

## **\$60,000 is shot from Bandit's Hand**

### ***Sack Containing Loot from Groton Bank is Left Behind When Bandit is Shot in Hand***

***Robbers Get \$1,000 in daring Daylight Hold-up Yesterday***

***Make Get-Away in Cars***

***Bank Employees Forced to Open Safe at Point of Gun***

According to a telephone report to the American from the sheriff's office at Redfield, south of here, all trace of the bandit quartet who robbed the First National bank at Groton yesterday has been lost, for the time being at least. When last seen the robbers were about ten miles west of Athol on a country road, traveling south. The party is said to have encountered bad roads, cut up by recent construction work, and turned around and headed back north. Authorities have not given up the chase however, and intend to extend the search in every direction. They are hopeful that the coming of dawn will bring a positive clue to the whereabouts of the band.

Four bandits entered the First National Bank of Groton yesterday afternoon, held up three employees at the point of a gun, swept the gold and currency from the counter into a sack forced the cashier to open the vault, seized \$3600 in currency, \$60,000 in bonds and \$247 in gold and rushed from the bank building to their car standing opposite the bank on the side street.

The alarm had been given by a commercial salesman, who on entering the bank saw the employees with hands up. Despite the order to stop, he rushed out and called assistance. When the robbers left the bank they were met with shots to which they quickly replied and for a few moments the street was the scene of a furious gunfight.

In this battle W. L. Cook who was crossing the street, without knowledge was shot in the hand, three bones being broken as the bullet tore the back of his hand.

### **\$55,000 Shot**

Pete Karokulis, who proved the hero of the hour, fired at the bandits as they were entering their car, and luckily shot the one carrying the loot in the hand, forcing him to drop the sack containing nearly \$65,000 in the middle of the road.

The robbers drove west on the Yellowstone trail, but something evidently went wrong with their car and they stopped the cashier of the Pierpont bank and the Pierpont pastor, who were driving east in two Ford cars, and forced them to give up the machines. A pair in each car, they drove but a few miles, until they met J. L. Henn, manager, and L. W. Blenkley of the collection department of the International Harvester company, of Aberdeen, who were driving east in a Studebaker special light six touring car. The advance car of the bandits was driven across the road, forcing Henn to run into them,

damaging their car and forcing the Studebaker into the ditch. The second car pulled up and the quartet took the Studebaker and soon turned south from the Yellowstone trail toward Stratford.

### **Change Cars Again**

Here they again changed cars, taking a Chevrolet coupe, belonging to Fred Gould, from his farm yard and leaving the Studebaker, which was later found and taken into Stratford. The bandits then proceeded south and the last seen of them was about six miles south of Mellette. C. J. Burns, local insurance man, who carried the insurance on the Henn car, reported last night that the machine was not badly damaged, and that something must have gone wrong, forcing the robbers to abandon it.

The sheriff of Brown County, with numerous posses. are hot on their trail and authorities in all neighboring counties have been notified.

### **The Hold-UP**

The robbers entered the bank by the front door about three o'clock, only three employees were in the bank. H. L. Michaels and Miss Amanda Lundman were in the main office of the bank while C. T. Harding was just entering the private office accompanied by Thos. G. McKiver. Suddenly there was a rush of feet and before any of the men realized what was happening they found themselves face to face with four determined looking bandits and staring into the barrels of four wicked looking guns. The order "hands up" was quickly obeyed and the four were lined up inside the bank cage, while one robber swept the gold and currency into a sack. The employees were asked if the vault was unlocked and when told that it was not, they forced Miss Lundman Harding and McKiver to kneel on the bank floor, so they could not be seen by passer-by and made Michaels enter the vault and unlock the safe. The men entered the vault with him, pointing their guns at his head. Nervous with excitement, Michaels failed to get the combination at first and he was told that, "You've got just another minute. Open it then or we will shoot you dead." Fortunately for Michael he managed to unlock the safe and one of the robbers who was also provided with a sack, reached into the strong box and took out a tin box containing over \$60,000 in rail road and municipal bonds, and envelope containing some \$600 in Liberty bonds and \$3,000 in currency. He failed to see another package containing more than \$100,000 in negotiable Liberty bonds and \$600 in new National Bank currency which had been signed by the bank officials that day.

While this had been going on in the rear of the bank, a salesman, whose name has not been given, entered the bank. Seeing the employee with hand's held high, he quickly turned and went out to give the alarm. The robber who was on guard outside the bank counter shouted to him to come back, but he paid no attention and rushed up the street to the soft drink parlor kept by Pete Karokulis. Telling him the bank was being robbed. Karokulis grabbed his gun and hastened to the corner of the Bradshaw and Archer store just in time to see the robbers entering their auto.

## **The Gun Fight**

The first shot fired was evidently a signal gun fired by the robber on guard in the lobby of the bank to warn the others that the alarm had been given. This shot was fired straight down, tearing a hole in the tiled floor in front of the cashier's window. Karokulis pulled the trigger as soon as he saw the robbers but there was no cartridge in the barrel of his automatic. He stepped in the nearby store to put his gun in shape and stepped out just in time to shoot one robber in the hand as he was entering the auto to make his get-away. He shot the bandit in the hand causing him to drop the sack which contained all that had been taken from the bank vault. As soon as the robbers left the bank C. T. Harding grabbed the revolver, which had all the time been lying on the counter, ran to the back window and fired. The bandits kept up a fusillade of firing, up and down the street, evidently shooting at everyone they saw. W. J. Cook, manager of the Ferney Farmers Cooperative elevator was crossing the street with his hands in his pockets. He heard what he thought was a blow-out and the next instant a bullet tore through his trousers pocket, ripping along the back of his hand and breaking three bones. The bullet was deflected by his hand or he would have been shot through the abdomen. Harvey Clauson, attracted by the sound of shots came out of the garage half a block from the bank and a bullet clipped the bricks not a foot from him.

## **Flee From Town**

The robbers were able to make their get-away, however, and drove furiously out of town, west on the Yellowstone trail. When about two miles from Groton, they met the cashier of the bank at Pierpont and a clergyman from the same city, who were driving two Fords east. Something was evidently wrong with the Buick which the robbers drove, for they commandeered the two Ford cars leaving their first car on the highway, where it was soon found by the pursuing party and taken back to Groton. Blood stains on the floor and on the back of the front seat showed plainly that the shot fired by Karokulis had taken effect.

Driving a few miles further west the robbers met the Studebaker car driven by J. L. Henn of Aberdeen. One of the Fords was driven suddenly across the road so that Henn could not avoid hitting it and was forced to run his own car in the ditch. Henn and his companion, Bleckley, were forced to turn their car over to the bandits. Mr. Henn states that they were all young men and were laboring under intense excitement as they fairly screamed when giving them orders to leave their car.

## **Take Chevrolet**

Turning south on the Stratford road the robbers next exchanged the Studebaker for a Chevrolet coupe which they found standing in a farmers yard. At ten o'clock the report came to the American office that a Chevrolet coupe, with three men inside and one man standing on the running board been seen, going at a high rate of speed, west of Mellette, off the Sunshine Highway, and headed south. Evidently a detour had been made to avoid going through any towns.

The car which the robbers drove when they entered Groton was a Buick touring car. Identified as one stolen from Ed Moyer on Saturday night in Aberdeen. When the car was abandoned the robbers left their fur coats and the car also contained merchandise which is thought may have been taken from the Spratt store at James on Saturday night.

No masks were worn and both the hold-up and the flight show signs of being the work of amateurs in crime.

### **Total Loss \$996**

The total loss of the bank, entirely covered by burglar insurance, was \$996 taken from the counter, all the other loot having been dropped when the robber carrying it was shot.

News of the hold-up reached Aberdeen about 4 p.m. and at 5 o'clock the News was on the streets Groton with the first printed account of the crime.

The First National Bank of Groton is one of the important financial institutions of the country, capitalized for \$25,000 with a surplus of \$25,000. The officers are Wm. B. Miller, President; Alex Highland of St. Paul, vice-President; C. T. Harding, Cashier; and H. Michael, Assistant Cashier. Mr. Miller, the President was transacting business in the country at the time of the robbery and did not hear of it until the excitement was all over. He said next time the vault would be unlocked in daytime as all the money was not worth the terrible risk run by Michaels as he worked the combination with two bandit guns pointed at his head. The loss Mr. Miller stated was just under \$1,000 and this was fully covered by insurance. The bank force worked until late in the evening checking up to discover if anything more was missing, but the above amount covered the total loss.

Miss Lundman, the only woman on the scene said she was too scared to scream and that all she could do was to hold up her hands and get down on her knees with the rest of them.

*Original Copy of this Article is on Display at the Wells Fargo Bank, Groton Store*