

ALLAN LEGERE: A LOOK BACK

By André Veniot

At 10:40 a.m. on May 3, 1989 convicted killer Allan Legere escaped from a bathroom at the Dr. Georges L. Dumont Hospital in Moncton.

He'd been taken to the hospital to be treated for an ear infection, under escort by guards from the Atlantic Institution, a maximum security penitentiary at Renous, N.B. Legere was serving a life sentence for the brutal murder of convenience store owner John Glendenning.

On the way in to the hospital, Legere asked to go to the bathroom. At the time, he was wearing handcuffs and leg shackles. Once inside, he opened the door once, asked his guard for some toilet paper, then burst out. The cuffs and shackles were in the sink.

Allan Legere was on the run.

That run would last for seven, very bloody months.

In that time, he killed four people and sexually assaulted a fifth, leaving her for dead.

The four were Annie Flam, an elderly storeowner; Donna and Linda Daughney, two middle-aged sisters; and Father James Smith, an elderly priest.

The manner of their deaths, its sheer brutality, cruelty and savagery, shocked and terrified the community of Miramichi where the murders happened.

That fear and terror spread throughout the province. People had guns and rifles under their beds.

Legere's escape and the subsequent murders provoked one of the largest manhunts in RCMP history.

It also introduced Canadians to what was then a new science, DNA analysis, now so commonplace and taken so much for granted because of such television programs as CSI.

There were no witnesses to his killings but Legere would be the first Canadian convicted of murder in large part because of the use of DNA.

The morning of Legere's escape I was working right across the street as a television reporter for CBC.

From that moment until his capture on November 24, I spent much of my time on the Miramichi, living there, sharing the hopes and fears of its residents.

There are some images from then that stick in my mind.

The discovery of the Daughney sisters' bodies and the white-clad forensic investigators combing through their backyard. How cold it was the night of Fr. Smith's murder, how very little traffic there was and the police checkpoints. The black-suited members of the RCMP Emergency Response Team, their guns, their big vans, the helicopters flying overhead. The snow that fell and fell in big, giant flakes the day of Fr. Smith's funeral. How the sun shone the day of Legere's capture and how absolutely delighted and happy people were. A weight, a huge weight had been lifted off their shoulders. That first sight of Allan Legere, thin, no beard, being escorted from the RCMP detachment while hundreds of people watched. The party at the Wharf Inn afterwards.

That part was over.

The preliminary hearing [Voir Dire] and the trial were to come and that is what you are about to read.

I happen to believe it was a seminal trial in Canadian judicial history.

The Crown prosecutors, Anthony Allman, Jack Walsh and Graham Sleeth, were...and still are...among the best ever seen in this province or this country. They were backed up by another exceptional prosecutor, and now Provincial Court judge, Fred Ferguson.

The RCMP work by Sergeants Vincent Poissonnier and Mason Johnston, now both retired, Sergeant Robert Kennedy and Insp. Kevin Mole was outstanding.

During the trial, Legere was loud, cocksure, disdainful and often had to view proceedings from his cell in the Burton courthouse, put there by Mr. Justice David Dickson, for his outrageous behaviour.

As for Legere's lawyer, Weldon Furlotte, you can reach your own conclusions.

On Nov. 3 1991, a five-man, six-woman jury convicted Legere of four counts of first degree murder.

He is now in a Special-Handling Unit (SHU) at the maximum security prison in Ste-Anne-des-Plaines, P.Q. near Montreal. He spends 23 hours out of 24 in his cell.

Legere is one of four Canadian prisoners not allowed to speak to the media. The others are Clifford Olson, Paul Bernardo and Valery Fabrikant.

After the Daughney sisters' murders, people on the Miramichi began installing outside lights for their backyards.

At the time, they were called "Legere lights."

They still are. And they're still on.

André Veniot is co-author of "Terror: Murder and Mayhem on the Miramichi" and "Terror's End: Allan Legere on Trial."