

*If you don't believe truth
is sometimes stranger than fiction,
read this amazing story.*

Case of the INCREDIBLE ALIBI

BY WILLIAM T. BRANNON

FRED JANSON had worked as a clerk at the National Guard Armory in Chicago for more than two years. He was a willing worker, perhaps a little more intelligent than the average. His boss had always regarded him as dependable—until Friday, Jan. 30, 1953.

That morning, Fred didn't come to work. The boss telephoned the lodging house where Fred lived and talked to the landlady. She reported

Fred—who didn't think the prospect was funny!

They drove on and parked near the Dutch Mill Tavern. Three of the men went inside while the fourth stayed in the car to watch Fred. They didn't wait long; soon the trio was back, one with his pockets stuffed with currency. Another said he had "a bucketful of change." The loot totaled more than \$400.

The car sped out of Rockford and finally stopped

money order for a payee in Columbus had been purchased that morning.

This seemed to substantiate Fred's story, and two FBI agents were called in. For the third time, Fred told his story. He described the men as of average height and build; all spoke in Southern accents. The main thing Fred remembered about their clothing was that one wore an overcoat with a garish plaid lining.



Fred's boss listened to his alibi for missing work with growing skepticism.

that he wasn't in his room; she assumed he had gone to work. The morning passed, but there was no word from Fred.

Then, about 4 p.m., he walked into the armory. His boss listened with growing skepticism as Fred told his story:

As he was driving home from work the previous evening, he had stopped for a red light. Suddenly, the car door was jerked open and two men scrambled into the front seat. They brandished revolvers and commanded Fred to drive.

Several blocks south, Fred was ordered to stop and get in the back seat. One of his captors took the wheel while two newcomers, both with guns, climbed in the rear, one on either side of Fred. The car shot ahead, eventually turning onto a highway leading northwest.

For more than two hours they rode, eventually reaching the outskirts of Rockford, Ill., 90 miles from Chicago. They stopped a few minutes while they made detailed plans for robbing a tavern, using Fred's car for a getaway. If somebody got the license number, it would be a good joke on

at a motel near Beloit, Wis. The four men rented a cabin for the night.

They were up early the next morning, driving back into Illinois. In Burlington, they stopped at the post office and one of the robbers got out. He said he had to mail a letter to Columbus, Ga. He was back soon and the car rolled on to Chicago.

On Milwaukee Avenue, the men got out, turning the car back to Fred. He then hurried to work as soon as he could get there.

The boss, who had heard some wild alibis for not coming to work, grew increasingly skeptical as the tale unfolded. "Maybe you'd better tell this to the police," he said.

Fred repeated the incredible story to Capt. Kyran Phelan at Chicago police headquarters. Phelan, too, has heard some wild accounts, but he knows from experience that truth is sometimes stranger than anything a man can invent.

He telephoned the Rockford police, who verified that three men had robbed the Dutch Mill Tavern the night before. Then Phelan called the postmaster at Burlington. He reported that a \$20

The Federal agents made notes and Fred was excused. They started driving back to their office when, from force of habit, they glanced in windows along State Street. Suddenly they stopped at a restaurant where four men sat at a table. From a nearby phone, one of the agents called Capt. Phelan, who sent reinforcements.

The four men, one from Arkansas, two from Alabama, and one from Georgia, were identified by Fred as the robbers. They confessed and were held on Federal kidnaping charges. Convicted, two drew four-year terms, and the other two, 12-year hitches in Federal prison.

Fred was congratulated by his boss, who learned that truth is indeed stranger than fiction. But Fred's story might have been viewed with skepticism for a long time had it not been for one of those minor slips which so often trip up criminals:

When the four men entered the restaurant, they had hung up their coats. One was hung so carelessly that the loud plaid lining was visible through the window to a passerby who, in this case, happened to be an alert FBI agent.