



JOHN MCDONALD

THE MURDER OF CONSTABLE JOHN MCDONALD

Researched & written by Jack Templeman

Information had been received of a possible break-in to the Radio Building at 120 Fort Street that housed the offices of the Manitoba Motor League as well as the Clean Towel Supply Company on the main floor and the Canada Glassware Company on the second floor. The object of the B & E was to be the Motor League as they sold license plates at that time so it would be reasonable to assume their safe would contain a considerable amount of money over the weekends, especially at the beginning of the year.

It is important to note that at this time the Winnipeg Police Department was much smaller. There were a lot of beat patrols and very few cruisers, five to be exact. Car #8 for the Fort Rouge area, car #9 for the North End, cars # 23, 35, and 46 for the downtown area. Only 3 cars were 2-way radio-equipped, 8, 9 and 46. The others, as well as detectives, had 1-way systems. While the 2-way cars could acknowledge messages or call the station, their messages could not be picked up by the other units, so the messages had to be repeated by the dispatcher. The first two 2-way radios were installed in May 1939 and the last one in the fall of 1939, shortly before this occurrence.

The Detective Department arranged to stake out the building on weekends and used constables for this tedious job. Their instructions were to allow the criminals entry and to notify the dispatcher at

the Rupert Street Station by phone so help could be sent before any attempt was made to arrest the culprits.

The stakeouts began in January 1940 and continued into February. On February 4th, an attempt was made on the building by prying the north side window but the culprits were spooked by a neighbour before they entered. This occurred around 8:30 p.m. and the stakeouts began at 10:00 p.m. up to this time.

The officers going into the building that night were Constables John McDonald #181A and Norman Stewart #27A. These same officers were in the building the next weekend, Saturday, February 10th at 8:00 p.m. McDonald had been involved in the stakeout seven times and this was the third night for Stewart.

The criminals involved in this bungled safe job were Mike 'The Horse' Attamanchuk, John Ashton Barnett and John Andrusiak. All three were well known to the police and had records relating to property thefts. They specialized in stealing autos and stripping them for parts, and B & E's in which tools were generally taken. They graduated to safe jobs and were not expected to be armed since this was night work that did not involve holding anyone up. Attamanchuk had other ideas and had no intention of being arrested and sent back to jail. He was carrying a Webley .455 cal.

John McDonald

On the fateful night, Stewart and McDonald saw a suspicious car drive around the building several times. About 8:30 p.m., the window leading into the washroom on the south side was smashed in, one male entered and then left shortly after. The officers waited to see what would happen and about a half-hour later, three men returned and entered through the window bringing with them tools and a drill to attack the safe. The officers let them get started and then entered the office of the Motor League. They had not phoned the station in case the culprits might hear them.

Each officer switched on a light hanging over the front counter. McDonald ordered the men “stay where you are or we will let you have it”. Attamanchuk's reply was “like hell we will” and he and Andrusiak ducked behind the office desks. Barnett raised his hands and stood still. Then Attamanchuk stood up with a gun in his hand and fired at McDonald first, then he turned towards



**Constable
Norm Stewart**

Stewart. McDonald fired one shot but missed. Stewart fired two shots and missed. Before Stewart could fire another, Attamanchuk fired at him striking him in the right hand with the bullet entering between the third and fourth fingers and travelling up into his forearm where it lodged itself. Stewart's gun was knocked from his hand and he was knocked down by the

impact. McDonald ran over to Stewart and shook him saying “Jesus, Jesus”. Barnett ran out the side door of the office with McDonald following into the hall towards the back of the building where entry had been made.

As Stewart struggled to get up and recover his gun he heard shooting from the hallway. As he got into the hallway, now holding the gun in his left hand,

he saw Attamanchuk by the fire door that divided the hallway. Stewart fired twice more with one bullet striking the door and the other hitting Attamanchuk the left shoulder, passing through and knocking him backwards.

The events of the next few seconds were confusing with conflicting testimony being heard at the Royal Commission. Stewart stated that he then chased another suspect up to the second floor and into the office of the Canada Glassware Company. The suspect smashed the glass out of the office door, entered and for some reason smashed a large window overlooking Fort Street. Stewart was getting weak from shock and loss of blood and he lost sight of the suspect but heard the metal fire door at the top of the stairs slam. He then yelled out the window that he had been shot and for someone to call the police. He then dialled the station at 105 and shouted for help before collapsing. His bloodied gun was found on the desk.



Constable John McDonald

When McDonald chased after Barnett it appears that Attamanchuk also went in that direction, which would place McDonald in the hall beyond the fire door and Attamanchuk near the door. McDonald was shot by

Attamanchuk with one bullet piercing his hip and lodging the bowels. The second and fatal shot struck him in the top of the head passing down to the back of the neck indicating that he was probably collapsing from the first wound when the second buffet struck. He was killed instantly.

Andrusiak managed to get out of the building via the window that had been used for entry. Barnett, along with the wounded Attamanchuk, smashed out the plate glass front doors and fled south on Fort Street. They crossed Broadway towards the Fort Garry Hotel. Mary Gorin and Helen Kornak

John McDonald

were walking east in the lane of Broadway while John Thomson was on the west sidewalk of Fort Street, just north of the building. Robert and Martha Ellis were walking south on the east side of Fort Street. All the witnesses described the taller of the two men as appearing injured and running awkwardly. Gorin, Kornak and Thomson all went to the service station on Broadway at Fort to notify the police.

Robert and Martha Ellis stayed on the sidewalk watching the building and saw the lights 'go on' on the main floor and then on the second floor. Almost immediately, a man on the second floor smashed out a window and yelled at them to phone the police as he had been shot.

Bombardier Joseph Wall and an officer from the army barracks across the street also heard the sound of the front doors being shattered and after a quick check of the barracks ran across the street to the Radio Building. They were in front of the building as the window on the second floor shattered and a man they identified as Stewart stuck his head out and shouted for help indicating he had been shot. As they started to enter the broken doors, the cruiser arrived and they all went up together.

The first call received at 9:42 p.m. was from the service station reporting that two boys broke a window in the Radio Building and were now running west on Broadway. This was broadcast over V.Y.W. to car #23 Constables R.M. Burns #38A and T.B. Oxley #152A accompanied by Patrol Sergeant Adams. The cruiser car was northbound on Main Street between York Avenue & St. Mary's Avenue. They turned left at St. Mary's and left again at Fort where they got a second message to rush as there was now a report of a shooting. They arrived at 9:44 p.m. and met two soldiers by the front doors.

The officers were told the man on the second floor had been shot so they entered through the broken doors and rushed upstairs to find the metal fire door locked from the inside. When they identified themselves, Stewart opened the door and collapsed. They carried him downstairs and Oxley ran across the street to phone for the ambulance.

Burns did not wait for the ambulance, but loaded Stewart into the cruiser and rushed him to St. Boniface Hospital.

Oxley returned to the Radio Building and awaited the arrival of detectives. Detective T. Ormonde arrived at about 9:46 p.m. and they began to search the second floor. About 9:55 p.m., Acting Detectives W. Owens and J.E. Sims arrived and joined them. Some nine or ten minutes after the arrival of the first units, Sims returned to the main floor and at that time discovered the deceased body of Constable McDonald in the dark hallway.

Andrusiak escaped and got back to the stolen car they were using. A similar car was identified by Street Railway employees working at Fort and Assiniboine as having sped east on Assiniboine and turned north on Fort that evening.

Attamanchuk and Barnett escaped through the broken front doors and made their way to Broadway and headed west. Barnett left the wounded Attamanchuk and went to the Ritz Taxi office on Colony Street where he got driver, Evard Jensen, to drive him east on St. Marys to pick up his 'drunk' friend. Attamanchuk came out from between houses between Edmonton and Carlton. The driver was ordered to drive them to Ellice Avenue and when they got to Young Street he was told to stop. Barnett gave him a dollar in silver for the thirty-five-cent ride. Jensen later identified Barnett and Attamanchuk as his passengers.

Barnett and Attamanchuk next turned up at 368 Langside Street but stayed only a few minutes. It would appear that they then joined up with Andrusiak somewhere and he had the stolen car, a maroon Ford with a whip aerial. By this time the police suspected Attamanchuk, and officers went

John McDonald

and staked out his mother's house at 273 McGregor. Constables Manning and Morris and Detective Dickie hid in the upstairs kitchen. At 12:20 a.m., on the 11th, a person was heard coming up the stairs. He knocked and received no answer so turned and fled down the stairs, but not before Dickie was able to shine his flashlight into the face of Attamanchuk. Dickie fired one shot at him but missed. Attamanchuk got outside and ran down Alfred and jumped into a maroon Ford. Dickie fired another shot at the car as it sped off south on McGregor. Manning and Morris both fired a few more shots at the fleeing car.

When the car turned west on Selkirk Avenue, it passed beat Constable J. Hansell #117E and he recorded the license 36-232 because he had heard the shooting. He met Manning and gave him the license number that Manning phoned in.

The car next turned up about 2:00 a.m. on the 11th with plates 26-338 attached and Andrusiak driving alone. Constables N. Buhr #161A and R. Young #62A were patrolling on Higgins and observed a suspicious car pull off Gomez St. They were in cruiser #46 which was 2-way radio equipped. They followed when the car turned onto Annabella and then east on Sutherland. The cruiser drew alongside at Stephens Street and the driver sped off. A chase took place with the cars going to Higgins, over the Louise Bridge and through the Kildonans.

The chasing officers radioed their route and this was relayed to the other cruisers. Other officers took up the chase in commandeered taxis. Detectives were aware that the second suspect, Andrusiak lived in North Kildonan and a bush area near the end of Munroe and Gateway was a dumping ground for stolen cars, so a number headed there to intercept the car. Their intuition proved correct very quickly as the car approached and Detective Hull shot the radiator. The billowing steam and the snowy road brought the car to a stop

a short distance down Gateway. The rear of the car also showed eight holes in the trunk and fender and one in the rear window from the pursuing police.

The sole occupant, John Andrusiak, was arrested without a struggle, although a loaded Webley Scott .455 cal and a loaded 12 gauge sawed-off double-barrel shotgun were found in the car. Also found in the car and of special interest was an overcoat, windbreaker, vest and shirt with bullet holes in the back and front and bloodstained and a bloodstained pillowcase. These were later identified as Attamanchuk's. Stolen license plates, including 36-232, and a stolen Philco car radio that was set to the police wavelength V.Y.W., were also seized.

Attamanchuk and Barnett left Andrusiak after the near arrest on McGregor Avenue and they turned up at 9:50 p.m. on the 11th purchasing a quantity of food at the Windsor Grocery in St. Vital. The shopkeeper was suspicious of them and recorded the license of the car they were now using, 36-269.

Police were notified and the men were identified from photos.

It appears that Attamanchuk and Barnett were planning to head south to the border as a rough map later found on Attamanchuk showed routes and places between Winnipeg and Minnesota. The plan fell apart when their car went into the ditch near St. Adolphe Road on Pembina Highway. The license number was broadcast and shortly after midnight, the Fort Garry Police Chief located the car at the Watson Service Station on Pembina. It was learned that two men had been in the car and had come back with it when it was towed in.

The car was later found to be stolen with the serial number ground off. The plates were registered to 'Mike Attamon' in Transcona. The plates had been purchased on Feb. 10th at the Manitoba Motor League, which also provided Attamanchuk with an opportunity to see the inside of the office the day of the safe attack.

Attamanchuk and Barnett were traced back into the city with the tow truck driver Clifford Mallet who

John McDonald

let them out at Broadway & Osborne. They were seen getting into a Crescent Taxi and driver Gus Candaele reported dropping them at Portage and Burnell at 12:30 a.m. on the 12th.

A short time later, at 01:15 a.m., they were identified buying drinks and chocolate bars in the store at 129 Hallet. At 05:00 a.m., they were found in 36 Hallet when the resident came home. The resident knew Attamanchuk from jail days. About 06:00 a.m., Barnett and Attamanchuk went to 298 Selkirk Ave.

That afternoon, about 4:15 p.m., Barnett and Attamanchuk were in the Wesley Pharmacy, at Ellice & Spence. Barnett made a phone call while Attamanchuk bought some gum. They separated because Barnett was spotted at 4:25 p.m. at Ellice and Furby by patrolling Detectives McPherson, Alexander, and Ormonde as he got into a Moore's Taxi. Barnett spotted the cruiser turning and jumped out and ran towards Sherbrooke. He threw his mitts which contained 13 rounds of .45 cal. ammo behind 447 Sherbrooke.

Detectives fired two shots at Barnett as he started to run, then one more shot in the first blocks as he cut through yards going west and finally three more shots as he neared Beverley. He was nicked on the foot by one bullet but did not slow down. He outran the officers and managed to get into the Thelmo Mansions Block on Burnell at Ellice. He dumped his hat and coat and exited the back door a short time later, but as he walked by, Detectives Owens and Sims, who had arrived to assist, recognized him. Owens dropped him with a hit on the head from his revolver. Barnett appeared in court with a large head bandage.

Searching police officers failed to find the coat and hat in the Thelmo Mansions but a reporter got the caretaker to help and they located them in a laundry basket. The reporter turned them over to the police without any fuss.



WANTED FOR MURDER: Above are police pictures of Mike Attamanchuk, alias Mike the Horse who is wanted for the murder of Constable John McDonald. Attamanchuk escaped with at least two companions after Saturday night's gunfight.

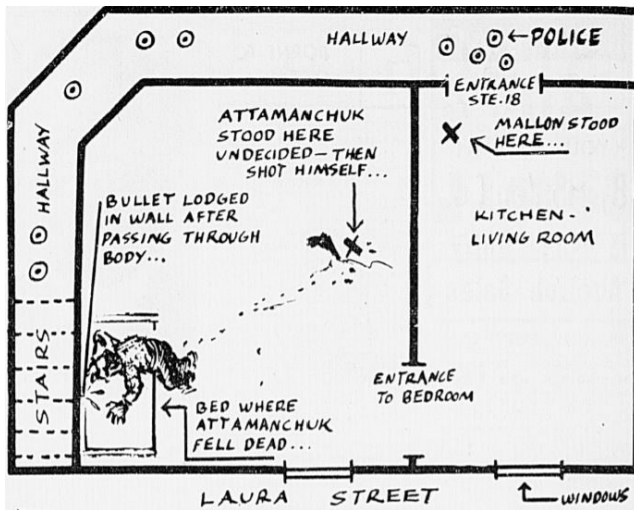
Only Attamanchuk remained at large as the manhunt went on. He next turned up at 11:45 p.m., that date, at Ste 18, Brant Block, 281 Laura St. at Logan where he forced his way in, gun in hand. Edith Sissons was alone there and was told to sit and be quiet. Shortly after midnight, Thomas Malin, boyfriend to Sissons arrived and joined them. Sissons had to dress his shoulder wound and made something to eat. Malin was able to convince Attamanchuk to let Sissons leave the suite, to keep her out of danger. Attamanchuk agreed, under threat of harm to Malin. Sissons went to a hotel and stayed there. She was not too concerned because she went shopping in the morning and returned to the block at 11:00 a.m., long after it was over.

Malin was forced to undress so he would not leave the room. Attamanchuk told him about the police shooting and said he would shoot himself before he ever gave up.

Detective James Mullholland got confidential information about Attamanchuk and at about 4:30 a.m., detectives attended and called Attamanchuk to surrender. Malin answered that he could not come out, as there was a gun in his back. Sergeant of Detectives, Alexander, sent Detective McDonald to call for tear gas and Acting Detectives Jim Ayers

John McDonald

and Harvey were outside to prevent escape via the windows. Detective Mullholland stayed in the hallway with Alexander. Suddenly a shot sounded from the suite and plaster fell in the hall. Malin yelled that Attamanchuk had shot himself so the officers had Malin kick the gun out into the hall before they entered.



When the officers entered, they found Attamanchuk sprawled across a bed with a self-inflicted wound in his chest. The bullet had passed through and into the wall. He was taken to General Hospital but was dead on arrival. The gun seized was later proven to have fired the bullets recovered from the body of McDonald and Stewart's arm.

Barnett and Andrusiak were tried for murder, but Mr. Justice Robson ordered the jury to dismiss the charge as the common purpose was only to rob the safe and Attamanchuk acted on his own when he resisted arrest and shot the officers. The Crown was allowed to lay new charges of Accessories After the Fact of the murder, and on October 15, 1940, each was sentenced to 20 years in the penitentiary.

Three years later, on October 26, 1943, Barnett was to show his violent nature when he managed to

obtain a gun and slip out of his cell in Stony Mountain. He was confronted by an armed guard and in an exchange of gunfire was killed before he was able to get out of the dome. The jury at the inquest ruled it justifiable homicide in self-defence.

John McDonald lived at 513 Redwood and was survived by his widow, Josephine 'Jessie' and two-year-old son, Gordon. Mrs. McDonald was provided with her husband's pay for the full month of February and the Police Commission assumed the cost of the funeral. She also received his pension refund of \$140.00. The Workman's Compensation Board provided a pension of \$40.00 for the widow and \$14.66 for the child until 16 years of age. The Commission also asked for a \$1,000.00 grant to Mrs. McDonald from the Police Emergency Fund. The Winnipeg Police Athletic Fund provided a \$600.00 grant.

The funeral was held on February 15th at Emanuel Lutheran Church at College and McKenzie, with burial in Brookside Cemetery. Pallbearers under Sergeant Robert Still were Constables George G. Smith, Bruce McDonald, Fred Peters, George Walkinshaw, Waiter Hansen, Norman McKenzie and John Gutray. The Guard of Honour consisted of 30 officers of the Winnipeg Police Department under Sergeant Harrod.

The next officer to give his life on duty was the same officer who discovered the body of Constable McDonald.

This tragedy led to the establishment of a Royal Commission to enquire into the "*Widespread criticism of the manner in which the City Police Department handled the attempted robbery of the Manitoba Motor League*" and "*The widespread dissatisfaction among members of the City Police Force over conditions of employment and promotion, allegedly without regard to seniority and efficiency.*" This Royal Commission will be the subject of a separate article in the future.