



PHOTO courtesy of Dean Lauze

Mural memorial

School mural honors RCMP officer shot while rescuing teen girl

IT WAS APRIL 10, 1965. The day that Constable Neil McArthur Bruce, a four year member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, came to the aid of a 16 year old girl that had been repeatedly sexually assaulted and was being held hostage in a cabin in the Westbank area of British Columbia.

Cst. Bruce had tried to reason with the suspect, Russell Spears, to release the girl, and approached the cabin unarmed as a gesture of goodwill. A shot rang out, and Cst. Bruce was struck in the chest by a .22 calibre bullet, fired by Spears. The girl managed to escape though she was shot twice by the same gun as she fled. The victim

survived her wounds. Cst. Bruce did not. On April 14, 1965, he succumbed to pneumonia caused by the bullet wound, leaving behind his wife and two children. He was 26 years old. On April 20th, Spears took his own life, after he was tracked down and surrounded by police, with the very rifle that he had shot Cst. Bruce.

Since that time, Cst. Bruce has lived on in the memories of his family, comrades, and those that knew him. His name was immortalized on June 2, 2000 when the Cst. Neil Bruce Middle School was opened in Westbank B.C., ensuring that the thousands of students, who would become part of this learning institution, would also be reminded of the legacy of this fallen hero that is the school's namesake.

The Cst. Neil Bruce Middle School is the only school in North America

FALLEN HERO

to be named after a police officer, and serves as a tribute to the commitment of all officers who serve.

On October 17, 2008, graphic artist, Dean Lauze, began painting a gigantic mural on the outside of the front of Cst. Neil Bruce Middle School, above the entrance doors.

As the school is located near a highway, the progression of his creation drew a lot of attention, and a lot of supportive honking by motorists passing by. On October 23rd, Lauze finished his mural, which features a beautifully detailed depiction of an RCMP Sergeant in red serge atop a tall dark bay, standing by a stream with bear cubs playing on the other side

of an alpine meadow. The Middle school logo, and the words "Spirit of the Cubs", referring to the name of the school sports team, graces the top of the mural. In speaking with the Principal, John Simonson said that the mounted RCMP member is not intended to be the likeness of Cst. Neil Bruce, but is generic in order to reflect every officer of the RCMP and is there to illustrate the school's connection with the force through its namesake.

It is clear that the RCMP is a very strong thread that has been woven through the fabric of the history of this great country for 135 years. As Canada's national police force, its worldwide acclaim and recognition are the result of the dedication of ordinary men and women who don the uniform and strive to

Vancouver artist Dean Lauze was selected to paint a commemorative mural on an exterior wall of Cst. Neil Bruce Middle School in Westbank, British Columbia.

do the extraordinary on a daily basis. One of those individuals is the son of Cst. Neil Bruce, Inspector Don Bruce-Fuoco, who is in charge of International Peace Operations at the RCMP National Headquarters in Ottawa.

Cst. Neil Bruce is one of 220 RCMP officers who have given their lives in the line of duty since 1876. It is fitting that his name, along with theirs, lives on not only in a mural, but in a school where young lives can shape the future by learning a bit about the past.

Cst. Bruce would be proud.