

09 Mar 2001 - 16 Dec 2010



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memorial: saluting the heroes



Name: Robert McBeath
Division: Patrol
Service: 1 year
Age: 24
Killed: October 9th, 1922
Cause: Gunshot
Location: Davie & Granville St.

VPD MEMORIAL SALUTES:

Robert McBeath

On October 9th, 1922, Constable Robert McBeath and his partner Detective R. Quirk were walking the beat downtown on Granville Street. His partner Detective Quirk describes the event. As written in the Vancouver Sun newspaper October 10th 1922, "It was about 02:30 hours when Constable McBeath and I were at Granville and Davie Streets. We conversed for a few minutes when our attention was attracted by the loud honking of an auto horn and the erratic manner in which the car was swerving from curb to curb as it came north on Granville Street. McBeath went into the road and signaled the driver to stop but the driver attempted to avoid the officer and we both jumped onto the running boards. People in the car were Marjorie Earl and Fred Deal. We succeeded in getting him to stop the car and McBeath took the negro to the patrol box while I remained with the woman. I heard a sudden roar behind me and saw McBeath and the negro struggling. As I went to McBeath's aid I saw the flash of a gun. It was pointed directly at my breast but I swung it aside just as it went off and the bullet passed through my hand. A second shot struck me in the side of the head as I grappled with the man and I fell. There was another shot and McBeath fell on top of me. As I tried to crawl from under McBeath the man who had moved off some distance fired again. I guess that was the bullet that went through the shoulder of my coat. I rolled McBeath on his back and fired at the negro. Then I followed him a little way and we again exchanged shots. I could not keep up and went back to McBeath".

Both officers were rushed to St. Pauls Hospital but McBeath died shortly after arrival.

The suspects photograph was shown around the area that morning and a witness told police where Deal was hiding out. Constable Langham arrested him shortly thereafter. Deal was unarmed but an area search located the murder weapon on the landing of a billboard at Drake and Granville Streets where it had been thrown.

Deal was charged with the murder of Constable McBeath and attempted murder of Detective Quirk.

He was convicted of murder and sentenced to hang on January 26th, 1923. However, the conviction was overturned on appeal and a new trial ordered. This time Deal was convicted of manslaughter by judge and jury. He was sentenced to life imprisonment. He served sixteen years in prison in Canada and then was deported to a prison near his former home in Florida in 1938 for the rest of his term.

[About this capture](#)

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Only seven years before, Robert McBeath, was sixteen years old and living in Kinlochbervie Scotland, with his adopted parents, Robert MacKenzie and his sister Mrs. Barbara MacIntosh. World War One had been raging for one year. McBeath was eager to fight and told the recruiters he was eighteen, he was accepted and joined the Seaforth Highlanders Regiment in Scotland. On November 20th 1917, he was a two-year war veteran. He was fighting with his unit, in the battle of the Somme, in Cambrai France. The Seaforths took part in the first battle ever carried out with massed tanks and easily broke through German lines. The Germans counterattacked the next day and recovered all the ground they had lost. The Seaforths were pinned down by intense gunfire from several machine gun nests and suffered heavy casualties. Lance-Corporal McBeath volunteered to attack the guns alone, armed only with a Lewis gun and revolver. He stormed the first machine gun nest, killing all the enemy soldiers. He was joined by a tank and then attacked the other four machine gun nests in succession and silenced them as well. The remaining enemy soldiers fearing they were under attack by a larger force retreated from their trench into the shelter of a tunnel. The Highlanders warrior blood was hot, he fearlessly pursued them into the tunnel and shot the first one dead who tried to fight; the remaining three officers and thirty soldiers surrendered to him. As a result of his heroic action he was awarded the Victoria Cross.

Prior to the Seaforths going over seas, they were reviewed by the Duke of Sutherland. The duke promised "croft land" to everyman who returned and a farm to who ever won the Victoria Cross. When Robert McBeath returned home to Sutherland he was given a hero's welcome. The people of Sutherland treated him like a lord and presented him with a silver tea service. He renewed his love affair with Barbara MacKay, daughter of Williamina Morrison MacKay, widow of John, a fisherman. They were married on February 19th 1918 in Edinburgh. Robert was awarded a farm as promised by the duke but it was not for him. Seeking more adventure he sold the farm and emigrated with Barbara to Vancouver. He first joined the British Columbia Provincial Police and then several months later the Vancouver Police Department. After his death Barbara was home sick and moved back to Scotland. She remarried and died childless in her mid-forties as Mrs. Alec MacDonald. She is buried in Scourie Sutherlandshire.

Constable McBeaths funeral was one of the largest ever in Vancouver history. All stores and banks were closed. Thousands of people attended to give their respect. The funeral procession took twenty minutes to pass by the main Post Office. It was led by Vancouver Police Inspector George Hood on horse back and two other mounted policemen, next came the Vancouver Police Pipe Band, then the widow Barbara in a hearse, next the mayor and council members, followed by three hundred Masons marching four abreast, behind them were eighty hand picked members of the Vancouver Police led by Chief Constable James Anderson, then one hundred members of the Vancouver Fire Department, twelve members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in scarlet uniform, fifty members of the Seaforth Highlanders Regiment Vancouver, a contingent from the Irish Fusiliers of Canada, several hundred World War One veterans, forty members of the BC Electric Railway, twelve members of the Canadian Pacific Police, several hundred members of the Foresters, St. Andrews, and Caledonia Societies and bringing up the rear several hundred

members of the public. As the procession passed by heads were bared and a reverent silence befell the crowd.

At the church service, Reverend J.S. Henderson eulogized him as follows, " Probably not since the murder of Chief MacLennan has an event so stirred the entire community with profound sorrow as the tragic event of Monday morning when in the discharge of his duty, on one of our public streets, the life of this brave young officer was taken. Many did not know him by sight, could not call him by name, but there were few hearts in homes that were not sad when the news of the event became known" He then described how he won the Victoria Cross. Then stated "Upon that splendid record I need not dwell, it will find a place in the annals of the Empires deathless dead. But I would that in the solemn atmosphere of this hour we might catch a vision of his great noble spirit, the high purpose and devotion and enthusiasm with which he gave himself to his life's mission. Canada's greatest need is just such men. This brave young officer will not have died in vain if his tragic passing will awaken a new civic spirit in relation to our police force. A new purpose on the part of the authorities to rid this city of that herd of undesirables, who through someone's blunder has made Vancouver it's breeding and feeding ground.

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Thousands of people viewed the open casket between the hours of 11am and 1pm at the Vancouver Police station. The entrance hall was adorned by floral tributes while two Union Jacks formed a background for the grey casket which was draped with another Union Jack. A wreath in the form of a Victoria Cross lay at the foot of the coffin and the Masonic Insignia was placed upon it.

Chief Constable James Anderson was quoted as saying, "Orders went out last night for a thorough clean-up of the city. We have been doing the best we can with the small force at our command, but special precautions will be taken from now on to check all people carrying firearms and all cases of immorality and drug dealing. A high-speed car with three men armed with guns is an essential part of the police equipment of any large city. In Vancouver it is all a question of getting enough money".

The Victoria Cross is the highest medal awarded for bravery in the British and Commonwealth armed forces. The medals are made from bronze, melted down from two Russian cannons captured by the British Army in the Crimean War, during the charge of the famous "Light Brigade" in 1854. The chance of surviving a Victoria Cross act is 1 in 10.

The Vancouver Police Department christened one of our new police boats the "McBeath" to honor his death.

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**Robert McBeath V.C.; policeman, highlander, husband, son.
"We Shall Never Forget You".**

"All the stories and words on this site were written from the heart, by Sgt. Steve Gibson. They are the result of research and interviews by Cst. Tod Catchpole with families and friends of the officers killed in the line of duty. For the sake of authenticity, the stories appear exactly as written and have not been edited by the site creators. While the Vancouver Police Department stands by the stories, visitors to this site should accept that they may contain minor factual inaccuracies."



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