner's Comment:** Several witnesses testified that visibility was less than optimal outside Mr. Plante's residence and at the end of the cul-de-sac where the shooting occurred. There was general consensus that the evening in question was absent of natural light, with substantial fog at street level.*

The witnesses provided varying accounts of the location and impact of artificial illumination from streetlights and the headlights of police vehicles parked nearby. The Corporal from the Integrated Police Dog Service testified that Mr. Plante was completely obscured by darkness and thick bushes immediately prior to the shooting incident.



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The jury heard further evidence with regard to the potential benefits and limitations of various technologies that could be utilized by police to search for people in dark conditions, including night-vision goggles, and helicopters equipped with thermal imaging cameras.

**TO THE MINISTER OF HEALTH FOR THE PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA; AND
THE BRITISH COLUMBIA AMBULANCE SERVICE:**

- 3. TO PRIORITIZE AN INCREASE TO THE NUMBER OF ADVANCED LIFE
SUPPORT AMBULANCES AND PARAMEDICS IN ACTIVE SERVICE
THROUGHOUT THE PROVINCE.**

***Presiding Coroner's Comment:** The jury heard evidence concerning the distinction between the skill sets of Basic Life Support (BLS) paramedics, and those who have taken further medical training to become certified as Advanced Life Support (ALS) paramedics. Paramedics called as witnesses advised that ALS paramedics are best-qualified to provide emergency interventions for patients facing life-threatening situations.*

One paramedic testified that Surrey – one of the largest cities in British Columbia with a population close to 500,000 people – has only one dedicated ALS ambulance unit on the road at any given time.

**TO THE MINISTER OF HEALTH FOR THE PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA; AND
THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF THE FRASER HEALTH AUTHORITY:**

- 4. TO PRIORITIZE AN EXPANSION OF SERVICES AT SURREY MEMORIAL
HOSPITAL TO INCLUDE AN APPROPRIATELY STAFFED, EQUIPPED AND
FUNDED EMERGENCY TRAUMA CENTRE AS IS CURRENTLY FOUND AT
ROYAL COLUMBIAN HOSPITAL.**

***Presiding Coroner's Comment:** Two paramedics from the BC Ambulance Service testified that they transported Mr. Plante by ambulance from the scene of the shooting in Surrey across the Patullo Bridge to Royal Columbian Hospital (RCH) in New Westminster.*

The jury heard that RCH has been designated as an emergency trauma centre for many of the communities within the jurisdiction of the Fraser Health Authority, including Surrey. Despite the city's sizeable population, Surrey Memorial Hospital (SMH) does not have the necessary personnel or resources in place to operate its own emergency trauma centre.



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One of the paramedics testified he was uncertain as to what extent patient transport may be impacted by construction-related closures of the Patullo Bridge scheduled for 2016.

TO THE MINISTER OF HEALTH FOR THE PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA; TO THE COMMANDING OFFICERS OF ALL POLICE AGENCIES IN BRITISH COLUMBIA; AND TO THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICERS OF ALL PROVINCIAL HEALTH AUTHORITIES IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

- 5. TO PRIORITIZE FUNDING FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION AND / OR EXPANSION OF MENTAL HEALTH-FOCUSED POLICE UNITS AKIN TO THE VANCOUVER POLICE "CAR 86 PROGRAM".**

Presiding Coroner's Comment: The jury heard evidence from several witnesses that police in British Columbia respond to a substantial number of calls involving people suffering from mental health issues and related crisis. The jury also heard that mental health-focused police units can be quite helpful with de-escalating situations where there is a potential risk to the individual, the police and the public. A retired Inspector from the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) spoke favourably of that city's specialized units comprised of police officers partnered with mental health professionals in patrol vehicles. Upon review, it appears that the jury's recommendation would properly reference VPD's "Car 87" program. Some Surrey RCMP members testified about their similar "Car 67" program.