

Special Agent Explains Work Of SP Police

By DAVE AVERILL
Of The Register-Guard

In 19 years of working on the railroad, a "yard bull" will probably get acquainted with everyone from hoboes to presidents.

That's been the experience of Vince Masson, the top Southern Pacific special agent in Eugene. He's met Roosevelt, Truman and Eisenhower as they passed through Oregon, and under less impressive circumstances he's met several thousand hoboes who were also in transit.

"The presidents wouldn't remember me," Masson admits. "They were meeting hundreds of people, and I was just there to keep people out of the presidential car."

HOBOS VISITORS

Some of the hoboes, on the other hand, remember Masson well enough to drop in regularly at his small frame headquarters on the sprawling SP yards north of Eugene. They make the visit even though they know that the yard bulls—hobo parlance for railroad police—will be obliged to run them off the railroad property after a sociable chat.

"You really run into some characters," Masson says. "There's one guy who comes through every spring wearing old election buttons all over him. He must have a thousand of the things pinned to his clothes. Says it's a hobby."

Now that the weather is warming up, Masson says the Eugene hobo population will show an increase as the knights of the road head north. This brings no joy to the railroad cops, who regard even the most picturesque hobo as a nuisance.

"There's nothing personal about it," Masson explains. "The days when railroad police used to mail hobos around with nightsticks have been gone for a long time. We just want to protect the company's property and prevent people from being hurt."

OTHER DUTIES

Even though the 5 SP special agents at Eugene eject about 3,000 trespassers a year from railroad property, Masson denies the popular notion that the railroad police are in business only to throw tramps off trains.

Among other things, he says, the agents save hundreds of thousands of dollars every year by reducing pilferage from freight cars. Here in Eugene, 2 of Masson's men work full time maintaining a night patrol in the freight yards.

"Most of the people we arrest for larceny are either company employees or people who used to work for the railroad," Masson says. "They know their way around and can figure out where to find the stuff they want."

The Eugene railroad police make about 200 arrests a year in the area protected by the local office. This takes in about



VINCE MASSON
Hoboes to Presidents

1,000 miles of right-of-way, ranging from Albany south to Ashland and from the Cascades to the Coast.

They get their authority to make arrests through special commissions from the governor. Many of their operations are carried out in cooperation with state or city police or with sheriff's officers.

NEAR-PERFECT RECORD

"In the time I've been in Eugene, we've only failed once to get a conviction on a man we arrested," Masson says. "The average conviction rate for railroad police is about 98 percent."

The special agent says the almost-perfect conviction record reflects the railroad's policy of never making an arrest until a clear case has been built up.

Sometimes this building up of a case is a tricky operation. Many thefts are discovered only after the freight car has moved thousands of miles from the point where it was robbed. The railroad police have to trace the car's movements until they find where it was parked long enough for the theft to occur. Then they start looking for the thief.

"There's one problem we don't have to worry about any more," Masson says. "That's the old trick of stealing stuff by throwing it out of a moving car. The trains move too fast for people to break into cars except when they're on a siding."

Masson, a kindly-looking man in spite of the automatic pistol that appears to be a permanent part of his wardrobe, says a large part of his work is comparable to that of a city or state policeman.

SABOTAGE PROBLEM

"The main difference is that we send our reports to the main office in San Francisco instead of handling everything locally," Masson says. Southern Pacific's chief special agent, A. J. McKenna, has his headquarters in San Francisco. The top SP special agent in Oregon is

B. V. McCabe, whose office is in Portland.

Like any other policeman, a railroad special agent never knows what's going to happen next. One thing that keeps them on the jump is sabotage, either by children putting various items on the tracks or by cranks with a grudge against the railroad.

"We get 1 or 2 reports a week of stuff being put on the tracks," Masson says. "Nearly always it's the work of kids."

Another problem, shared with city police in run-down districts, is drunks. They seem to congregate on railroad property.

"Drunks give us a lot of trouble," Masson says. "They get down here in the yard and we have to try to keep them from getting themselves hurt by moving trains. Some of them get tough and want to fight, and some of them pass out and have to be dragged away from the tracks."

America's railroad police, with more than 8,000 members, make up the largest private police force in the world, but they are unknown to many people because of their policy of avoiding publicity. Minor cases don't get into the newspapers, and in major cases the agents keep in the background and let local officials take the credit.

"That's the way we like it," Masson says. "Publicity can help local police get credit for doing a good job, but it doesn't mean a thing to us. All we're worrying about is doing a good job for the company."

Scout Career Talks Planned

Young men interested in becoming professional workers for the Boy Scouts of America are invited to meet for discussion of this career Thursday from 2 to 4 p.m. at the office of student affairs at the University of Oregon.

Available for consultation will be Roger Bales, deputy regional Scout executive and representative of the Personnel Division, BSA.

Men entering the scouting profession must be between the ages of 21 and 35, must have a college education and experience either as a Scout or an adult Scoutmaster.

During Bales' visit in Eugene he will participate in the Klamath (Eugene) district meeting, 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, at the Osburn Hotel. He will also attend the district meeting of the Three Sisters district to be held at the Springfield American Legion building at 7:30 p.m.

Captain Convicted

CANAKKALE, Turkey—A Turkish court convicted Navy Capt. Sabri Tchelenoglou Monday of negligence in a March, 1953 submarine disaster in which 81 lives were lost. He was sentenced to 20 months in prison.

French Chief Favors Early Big 4 Talks

WASHINGTON—Premier Edgar Faure of France says he favors a conference "as soon as possible" between the Western Big Three and Russia.

Expressing hope that some such session involving the foreign ministers of France, Britain, the United States and Russia can be held by July, Faure said in a copyrighted interview with the

magazine U.S. News and World Report that he believes the four heads of state should also get together.

"If we want to achieve results," he said, "we must undoubtedly one day come to a four-power meeting at the highest level."

Asked whether he thinks a real settlement of cold war tensions is possible, or whether new talks

can only continue a stalemate, Faure replied: "I think a true settlement is possible."

As for the Far East, Faure said his government intends to work for "the recognition of Communist China by all the Western Powers together." Like the United States, France does not now recognize the Peking regime. Great Britain

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