

The Melita Bank Robbery

A VANTAGE POINTS FLASHBACK

Ninety-Nine years ago, in late September 1923, the town of Melita came to life with the pealing of its alarm bell. It was the middle of the night!

You can imagine how startling that was, considering I was me and my buddies that were robbing the Union Bank of Canada on Main Street. There were half-dozen of us to pull off the heist. But even in a sleepy pioneer town, it was tougher than you think!

First, we entered Melita very early Saturday morning, everything was quiet. We headed for the town's power station and there we gagged and bound the night engineer to stop him from turning on the street lamps. Then we cut the telegraph and phone lines, leaving the town cut off from the rest of the world. That was my idea!



Melita in the 1920's

There was a heavy lock on the bank's front door. We broke it off and took to the vault door with hammer and chisel. We knew it was loud. We had to work fast. Get in and get out!

The racket woke 2 men upstairs, whose beds were above the vault. One was the bank teller. He called down asking what was going on. I yelled, telling him to keep quiet and he wouldn't get hurt. But they spooked, running down the stairs and out the door. Fortunately, one of our men keeping watch at the back lane caught them.

We blasted the vault door with eight explosives, blowing the bottom right out of the safe. The explosion woke Mr. Hoe, the Chinese storekeeper, just north of the bank. He thought

we were robbing his store and ran out his back door. Our gunman caught him too. What a fiasco!

In the meantime, a man named Walter Waite, who lived just 2 doors down from the Chinese shop, woke at the sound of the blast and heard the exchange with Mister Hoe. He made his way outside to the top of Main Street and crawled across the street to the fire bell.

As the bell pealed out over the town, folks came out to see what all the excitement was about! The local newspaper editor was first on the scene. I just wanted to scare him with a few shots, but, blast it, one of the bullets caught him in the foot.

Fifteen minutes after the fire bell sounded, we were gone, made off with close to \$8,000 in cash and some \$90,000 in securities.

Some thought we headed straight for the American border. It's a good idea since it's easy to cross in the dead of night and the United States is so close.

Yup! Robbing the Union Bank of Canada in the town of Melita went fairly well, only one injury to the fella who stuck his FOOT in where it didn't belong!

Adapted from a story written for Vantage Points 2.

Vantage Points Flashbacks were written by David Neufeld with help from Betty Sawatzky. They were originally aired on CJRB Radio out of Boissevain, Manitoba in the early 2020s.