

Secrets of the Secret Service

—THE SAN QUENTIN CASE

Message About a "Baby Boy"

Led to One of the
Most Amazing
Counterfeitors,
Right in San Quentin
Prison

By JOHN JAY DALY

ALL was quiet on the Western front, not a counterfeiter operated on the Pacific Coast. Suddenly Seattle, San Rafael and San Francisco began to bristle with phony \$10 Federal Reserve notes. New Year's Eve, 1935, saw a flock of these bills passed on taxicab drivers in the three cities. It was a veritable orgy of counterfeiting. The Secret Service went into action.

Since only one of these peculiar notes appeared east of the Rocky Mountains the chase for counterfeiters confined itself to the Far West.

On one day—February 10, 1936—three arrests were made in the aforementioned cities. Pieced together, they uncovered one of the greatest counterfeit conspiracies of modern times—and the trail led directly to San Quentin, the largest penitentiary in America, with 6000 prisoners.

Involved in this master plot were five convicts behind the bars, two convicts out on parole and two civilians. For two years they plied their trade—one year to get organized and equipped, another year spent to spread results of their counterfeit craftsmanship.

Only for an innocent-enough looking telegram sent one day from Seattle to an inmate in San Quentin, the conspiracy might have gone along farther. The telegram read:

"Baby boy arrived stop Alice doing well.
"GALE."

This message was sent to Jack T. Lewis, an expert photographer serving a stretch in San Quentin.

Lewis was working in the prison photoengraving plant. He had been assistant there to Daniel R. Wilson, foreman of the photoengraving outfit, who was out on parole.

Whether it was Wilson or Lewis who devised this counterfeiting scheme Secret Service operatives will never know. Each man blames the other.

Anyway, Secret Service agents cracked the case when they made three separate arrests in one day. On the morning of February 10, 1936, they picked up Thomas Bell, 39, on the streets of San Rafael. Bell, a native of Scotland, had just passed a queer \$10 bill on a taxicab driver. They got Bell before he even so much as touched the pistol in his hip pocket.

Shortly after that, on the same day in Sacramento, Secret Service men landed Clifford L. Parr, a photoengraver who had dispensed with a number of \$10 Federal Reserve notes. Parr went along peacefully after agents got the drop on him.

That night in San Francisco, Secret Service agents arrested Daniel R. Wilson, 31, for passing more than twenty-two counterfeit notes, all of \$10 denomination.

Examination of these men proved them all ex-convicts—on parole from San Quentin, Wilson the former foreman of the engraving plant there. Parr also had been employed in the same plant. Circumstances began to add up.



In the early morning hours Jack Lewis worked in his improvised counterfeiter's den within the walls of San Quentin Prison

Secret Service men took him in hand. They told him things he never dreamed they could know; how he had tried to involve the innocent wife of a fellow convict by sending her ten of the counterfeit bills; how he had inveigled an outsider into helping him and then "put the finger" on the man; how he had doubled-crossed any number of persons. Outsmarted by the Secret Service, Jack Lewis admitted every charge against him—without benefit of the third degree. They had him on the spot two hours.

When it was all over and prison officials wanted to compliment the Secret Service men, all "Tex" Strange said was: "Let's beat it and get a cup of coffee."

Before they "beat it," however, they staged their final raid on the engraving plant in San Quentin and there, hidden behind pictures of motion-picture actresses, found enough counterfeit money to pay a king's ransom.

Above the ceiling in the dark room were found seven copper "face" plates and five copper "back" plates for counterfeit \$10 notes and a set of plates for \$1 silver certificates. Paper with the imprint of the Treasury seal and serial numbers was discovered in great quantity.

With all equipment and paraphernalia furnished by the State of California, as part of the prison equipment, these conspirators went out to beat Uncle Sam in a big way. It is estimated they printed \$12,000 in spurious notes.

Daniel Wilson's brother-in-law, Clifford Parr, was the plate engraver, but the greater part of the work was done by Lewis, the expert photoengraver.

Through the innocent co-operation of a salesman from a San Francisco photographic supply house a great number of packages went out of San Quentin. All contained counterfeit notes. They were mailed to Jack Loretto, whose real name was John Paul Rossi. He passed several hundred in Seattle and vicinity.

In San Francisco, a man named Norman Glickman rented a postoffice box in the name of Davis and there received some of these notes. Secret Serv-

ice men, catching Glickman in the act, found he had a brother-in-law, Bernard Kent, in San Quentin—and the trail was opened. Glickman was the man who brought the only note east of the Rockies. He passed it in Chicago. Yet Glickman, when tried by a jury, was acquitted—even though he admitted guilt.

This aroused the Secret Service men. They went out to get others, and they did. Before they stopped the chief of the prison commissary department was involved. He was Louis J. Murray, a civilian employe, who fell readily into the plans of Lewis and Wilson. Agents found that Murray had carried as many as 100 counterfeit notes out of prison.

The trail led to Daniel Wilson's home—where he held forth on parole—and here fourteen notes were discovered.

All the West Coast around San Francisco and Seattle was being infested with these counterfeit bills, even after some of the gang had been cut off from the source of supply.

In the dead letter office in Seattle reposed a package addressed to Gale Halter, a package sent by Jack Lewis. Gale was sender of the "Baby Boy Arrived" telegram. Opened, the package disgorged 213 of the San Quentin counterfeit notes—and that was the last of the species.

The fact that the principals involved in this counterfeiting case were formerly engaged or were working in the photoengraving plant in prison kept them from suspicion for a time at least. Naturally, one would expect a well-regulated prison to keep tab on the goings on within those prison walls, but after all, there is a certain amount of relaxation after a convict has seemingly shown an inclination to obey the prison rules and make no trouble.

It was on this theory that Lewis worked. He was a good engraver in the sense that reproduction plates are produced, and in his capacity as a workman there he had access to all the chemicals, zinc for plates and other material necessary.

His biggest job was getting the spurious money into circulation. How that was done has already been recounted.