RCMP seize Victoria Cross from Ontario auction house

Believed to be medal awarded in 1917 and stolen in 1973

CanWest News Service

RCMP seized a controversial Victoria Cross from an Ontario auction house after the Canadian War Museum alerted police the coveted artifact might have been stolen from its collection in 1973.

RCMP Cpl. Nathalie Deschines said the medal — apparently the original awarded to Canadian soldier Filip Konowal in 1917 — was removed Monday from Jeffrey Hoare Auctions in London, Ont., and will be analysed by military heritage experts.

"Eventually it will come to Ottawa for the duration of the investigation, to find out who's the rightful owner," Deschines said.

The auction house issued a statement Monday saying the Canadian War Museum "has asserted a claim of ownership for the Konowal VC and has requested that it be returned to the museum. Accordingly, the RCMP have taken possession of the cross while the true ownership is determined."

Jeffrey Hoare had announced the sale of the "historically important" medal as the highlight of its May 30 auction of military artifacts in Hamilton.

Konowal was born in Ukraine in 1888. He immigrated to Canada just before the outbreak of the First World War and enlisted with the Canadian Expeditionary Force.

SUPPLIED

The Victoria Cross, awarded for pre-eminent acts of valour or self-sacrifice or extreme devotion to duty in the presence of an enemy.

In the battle for Hill 70 at Lens, France, in August 1917, he single-handedly killed at least a dozen enemy soldiers and seized a German machine-gun.

In presenting Konowal his Victoria Cross — the Commonwealth's highest award for bravery — King George V told him: "Your exploit is one of the most daring and heroic in the history of my army. For this, accept my thanks."

Konowal experienced tragedy and hardship in Canada after the war. He served time in prison for killing a man, apparently in self-defence. He later worked as a janitor at the House of Commons before his death in 1959.
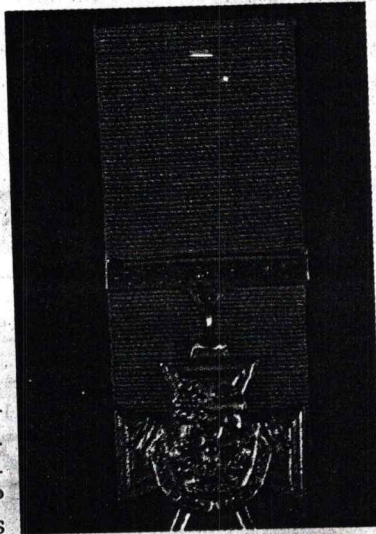
Lubomyr Luciuk, Konowal's biographer, informed the museum Friday of the impending sale. Museum officials quickly called the RCMP and asked that the medal be withdrawn from auction and its provenance investigated.

"They moved quickly and it's a pretty good development," museum spokesman Mark O'Neill said. He said curators from the Ottawa museum will examine the medal next week.

Museum officials aren't sure whether the Konowal VC was lost or stolen in 1973. There's also doubt about whether the medal was the original.

War Amps chief executive Cliff Chadderton said he was pleased the long-lost medal appears to have been found and claimed credit for sounding alarms about it four years ago.

Harper outlines financial policy

CanWest News Service
TRURO, N.S.

Accusing the Liberals of "fiscal dishonesty," Conservative Leader Stephen Harper unveiled the bare bones of his party's economic platform on Monday, promising hefty tax cuts and "targeted spending" on defence, health and agricultural bailouts.

In a speech to a business audience in Truro, N.S., Harper said, "We must aim to make (Canada) a lower tax jurisdiction than the United States."

Harper also said the Martin government has undertaken "disturbing practices" to cook the books, underestimating surpluses and indulging

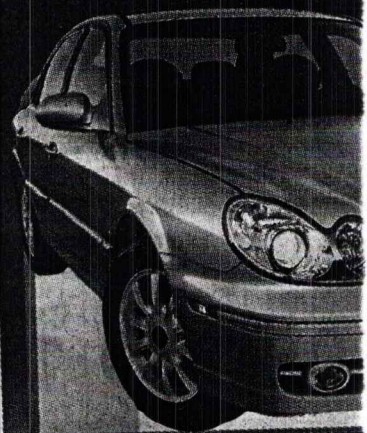instituted additional safeguards on estimating both spending and revenue.

Harper said a Conservative government would make health spending a key priority and would add performance measures to health. It would also put more police on the streets and set aside money for agricultural and forestry aid.

Harper said he would pay down the national debt, and use tax breaks to favour infrastructure spending and social programs such as day care. The Conservatives would also scrap "corporate welfare" in favour of lower business taxes.

Airline taxes would drop, as would personal income taxes, particularly for the middle class.

Party members said later that he appeared to win