

# BAD LUCK BANK ROBBERS

*Researched and written by Patrol Sergeant Mark Hodgson*

The year was 1944, Canada was still at war with Hitler and in Winnipeg Chief Constable George SMITH, was stating in his annual report that it was a good year for police. His only complaint was that too many men released on bail were re-offending.

In 1944 there were three murders in Winnipeg. The most noteworthy was the murder of Samuel W. CAUGHEY, an accountant at the bank of Commerce located at Dufferin and Main St. (now economy Pawn Shop). The murder occurred during a botched bank holdup, on June 2nd, 1944 at 2:00 p.m. The culprits involved were Frank SHURA age 32 of 643 Langside St. (W.P.D. #12042). Arthur Fredrick EVANS age 37 of 307 Furby St., William DACKO age 24 of 550 MacMillan Ave., and Leonard Leroy PETERSON age 23 of 429 Furby St.

SHURA and EVANS, were established criminals at the time, with SHURA being a recent release of the Stony Mountain Penitentiary. DACKO and PETERSON were much younger, but both were long-time petty criminals and were about to make the jump from this to the big-time' armed robberies'. It would appear that SHURA and EVANS were the leaders, but DACKO and PETERSON were very much willing participants. The ironic thing about this group is the incredible streak of bad luck that followed these men. In essence, they couldn't get lucky in a house of ill-repute with a fistful of dollars.

In May of 1944, SHURA and EVANS decided that they wanted to pull off an armed robbery of National Cartage, but they realized they would need some help. EVANS knew Leonard Leroy PETERSON from when they both worked at Lyons Storage and he figured that PETERSON was a good candidate for the job. EVANS asked PETERSON to drop by on May 16th, 1944. There PETERSON met Joe WYZROB (used alias Joe HOUSTIN). Then, on the 17th of May, Evan and WYZROB brought Frank SHURA to PETERSON's place on Furby. SHURA approved of PETERSON and on May 21st they all met at SHURA's place at 643 Langside St. There, they discussed the plan. SHURA told the group how he and EVANS had hoped to organize a hold up of the National Cartage, but due to the fact his inside connection had left the company the job was off. At that point, the discussion quickly changed to doing an armed robbery. The idea of doing two in one day was even 'batted around.'

The banks mentioned were the Bank of Montreal at Osborne and Stradbrook and the Bank of Commerce at Main and Dufferin. Another bank mentioned was the Royal Bank in Transcona, because of the large railway payroll. This location was quickly dropped because of the limited escape routes. It was finally agreed that the bank of Commerce at Dufferin and Main would be the target.

On the 22nd of May, WYZROB, EVANS, SHURA and PETERSON attended the Bank at Dufferin and Main St. during the daytime. The group cased the bank and decided that the bank would have to be done on a very rainy day to ensure that the streets were clear, or a very hot day, so the blinds in the bank would be drawn, so no one would be able to see inside. Having cased the bank, another meeting was called. At that time Joe WYZROB indicated that he would not take an active part in the robbery, but would loan the bandits his car. That evening at the Shanghai Cafe on King Street the group met with a friend of SHURA, William DACKO. DACKO was deemed a good man and was accepted into the gang. At the meeting, WYZROB gave Art EVANS two guns, a 32 Cal. Revolver and a 22 Cal. target pistol. The gang also had SHURA's three guns (two pistols and a sawed-off shotgun).

On the 23rd of May, it was decided the job would be done. WYZROB drove SHURA, DACKO, EVANS, and PETERSON to the corner of King St. and Stella Ave., WYZROB was planning to leave the car with the gang and meet them later. But as luck would have it disaster struck. As PETERSON was getting out of the car, EVANS banged the gun in PETERSON's pocket. The gun discharged and WYZROB was shot in the chest. Well, needless to say, the job was called off due to lack of gun control. PETERSON, DACKO and SHURA quickly headed to the river to dispose of the weapon that wounded WYZROB, while EVANS rushed poor Joe WYZROB to the Winnipeg General Hospital. There the bullet was removed and WYZROB's life was saved. When questioned by police about the injury, WYZROB stated he couldn't remember a thing and EVANS told Det. George BLOW, the investigating detective, he found WYZROB shot and like a good citizen, drove him to the hospital.

After the shooting EVANS, DACKO, PETERSON and SHURA were feeling somewhat guilty for the wounding of Joe WYZROB and the financial burden now upon him. So the boys decided that something financial should be done for poor Joe. The gang decided that they would still go ahead with the holdup of the Bank of Commerce at Dufferin and Main. It was also decided that they would need another man. The new man was Tom ROMANUK, a friend of SHURA's from Stony Mountain. The group then set a target date of May 26. With everything moving along quite well, a stick was thrown into the spokes of our gang's wheels. On the 26th of May, ROMANUK told the other gang members that he couldn't get off work that day. At that time the gang decided the job would be put off until May 29, a day ROMANUK could get off.

It was also decided by SHURA that, before the job, a new car should be found. SHURA told PETERSON to rent a garage near SHURA's place. PETERSON rented the garage at the rear of 587 Langside St. from Hazel GOODMAN. Then EVANS, SHURA, and PETERSON attended to the parking lot on Sherbrook near Sargent. There they stole a 1938 Blue Ford Sedan bearing Manitoba Lic. 142-76, owned by Charles DEERING of suite A Wiltshire Apartments. The vehicle was then parked in the rented garage.

On Monday, May 29th, PETERSON attended SHURA's place. There SHURA gave PETERSON a set of Manitoba licence plates bearing numbers 39-506. He told PETERSON they belonged to a guy who had moved to Vancouver and left them at his

niece's place at 465 Henry St. PETERSON then attended to the garage at 587 Langside and changed the plates on the stolen car. After changing the plates, PETERSON returned to SHURA's place and the entire gang was there, minus ROMANUK, who had informed SHURA that he was backing out of the job. With this new information SHURA quickly recruited a new man, only known as Lanky.

After the hasty recruitment, the gang met at SHURA's niece's place at 465 Henry St. There the gang all piled into the stolen car and headed for the bank at Dufferin and Main. Because it was a very hot day and people were out on the street, the gang felt it would be best to break up into two groups and approach the bank from different directions. This was done in an effort to avoid attracting attention.

At a little after noon EVANS, acting as the wheelman, dropped SHURA and PETERSON off at Dufferin and King St. They would approach the bank from the south off Dufferin. EVANS then dropped off Lanky and DACKO at Stella and King St. They were to walk down Stella to Main St. and approach the bank from the north. If all the timing worked out they were all supposed to meet at the front door at the same time. SHURA and PETERSON reached the corner of Dufferin and Main, which would be approximately 5 or 6 yards from the front doors. They waited the prearranged amount of time and then walked around the corner anticipating to see Lanky and DACKO. Instead, all they saw was something big and blue, a Winnipeg Police beat constable. Lanky and DACKO had seen the Constable and fled the scene without informing SHURA and PETERSON. After a hasty retreat, they all met back at SHURA's niece's house at 465 Henry. There the very unlucky and frustrated group vented their anger on DACKO and Lanky for fleeing without warning the other two. At that point, Lanky was out.

The next day the gang again met at 465 Henry, where SHURA introduced his newest recruit, a man known only as Eddy. After some debate, it was decided that the bad-luck bank robbers would try again on Thursday, June 1st. It was raining on June 1st. This buoyed the spirits of the group. It appeared the gods were with them. At 9:00 am they all met at 465 Henry Ave. There they all armed themselves and headed out over to the bank. To avoid any recurrence of the previous events, the gang decided to locate the beat constable prior to any attempts. PETERSON located the beat Constable at Tadman's Hardware Store near Euclid and Main St. After meeting with his cohorts, it was decided that they would wait till the Constable left the area. While waiting DACKO and SHURA felt that they had been recognized by several passerby's. With this in mind, they decided to try another bank.

It was then decided that the bank of Montreal at Osborne and Sherbrook was a better choice. So the boys headed south. There they found that the beat Constable was just south of the bank. Because it was close to noon, our culprits anticipated that the Constable would be attending a nearby school to ensure the kiddies got across the street safely. At noon the boys jumped into action. PETERSON, DACKO and Eddie left the car and went and stood in the doorway next to the bank. SHURA then made one quick check of the area. Just as the robbery was about to be executed, lighting strikes the boys again. SHURA spots the boys in blue in a cruiser car coming up

Osborne and stopping to talk with the Beat Constable. You guessed it, the job was called off due to the overabundance of police in the City of Winnipeg. But this was not the end of the day for our hard-luck cases. Frank SHURA told the gang that he knew of a bank in Langruth that could be done at night real easy. So after a few bottles of courage, the boys headed for Langruth. They arrived about midnight and found the bank had closed the branch. So back to Winnipeg the bungling bank robbers headed. Before breaking up for the night they decided that they would meet at SHURA's niece's place the next morning.

The next morning was June 2nd, 1944. The gang all showed up at SHURA's niece's place minus Eddie. He was a no-show. SHURA decided they would attempt another job without Eddie. After casing several banks, it was again decided to try the bank of Commerce at Dufferin and Main St. At approximately 2:00 p.m. EVANS again acting as the wheelman pulled up just north of the bank Commerce on Main St. SHURA, PETERSON and DACKO got out. The plan was that once the three entered the bank, EVANS would pull right in front to facilitate a quick getaway if necessary.

The three men entered the vestibule of the bank. There they all donned homemade masks and entered the lobby. When entering, the robbers encounter a male leaving the bank. At that time the robbers drew their weapons. SHURA had a sawed-off shotgun. PETERSON had a 38 Cal. Revolver and DACKO had the 22 Cal. target pistol. The male they encountered was John MIODZINSKI. He was backed up into the bank. Once in the main public space of the bank, the robbers yelled "This is a holdup. Everybody get your hands up". From this point, the robbers had planned to move everyone in the bank to the west wall (back of the bank). SHURA covered PETERSON and DACKO as they herded the people to the west wall. DACKO started to move the people in the public space and PETERSON headed for the Manager's office in the southeast corner of the bank behind the counter. In the office, PETERSON found the bank manager Hugh ALLINGHAM of 156 Garfield St. and Mr. Paul STEMKOWSKI of 111 Lusted St. PETERSON instructed STEMKOWSKI and ALLINGHAM to move west out of the office. At that point, ALLINGHAM and STEMKOWSKI moved out of the office with PETERSON behind them. As they moved behind the counter PETERSON noticed one of the bank employees was arguing with SHURA.

This employee was Mr. Samuel W. CAUGHEY of 72 Monck Ave. As PETERSON approached him, the accountant CAUGHEY began arguing with PETERSON. PETERSON told CAUGHEY to move along with ALLINGHAM and no one would be hurt. CAUGHEY then picked up a piece of cardboard and attempted to hit PETERSON with it. CAUGHEY then began screaming for someone to call the police. The fight continued and CAUGHEY began to back PETERSON up. Once this started ALLINGHAM began moving to help CAUGHEY. By the time ALLINGHAM had caught up to CAUGHEY, he had forced PETERSON out towards the door. At this point, SHURA was panicked by the situation. He levelled his shotgun at the onrushing CAUGHEY. With one pull of his finger, he unleashed 22 pellets. These pellets hit CAUGHEY directly in his right cheek. The force was so great it knocked CAUGHEY back several feet and this stopped the on-rushing ALLINGHAM. The pellets found their mark and CAUGHEY was dead almost

instantly as the pellets scrambled his brain. Frank SHURA yelled 'come on'. At that point, SHURA and DACKO ran out of the bank with PETERSON close on their heels. As their normal luck would have it, Art EVANS and the car were nowhere in sight. So the bungling robbers turned south and ran to Dufferin. There they turned west. At the rear of the bank, there existed an alley that separated a group of small businesses from the back of the bank. There they turned north of the alley and ran past the Northern Taxi garage. Unfortunately for our bad luck bank robbers, off-duty police officer Sgt. Oliver MATHESON was working on his car that day. Where was he working on his car you ask? Well, he was working on it in front of the Northern Taxi garage.

The Sarge knew something was up. As the three passed MATHESON, two of our hard-luck cases had the presence of mind to keep their masks on. But DACKO didn't and MATHESON really eyeballed him. Still, not knowing of the attempted robbery MATHESON felt the group looked suspicious and began to follow them, but lost them. About the time MATHESON lost the robbers they were cutting through a fence onto another lot, north on the alley just south of Stella Ave. an old open-air market lot. At that time the fleeing robbers caught the attention of blacksmith Constant FRYZA. FRYZA's blacksmith shop was located on Stella Ave. just west of Main St., His shop looked out onto the vacant lot the culprits were running on at the time. FRYZA saw SHURA stop and put down an overcoat wrapped up in a ball. Later FRYZA checked the coat and found the murder weapon wrapped inside. The shotgun was later seized by Det. Alexander PRICE.

Getting back to our bad luck bank robbers... Well from all appearances, when Frank SHURA stopped to hide the murder weapon, the other two, PETERSON, and DACKO, forgot SHURA even existed. As PETERSON and DACKO reached the west end of the lot at King St., luck shined on them finally. There they ran into Art EVANS and the car. The two jumped in and EVANS sped off and turned west on Dufferin leaving poor Frank SHURA behind. Unknown to the boys in the car they caught the attention of John STALIGA of 141 Meade St. STALIGA thought it a little odd to see two armed men jump into a car and speed off, so he recorded the licence plate number and later gave it to the detective who later attended the bank.

While all this was going on SHURA saw his cohorts drive away and began running south on King St. This caught the attention of Eddie DREVENT, who followed SHURA and observed him disappear into the CPR Yards just south of there. The clothing turned out to be SHURA's mask and was recovered by Det. Murdoch GILLIES.

Within minutes of the crime taking place, members of the Winnipeg Police Detective Division were on the scene. First on the scene were Detectives Alexander F. PRICE, Det. Thomas ORMANDE, and Detective Murdoch (Murdoe) GILLES. As mentioned earlier, our bungling bad luck bank robbers had left quite a trail for the boys in the blue to follow. By 3:00 p.m., the detectives had traced the plate supplied by STALIGA to 465 Henry Ave. When police attended to 465 Henry Ave., SHURA's niece covered for the gang, but police had one ace up their sleeves. Police received information from an informant as to who was responsible for the bank robbery at Dufferin and Main.

From the next series of events, it would appear the informant knew Frank SHURA was the leader of the group but was unsure of his accomplices. So the police began to look for Frank SHURA and his known friends, one being Arthur EVANS.

At 5:30 p.m. on June 2nd, police attended Art EVANS home and picked EVANS up for questioning. EVANS stated he was in and out all day and was later released. Then, shortly after midnight police attended to 643 Langside St. and arrested Frank SHURA for the murder of Samuel CAUGHEY. When questioned by Sgt. Of Detectives W. MACPHEARSON about his movements on June 2nd, SHURA stated that he had been at his niece's place all day except for when he went to look for work at the CPR yards. At about the same time SHURA was being arrested Det. George BLOW, Det. DAVIES and ALLAN were re-attending to EVANS' home at 307 Furby St. It appears the informant had found out who else was involved and passed the information onto the police. At 12:45 a.m. on June 3rd, Art EVANS was seen going into 307 Furby and was immediately arrested by police. Upon his arrest EVANS commented "What the hell are you doing here, why didn't you phone me. I would have come down alone. I just had a row with the landlady. Let's get out of here". EVANS was detained on suspicion of Armed Robbery (I guess the bail reform act didn't exist then). Then on June 3rd at 12:30 p.m. Det. William OWENS and Det. Alf PRICE attended to 429 Furby St. There they found PETERSON in the attic room. PETERSON was asked where he had been on June 2nd. He answered, "Oh, I was in and out most of the day". Unknown to PETERSON police had questioned PETERSON's landlady who told them she had seen him with Art EVANS on June 2nd. When police asked PETERSON if he had seen Art EVANS on the 2nd, he replied "No I didn't see him anytime during the day". Police then arrested PETERSON and detained him for suspicion of Robbery.

It appears police had a few problems locating DACKO, but on June 6th police arrested DACKO at his place of employment, the war munitions plant in Transcona. This was done by Sgt. Of Det. W. MACPHEARSON and Deputy Chief Charles (Chas) MACIVER (got to like those active deputy chiefs). When asked about his whereabouts on June 2nd, DACKO stated that he was at work.

Once all the culprits were in custody the evidence started to mount. The murder weapon (the shotgun) was found to be stolen from the farm next to the SHURA family farm. The jacket in which it wrapped was discovered by Constant FRYZA, was the property of SHURA's niece's husband. The mask SHURA threw over the fence on Jarvis was found to have the same laundry mark as the clothing he was wearing when arrested. Also, SHURA was picked out of a police lineup by the bank manager, Hugh ALLINGHAM as one of the culprits. But the most damaging evidence was yet to come.

As for William DACKO, police had Sgt. MATHESON who picked him out of a police lineup as the man running without a mask on his face shortly after the robbery. Police also obtained a copy of his work record, which listed him as absent on June 2nd, 1944, which shot a big hole in his alibi. But again the most damaging evidence was yet to come. Besides the evidence supplied by the informant, the evidence against EVANS and PETERSON was mostly circumstantial at best. Witnesses were not able to identify

either of them and they could only be established as friends of DACKO and SHURA. But the thought of being hanged or spending his life in prison did not appeal to young Leonard PETERSON.

On June 9th, 1944, PETERSON met with his wife. After the meeting, PETERSON and his wife entered the office of Deputy Chief Chas MACIVER. Beside MACIVER was Sgt. Of Det. W. MACPHEARSON. MACIVER asked if PETERSON would make a voluntary statement. PETERSON replied, "if I am not charged with murder I will tell the truth". MACIVER then asked MACPHEARSON to take the PETERSONs out of his office. MACIVER made one phone call and asked them all back into the office. MACIVER looked at PETERSON and said, "You will not be charged with murder provided you tell the truth, make a statement and be a crown witness". MACIVER then cautioned PETERSON that anything said could be used as evidence at his trial. MACIVER then told PETERSON in return he would be charged with manslaughter. PETERSON's wife asked "How much time will my husband get for this charge?" MACIVER answered, "I am not a judge. He could get anything from life to a suspended sentence". Under those conditions, PETERSON told how he got involved and all the botched attempts and the actual events as he remembered them on June 2nd, 1944.

On June 10th, 1944, PETERSON took police to the garage at the rear of 587 Langside. There, police found the stolen getaway car and the handguns used by EVANS, DACKO and PETERSON. Police also found a shirt with DACKO's laundry mark on it. Later on, the 10th PETERSON took police to the billiards hall at 532 Ellice. There on the roof police found the plates used in the armed robbery attempt. PETERSON then took police to Meadows, Manitoba, where the original plates were located in a ditch.

With all the pieces of the puzzle now in place, a preliminary trial was held on July 4, 1944. DACKO, SHURA and EVANS were committed to stand trial for the murder of Samuel W. CAUGHEY. PETERSON was tried separately for manslaughter as promised by Deputy Chief MACIVER. DACKO, SHURA and EVANS were all convicted of murder and were sentenced to life at Stony Mountain Penitentiary. PETERSON was convicted of manslaughter and was sentenced to 12 years.

So ends the tale of the bad luck bank robbers ...