



James J. Rowley

How We Track Down Bond Thieves

When you buy a U.S. Savings Bond, you've put your money in a safe place—just ask the crooks who've stolen some

By JAMES J. ROWLEY, Chief, United States Secret Service

A DAPPER GENTLEMAN handed several United States Savings Bonds to a woman bank teller in Louisville, Ky.

"I want to cash these," he said calmly. "I'm with the Veterans Administration."

The ruse had worked before. Willis Edwin Hirsch already had cashed and forged 18 Savings Bonds in Mississippi. Now his luck was about to run out. In checking the Bonds, the lady cashier noted what she thought were erasures.

"And I wonder why a Government official would cash these while traveling?" she asked a superior.

By this time, however, Hirsch had become suspicious and fled. He didn't waste time, though. Soon he appeared at a second Louisville bank with the same story. He hovered nearby as a bank official took the Bonds and made a telephone call—to the local Secret Service office of the U. S. Treasury. Through the Secret Service, the first bank already had broadcast an alarm about the suspicious gentleman. Hirsch caught enough of the conversation to send him scurrying to Mexico.

We didn't lose complete track of our man, though. Soon Mexican authorities were telling us Hirsch was in Tijuana, then Acapulco. He was having a wonderful time on stolen money. And we? Well, we had to wait patiently, but we knew we'd have a showdown soon.

The Treasury Department sells about 85 to 90 million individual Savings Bonds a year, totaling \$4½ billion. Right now and until June 30, it is conducting a

Freedom Savings Drive, the biggest since the Korean War. If you buy these Bonds, you're putting money in one of the safest investments. Most criminals leave Savings Bonds behind while stealing jewelry and negotiable securities. They have good reason; it's hard to cash Bonds, and if they are cashed illegally, the Secret Service starts a patient but endless hunt for the criminals.

LATELY, some not-so-smart thieves have begun grabbing Savings Bonds—not much in relation to the total invested but still amounting to hundreds of thousands of dollars. Hirsch was one of these, and his end is fairly typical.

A few weeks after his disappearance, we got a telephone call from a bellhop in a Laredo, Texas, hotel. "I saw a picture of this guy Hirsch," the bellhop told us. "I think he just checked in here."

We sent two agents to the hotel to check the tip. We didn't want to make any mistakes, so the agents first showed Hirsch's photograph to waitresses in the dining room. As they studied the picture, a dapper, sun-tanned man strode into the room. The agents spotted him just as he realized who they were.

Our two agents already were on a dead run across the dining room. Chairs tumbled over, a table went crashing. Hirsch made the lobby, scattering on-lookers in his fierce flight for freedom. He got as far as the door when one of the agents let loose a perfect flying tackle. The two men slammed heavily onto the floor.

Hirsch admitted cashing \$67,000 worth

of bonds. In his luggage we found seven \$1,000 Bonds which had been stolen in the Midwest. He claimed he had bought them from the actual thieves. Hirsch is now serving a 10-year term for forgery.

As I said, Savings Bonds are a safe place for your money to grow, but you can add to that safety with some precautions of your own.

1. Keep your Bonds in a secure place; a safe-deposit box is ideal.

2. In a separate place, keep a record of each Bond number, just in case your Bonds are lost, stolen, or burned. With such information, you can get a Bond reissued with the original date of purchase, or receive cash value if you desire.

3. When cashing in Savings Bonds, cooperate with bank officials as they check your identification. Sometimes, Bond holders resent these checks which, after all, are for your own protection.

THOMAS BARTKOVSKY's case dramatizes this point. He entered a bank and attempted to cash 52 Savings Bonds. Most people about to redeem an amount like that are proud and full of plans for travel or spending sprees.

Not Bartkovsky. He seemed shamed by his nest egg and obviously had no plan other than to collect his money and get out of the bank. Officials became suspicious and started the crackdown on a ring that had forged and cashed \$68,050 in stolen Savings Bonds.

It didn't take much to trip this ring, just a suspicious bank official—but it was enough to send some ring members to a Federal penitentiary for 10 years.

COVER:

A mother, like this one photographed by Phoebe Dunn, is nourishment and warmth, laughter and easy discipline—but today, her day, a mother is most of all to love.

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