

The Coquitlam Bank Robbery

By Cst. R. W. MORLEY

At 10.30 a.m. on Apr. 3, 1956, the bank alarm that will ring down through the history of the RCMP suddenly shattered the early morning routine of the Burnaby Detachment office, in British Columbia. Immediately the terse message that has lately been heard all too frequently in the Vancouver area, crackled over the police radio:

"Burnaby to all cars and stations. . . . A bank alarm. . . . The Royal Bank of Canada, Lougheed Highway and North Road. . . . All other stations please maintain radio silence. . . ."

Over and over the message was repeated. While speeding police cars converged on the bank, an attempt was made to contact the premises by phone, a routine practice, to ascertain if the switch had been accidentally tripped. When no answer was received, all cars were notified that this was no false alarm.

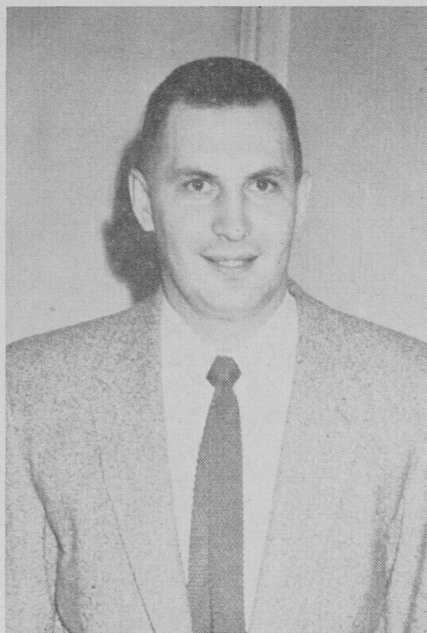
The first car on the scene was one from nearby Maillardville Detachment, with Csts. H. M. C. Johnstone and A. L. Beach. When the car slowed near the bank, Johnstone leaped out and ran toward the side of the building. While Beach drove around to the parking lot in front of the bank, Johnstone headed for the front door. Everything inside appeared normal as he entered. The manager, J. D. W. Howat, was standing behind the counter. Johnstone asked if everything was all right.

Menaced by a sawed-off shot-gun in the hands of a masked bandit standing out of Johnstone's line of vision, Mr. Howat shook his head. At the same instant, Herbert Howerton, his face also masked, sprang up from behind the counter and fired a .38 slug point-blank at the Policeman, now only about 15 feet away. Falling to the floor and completely unprotected in the main lobby of the bank, Johnstone was suddenly the target for a barrage of shots from Howerton and

Howard Folster who now ran, screaming hysterically, from the vault toward the main door, his only avenue of escape.

Drawing his revolver, Johnstone snapped one shot at William Banks as he attempted to leave the manager's office. The bullet struck Banks in the left shoulder, spinning him backward and knocking the shot-gun out of his hands. Johnstone next turned on Folster who was charging toward him, emptying all five shells from his .32 revolver as he ran.

Most of these found their mark in the Policeman's body. His empty gun still clicking, Folster raced through the door, attempted to climb on the speeding getaway truck driven by the fourth bandit, William Gordon Garry Owen, but fell off and collapsed in blind terror under the wheels of another parked truck. Then Howerton, clutching \$10,000 under his arm, leaped the bank counter and sprinted past the prostrate form of



Cpl. H. M. C. Johnstone