

MARAUDER SHOT DEAD

CONSTABLE'S ACTION ENDS REIGN OF TERROR

The Story of the Scrub Tragedy at Nowendoc

RUSSIAN'S LIFE CUT SHORT BY POLICE BULLET

(By Our Special Representative)

In the rugged scrub country around Nowendoc on the morning of October 5 last Constable Gilroy, the local police officer, shot dead Alexander Harast, a prisoner out on license and the possessor of a long list of criminal convictions.

According to the story unfolded at the Coroner's Court (Walcha) yesterday, the constable's act effectively ended the reign of terror which a desperate man had exercised over a district of 80 miles. Witnesses told the Coroner (Mr. A. Townshend) that residents of the sparsely populated district were panic-stricken by the marauding visits of Harast, a Russian, aged 45 years, and a man of gorilla strength.

Interesting moves in the case included the exhumation of the body for the taking of fingerprints, to remove the slightest doubt that the man who was shot was identical with Alexander Harast. The wisdom of this action was revealed by the statement of the Coroner that he had received a letter suggesting that the police had shot the wrong man. According to the evidence tendered yesterday, all doubt on this score was eliminated.

The public gallery was filled when the hearing commenced at 11.30 a.m., from the point where the Government

from the point where the Government medical officer had certified as to the cause of death.

Superintendent O'Brien (Tamworth), assisted by Inspector Harrison (Armidale) presented the case for the Crown.

Sergeant Schraeder, stationed at Walcha, said that about 8 p.m. on August 16 he went to Moona Plains where Henry Charles Partridge and William Chandler were camped. They had reported the loss of certain goods, including a shotgun and a box of cartridges. Inquiries were made by the police and some of the goods were recovered on October 5 last at Nowendoc. The goods were then in the possession of a man he now knew to be Alexander Harast. From August 16 to October 5 witness and other police were engaged in a search for the de-

ceased between Walcha and Nowendoc, a distance of approximately 80 miles. The country was rugged and heavily timbered. Witness came in contact with a number of settlers and kangaroo shooters, and reports were made that their homesteads and huts had been broken into and goods stolen. Among those who reported losses was Mr. Abel, a kangaroo shooter on Moona Plains, who had some food stolen. On August 24, Abel said that he had seen Harast, who was armed with a shot gun.

Witness produced a quantity of articles, the subject of the robberies from

articles, the subject of the robberies from homesteads and huts in Nowendoc district. They had been identified by the owners. Witness said that the articles were stolen by Alexander Harast and had been found in his chaff bag, on the day he was shot by Constable Gilroy. As a police officer he knew Harast as a dangerous criminal, with a long record.

Settlers Were Panic-stricken

Witness identified a photograph as that of Harast, otherwise known as Georgene Harast, Alexander Forgen, Alexander Starist and Gustav Remmick.

During the time Harast was committing the series of robberies many of the settlers were panic-stricken, and some of them took their children from school, as they had to cross lonely areas.

On October 4 witness was on Riamukki Station, near Nowendoc, in company with Constables Gilroy and Worrall. Witness saw Mr. Wilson, manager of the station, and showed him an official photograph of Harast. Wilson said he had seen the man on the station that afternoon. They searched the station until 10 p.m. On October 5 at 4 a.m. witness left the station with the constables. At 8 a.m. he heard two reports of a firearm and set off in the direction. He met Gilroy coming towards him. Gilroy said that he had shot Harast. Gilroy said "I saw Harast hiding behind a tree."

...
ast hiding behind a log near a boggy creek. He was in a thickly timbered patch of country. I recognised him and said 'I am Constable Gilroy. You are Harast and I am arresting you for a series of robberies that you have committed.' Harast said to me 'You can't

take me.' He was seated on a chaff bag. He got up and bolted across the creek. He then said 'You can't follow me.' Gilroy said:

"I know you are a dangerous criminal, and if you don't surrender I will shoot you."

Continuing, witness said that Gilroy told him that Harast continued to run away. Gilroy was mounted, but owing to the boggy nature of the country and the thick scrub, he found it impossible to pursue him on horseback. Gilroy said that he then dismounted and followed him on foot. As Gilroy was approaching him he picked up a stout piece of wood, about 6 feet long, and raised it above his head. Gilroy said that Harast came towards him, and said 'Don't you come another yard or I'll shoot you stone dead. I have a better revolver than you have.' As he said that he placed his hand in the vicinity of his hip pocket, and with his left hand held the stick above his head, and made a strike at him. Gilroy said that he was then 9 or 10 feet from him, and drew his service revolver and said:

"If you don't surrender I will be forced to shoot you." Harast

be forced to shoot you." Harast continued to strike, and Gilroy said he fired a shot over his head.

"Harast Was Mad With Rage"

He could see that Harast was mad with rage. Harast took hold of the stick in both hands, raised it above his head, rushed at him in a crouching position and made several vicious strikes with the stick. Gilroy said that he said to Harast:

"I am Constable Gilroy and you know me. If you don't surrender I will be forced to shoot you. I know you, and I know that you are a dangerous man.

At the time Harast was infuriated with rage and Gilroy considered that his own life was in immediate danger as he knew Harast had fire arms on his person or concealed close by.

Continuing, witness said that he then viewed the body. The condition of the ground was boggy, and Gilroy indicated the exact position where Harast was alleged to have attacked him. Gilroy produced a stick. Witness then communicated with the Coroner and Dr. Stephens, who visited the scene. An inquest was opened at the Nowendoc Police Station and adjourned. After the body had been viewed by the Coroner, he made a search of the clothes and found an automatic pistol in the pocket. The pistol was capable of being discharged. On October 7 he received an order from the Coroner and went

an order from the Coroner, and went to Nowendoc and exhumed the body of Harast. He took three sets of fingerprints, which were submitted to Sergt. Walkom, who is in charge of the Fingerprint Branch of the C.I.B. The fingerprint file was tendered. After viewing the body, and from the police records he was in a position to state definitely that the man was Alexander Harast, and that he was buried under that name. As far as witness knew he had no relatives in this country.

In answer to Supt. O'Brien, witness said that about 1919 Harast was con-

victed of a series of robberies in another part of the State, and that when pursued by the police that he fired at Sergeant Roberts. Harast was liberated on license from the Long Bay Penitentiary on May 12, 1934.

Constable James Ernest Gilroy, stationed at Nowendoc, said that other police had been searching for Alexander Harast, who was wanted for robbery. Had he been arrested he would have been charged with the offences. About 8 a.m. on October 5 witness was searching for Harast, and saw him sitting on a chaff bag behind a log. The bag contained clothes and food. The clothes and other articles had been stolen by Harast. Witness rode up and said, "I am Constable Gilroy, you are Harast, and I am going to arrest you for a series of robberies." He said, "You can't take me," and then bolted. Witness was followed

...s. He said, "You can't take me," and then bolted. Witness was forced to dismount and followed him on foot. Witness again told him to surrender. He picked up a stick and held it in his left hand. He then put his right hand in the direction of his hip pocket. He made a hit at witness, and threatened to shoot him dead if he came another step. He was infuriated. Witness knew he had been armed, and believed that he was then armed. Witness dodged the blow with the stick, and drawing his revolver said, "If you don't surrender I will be forced to shoot you." Witness said he fired a shot over his head. This made him wilder than ever, and he grabbed the stick with both hands and came at witness. Witness then fired, and the bullet struck him in the chest, and he dropped to the ground.

"I felt that my life was in immediate danger," said witness, "and had I not taken the course I would have suffered either bodily injuries or death."

Sergeant's Warning to Constable

Continuing, witness said that he knew Harast as a criminal of a very dangerous type; a desperate man who would not hesitate to shoot anyone who attempted to prevent his escape. He had been warned by Sergeant Schraeder not to attempt to arrest him by himself. Settlers had told him that Harast had boasted that he would not be taken by the police, and that

not be taken by the police, and that he would shoot the first constable who attempted to arrest him, any civilian who assisted them, or anyone who gave evidence respecting his movements.

Witness saw the hole in the left breast of deceased, and another hole under the right shoulder blade. The Government Medical Officer said that the injury could have been caused by a bullet fired from a service revolver.

Const. Frank Worrall, stationed at Walcha, said that on September 22 he was with Mr. Crawford of "Moona Plains," making inquiries regarding some missing property. Harast was present, and witness called upon him to surrender. He said, "Stand there or I will shoot." Witness stooped to get through the undergrowth and approached Harast. When he ran into the scrub Harast was carrying a .22 calibre rifle and a large knife. Harast said that he had been looking for kangaroos, and as witness approached he said, "You won't get me." Harast dropped a chaff bag containing a coat, vest and pair of braces. This property had been claimed by Mr. Morgan, of Armidale. Witness identified the body of the man shot by Gilroy as that of Harast, and who was

roy as that of Harass, and who was

identical with the man he saw on Moona Plains Station.

Supt. O'Brien said that he **did not** intend to call other witnesses available.

The Verdict

Before delivering his verdict, the Coroner said that he wished to express his thanks to Superintendent O'Brien and Inspector Harrison for their presence and assistance. He felt sure that had an officer of the department warranted censure, they would be the first to administer it. The evidence showed that deceased was a dangerous criminal, and his agility and stamina allowed him to operate 25 miles to the north-east and next time 50 miles to the south. The country was very rough and wild, and Constable Gilroy had very wisely advised the settlers in lonely parts to be armed for emergencies. He (the Coroner) knew from personal knowledge that men in the Moona Plains area were armed. Gilroy's duty was to capture the marauder, and he was sure that no one felt the result of the encounter more than the constable. Continuing, the Coroner said that he had re

ing, the coroner said that he had received a letter from Nowendoc suggesting that the wrong man had been shot, but the fingerprint evidence, and that given by Constable Worrall of his meeting with Harast at Moona Plains disposed of that suggestion.

The coroner then returned a verdict of justifiable homicide, and, further, found that Constable Gilroy had fired only when his life was in danger, and in the execution of his duty.

Policeman Commended

"I wish to make a few remarks in regard to the action taken by Constable Gilroy," said Supt. O'Brien. "I probably know Harast better than anybody here, and I can say that he would not hesitate to shoot any policeman or civilian who attempted to interfere with his liberty. I say publicly that Constable Gilroy on October 5 upheld the best traditions of the police force of this State. I had never seen the constable until October 7, and I say that I am proud to have him in my district. He is an officer of sterling worth, and I hope that these remarks will be conveyed to the right quarter in order that he may receive the highest commendation from the Department. Personally, I think that he is entitled to promotion to the non-commissioned rank. In the dense, bush scrub he faced this man alone, well knowing him to be a desperate criminal. The action he took probably saved the lives of other men. Gilroy's action was meritorious,

men. Gilroy's action was meritorious, and stamps him as the class of man of which we should feel proud. Here, in this court, I tender my heartiest thanks for the service he has rendered the Department and the community.

Mr. C. Crannitch, as a citizen, also congratulated Constable Gilroy on his fine conception of duty.

In reply, Constable Gilroy said, "I thank you very much for what you have said on my behalf."
