

# Chapter 1 of: An Instructive Mountie

Adventures of the First Woman Mountie

Book 12

[www.laurieschramm.ca](http://www.laurieschramm.ca)

Print ISBN: 978-1-7387599-6-5

ePub ISBN: 978-1-7387599-7-2

**LAURIE SCHRAMM**

This is a work of historical fiction, set in the 1970s. Although most of the historical references are accurate, a few are not, and names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead is entirely coincidental.

Copyright © 2023 Laurier L. Schramm

All worldwide rights reserved, including those of translation into other languages. No part of this work may be reproduced in any form, electronic or mechanical, including by photo-printing, microfilm, or any other means, nor transmitted or translated into a machine language without written permission from the publisher. Registered names, trademarks, and the like, used in this book, even when not specifically marked or identified as such, are not to be considered unprotected by law.

## Chapter 1. THE SEEDS OF DESTRUCTION

August 6, 1979

Prince Albert, Saskatchewan

It was a dreary day in Northern Saskatchewan. Summer would soon give way to fall and this seemed like a symbol of the coming change: it was cool and overcast with heavy clouds, and a light rain was beginning to fall. Not, in short, the kind of day that most people would rush out and embrace with an enthusiastic smile, but the kind that leave most people wanting to simply stay home in bed or, failing that, to resignedly trudge out and attempt to get it over with. It was clearly the latter attitude that had been adopted by the three, rather forlorn-looking, men who slowly walked out of the Saskatchewan Federal Penitentiary, near Prince Albert, and climbed into a plain, unmarked prison van. The attitude of the two guards could, perhaps, be explained by the weather, but their prisoner would normally have appeared to be in good cheer. Such cheeriness would surprise anyone who knew him well, but then no one in the prison knew him well.

Four years earlier, in 1975, he'd been convicted of murder and sent to the Saskatchewan Federal Penitentiary and incarcerated in its high-security area. Two years later, good conduct, a perpetual outward-appearance of cheerfulness, and a carefully cultivated, friendly relationship with the prison staff distinguished him from the majority of the inmates who tended to be morose and withdrawn, and certainly from the roughly one-third of the inmates, who tended to be angry, surly, and prone to violence. The prison, like so many others, was not well funded and had evolved over time to rely quite heavily on the unpaid work of trusted prisoners who were willing to work as a way to pass the time and add some diversity to an otherwise dull routine. These trusties, as they were called, were allowed – encouraged even – to perform janitorial, clerical, warehousing, cooking, cleaning, and other tasks for which they were given extra freedom and privileges in lieu of pay. In this prisoner's case, he had gravitated to the prison workshop, where his obvious skill with tools led to him teaching other inmates and eventually becoming the workshop supervisor. In this position, it was easy for him to construct a slender, easily concealed knife and several kinds of lock-picking tools, all of which he concealed in a hidden compartment of a leather belt that he had also made for himself.

Now, on this dreary day, he had dropped his cheerful and friendly guise in favour of a dudgeon combined with an air of pain and discomfort. This wasn't very difficult because his inner nature was to be rather sullen and discontent, and he really was in some pain due to the ear infection that had been diagnosed by the resident nurse at the prison infirmary. So it was, that the prisoner and his two guards clambered into the prison van and drove to the Holy Family Hospital<sup>1</sup> in Prince Albert to get his ear infection treated.

After being given an antibiotic by one of the physicians, the prisoner said he had to use the toilet and, was allowed to go into the men's washroom unsupervised, although he still wore leg-irons and the guards had agreed to unlock one side of his handcuffs. Being on the third floor, the guards probably judged that it was too high up for him to jump out the window

---

<sup>1</sup> Prince Albert's Holy Family Hospital closed in 1997.

and, in any case, he was a trustie after all, and he was still confined with the leg-irons.

Once he was in the washroom and out of the guard's sight, the prisoner picked the locks on his handcuffs and leg-irons, tossed them in a garbage bin, and promptly crawled out one of the windows. From there, he was able to make his way along a narrow ledge and re-enter the hospital through the open window of an unoccupied recovery room. Cautiously walking towards the door leading to an operating theatre, he could hear the indistinct sounds of several voices. Creeping closer, and placing an ear to one door, he was able to hear enough to judge that an operation was underway.

*Perfect, he thought, that should keep them busy.*

Searching around, he found a laundry hamper in one corner of the room, from which he was able to select a set of hospital scrubs that fit him reasonably well and didn't appear to be overly soiled. Replacing his prison uniform with the scrubs, and placing his prison garb at the bottom of the hamper, all that remained was to watch for the hallway to become busy, and then calmly walk out and away from the direction of the guards, who were just then entering the washroom to check on him.

As the guards, having found the washroom to be empty of their prisoner, rushed back out to the corridor to begin a frantic search, he was already out of their line of sight, walking down one of the staircases that led to the rear of the hospital. Continuing all the way to the basement, he located the morgue and entered the pathologists' locker and shower room. Several of the steel lockers appeared to be in use, as they had padlocks on them, and he was relieved to note that the lockers were of the same design as his old high-school lockers had been. In other words, the doors were secured by hinged vertical bars that projected into holes at the top and bottom of the doorframe, and which were moved by the lifting of a latch once its padlock had been removed. What he had learned as a high-school student was that such doors could easily be opened by inserting a steel ruler into the gap between the door and frame and, with one tip of the ruler jammed against the lower of the vertical bars, the mechanism could be independently actuated, opening the door. He didn't have a steel ruler anymore, but he did have a knife.

The first locker he tried was empty. The second had clothes that were too large for him, but an adjustable baseball cap, so he extracted the latter. The third locker he tried yielded a bonanza: a serviceable set of acceptably fitting street clothes, a wallet identifying its owner as a physician, and a set of car and house keys. which he simply carried out with him. A brief period in another washroom down the hall enabled him to change out of the scrubs and into the newly stolen clothes, after which he emerged into the corridor once again and then calmly walked back upstairs to the main floor and out one of the rear doorways.

The prison guards, meanwhile, had conducted a quick but fruitless search of the third floor, called in to report the prisoner's escape, and were moving to take up positions at the main front and rear doors to keep watch while they waited for reinforcements. The guard that ran to the back door actually saw the prisoner walking towards one of the parking lots but didn't recognise him. The guard was looking for someone in a prison uniform, not regular street clothes and a cap.

As the prison guard went back into the hospital to continue searching, the prisoner headed for the staff parking lot and began checking the most expensive-looking vehicles, looking for that belonging to the physician whose wallet, keys, and clothes he'd stolen. The keys were for

a Volvo, and the only one in sight was a fairly new-looking station wagon. That was the one. Settling himself in the car, he backed out and drove away, heading south to Saskatoon.

As he did so, he kept an eye out for roadside towns that were small – small enough to have no bank, and therefore no automatic cash dispenser. At such small towns, he knew, any local residents needing extra cash would go to the local gas station to buy a few small items and ask the attendant to put a larger amount on their credit card, taking the difference as cash. At the first such stop he checked the physician's wallet more carefully. It contained nearly two hundred dollars in cash<sup>2</sup> and two credit cards. Using one of the credit cards, he bought a few things and asked for an extra forty dollars in cash. He repeated this at several small towns along the way, alternating credit cards and being careful not to ask for too much cash at any one store. The prisoner was fully aware that his actions would create a trail for the police, but he wasn't very concerned. He had a plan for that.

When he reached Saskatoon, the prisoner alternated using the two credit cards to buy some additional clothes and a suitcase at a second-hand store, then bought a large stock of mostly non-perishable food and drinks at a grocery store, then a large gasoline can and some tools at a hardware store, then filled the gasoline can and the Volvo's tank at a gas station. When he went to a liquor store, he discovered he'd reached the credit limit on one of the cards, so he switched to the second. With the Volvo thus loaded, he drove to the Yellowhead Highway heading west towards the Alberta border,

The next question was how long it would be before the physician noticed that his clothes and wallet (and car) were gone and whether he would first call the police or the credit card companies. He'd escaped from the hospital at about 9:30 am, and estimated that the theft would be discovered no later than about 11:30. He guessed that the police would be called first, and the credit card companies second, and figured that might buy him an additional 30 minutes. Accordingly, he made two more small town stops to get more cash from the second credit card then threw them both away.

When he reached Lloydminster, which straddled the Alberta/Saskatchewan border, he went looking for a large industrial plant of some kind and ended up at a large oil refinery on the Alberta side, in the city's northwest corner. At the refinery, he drove into the middle of the large employee parking lot, which was quite full, and found an empty parking space. Pulling into it, he reached for a flat-bladed screwdriver, got out of the car, and casually walked to the front of the vehicle parked beside him. There he knelt down and unscrewed the front licence plate<sup>3</sup>. Moving nonchalantly to the vehicle on the other side of his stolen Volvo, he removed its front licence plate as well. Walking to the back of this, second vehicle, he knelt down and replaced the rear plate – the one with the 1979 registration sticker on it - with the plain one that had been on the front of the first vehicle. He then had the front and rear plates from the second vehicle, while leaving both vehicles with rear plates but no front plates. He knew that the vehicles' owners would identify their respective vehicles by their make, model, and colour, and he figured - correctly, as it turned out - that it would be many days before either owner noticed that anything was amiss with their licence plates. In fact,

---

<sup>2</sup> \$200 in 1979 would be worth about C\$790 in 2023.

<sup>3</sup> The Province of Alberta didn't switch their motor vehicle licensing requirement from two plates to one (at the rear) until 1992.

the second driver was only alerted when he was stopped by the police two weeks later in a routine traffic stop. He was naturally unable to explain to the police why he had no front licence plate, nor why his rear plate had no registration renewal sticker on it and did not match the number on his registration certificate. The owner of the first vehicle only became aware of the problem when she was contacted by the police, who had checked on the second vehicle's plate number for its rightful owner.

The next stop was to check-in at an older-type motel on one edge of the city that had seen better days but which, judging by the nearly full parking lot of pickup trucks, seemed to be getting a lot of business from the oilfield service crews. At the motel, he obtained a room for a single night, for which he paid the full bill in advance, in cash. Before leaving, he transferred everything he had purchased from the Volvo to his motel room.

Next, he drove around looking to find used-car dealers of the kind that dealt in vehicles of somewhat questionable driving history and condition, and that would be used to making cash deals. In this he didn't have much trouble, as there were several to choose from and, in fact, he chose two. At the first one, he negotiated the sale of the Volvo, producing the physician's driver's licence and vehicle registration certificate, and explaining that he'd been gambling heavily, had a run of bad luck, and needed to quickly pay off his debts to the kind of people that only accepted cash. The dealer, who had heard hard luck stories of all kinds, either accepted his story or (more likely) didn't care, glanced at the paper work, looked over the Volvo, and then offered the prisoner a low price, probably about a quarter of its market value, the prisoner estimated. After protracted dickering back and forth, they eventually settled on an amount the prisoner estimated to be about two-thirds of its market value. Once he'd collected his money and handed over the keys, he telephoned for a taxi, which he directed to take him to the second used-car lot he'd chosen.

At this second car lot, he looked everything over very carefully for something that would match his two priorities: good mechanical condition and something that looked nothing like a Volvo station wagon. His ultimate selection was an older-model pickup truck for which he negotiated a reasonable price that was far less than he'd just received for the Volvo, and paid for it in cash. When asked to provide a name and address, he made up both on the spot. He decided that he would be Frank Smith, and he provided legitimate-sounding address and phone number in the city (having made a note of the number of the phone he'd used in the previous car-lot). When the salesman handed over the truck's keys, he got in and drove it away, saying that he'd take the risk of driving it, un-plated, to the nearest vehicle registration office. This was such a common practice that the salesman didn't even raise an eyebrow.

When he was a few blocks away from the second used-car lot, the freshly renamed Frank Smith pulled into a convenient parking lot and installed the matching set of Alberta licence plates that he'd brought with him. His next stop was a large hardware store, at which he purchased some plastic sheeting, painter's masking tape, and a number of cans of aerosol spray paint in a flat, forest green colour. The rest of his afternoon was spent behind an old, abandoned warehouse-type building on the outskirts of the city where the truck was sheltered from the wind and largely away from public sight. After removing and discarding the hub caps then masking the windows and lights with the plastic sheeting and masking tape, he used one can after another to paint everything else but the tires in the 'military' green, even the wheels and chrome bumpers. When he was done and had removed the tape

and sheeting, the truck actually looked very much like an army truck.

The next day, Frank Smith enjoyed a hearty traveller's breakfast, loaded up his green truck, and headed for the Yellowhead Highway again. This time, however, he headed east. Knowing full well that the police would be looking for an escaped prisoner driving west in a late model Volvo station-wagon bearing Saskatchewan plates, he would be an ordinary citizen driving east in an army-surplus pickup truck bearing Alberta plates. Of course, he still had no valid identification, nor proper vehicle registration or insurance, so he planned to drive carefully and trust to luck that he wouldn't be stopped by the police. Now that he was out of prison, there were some things he needed to do.

As it turned out, Frank Smith was lucky; he made it all the way to Northern Ontario without incident.



Saturday, November 10, 1979  
Near Ottawa, Ontario

Just west of Ottawa (but before Arnprior), and slightly south of the Ottawa River, Frank Smith was crouched low beside a set of train tracks, right at the point where the tracks began to cross a small bridge. He was busy placing a bomb beside one of the rails.

This was no ordinary bomb. He had spent several years, while incarcerated in the Saskatchewan Federal Penitentiary at Prince Albert, studying the art of bomb-making from a fellow inmate that had been willing to teach him in return for lessons in wood- and metalworking. Then, following his escape from prison, he had established himself in an isolated cabin in Northern Ontario experimenting with different formulations and testing them in an abandoned quarry. Ultimately, he had come up with a nitrate-type, binary explosive of his own design. Nitrate meant that it was based on a chemical reaction between ammonium nitrate and ammonium perchlorate. Binary meant that the explosive comprised two parts, each in a separate bottle such that neither bottle was explosive on its own – it was only dangerous after the contents were mixed together. This meant that it was safe to carry – both in terms of explosion risk and also legal risk, because it wasn't technically an explosive until the two parts were mixed together. If he was caught carrying the two bottles, he planned to claim that they were parts of an exploding target he had made for the purpose of

target practise at an approved gun range – all very legal<sup>4</sup>. Of course, he planned to use the explosive in a very illegal way, beginning with the particular piece of track beside which he was crouched.

From his backpack, he withdrew two plastic bottles. The larger bottle contained a mixture of two powerful oxidizers, ammonium nitrate and one other, each having been individually ground to specific particle sizes and then mixed together in a very specific ratio<sup>5</sup> in order to achieve an extremely high detonation-success rate and a powerful blast. The second, smaller bottle contained an explosive-grade metal powder mixed with small amounts of several other metal powders, all of the powders also having been individually ground to specific particle sizes and then mixed together in very specific, but different ratios from those in the first bottle. Taking the second bottle, he carefully poured the entire contents into the first bottle, replaced the cap on the latter and then shook the bottle to produce a reasonably uniform mixture of all of the various components.

He gazed at the first bottle. It hadn't been a bomb before, but it was now. Even so, a feature of this particular kind of bomb was that it was still reasonably safe: it wasn't flammable and couldn't be detonated by friction. Detonation would require the high-impulse energy of a centre-fire rifle round<sup>6</sup>, such as from a .308-calibre hunting rifle, which was precisely the kind of rifle he had in his truck.

Next, he withdrew from his backpack, a third bottle. This one was full of gasoline. Using a small trowel, he dug away some of the gravel underneath the rail, between two of the big wooden ties. Into this space, he wedged the two bottles. The wide screw cap on the bottle containing the bomb had been painted a very bright, fluorescent orange. Stepping back from the tracks, he verified that the orange cap was clearly visible. Given the thin layer of fresh, white snow on the ground it stood out very clearly indeed.

Finally, Frank picked up his pack and walked across the short gully over which the bridge passed, and repeated his actions, placing a second bomb where the tracks left the bridge and reconnected with the ground. He now had one bomb placed at each end of the bridge.

Satisfied, Frank hiked back to the place he had parked his truck, which was about a quarter of a mile away and behind a small hill, out of sight of the rail line.

When he reached the truck, Frank traded his backpack for a .308-calibre Winchester hunting rifle, an old tarp, and a white bedsheet. Slinging the rifle over his shoulder, and carrying the rest, he walked to the crest of the nearby hill, spread the tarp out on the snow and took up a prone position where he had a good view of the rail line and the place where it crossed the small bridge. The white sheet he draped over his body and the tarp, so that only his face, arms and rifle were exposed. From inside his jacket, he withdrew a white toque,

---

<sup>4</sup> This was an illusion on his part. The manufacture of explosives is federally regulated in Canada and requires a permit.

<sup>5</sup> I have left out some of the specific component names, and all of the quantities and particle sizes, in order to avoid providing a recipe for use in real life.

<sup>6</sup> This account is entirely fictional but, in real life, a binary exploding target package of the kind described here would eventually be developed in 1996, subsequently patented, and marketed as small, exploding targets for use in target practice, training, and shooting competitions, under the trade-name Tannerite<sup>®</sup> Binary Exploding Rifle Targets. See: D.J. Tanner, "Binary Exploding Target, Package, Process and Product," U.S. Patent 6,848,366 B1, Feb. 1, 2005.

which he donned.

*Time to settle in to wait*, he thought. Even with the tarp, it was cold lying on the snow, and the dampness in the air made it feel even colder than the dry prairie cold he was used to, but he used the cold to help him stay focused. He had estimated that a particular freight train would reach the bridge in about another 30 minutes and, sure enough, when half an hour had passed, he could hear a train horn in the distance, and shortly after that, the sounds of an approaching train.

The approaching freight train comprised three locomotives, over a hundred freight cars, and a caboose. Among the cars carrying dangerous goods was a series of tankers filled with propane. Some of the other tankers and boxcars carried a variety of other highly flammable materials. The train carried a crew of four, with two in the lead locomotive and two in the caboose at the rear. As the train rolled along at about 70 kilometres per hour, the engineer and the head-end brakeman in the front locomotive were casually chatting about everything and nothing as they kept a casual lookout ahead for the usual railway signs and signals. Similarly, the conductor and the tail-end brakeman in the caboose<sup>7</sup> were sitting high up in the cupola (the raised section on the roof of the caboose), from which vantage point they could look down the length of the train. They, too, were chatting casually as they kept an eye out for anything out of the ordinary on the train ahead.

As the train came into sight, Frank peered intently through his rifle's telescopic sight and he slightly increased the pressure of his trigger finger on the trigger. Had the engineer, who sat on the right-hand side of the locomotive, chanced to look over at the top of the hill, it's unlikely he would have been able to see anything unusual. In addition to the distance involved, very little of Frank's upper body was exposed. He wore a white cap, and had covered his hearing protectors with white adhesive tape so his head would blend-in with the snow. Frank allowed the three locomotives and all of the leading boxcars to pass over the bridge, but when the first of the tankers approached, he squeezed the trigger. He didn't know which of the tankers carried the most flammable materials but, for his purposes, it didn't really matter.

Several things happened then, in rapid succession.

Frank's shoulder recoiled from the force of the shot which sounded something like the crack of a whip and was loud: at nearly 170 dB, it was louder than being near a fighter jet taking off.

The train crew heard the shot.

"What the hell was that?" said the engineer, who was the next closest to Frank's position.

"I think something just blew," said tail-end brakeman in the caboose. "Better signal the guys up front."

"Right," said the conductor, pulling on the emergency brake.

Simultaneously, all the crew members got their answer. There was a loud explosion as the binary explosive detonated and ignited the can of gasoline. The explosive alone would have done the job, but with the added power from the gasoline, the tanker rolling over it had no

---

<sup>7</sup> In later years, beginning in 1988, cabooses were phased out of Canadian railways. Since then, trains have been operated by an engineer and a conductor, both of whom ride in the locomotive.



chance. As that particular tanker was carrying propane, it immediately exploded into a huge orange fireball that rose up 300 metres.

“Look at that!” said the head-end brakeman to the engineer. “One of the tankers has gone up.” He instinctively reached for the brakes, but the engineer’s words stopped him.

“No! Not the brakes. We need to pull what cars we can away from that explosion.” Adding power, he kept the front end of the train moving forward.

Meanwhile, the cars behind the exploding tanker still had momentum propelling them and with a wave of screeching, tearing, and banging, the following tankers in the train began to smash into each other, causing some to crush, some to jack-knife upwards, and others to tip over and off of the rails.

As Frank watched from his vantage point on the hill, his jaw dropped at the drama unfolding in front of him: more explosions, more sounds of smashing and tearing metal, a set of train wheels spinning into the air, one entire tanker being lifted high into the air before itself exploding into another fireball and then raining fire down to the ground.

From the cupola of their caboose, the conductor and the tail-end brakeman had a similar view, and watched, frozen for a moment in horror. Then, shaking himself back into alertness, the conductor reached for his radio-telephone to call in an alarm. He’d no sooner transmitted the alert than the caboose smashed into the wreckage in front of them. As the caboose was twisted up and off the rails, the entire cupola was ripped away, carrying its human cargo with it.

Given the number of cars carrying dangerous goods on the train, all available police and fire personnel in the area were called to respond<sup>8</sup>.



---

<sup>8</sup> In real life, CP Train 54 with three locomotives and 106 cars accidentally derailed as it was passing through Mississauga, Ontario on November 10, 1979. It was carrying a tanker of chlorine and 39 tankers filled with a variety of flammable materials, including propane and butane. Some of the latter went up in flames, causing huge fireballs and concerns that the chlorine might get converted to deadly phosgene (‘Mustard Gas’). As a result, the entire region, comprising some 250,000 people, was evacuated – the largest evacuation in North American history. See for example: Heritage Mississauga, “Mississauga Train Derailment,” Mississauga Heritage Foundation, Mississauga, ON, 2018, <https://heritagemississauga.com/mississauga-train-derailment/>

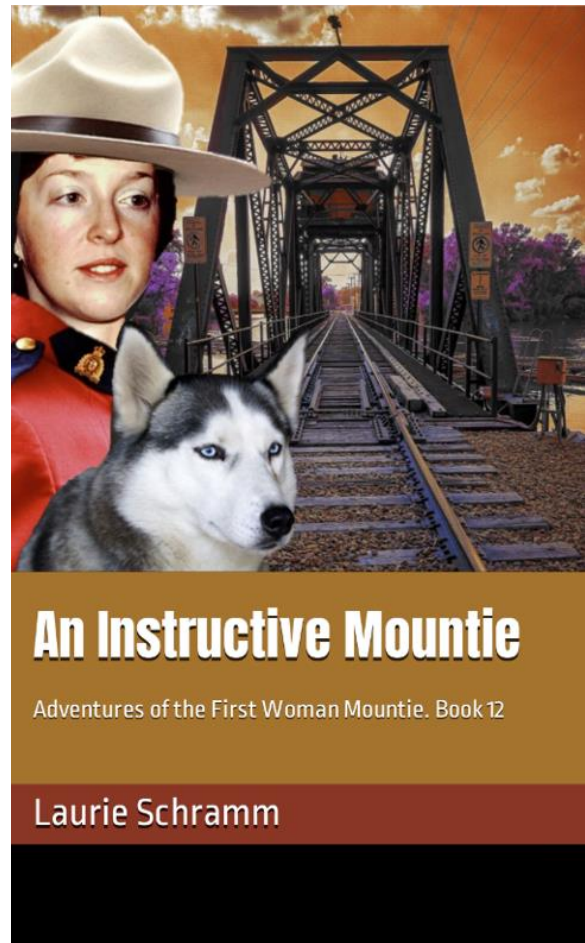
RCMP Constable Alexandra Houston's adventures continue in: ***An Instructive Mountie. Adventures of the First Woman Mountie Book 12***, by Laurie Schramm, 2023.

Available on all Amazon websites worldwide,

Print ISBN: 978-1-7387599-6-5  
ePub ISBN: 978-1-7387599-7-2.

For more information see:

[www.laurieschramm.ca](http://www.laurieschramm.ca)



## **ADVENTURES OF THE FIRST WOMAN MOUNTIE**

*Book 1: An Inconvenient Mountie*

*Book 2: An Inconspicuous Mountie*

*Book 3: An Indestructible Mountie*

*Book 4: An International Mountie*

*Book 5: An Inseparable Mountie*

*Book 6: An Indispensable Mountie*

*Book 7: An Inexorable Mountie*

*Book 8: An Intrepid Mountie*

*Book 9: An Intimate Mountie*

*Book 10: An Ineradicable Mountie*

*Book 11: An Incommunicado Mountie*

*Book 12: An Instructive Mountie*

*Book 13: An Inimitable Mountie*