

IN THE PROVINCIAL COURT OF MANITOBA

IN THE MATTER OF: The Fatality Inquiries Act C.C.S.M. c. F52

AND IN THE MATTER OF: An Inquest into the Death of Steven Campbell (DATE OF DEATH: November 21, 2015)

Report on Inquest of Judge Timothy Killeen Issued on this 20th day of August 2024

APPEARANCES:

Inquest Counsel Jodi Koffman Counsel for the RCMP Erica Haughey



MANITOBA

THE FATALITY INQUIRIES ACT REPORTED BY PROVINCIAL COURT JUDGE ON INQUEST

RESPECTING THE DEATH OF: STEVEN CAMPBELL

Having held an inquest respecting the said death, I report as follows:

The name of the deceased is: Steven Campbell

The deceased came to his death on November 21, 2015, in Thompson, Manitoba.

He died by the following means: homicide

Attached hereto and forming part of my report is a list of exhibits required to be filed by me.

Dated at the City of Winnipeg, in Manitoba, this 20th day of August, 2024.

"Original Signed by:"

Judge T. Killeen Provincial Court of Manitoba

COPIES TO:

- 1. Dr. John Younes, Chief Medical Examiner
- 2. Chief Judge Ryan Rolston, Provincial Court of Manitoba
- 3. The Honourable Matt Wiebe, Minister Responsible for *The Fatality Inquiries Act*.
- 4. Jeremy Akerstream, Deputy Minister of Justice & Deputy Attorney General
- 5. Michael Conner, Assistant Deputy Attorney General
- 6. Michele Jules, Executive Director of Manitoba Prosecution Service
- 7. Jodi Koffman Counsel to the Inquest
- 8. Erica Haughey Counsel for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police
- 9. The family of Steven Campbell
- 10. Aimee Fortier, Executive Assistant and Media Relations, Provincial Court of Manitoba



MANITOBA

THE FATALITY INQUIRIES ACT REPORTED BY PROVINCIAL COURT JUDGE ON INQUEST

RESPECTING THE DEATH OF: Steven Campbell

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

I.	Introduction	1
II.	Calling the Inquest	3
III.	The Chronology of the Criminal Trial	5
IV.	The Charges Against Abram Letkeman	6
V.	Standing Hearing	7
VI.	The Exhibits on the Inquest	8
VII.	The Evidence from the Trial	9
VIII.	The Medical Evidence	12
IX.	The Driving Offences	13
Х.	Subsequent Events	15
XI.	Conclusion	17
	Appendix A – EXHIBIT LIST	

I. INTRODUCTION

[1] On November 21, 2015, Steven Campbell was driving his Jeep Cherokee in Thompson, Manitoba. He had four passengers with him, including Lori Flett. November 20 had been her birthday and she had been celebrating with others at a bar in Thompson. When they left the bar at about two o'clock in the morning, they got into Mr. Campbell's vehicle.

[2] Soon afterwards, the way the Jeep was being driven caught the attention of a Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) constable, Abram Letkeman. Constable Letkeman later resigned from the RCMP. Although he was a police officer at the time of the event, he resigned after the trial and before the appeals. Rather than using Constable Letkeman or Mr. Letkeman, depending on the time, for clarity he will be referred to as Letkeman.

[3] Letkeman decided that the driver was possibly impaired and decided to follow the Jeep, with the intention of stopping it.

[4] Mr. Campbell did not stop when signalled to do so. There was a pursuit, at relatively low speeds. There were collisions between the vehicles. Eventually, Mr. Campbell was trapped in an area of bush and tried to escape by driving at Letkeman. Letkeman shot and killed Mr. Campbell. The Inquest was called by the Chief Medical Examiner (CME) as the death was caused by a police officer, nominally acting in the course of his duty.

[5] The event was investigated by the Independent Investigations Unit of the Department of Justice. Eventually, Letkeman was charged criminally in relation to the shooting death of Mr. Campbell and in relation to his driving just before the shooting. That driving had involved two collisions, the latter of which caused bodily harm to Lori Flett.

[6] A trial was held in Thompson Court of Queen's Bench (as it then was) in 2019 before Justice C. Martin, sitting without a jury. At the conclusion of the trial, Letkeman was convicted of one of the driving offences involving harm to Ms. Flett. He was acquitted of the firearm offences. He was not convicted of having caused the death of Campbell.

[7] He was sentenced to pay a fine of \$10,000 and was given a three year probation order and prohibited from driving. The Crown appealed the sentence to the Court of Appeal, which overturned the sentence, replacing it with a term of incarceration. The Court of Appeal stayed the incarceration for reasons explained in the majority decision.
[8] The Crown filed an application for leave to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada. That application was dismissed in March 2022, ending the legal proceedings against Letkeman.

II.CALLING THE INQUEST

[9] As noted above, the Inquest was called by the CME pursuant to *The Fatality*

Inquiries Act, CCSM cap. C52 (FIA). His letter to the Chief Judge was dated August

18, 2016.

[10] In his letter, the CME noted that the circumstances were currently under

investigation by the Independent Investigation Unit. That unit is responsible for

investigation of police involved deaths, among other things. The relevant sections of

the FIA state:

19(2) The chief medical examiner may determine that an inquest should be held if he or she is of the opinion that

(a) an inquest is necessary to determine the cause or manner of death or the exact circumstances in which the death occurred; or

(b) an inquest may enable the presiding provincial judge to recommend changes to provincial laws or the programs, policies and practices of the provincial government or of public agencies or institutions to prevent deaths in similar circumstances.

Presumption of inquest

19(5) Subject to subsections (6) and (7), an inquest into a death must be held if (a) the chief medical examiner has reasonable grounds to believe that the deceased person died as the result of the use of force by a peace officer who was acting in the course of duty; or

(b) at the time of death, the deceased person was

(i) in the custody of a peace officer,

(ii) a resident in a custodial facility,

(iii) an involuntary resident in a facility under The Mental Health Act, or

(iv) a resident in a developmental centre as defined in The Adults Living with an Intellectual Disability Act.

[11] Mr. Campbell's death was the direct result of Letkeman attempting to stop his

vehicle and take him into custody for an impaired driving investigation. Calling an

Inquest to determine the circumstances of Mr. Campbell's death was required under the *FIA*.

[12] However, other events intervened. Letkeman's actions were investigated by the Independent Investigations Unit. The investigation was extensive. It required opinions from experts to analyze the physical evidence, the location and movement of the vehicles before and as the shots were fired, the operation of the firearm and the use of force.

[13] Ultimately, in 2017, charges were authorized. At that time, Letkeman was still

an officer of the RCMP. His commanding officer, Superintendent Fleury was notified

of the charges and suspended Letkeman from service on March 3, 2017.

[14] Letkeman was charged with criminal offences in relation to the death of Mr.

Campbell and other offences from this incident.

[15] The criminal charges necessarily meant that the Inquest could not proceed. The

FIA provides:

26.1(1) Where, before commencement or completion of an inquest, a criminal charge is preferred in respect of the death that is the subject of the inquest, the presiding provincial judge must postpone or adjourn the inquest pending determination or conduct of a hearing on the criminal charge.

Inquest after criminal proceedings completed

26.1(2) Subject to subsection (2.1), an inquest may proceed when a criminal charge in respect of the death has been finally determined.

Cancelling inquest

26.1(2.1) The presiding provincial judge may cancel an inquest if he or she is satisfied that

(a) the circumstances of the death have been adequately examined in the criminal proceedings; and

(b) the public interest would not be served by holding an inquest into the death.

Notice to minister

26.1(2.2) If the presiding provincial judge cancels an inquest under subsection (2.1), he or she must file a report with the minister setting out the reasons why the inquest was cancelled.

[16] The Inquest was adjourned. No date was set, pending the resolution of the criminal case against Letkeman.

III.THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE CRIMINAL TRIAL

[17] Letkeman was tried in Thompson, in the Court of Queen's Bench before Justice C. Martin, sitting without a jury. The trial took several days. A verdict was delivered on August 19, 2019. Letkeman was convicted of some charges and acquitted of other charges. Most pertinently, he was acquitted of the charges involving Mr. Campbell. I will return to the trial after reviewing the chronology.

[18] Letkeman's sentencing took place later that year. After the sentence was imposed, an appeal was filed in the Manitoba Court of Appeal. In a decision on that appeal, the sentence was varied to a term of incarceration. The conviction remained.

[19] That decision was then the subject of an application for leave to appeal in the Supreme Court of Canada. Ultimately, that application was rejected. That finally ended the proceedings in relation to the criminal charges, allowing the Inquest to proceed.

[20] Had Letkeman been convicted of a charge involving the death of Mr. Campbell, that might have made it appropriate to cancel the Inquest. A conviction requires proof

of guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. If the trial evidence had established beyond a reasonable doubt that Letkeman had been criminally responsible for the death of Mr. Campbell, there would have been no further need to inquire into the circumstances of the death. They would have been known. However, the Trial Judge was left with a reasonable doubt and entered acquittals on the charges involving this death.

IV.THE CHARGES FACED BY LETKEMAN

[21] Letkeman was charged with six criminal offences, of which three related to the shooting death of Mr. Campbell. Letkeman was charged with manslaughter, criminal negligence causing death and discharging a firearm into the vehicle while knowing or being reckless about the presence of people in the vehicle. Letkeman was acquitted of the three shooting charges, related to the death of Mr. Campbell.

[22] Other charges related to his driving during the pursuit. Those charges were criminal negligence causing bodily harm, dangerous driving causing bodily harm and dangerous driving.

[23] The driving charges were in relation to Letkeman's driving within minutes before the shooting. They related to collisions with the Campbell vehicle while Letkeman was intentionally striking the Jeep to try to disable it. Letkeman would have been found guilty of all three, but the counts related to the same event and Courts do not impose multiple convictions for the same act. Letkeman was convicted of the most serious charge, criminal negligence causing bodily harm to Lori Flett. Ultimately, he was sentenced only on that charge. The trial Court imposed a fine and other penalties, including a driving prohibition. The Court of Appeal imposed a term of incarceration instead of the fine.

V.THE STANDING HEARING

[24] After appropriate notice, a standing hearing was held. Prior to the hearing, Inquest counsel had notified the family of Mr. Campbell of the Inquest. The family indicated that they would not be retaining counsel but wished Inquest counsel to ask for standing on their behalf. That request was granted. The family of Mr. Campbell did not reside in Thompson and asked to be able to appear by video or in person, if the case was in Winnipeg. That request was also granted.

[25] Inquest counsel also notified the trial and appeal counsel who had represented Letkeman. They did not request standing and indicated that they did not have current contact information for him. An inquiry was also made through the RCMP to ensure that Letkeman was aware of the proceeding. There was no response from or about him. He did not make an application for standing and did not participate in the Inquest in any way.

[26] Counsel for the RCMP applied for and were granted standing. No one else applied.

[27] The standing hearing was held in Winnipeg, with a live video link to Thompson, to allow anyone from that community to appear. No one attended the hearing.

Accordingly, it was determined that the subsequent proceedings would take place in Winnipeg.

VI.THE EXHIBITS ON THE INQUEST

[28] All evidence to explain what happened at the time of Mr. Campbell's death had already been called in Letkeman's trial. It was a public event. There was examination and cross-examination on all issues. Civilian witnesses as well as experts testified. Letkeman testified on his own behalf. He was cross-examined. Full argument was heard. A thorough analysis was conducted by the Court. A reasoned decision was given. The conviction was not overturned on appeal, although the sentence was varied. [29] In these circumstances, it would have been pointless to require that the same evidence be recalled. To do so would have required that all the civilian, police and expert witnesses be recalled to essentially repeat what they had said years earlier. There had been recollection problems with some of the civilians at the trial; it would have been surprising if they had become more reliable years later. The entire process would have required significant resources.

[30] It would also not be reasonable to revisit issues which had already been finally determined. Finality is important in any legal proceeding. Calling evidence from witnesses who have already testified would have left the potential for complications. For example, Letkeman testified at the trial, but was not available for the Inquest. That

Page 9

could have resulted in different inferences being drawn from the available evidence. That was not an acceptable option.

[31] The standard of proof at the criminal trial was proof beyond a reasonable doubt. The Judge presiding at the trial explained why Letkeman was found guilty of some charges and found not guilty on others. There was a thorough examination of the evidence, including the evidence of Letkeman. There were credibility findings. That judgment clearly determined the facts concerning what caused Mr. Campbell's death.
[32] Inquest counsel suggested that the witnesses need not be called again as their evidence and a decision on the evidence already existed. The Court agreed.

[33] Accordingly, Inquest counsel provided the Inquest with the entirety of the criminal case against Letkeman, which provided a sufficient, indeed compelling, basis to determine the issues that arise on the Inquest. The summary of facts listed here comes from the evidence called at the trial and the decision of Justice Martin. That decision is available online as *R. v. Abram Letkeman, 2019 MBQB 124*.

VII.EVIDENCE FROM TRIAL

[34] Letkeman was a constable with the RCMP, working alone that night. He was on patrol in Thompson as the bars were closing. His attention was drawn to the vehicle being driven by Mr. Campbell. Mr. Campbell and others had been out celebrating Lori Flett's birthday. As the bars closed at about two o'clock in the morning, Ms. Flett, Mr. Campbell and others got into Mr. Campbell's Jeep and left the parking lot of a local hotel. Mr. Campbell was a suspended driver. The vehicle that he was driving was unregistered but had affixed to it a plate from another vehicle. Mr. Campbell's driving caused Letkeman to suspect that he was impaired. He attempted to stop Mr. Campbell's vehicle and investigate.

[35] Mr. Campbell did not stop. Instead, he drove off with Letkeman in pursuit. The speeds were not high, in the range of thirty-five to forty kilometres per hour. Although Letkeman was signalling to Mr. Campbell to stop, Mr. Campbell did not do so. Letkeman broadcast that he was following a possible impaired driver and continued to broadcast the location of both vehicles as he pursued the Jeep. The first broadcast was at 2:00:11 a.m. The entire event was over by 2:06:21 a.m.

[36] As a police officer, Letkeman was entitled to investigate suspected impaired driving. He was entitled to follow Mr. Campbell and signal Mr. Campbell to stop. However, he did not simply follow the car. Instead, he attempted to stop the car by ramming the rear of the car. That spun the Jeep 180 degrees but did not cause it to stop. He had not been trained to perform that maneuver. Even if he had been trained, the circumstances of the low-speed pursuit of a possible impaired driver did not call for such an action. Letkeman did not notify the dispatcher of the collision. Instead, he sought permission to continue the pursuit. That was granted, based on the significant omission.

[37] The pursuit continued, at low speed, to an area near the edge of the city. The Jeep turned onto a Manitoba Hydro right of way, with Letkeman in pursuit. Both vehicles continued onto an all-terrain vehicle (ATV) trail which was part of the right of way. The terrain was rough, snow covered and uneven. There were patches of ice.
[38] The evidence of the passengers was that they were urging him to stop, but he

refused to do so.

[39] The two vehicles were on the trail, with trees and thick brush along the sides of the trail. At a point, the Jeep swung right and stopped. Again, Letkeman attempted to disable the vehicle by colliding with the side of the Jeep. This collision was what is sometimes called a T-bone collision. He drove the front of his cruiser into the front passenger side of the Jeep. Ms. Flett was badly injured because of that collision. The collision was also unsuccessful in stopping Mr. Campbell. He backed up and the Jeep moved in an arc, in part due to the impact of the police car. Mr. Campbell then came to a stop.

[40] At that point, Letkeman got out of his vehicle. He drew his firearm and held it in what was described as the high, ready position.

[41] The Jeep then again went into motion. It moved forward and to the left. As it did so, it came at Letkeman, who was out of his vehicle and standing with his firearm drawn. [42] The trial judge described Mr. Campbell as making the tragic decision to drive forward. There is no clear explanation as to why he had continued to drive, despite knowing that the police were trying to stop him and being urged by his passengers to stop. There were no weapons in the Jeep.

[43] Mr. Campbell drove forward as Letkeman was walking in front of the Jeep. Whether Mr. Campbell intended it or not, that put Letkeman in danger. The Jeep also intentionally veered to the left, generally towards Letkeman.

[44] The Jeep struck Letkeman on his right foot. Letkeman began to fire at the Jeep at about that time. The entire event on the right of way was seconds. Indeed, the whole event was only about six minutes in length. Letkeman fired eleven shots. Mr. Campbell was struck nine times and died from the wounds. The expert analysis noted that all eleven shots could have been fired in about three seconds.

VIII.THE MEDICAL EVIDENCE

[45] The autopsy was conducted on November 24, 2015. The medical examiner listed the areas where Mr. Campbell had been struck by bullets fired by Letkeman. A subsequent toxicological examination determined that Mr. Campbell had a blood alcohol level of 190 milligrams of alcohol in 100 millilitres of blood at the time of his death. He had cocaine in his system, as well as metabolites of cannabis. His death was caused solely by the gunshots fired by Letkeman.

IX.THE DRIVING OFFENCES

[46] Letkeman was charged with offences from deliberately colliding with the Jeep in an effort to disable it and stop any pursuit. He struck the side of the Jeep, causing significant damage to the police vehicle. He did not stop the Jeep. He was not trained in using a collision to stop a fleeing vehicle. There was nothing to suggest that this pursuit required such an extreme measure, even if he had known how to perform the maneuver. Although any impaired driver presents a risk, Mr. Campbell was driving relatively slowly, late at night. No evidence suggested that other vehicles or pedestrians were in jeopardy. That first collision was less than two minutes after the event started. Tellingly, Letkeman did not tell his communications centre or supervisor that he had intentionally struck the Jeep.

[47] The expert report on use of force noted that the RCMP policy regarding vehicle pursuits states; *"In conducting the risk assessment to initiate a pursuit, the seriousness of the situation and the necessity for immediate apprehension must outweigh the level of danger created by the pursuit"*

[48] The expert noted that the first collision had not caused Mr. Campbell to stop. It should have been obvious that other means were going to be required to stop the jeep, if the pursuit continued. The prudent course would have been to discontinue the pursuit. Other officers were enroute. It may have been that the vehicle could have been located later. In any event, the risk in pursuing it was greater than the risk in letting it drive off.

[49] The second collision occurred when Letkeman intentionally drove into the side of the Jeep on the right of way. That collision was significant and forceful. It caused serious bodily harm to Ms. Flett. The conclusion from the evidence was that Letkeman deliberately struck the entire passenger side of the Jeep with the entire front of the police car. The Jeep was stopped. The police car was travelling over 20 kilometres per hour. That action displayed a wanton and reckless disregard for the safety of the passengers in the Jeep. That was the basis for the conviction for criminal negligence causing bodily harm to Ms. Flett. That collision was certainly less than twenty-three seconds before the shooting. More likely, it only shortly preceded the shooting.

[50] As noted, the result was different on the shooting charges. Justice Martin concluded in paragraphs 90 and 91:

In the end, Cst. Letkeman made a series of bad decisions leading to him being in a position in front of the Jeep at the moment Mr. Campbell decided to drive forward. I have a reasonable doubt that the officer would have put himself in that spot if he thought he would have to shoot into the Jeep to save his life. Mr. Campbell's action could not reasonably have been anticipated -- it is one thing to try to escape a drunk driving charge, but it is quite another to try to run over a police officer in the process. I am satisfied the officer would have been grievously hurt or killed if he did not use lethal force to try to stop the vehicle from advancing. On the facts I accept, the shooting was consistent with the RCMP Discharge of Firearms policy and the use-of-force expert's evidence. No doubt Cst. Letkeman bears fault, but except for Mr. Campbell's driving forward and then leftward, I am satisfied he would not have shot. Analyzing the number of shots and the precise movements of the parties, and the risk to Cst. Letkeman in the way the Crown suggests would be imposing a standard of near perfection in a fast and highly chaotic situation.

In these circumstances, I am left with a reasonable doubt that the shooting was not justified in accordance with s. 25(3). While Cst. Letkeman brought the jeopardy upon

himself through his acts that night, Mr. Campbell should not have driven forward as he did and I am not satisfied such an act should or could have been anticipated. The result was a tragic but proportionate response to a real and immediate threat to the officer's life.

[51] An Inquest is not to assign fault but is not precluded from reporting a finding of fault made by a Court of competent jurisdiction. Although Letkeman did not commit a crime in shooting Mr. Campbell, his own actions in the preceding short period put him into the position of danger.

X.SUBSEQUENT EVENTS

[52] As noted, his commanding officer had suspended Letkeman from service after he was first charged. As further information became known, it was determined that the matter should be referred to the commanding officer of RCMP D Division. That was done and in 2018 a referral to The RCMP Conduct Board was made. The allegations against Letkeman were reworded to be consistent with the criminal charges.

[53] The criminal conviction, as well as the evidence from his trial established the allegations on a prima facie basis.

[54] After the conviction and sentence, Letkeman voluntarily resigned on December19, 2019, before the Conduct Board hearing took place.

[55] At the Inquest, the RCMP filed evidence concerning the internal investigation.

[56] In some circumstances, an intentional collision with a vehicle being pursued may be used. This precision immobilization technique is obviously a dangerous action, for all involved. It is something that requires training, both in the use of the technique as well as the circumstance in which it may be performed. It is only to be used when the use of force risk assessment protocol, the Incident Management Intervention Policy, allows.

[57] Letkeman had no training in this technique and should never have attempted to perform it. Even if trained and capable of performing the technique, the circumstances of this pursuit would never have allowed him to attempt such a dangerous maneuver.

[58] Mr. Campbell was impaired at the time. His refusal to stop the vehicle gave Letkeman a clear reason to pursue him. An impaired driver is always a potential threat to others who may be on or near a roadway. The initial pursuit was justified. Indeed, it was probably required.

[59] However, the circumstances of the continuing pursuit could never have justified an intentional collision. The speed was relatively slow. There was no basis to believe that any offence other than impaired driving had occurred. It was apparent that there were passengers in the vehicle. Other police officers were in the city and able to assist. It was likely that the Jeep could be followed, if not contained. It was possible to identify the vehicle, although not possible to know who was driving or if the vehicle was stolen. It would have been apparent that a collision was not justified. A reasonable person, considering the danger and knowing that the driver did not stop even after the first collision, would have discontinued the pursuit to avoid more harm. [60] Although the collision did not cause Mr. Campbell's death, the first and second

intentional collisions resulted in a situation where Letkeman feared for his life as Mr.

Campbell drove towards him. They lead to the tragedy that followed.

[61] The internal review confirmed that Letkeman was trained in the use of force but

disregarded his training on that night. There was nothing lacking in the training.

The internal report concluded:

To summarize, Letkemen's actions were contrary to RCMP policy as follows: - The RCMP's IMIM (Incident Management Intervention Model) and Use of Force Policy - in conducting the "PIT Manoeuvre" and actions in the "T-Bone crash on the ATV trail", Letkemen's actions were not consistent with policy in that they were not reasonable given the totality of the circumstances. - Emergency Vehicle Operations (Pursuit) Policy - Letkemen's actions in the pursuit were not consistent with policy in that: He did not conduct a continuous / conducted an improper risk assessment; He did not properly communicate the pursuit to OCC and his supervisor; He did not terminate the pursuit when it was prudent to do so

[62] No amendments to RCMP policy were made, nor were there changes to RCMP training, as a result of this incident. Letkeman's decisions and actions were on his own accord and contrary to RCMP policy. His actions were neither a result of the policies themselves, nor his training.

XI.CONCLUSION:

[63] The tragic event followed actions that were unwise, unjustified and, insofar as Letkeman's driving is concerned, illegal. His actions were contrary to his training. He has left his employment and served the sentence imposed upon him in the criminal trial. Nothing in his background or training should have alerted the RCMP to the potential for this behaviour. No recommendations for changes are needed.

"Original Signed by:" KILLEEN, P.J.



MANITOBA

THE FATALITY INQUIRIES ACT REPORTED BY PROVINCIAL COURT JUDGE ON INQUEST

RESPECTING THE DEATH OF: Steven Campbell

APPENDIX "A" – EXHIBIT LIST

Exhibit No.	Description
1.	Trial Evidence
A)	June 17, 2019
В)	June 18, 2019
C)	June 19, 2019
D)	June 25, 2019
E)	June 26, 2019
F)	June 27, 2019
G)	August 27, 2019
H)	January 17, 2020
I)	Response of accused to leave for appeal application in Supreme Court of
	Canada
J)	Notice of Rejection – Supreme Court of Canada
2.	
A)	Decision of Manitoba Court of Queen's Bench
B)	Inspector Hall Report on Steven Campbell
C)	Record of decision on Constable Abram Letkeman