



**BWG Mayor Frank Jonkman, Police Chief John Harrison, Innisfil Police Chief Bruce Davis with "survivors" of 1951 bank heist at scene of crime - now a convenience store.**

## When guns blazed in Bradford

On a warm, sunny afternoon in July, 1951, there weren't that many customers in the Bradford branch of the Canadian Bank of Commerce, at the corner of Holland Street West and Barrie. A matron making a loan payment. Marsh farmers, depositing funds to their accounts.

That was when a black, four-door 1950 Ford pulled up at the curb. Three men got out and entered the bank. A fourth, the driver, remained in the car. The bank was about to be robbed.

"I was a teller at the time, and it was the practice... to lock up the bulk of your cash holdings in a safety deposit box while away for lunch. I had unlocked my cash drawer and was heading back to the safety deposit box, into which I had placed the bulk of my cash during my lunch period, when I heard a commotion behind me in the customer area. Someone was yelling and running.

"When I turned around, I saw the largest handgun I had ever seen being waved around by a big guy who was ordering the customers and staff to get on the floor, while all the time pulling a handkerchief up over his face. >

"Another guy went in through the Manager's office and into the area behind the counter, and ordered the Manager, Accountants and other personnel at that end of the office to the floor as well." - Keith Collings, memoir.

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The man holding the gun was later identified as Steve Suchan, an alias adopted by Valent Lesso when he abandoned a potential career  
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# When guns blazed on Bradford's streets

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as a classical violinist to take to a life of crime. The man who came through the manager's office was Leonard Jackson.

A third man, identified as having the surname "Shirley", stood watch at the door, preventing anyone from leaving, and timing the robbery.

Both Suchan and Jackson were later to gain notoriety as members of the Boyd Gang, after joining up with Edwin Alonzo Boyd whom they met in the Don Jail.

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Don Reid was a 21 year old university student at the time, working at the bank during the summer as an accountant. He was accepting a loan payment, when Jackson came through the office behind him. "The lady I was taking the loan payment from took out her rosary, because she saw him first." Reid said he "thought that was a little heavy for a loan payment," until he turned and saw the armed robber standing behind him.

The robbers scooped up the loose bills from the tellers' stations and the cash drawers, snatched cash from the hands of one of the bank customers, tried the safe to see if it had been left open (it was locked), and finally fled, ordering everyone to keep their faces to the floor.

They got away with \$4,094 - but missed \$55,000 in mutilated bills, bagged and about to be sent back to the Bank of Canada.

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Richard Jarzylo was 11 years old, waiting in the bank while his father cashed a cheque.

"I didn't pay any attention until one of them (Suchan) jumped the counter," Jarzylo said. Suddenly, he saw "my dad had a gun at his back."

The boy tried to get away and leave the bank, but "they shot at me. I don't know if it was intentional. My dad told me to get down and hide." Jarzylo did, crawling between the wall and a register.

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The robbery, timed by the look-out at the door, had taken only one minute. But that was enough time for O.P.P. officer Reg Wilson, who had spotted the men entering the bank; to get his gun.

As the robbers fled, he opened fire, hitting the car with all six shots, but missing the robbers.

"Somehow they eluded the bullets and apparently did not get hurt. However, they were confused by the shooting, as were we, and they started shooting up into the bank windows. They thought the shots to their car were coming from the bank staff. Little did they know that we were trying to get under desks as shelter to escape the firing.

"Reg came very close to meeting his maker that day. When the crooks realized he was the guy firing at them, they gave him all their attention, and just like in the movies, he was missed only by inches. The plate glass window, just above the doorway he was standing in, was shattered." - Keith Collings.

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Ron Coffey was standing out on the street, where Bracken's Drug Store used to be. "I noticed these two guys backing up, and then I hear - I couldn't believe it - it sounded like firecrackers. I'd never heard gunfire before."

The black Ford stood waiting, its doors open. "One of the men was limping, and I thought, Holy Hanna, he's been hit," Coffey remembers. He found out later it was Leonard Jackson, who had a wooden leg.

The robbers fled west on Holland, guns blazing, then headed north on Church, and east out of town.

"It was quite an experience," says Coffey. Although the shoot-out lasted only 15 or 20 seconds, "in my mind's eye I can see it as if it was just yesterday."

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On October 6th, 1996, twelve "survivors" of the robbery met at the former bank, now the 11 & 88 Super Convenience Store, to commemorate the 45th Anniversary of the bank heist, and to reminisce about their contact with two desperadoes who later joined the Boyd Gang.

The event was organized by Special Constable Bluestein, a collector of police memorabilia and historical artifacts, who wanted to ensure that this piece of Bradford history wasn't forgotten.

The 12, their friends and family members, toured the

former bank, including the hidden vaults in the basement, then went across the street, for a complimentary luncheon of caesar salad, chicken parmesan and fettucini noodles, and a glass of wine, courtesy of The Winchester Arms - which in 1951, was Barton's Hardware Store.

The Store almost played a role in the heist. "We learned afterwards that some of the Merchants (one of them was Ron Bannerman of the 5 Cents to \$1.00 Store) saw the guys enter the Bank, and they proceeded to the Hardware Store... It was their intention to wait for the crooks to enter the getaway car, then shoot at them with shotguns taken from the Hardware store stock. Norm Barron, the store owner, would not give them guns for fear someone would get hurt. I guess that was a wise move, but the incident may have been quite different, as some of those residents were hunters and very good with guns." - Keith Collings.

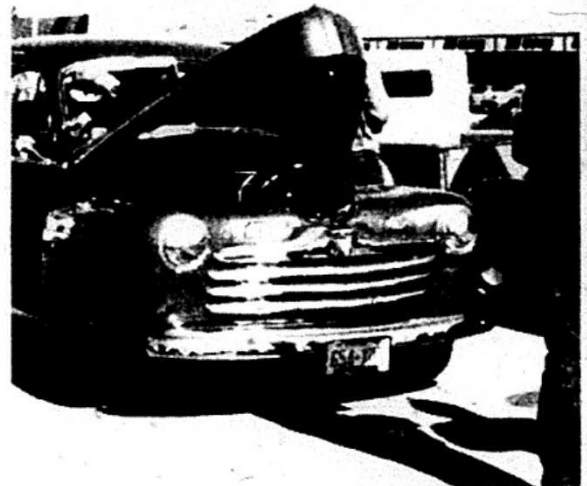
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The culprits were rounded up and sentenced to a term in the Don Jail. There, Suchan and Jackson met Boyd, also doing time. They managed to escape, so the story goes, using saw blades hidden in Jackson's wooden leg to cut through the bars, and climbing down a rope made from bedding.

The Boyd Gang terrorized banks across southern Ontario. Then, in 1952, Suchan and Leonard Jackson gunned down Toronto Sergeant of Detectives, Edmund Tong.

Suchan and Jackson were found guilty of murder, and later hanged at the Don Jail. Boyd was given 8 life sentences in the Kingston Penitentiary. He was paroled in 1966.

Now 82, Edwin Alonzo Boyd lives in British Columbia, and was contacted by S/PC Bluestein, over the plans to commemorate the 45th anniversary of the Bradford heist. Boyd was willing to come to Bradford, he said - if the police would pay his plane fare.



Back Alley Cruisers car club, Northern Perk coffee shop and B.W.G. Police teamed up to hold huge Classic Car Show, Oct. 6, at No Frills Plaza. Event commemorated 45th anniversary of bank robbery by members of Boyd Gang - and raised money for Helping Hand Food Bank.