

Secrets of the Secret Service

NO. 8—THE MICHENER CASE

Counterfeiters Are Balked in Their Attempt to Steal Supplies From a Printing Plant

By JOHN JAY DALY

ONE Saturday night in Minneapolis burglars broke into a print plant and made away only with material for counterfeiting.

Nine nights later, two men stood watch in the back room of an engraving plant in Duluth, Minn., while a young photo-engraver etched a set of plates—ten-dollar notes on the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis.

As the engraver worked, late into the night and early morning, one of the men covered him with a revolver. The other man directed the work.

When the plates were finished, the two men bound and gagged the engraver, pasted his mouth with adhesive tape, locked him in a dark closet and went their way.

Two nights after that, robbers broke into a printing plant in St. Paul, put engraved plates on the presses and ran off a series of bogus notes. They stole nothing, but in the haste of a getaway they left behind them a partially printed ten-dollar note—a proof print. This print was later found under a press.

On the following day, the Northwestern National Bank in Minneapolis reported to the Secret Service that counterfeiters were circulating a spurious ten-dollar bill. Two of these turned up at the bank. Uncle Sam's men started an investigation.

Unknown to the crooks, the Duluth engraver turned a trick on the men who imprisoned him. While they had him in their power, working under the muzzle of a gun, he made one extra negative. This he slid under a pile of steel engravings. It was the face of the note. When released from his workshop prison on a Monday morning, the engraver turned the negative over to the Secret Service.

With only this slim evidence to go on, Secret Service men started on the trail of the counterfeiters, coupled them with the engraving and printing jobs and robbery. That was in late August and early September, 1934.

At noon on February 15, 1935, in St. Paul, the manager of a large printing establishment notified the Secret Service that he had received a mysterious telephone call from an unknown man who wanted some particular work done—the printing of a utility bond. An emergency job. Saturday afternoon the plant was closed, only the management on duty.

The Secret Service agents were sent to the shop—Grady Boatwright and his assistant, Lauren Jackson. They formulated a plan of action. Instead of one man, two men arrived. They made a bluff about getting some stock certificates printed along with the utility bonds. Wanted a certain brand of green ink; like that used on United States currency.

Boatwright and Jackson had stationed themselves in the company's office and posed as officials. When the two men arrived, Boatwright was behind a desk in his shirt sleeves. February, it was cold outside; but the plant's offices were heated.

The men had on overcoats. Boatwright, supposedly manager of the plant, invited them to take off their overcoats. They said "No."



The Secret Service Man stepped in front of one of the crooks and grabbed his arm. The other operative immediately covered the second counterfeiter

While one man talked business, the other sat in a chair, in the middle of the room, both hands thrust deep in his overcoat pockets. Boatwright suspected the man was armed.

Then the visitors asked to be shown through the plant—the deal consummated. Boatwright sensed this was the moment for a planned hold-up. He asked them to wait a minute. Everybody in the room stood. As Boatwright brushed by the larger of the two men, a pistol was felt through his coat pocket.

By a prearranged signal, Jackson from another room ordered a radio police car to come quietly—without blowing sirens—to the assistance of the Secret Service agents. The call was put in, but no time to wait for the responding officers. The duo demanded action. They were in a hurry. Wanted to see the plant, and see it right away. Also, stage their hold-up. They had their eyes on a safe.

"All right," Boatwright said, as he stepped in front of the taller man and grabbed both his hands. He jerked two Colt .45-caliber revolvers from him. Tossed them away. In a flash, Boatwright turned and covered the other man. Jackson stepped through the door and pounced on the first man, who tried to recover his own guns.

The radio car came and hauled these two men to jail. They were indignant, put up a front. Demanded to know why they were arrested. When photographed and fingerprinted they admitted being escaped convicts from the Idaho State Penitentiary.

One man turned out to be John Knight Giles, alias John Douglas, alias Basil Haig, and also known as John K. Laird. He had been serving a lifetime for murder. His companion was Brady Durrell Morris, alias James M. Ford, who had done three years at the Chillicothe, (O.) Reformatory before going to Idaho. Since their escape they were wanted in Salt Lake City for train robbery and for killing a Deputy Marshal. Also for robbing a bank.

When the Secret Service men looked up Giles' record they found he was wanted also for a robbery in Denver. On his person he carried a utility bond of a Colorado company. That was the

bond he wanted reproduced in the St. Paul print shop.

The Secret Service also learned that two men escaped at the same time from the Idaho State Penitentiary with Giles and Morris. These men were Elliott W. Michener and Richard Franzeen.

Now the Secret Service operatives were getting somewhere. Things were beginning to add up. Tell-tale tokens in various parts of the Western country were checked.

For instance, a month before the arrest of Giles and Morris, and the final buzz of activities in and around the Twin Cities, Secret Service men cracked down on a house in Alameda, Calif. It was a counterfeiter's den—but the occupants had flown. However, a stolen printing press was recovered and it happened to be a press taken from Minneapolis, along with a lot of counterfeiting material. Agents got 100 incomplete five-dollar United States notes.

The recovered press, an imported machine valued highly, bore one distinguishable thumb mark. So did a proof print, left in the hurry to get away.

That thumb mark presented possibilities. It did more. It resulted in the Secret Service getting their men—Michener and Franzeen. Fingerprint experts narrowed that thumb-mark down to one man—Richard Franzeen.

The Secret Service now knew positively who they wanted—but the two men were on the loose and traveling fast. Their trail led through a vast territory. They scattered spurious notes as they went.

In a liquor store one night in Montana, the proprietor questioned the genuineness of a \$10 bill. Michener pulled a pistol on the man and made his escape; but the note remained behind as an indication of the direction these two men followed. It was in another liquor store that Michener came face to face with Secret Service agents, who knew his habits, but this time his pistol was of no use. They knocked it out of his hands before he fired a shot.

Franzeen, his partner, went to work on a farm in Northfield, Minn. After all the excitement he decided to go straight. Once he had studied to be a military man. Even had an appointment to West Point. Six months on the farm, leading a quiet regular life, started

him thinking. He might still get back to be a useful member of society if some Judge would only be lenient. Because the farmer, Floyd Jones, had been good to his hired man, Franzeen decided to let the old fellow collect the reward offered for the arrest and conviction of a counterfeiter. The farmer called the Minnesota State authorities. They knew nothing of the case, they said. It was more difficult for Richard Franzeen to surrender than it was for him to avoid arrest, in the past.

Finally, when the Secret Service got the welcome news they went out to the old farmhouse in Northfield, and brought in the man.

From Michener and Franzeen, in an effort to piece together a rambling story and check their records, the Secret Service learned many interesting things.

Michener and Franzeen went into a factory near Minneapolis one Saturday afternoon just after all the work-hands had gone for the day. The desperadoes blew the safe and got out the treasurer's check book. They spent an hour or so forging checks. Then, one of them went into the business district and presented these for cash, while the other remained in the factory to answer phone calls.

Whenever any merchant expressed doubt about a check, Michener told him to call up the factory and talk to the officials.

Franzeen answered the phone and pretended he was the company treasurer. "It's okay," he'd say. "Give the man his money."

Michener and Franzeen specialized in raiding print shops—at night—working under cover of darkness. In those places they made their notes.

On their last big job in a print shop, working in semi-darkness, afraid to turn on all the lights, Franzeen and Michener left another identification mark that helped prove their undoing. When they finished their work, prepared to depart, they overlooked one impression made on the press—the back plate number of a \$10 note.

On all notes there are two numbers—the back plate number and the front plate number.

All Secret Service agents had to do now was put their fingers on these men. Their habits known, it was a case of watchful waiting by Uncle Sam's unrelenting agency.

When Michener and Franzeen were confronted with all the evidence against them they confessed. On their pleas of guilty they were sentenced to serve thirty years, on two counts, in Alcatraz.