

The **FBI** Story — by Don Whitehead

CHAPTER 10

Rebellion Against Crime

John Herbert Dillinger led a kill - crazy gang which swept through the Midwest from September, 1933, until July, 1934, leaving a trail of ten men murdered, seven wounded, four banks robbed, three police arsenals plundered and three jails from which prisoners were freed.

But it wasn't the murders or the robberies or the jail deliveries which first sent the FBI after Dillinger, because none of these crimes was a federal law violation. He ran into trouble with the G-Men because he drove a stolen automobile across a state line.

During the twenties most of the country had watched the growth of crime and gangsterism with a so-called attitude. Those fellows in the gangs, many people felt, were no worse than the thieves in dinner jackets who had been corrupting federal, state and local governments; about the only difference was that one group used guns and the other didn't. But this tolerance gave way to angry demands that something be done about the menace of the gangsters and racketeers.

Special Kidnap Line

The country and Congress came to the realization that the federal laws were woefully weak in combating interstate crime. Criminals were operating with high-speed automobiles, armored cars, high-powered rifles, machine guns and armaments which were better than those of the law enforcement agencies. Crime wasn't localized. One gang could, and frequently did, operate across the lines of a half-dozen states.

By 1933 bank robberies were occurring at the rate of almost two a day. Kidnapings had increased alarmingly despite the Lindbergh Kidnap Law. The attorney general had urged people to report kidnapings to the FBI by calling the special "kidnap" number—National 8-7117, Washington, D. C.

Wooden Gun?

Many of the gang operations were not in violation of federal statutes and there were some curious inconsistencies in the laws. For example, a bank official who embezzled \$50 from a federal bank in 1933 had violated a federal law. But a gang of bandits might rob a federal bank of \$100,000, machine-gun the bank officials and escape into another state without violating a single federal statute. And the bandits could be reasonably sure that pursuit would end at the state line.

Dillinger, wanted in Indiana for the murder of an East Chicago policeman, was recognized in Tucson, Ariz., and arrested with three members of his gang. Tucson police found, among other odds and ends at the Dillinger hide-out, three Thompson sub-machine guns, two Winchester rifles mounted as machine guns, five bullet-proof vests and more than \$25,000, part of which was identified as loot from an East Chicago bank.

Dillinger was returned to Indiana and placed in the county jail at Crown Point to await trial. But he escaped on March 3, 1934. He always claimed he frightened the jail guards with a wooden gun which he had fashioned with a razor blade as he whiled away the time in his cell. The red-faced guards said Dillinger had a real .45 which someone had slipped to him.

Traps Sprung

Dillinger grabbed two machine guns, locked up the guards, stole the sheriff's automobile and headed for Chicago. The instant he crossed the Indiana-Illinois state line, he violated a federal law—the National Motor Vehicle Theft Act, commonly known as the Dyer Act, which prohibits transportation of a stolen motor vehicle across a state line.

On two occasions, agents thought they had Dillinger trapped. Each time he escaped in a barrage of machine-gun fire. But the circle was tightening.

In April the Dillinger gang was found at Little Bohemia Lodge, a summer resort some 50 miles north of Rhineclander, Wis. Warned by barking dogs of the approach of an FBI raiding party, Dillinger and his buddies escaped. A short distance from the lodge, Lester Gillis, alias "Baby Face" Nelson, a member of the Dillinger gang, killed Special Agent W. Carter Baum, and wounded another agent and a local officer.

On the first day of June, Hoover called Special Agent Samuel P. Cowley into his office to give him a special assignment. Cowley was a hefty, 34-year-old Utah lawyer who had served as a missionary in the Mormon Church before he joined the FBI. He was to take charge of the Dillinger search.

Cowley's search led him to Chicago. Dillinger was reported in hiding, recovering from a doctor's attempt to disguise the Dillinger features by plastic surgery. Cowley and Melvin Purvis, special agent in charge of the Chicago office, worked closely with two East Chicago policemen, Capt. Timothy O'Neill and Sgt. Martin Zarkovich, in running down the scores of rumors and tips from people who thought they had recognized Dillinger.

Woman in Red

The break in the case came on July 21. O'Neill and Zarkovich brought a dark-haired, middle-aged woman to the FBI. She was Anna Cumpanas, and she was in trouble. The Immigration and Naturalization Service wanted her



Mrs. Anna Cumpanas, also known as Anna Sage, was the "Woman in Red" who finally led FBI agents and police to John Dillinger, gang chief of '30s. The bawdyhouse operator later was deported.

deported as an undesirable alien because she was the madam of a bawdyhouse in Gary, Ind.

Her proposition was this. She would lead John Dillinger to the FBI—but she wanted a promise that she would receive a reward and also that something would be done to permit her to remain in the United States. The reward was promised. Purvis said he would do what he could to help her, and he would call her co-operation to the attention of the Labor Department, which handled deportation matters.

Anna Cumpanas said that John Dillinger was planning to take her and his girl friend, Polly Hamilton, to a movie theater the

prearrangement Purvis lit a cigar. Dillinger must have sensed that something was wrong. He glanced over his shoulder and saw an agent moving toward him. He darted toward an alley, clanking a pistol from his pants pocket. But before he could get his gun into action, three FBI agents fired five shots. Slugs tore into Dillinger's body and he pitched on his face. The chase was over.

Cowley paid Anna Cumpanas \$5,000 from the \$10,000 reward money which the federal government had posted. The two East Chicago policemen each received \$2,500. But a federal judge ordered her deported, and she died in 1947 in the little Romanian town of Timisoara.

(Tomorrow: The FBI Laboratory.)

3 Men Killed In Kansas Gas Plant Blowup

The whole area presently is in the grip of a cold wave.

The were about 25 men in the plant. Fourteen were burned and battered by the explosion. Three were reported in critical condition. Four were released from a hospital after treatment.

The blast blew the metal roof and sides off the main compressor building, 264 by 68 feet. It wrecked the engines and compressors. An

adjoining machine shop was heavily damaged. Five other buildings and eight houses on the 80-acre plot 15 miles northeast of Liberal had lesser damage.

One company official said the loss might run several million dollars. "Everything just went off in my face," said J. D. Armstrong, one of the workmen injured. "Pieces of metal and glass were flying all

over the place and everything was on fire."

The fire burned two hours, fed by gas from broken lines, before valves could be closed.

Those killed were Melvin Swafford, 35, who lived on the station; James Hanes, about 30, Paul Valley, Okla.; and Ivan Hill, about 40, Liberal.

A company spokesman said failure of a piece of equipment

on a compressor engine caused the blast. Workmen said they heard a hissing noise just before the explosion.

The Liberal station collects gas through small pipelines from fields in southwest Kansas and the Oklahoma and Texas Panhandles, compressing it and boosting it along 24 and 26-inch mains to the East. It was the largest compressor station in the world.

Fuel Supply Threatened As Far as Detroit by Service Cutoff

LIBERAL, Kan. (AP)—An explosion flashed through a big pipeline compressor station here in the southwest corner of Kansas yesterday, killing three workmen and threatening natural gas supplies as far east as Detroit.

Officials of Panhandle Eastern Pipeline Co. said they hoped to restore deliveries to 70 per cent of normal today.

They indicated this would mean no curtailment of gas for household use along Panhandle Eastern's system in Kansas, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio and Michigan.

Industrial users in the six states were cut off immediately.

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