

# Special Weapons Unit rescues bank manager in mock exercise

**Stories and Photos by Gerry Flaherty**

The mock drama began at 8:30 in the morning, when a man with a stick of dynamite in his possession gained entry to a bank branch on Main St. S. in Georgetown.

The man demanded money from the bank manager, and for some reason decided he wasn't getting the co-operation; he wanted and took the manager hostage.

The man armed with the dynamite then took the bank manager out to a waiting car, and drove about one mile south on Main St. to an abandoned cement silo located south of Maple Ave. where Main St. becomes a country road.

The bandit and his hostage entered the silo and waited for the expected police negotiations to begin. The man demanded money and his freedom or both he and the bank manager would die in a dynamite explosion.

Police on scene

By this time, a regular

police cruiser with several officers inside was maintaining surveillance of the silo from a distance.

In the Georgetown station which is North Halton headquarters for Halton Regional Police, meanwhile, Superintendent Floyd Schwantz was on the phone to Inspector Allan Stansbury in Oakville describing what was happening.

The inspector, 43, and a 24-year police veteran, quickly ordered his 18-man Special Weapons Unit into action.

Police radio dispatchers were advised, and at 9:30 a.m. calls went out to precincts in Acton, Milton, Burlington and Oakville for all members of the special squad to get to Georgetown in a hurry.

Many at home

In many cases the officers were not on duty, and were phoned at home. They were unaware that it was a practice session, and did not know an exercise was to take place on that day.

By 10 a.m., most of the men had arrived at Georgetown Precinct where they changed into their blue jumpsuits and grabbed their weapons including 12 gauge shotguns, .308 calibre rifles, and .308 calibre rifles with telescopic sights.

They also grabbed gas masks, extra ammunition, pistols and bullet-proof vests.

By 10:20, the Special Weapons Unit was on the scene and being briefed by Staff Sergeant Eric Bullock of Burlington Precinct, the unit's tactical manoeuvres officer.

Silos surrounded

Right off the bat, he sent three men armed with high-powered rifles through the snow-covered fields and trees to get behind the silo to ensure the bandit had no escape route.

Those three men were later visible, as they lay on the ground with rifles aimed 100 yards east of the silo.

The unit was divided into several teams, all in radio contact with each other, and

the operation was underway.

Vertical

The silo has about seven open windows on its west side, and sharpshooter Sergeant Dick Hilton was set up on the edge of the road where he lay down on a yellow ground sheet and took aim. He is from Georgetown Precinct.

Inspector Stansbury said later that as a last resort Sgt. Hilton would have been ordered to pick the bandit off through one of the windows if he could.

At this point, Superintendent Schwantz was on a megaphone negotiating with the bandit, and telling him that the police were willing to make a deal if the bank manager hostage was not hurt, and that the bandit would not be hurt by police wither.

The bandit had a major problem, which he didn't realize, in that the silo has a blind side on the north.

And the five-man tear gas team, also armed with rifles

and pistols, were able to sneak through the fields and get up next to the silo unnoticed. They all wore bullet-proof vests and gas masks.

As negotiations continued, Sergeant John Watson of Milton Precinct left the gas group to sneak along the side of the silo and with a fast right-handed toss sent a tear gas cannister flying into the silo.

Cannister explodes

As Watson quickly ran back to his group, the beer-can-size cannister exploded and gas smoke poured from the two lower windows of the silo.

In seconds, the blinded bandit stumbled from the silo and was jumped by the gas team. He was led away in handcuffs. The banker was freed, unharmed.

Inspector Stansbury, commander of the Special Weapons Unit, said on the scene that the operation was "very good—it worked out well."

He said the alleged bandit told him he could only see two of the officers involved in the assault, and they were so well-concealed and so far away (the men behind the silo) that he couldn't have hit them with rifle fire anyway.

Strict orders

Inspector Stansbury, interviewed later in his Oakville office, said the members of the Special Weapons Unit have strict orders when it comes to shooting.

He said they may only shoot on the order of the tactical manoeuvres officer, or if it is absolutely necessary to protect their own lives or the life of someone else.

Talking about weapons, he said all the men take special target practice sessions at the Halton Regional Police range in Oakville, and the sharpshooters take advanced courses on top of that.

He said Sergeant Hilton, who was used as the sharpshooter in the mock exercise, could with his .308 calibre Remington rifle with a telescopic sight, hit a person in a

vital part from a distance of 300 yards, which is three football fields away.

It has been done in practice sessions, he said.

Never used in North

The Special Weapons Unit has practiced in North Halton before, but has never been called out for real in the north.

The unit, though, has been called out for real twice in its two-year history, once in the southern part of Milton, and most recently in Oakville.

Inspector Stansbury, describing the Oakville callup, said it occurred last fall on Burnhamthorpe Rd. and involved a lone man, believed to be mentally ill, who was armed with a rifle and holed up in a house.

The officer said some of the unit members managed to silently break through a door, and surprised the man and overpowered him in his living room.

Same as SWAT

The Special Weapons Unit is basically the same as the SWAT (Special Weapons Assault Team) unit of the Los Angeles Police Department which is featured in the TV series of the same name.

Asked why the unit was formed in Halton, Inspector Stansbury said "we are very aware of situations which go on around us, in Toronto, Calgary, Vancouver and London (Ont.)."

"We feel we have to be adequately trained and equipped to deal with situations such as hostages, or where you have criminals who cannot be extricated from their vantage points."

He said examples of the latter would be a rooftop sniper, or the bandit who was entrenched in the Georgetown silo.

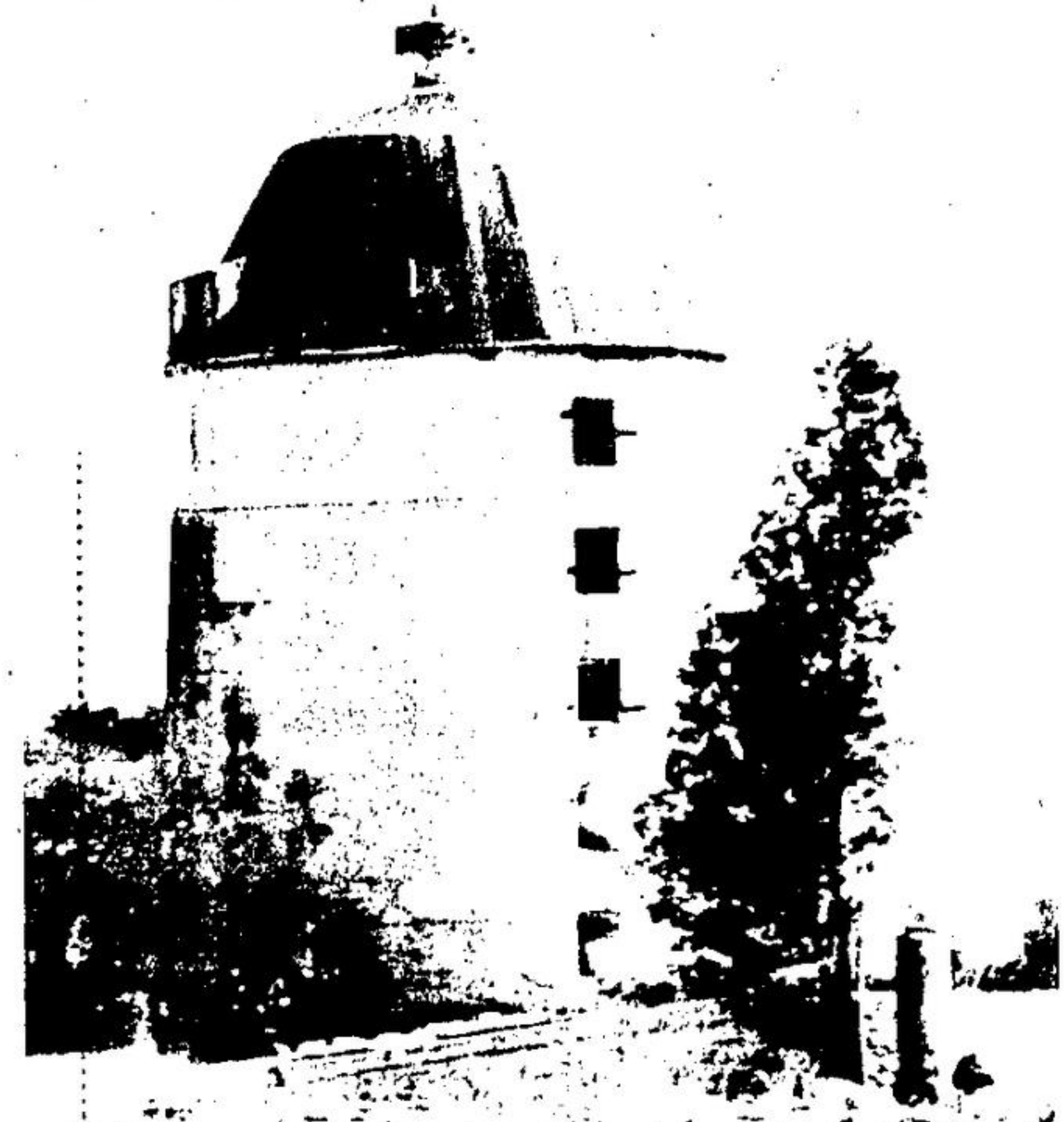
The inspector said all the volunteers in the unit are experienced policemen to start with, and the large number of sergeants who are members attests to this.



AS A LAST RESORT, police sharpshooters using Remington .308 calibre rifles with telescopic sights would be ordered to shoot (if possible) someone involved in a major criminal act. Taking aim during last week's mock drama in North Halton was Sergeant Dick Hilton of Georgetown Precinct. A police spokesman said the sharpshooters receive special training, are "very accurate," and can hit a person in a vital part of his body from a distance of 300 yards (three football fields).



STAFF SERGEANT ERIC BULLOCK, the tactical manoeuvres officer of the 18-man Special Weapons Unit, points as he briefs his men on the latest developments in and around the cement-block silo where a bank manager is being held hostage.



TEAR GAS SMOKE pours from a Georgetown silo after a member of the Special Weapons Unit of Halton Regional Police last week sneaked up to the lower window and tossed in a tear gas cannister. Rifle-toting officers huddled next to the cement silo, waiting for the criminal and his bank manager "hostage" to emerge. Both men inside were temporarily blinded by the tear gas, and the criminal was jumped and handcuffed when he left the silo. It was a mock exercise.

**Instructors welcome to clinic**

Persons who are at present instructors in recreation departments or YMCA programs or people interested in becoming instructors are invited to attend the gymnastic clinic on April 3 in Georgetown high school. An Ontario Gymnastics Federation instructor will conduct the clinic and will provide teaching techniques and conditioning exercises as they apply to gymnastics for children.

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## Correction in account

The name of Joseph Van Oosten, R. R. 2, Acton, was unfortunately omitted from the list of mourners in the Free Press account of the funeral of his brother, John Van Oosten, who was buried in Acton on March 11.

The late Mr. Van Oosten is also survived by his parents, John and Agatha Van Oosten; his wife, the former Charlene Higgins, 286 Arthur Street; two other brothers Vic Van Oosten, Orangeville and Mark Van Oosten of R. R. 2 Acton, and three sisters, Mrs. B. Dinwoody (Martha) of Willowdale, Miss Maggie Van Oosten, Toronto and Miss Joanne Van Oosten, Bramalea.

## Six more join Y's Men

Last night (Tuesday), six new members joined the Acton Y's Men Club.

They are Jim Rivett, Lytle Pruefer, Larry Douglas, Brian Weber, Ralph Hall and Ken Hurren.

## K. Leslie is weed inspector

Keith Leslie, Terra Cotta, was appointed weed inspector by Halton Hills works committee Monday. This will be Mr. Leslie's third summer of duty on the job.

The committee discussed possible policy changes for weed inspection and weed cutting including sending registered letters to land owners who should cut weeds.

The charge of \$15 an hour for residents who have the town cut their weeds was termed acceptable by the committee.

The weed inspector will receive \$2,200 for the season.

## May need new policy conventions, seminars

During their budget discussions, Halton Hills Council may have to form a new policy on attendance of conventions and seminars by council and staff members.

At council's finance and personnel committee meeting Monday night, Councillor Pat McKenzie suggested a new policy may be needed. He pointed out that the Halton Region had voted to continue participation in conventions and seminars only by a narrow 11-10 margin. The issue will likely be dealt with again, since three regional councillors were absent from the meeting.

Councillor McKenzie noted that every department has included convention and seminar funds in their budget requests to Halton Hills council.

Following the suggestion of treasurer Ray King, the committee authorized the town's purchasing agent Hugh

Patterson to attend a week long course in operation of the Gestetner offset printing machine.

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Rose 15 oz. Jar	(Save 14c)	<b>TOMATOES</b>	<b>59¢</b>
<b>SWEET MIXED PICKLES</b>	<b>59¢</b>	Libby's 14 oz. Tins	(Save 19c)
Libby's 12 oz. Pkg.	(Save 30c)	<b>FRUIT COCKTAIL</b>	<b>2/89¢</b>
<b>KERNEL CORN</b>	<b>2/79¢</b>	Robin Hood 7 lb. Bag	(Save 20c)
Christies 24 oz. Leaf	(Save 33c)	<b>ALL PURPOSE FLOUR</b>	<b>\$1.19</b>
<b>NEW 100% WHOLE WHEAT BREAD</b>	<b>3/\$1.29</b>	Red Rose Pkg. of 100	(Save 20c)
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