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BRITISH COLUMBIA

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Investigation clears RCMP drug undercover team

GERRY BELLETT
Vancouver Sun

A Vancouver RCMP drug undercover team has been cleared of any wrongdoing in an operation that led to an officer's death and a B.C. man being arrested by Thailand police.

An intensive two-year investigation by the RCMP Public Complaints Commission into Operation Decryption found the officers acted courageously and professionally in the arrest of drug dealer Alain Olivier. Olivier was arrested Feb. 19, 1989, in the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai and later told reporters he was a victim of RCMP entrapment.

It was during his arrest that Cpl. Derek Flanagan, 35, died after falling from the rear of a truck while wrestling with one of the Thai drug dealers Olivier had introduced to the team.

The suspects were attempting to flee in the truck after the RCMP team of Flanagan, Sgt. Jack Dop, Cpl. Barry Bennett and Const. Jim Girdlestone identified themselves as police.

Olivier wasn't in the van but was wrestled to the ground by Girdlestone.

About 2.4 kilograms of heroin worth about \$15 million on the street in Canada was seized in Thailand.

Olivier claimed to have been taken to Thailand by the drug team just so he could be arrested and that he was saved from the wrath of the RCMP team by the arrival of Thai police.

These allegations led to Dr. Richard Gosse, chairman of the

Heroin sting in Thailand claimed Mountie's life

RCMP Public Complaints Committee, laying a complaint against the team June 23, 1989.

On Thursday, The Vancouver Sun obtained a copy of the commission's 144-page report that found the team "did everything the force expected of them."

"They did it professionally and with courage. Nothing in this report should detract from the pride they rightfully take in their work," said the report, written by acting commission chairman Fernand Simard, who assumed the post after Gosse left the commission last June.

But Girdlestone said in an interview the whole affair left a bad taste in his mouth despite the findings that exonerated the team.

Girdlestone and the other surviving members of the team refused to be interviewed by the commission after investigators refused to supply details of the allegations.

"This investigation should never have been conducted in the first place. Gosse ordered it after reading newspaper stories.

"If the commission had come to us and said 'These are the accusations — what's your side?' it would have been cleared up," he said.

The team was disbanded after Gosse started his investigation.

Girdlestone said he wasn't bitter about this as much as the lingering suspicion that the team had done something wrong.

"We'd lost enough. We lost a great officer and a great guy doing this and they come along and add to it by

ordering an investigation which really questioned his actions, too." He said the commission also committed an injustice on Olivier by raising his hopes that he might be freed.

Olivier is now serving a life sentence in a Thai jail for his part in the affair.

The commission probed four issues that stemmed from Olivier's arrest:

- Was he improperly set up by the team?
- Was he improperly threatened by them?
- Was the team engaged in an operation for which there was proper authority?
- Was the operation carried out according to RCMP policies and procedures?

Simard found it unlikely Olivier was entrapped and that his version



DEREK FLANAGAN:
Died in line of duty

of his involvement in the drug smuggling scheme, as reported in newspapers, differed from recordings police had made of his conversations.

As for his assertion he was "lucky the Thai police arrived" and his fear of being killed by the Canadians who put a gun to his face, Simard found no evidence of this.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

FIGHTING CRIME

Mountie's widow wounded by 'cowboy' label

GERRY BELLETT
Vancouver Sun

Fiona Flanagan, whose husband was the first RCMP undercover drug officer killed in the line of duty, wanted to spare her children from having their father labelled a "cowboy."

Cpl. Derek Flanagan died Feb. 19, 1989, after falling from the back of a speeding truck while fighting with a drug trafficker he was trying to arrest in northern Thailand.

He left behind his wife and two boys.

But the assignment that killed him came under the scrutiny of the RCMP Public Complaints Commission.

And Fiona Flanagan felt specially wounded by newspaper remarks from commission chairman Richard Gosse — who ordered the investigation — that he was going to see if the operation was "another cowboy escapade" by the RCMP.

"That really hurt," she said Monday. "Some day these kids will want to read all the stories that have been written about their dad and I didn't want them to be left with that impression."

Last week, the commission finally published its findings: Flanagan and the three other undercover police officers carried out the operation in Chiang Mai with courage and professionalism.

Flanagan, 35, was posing as a her-

oin buyer in a 15-month international investigation code-named Operation Deception. About 2 kilograms of heroin worth approximately \$15 million on the street in Canada was seized in Thailand.

Although relieved by the findings, Flanagan said she is still bitter with Gosse for ordering the investigation as it cast a shadow over her husband's memory and the reputations of the other three officers.

Gosse took the step after a British man, Alain Olivier, complained to newspaper reporters from a Thai prison that he had been set up by the RCMP team and forced to take part in the operation.