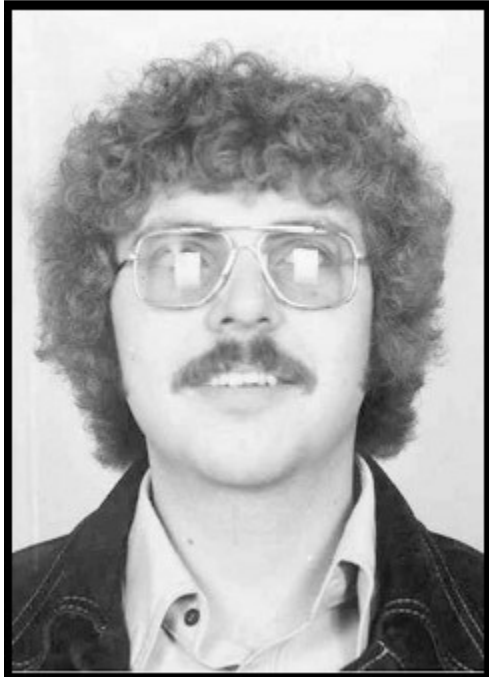

WERNER (VERN) R. FRIESEN



Stony Mountain Institution
July 13, 1984
Aged 33 years

Werner Rudolph Friesen known both as “Vern” and “Rudy” to his friends and coworkers, was 23 years old when he joined the staff of Stony Mountain Institution in 1974. He completed his induction training course as a CX-I Correctional Officer in June of that year and in December he was promoted to the rank of Living Unit Officer. In April 1975, he was one of two officers from Stony to be sent to Kingston, Ontario for 10 days to complete the “Living Unit Officers” course at the Correctional Staff College. He was one of the first to participate in the new programme when it was introduced at Stony Mountain. He was married and the father of a two-year-old daughter. He was described as a man of devout Christian faith and a “quiet professional who added to the morale of the men he worked with, and who handled stress and acute tension well” At the time of his death, his wife was 6 months pregnant with the couple’s second child.

THE INCIDENT

At 11:00 p.m. on July 13, 1984, as a lock-up call was announced over the P.A. system, Living Unit Officers Wendl, Friesen and Rampersad left their office in Unit 3 to go to the A-5 and A-7 “reception area” ranges to conduct the nightly lock-up. Range A-7 was on mezzanine one floor above range A-5 and both faced a large open common area. This section of the institution contained 36 cells and usually housed inmates undergoing a two-week orientation period before being introduced into the general population. In the prison slang, this area was known as the “fish tank” in reference to the newcomers who more seasoned inmates called “fish”. However, at the time, the institution was dealing with severe overcrowding, resulting in a mixture of 66 new and general population inmates in that area, most of whom were housed in a double-bunking situation. When the unarmed officers arrived at the range, Officer Wendl conducted a visual check through the small window in the barrier there was no sign of imminent danger. He then unlocked the barrier and he and Officer Friesen stepped onto the range while Officer Rampersad followed.

Witness reports vary, but the most accepted version was four inmates, Daryle Kent, Walter Sinclair, Donald Hoard and Frank Gode rushed the officers who had little time to comprehend what was happening. Kent and Sinclair had concealed themselves in the shower immediately to the left of the entrance to the common area. When Officer Wendl entered the range followed by Officer Friesen, the inmates attacked. Witnesses testified that inmate Gode wrapped his arm around Officer Wendl’s waist while Sinclair stabbed him in the back with a broken pair of scissors. At this point, Officer Wendl broke away and ran to the open stairwell leading to the central dome area. Inmate Sinclair chased him to this location and some believe that he pushed the officer down the stairs to the second floor. It was this act that alerted officers in other parts of the building to the fact something was terribly wrong in the reception area.

Upon seeing the assault upon Officer Wendl, Officer Friesen attempted to come to his assistance, but inmate Kent restrained him from behind. Inmate Sinclair then stabbed Officer Friesen in the chest. The officer managed to break free from his assailants and, although severely bleeding from his wound, ran back to the Unit 3 office. Officer Rampersad was already there, having retreated to the office to activate the emergency button and call the control centre for emergency assistance. He was laying on the floor behind the door when Mr. Friesen entered, asked him to call for assistance and said he felt he might pass out. He then collapsed on top of Officer Rampersad. By this time, fellow officers on the lower level of the building were coming to assist. Others removed Mr. Wendl from the dome and transported his body to the institutional Health Care Center where he was pronounced dead.

Immediately following the assaults, inmates Gode and Hoard ran into the dome area and many of the more than sixty inmates in the range began to smash furniture and windows and kick at barriers, they also began spinning the locking wheels controlling the travelling bars running above the cells along the range. Within an hour, members of the R.C.M.P and Winnipeg Police began to arrive on the scene. The Institutional Emergency Response Team and other officers drew weapons from the penitentiary armoury and, from the mezzanine overlooking the range, ordered the inmates in the unit to return to their cells. By this time, the R.C.M.P. Emergency Response Team was also present. When the rioters did not comply, a warning shot was fired into the ceiling without effect; it took three more shots at the ceiling and walls before the inmates dispersed and complied with the order. Mr. Friesen was then removed from Unit 3 office and rushed to Seven Oaks Hospital where he was pronounced dead on arrival.

Inmates Walter Thomas Sinclair (serving 30 months for assault and break, enter and theft charges), Daryle Evan Kent (serving two concurrent three-year sentences for robbery), Frank Arthur Gode (serving a two-year seven-month sentence for property offences) and Donald Sidney Hoard (serving a two-year sentence for Break, Enter and Theft) was charged with two counts of first-degree murder for the killings of Officers Wendl and Friesen. A three-week trial presided over by Mr. Justice Patrick Ferg was conducted in May of 1985. After the trial, guilty verdicts were brought against all but inmate Hoard who was found not guilty. The three convicted inmates were given two concurrent life sentences with a twenty-five-year parole eligibility date. On appeal in May of 1986, inmate God's conviction was amended to manslaughter, and inmate Kent's two convictions for first-degree murder were amended to one conviction of first-degree murder and one of manslaughter.

Originally thought to be an isolated incident, it was later determined that the inmates involved had been drinking home-brew for five hours before the assault and that they had become extremely intoxicated and irrational. It was during this time that they concocted the plan to kill the first correctional officer that entered the area- it didn't matter who – hoping that the act would spark a general riot that would cover up an escape attempt. Several inmate witnesses resident on the range where the incident occurred testified that they overheard the accused planning to kill officers. Inmate Sinclair, who was found to be the primary assailant of both officers, denied this fact, saying there was no reason for the fatal attack, that they had planned to take hostages but, in the heat of the moment, he had “went nuts”.

THE FUNERALS

Both funeral services for these fallen officers were held on July 18, 1984, five days after the tragic incident. Living Unit Officers Friesen's service was held at 10:30 in the morning in Winnipeg followed by the service for Living Unit Officer Wendl at 2:30 in the afternoon in nearby Selkirk. To allow as many Stony Mountain staff as possible to attend the services for their slain colleagues, Warden Jim O'Sullivan of Saskatchewan Penitentiary in Prince Albert sent fifteen correctional officers from his institution to assist in securing Stony Mountain Institution. On the same date, memorial services were held simultaneously at every federal correctional institution across Canada, as well as at St. Patrick's Church in Ottawa for National Headquarters staff. The St. Patrick's service was officiated by Rev. Canon Tom James from the Chaplaincy Division of NHQ and L'abbe Gabriel Savignac, the Regional Chaplain of Quebec.

Mr. Friesen's funeral took place in the First Mennonite Church in Winnipeg. More than 1,000 people attended with representatives of the R.C.M.P., local and regional police forces and provincial jail officers from Newfoundland to Vancouver Island in attendance. Over 800 federal prison officers at the funeral wore a symbolic black armband in honour of their fallen colleague. Solicitor General Robert Kaplan, Commissioner Donald R. Yeomans, Regional Deputy Commissioner Jim Phelps, Members of Parliament Dan McKenzie (PC-Winnipeg-Assiniboine) and Bill Blaikie (NDP-Winnipeg-Bird's Hill) represented the federal government to pay their respects. Members of the Native Clan Organization of Manitoba were also among the mourners. Reverend Alfred Bell, a former Stony Mountain Chaplain, described the officer as "one of those quiet professionals the system can be proud of" and as a man who loved his wife and daughter and cared about his colleagues.

Mr. Friesen was buried with full honours at Winnipeg's Brookside Cemetery in section 30, Lot 0770. Grave 0. He was thirty-three old and was survived by his wife Collette and three-year-old daughter Kendra, a brother Hal and his parents Peter and Elsa. He is remembered on the Canadian Police and Peace Officers' Memorial on Parliament Hill, Ottawa on tablet #16, script 18.