

LAST OF THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERS

For a piddling \$1.70 an hour he dies

with his boots on 6 times a day!

by Chuck Graham, with Paul Ditzel

The train was only a few minutes from the depot when my accomplice and I slipped from our hiding place and pulled our red bandannas up over our faces. I snapped off two shots from my six-gun, and kicked open the door to the crowded coach.

"This is a holdup!" I announced. A lady screamed and tried to shove her purse down between the seats. "We don't want your money," I said. "We're here to rob the mail."

By the time the train reached town, we had run through the coaches and escaped. My 22,000th train robbery was a success. That's right: I said my 22,000th train robbery!

As head train robber at Knott's Berry Farm & Ghost Town on State Highway 39 in Buena Park, Calif., a 30-minute drive from Los Angeles, I have stuck up more trains than the James brothers, the Daltons, and Rube Burrow combined. I pull a stickup every 10 minutes, rain or shine.

I've robbed movie actresses and Hollywood gun-slingers. I've shoved a six-gun under Gov. Orval Faubus' nose.

Jesse James died only once, but I "die" with my boots on six times a day when Ghost Town baggage agents "surprise" my accomplice and me and drop us with shotgun blasts. An undertaker carts our "corpses" away in a wheelbarrow after an appropriate funeral oration.

But I have more job security than Jesse had. I work 48 hours a week, punch a time clock, and get a two-week paid vacation every year.

Money-wise, Jesse might have done better. Good train robbers these days make only \$1.70 an hour, although Jesse didn't have to worry, as I do, about the revenue agent who looks skeptically at my income-tax return which lists my occupation as "professional train robber."

Burrow, the Prince of Train Robbers, never had to worry about some of my occupational hazards. When I burst into the coach, I always pause for an instant and size up my victims. I swallow hard when I see Boy Scouts. One of them invariably performs his good deed for the day by triggering a full charge into my face. Loaded water pistols are deadly at point-blank range!

I manage to grin and stagger, half-blind, to the end of the train. That is, if I'm not tripped, elbowed, gouged, or punched on the way by a teen-ager or dowager.

They say women are the gentler sex. I'll argue that point without mentioning the names many of them let fly at me. My bruises testify that I'm fair game for whatever pops into the paying passenger's mind.

I've been whacked on the head so many times by handbags that I've lost count. And I've been



"This is a holdup!" the bandit yells waving a six-gun. Often, however, his "victims" fight back.

kicked until my shin bones have ridges on them from knees to ankles.

One afternoon a prim young lady cut my legs pretty badly. The taps on her shoes slashed as viciously as knives on a fighting cock. "That's what you get for being a dirty old train robber!" she yelled at me as I limped down the aisle.

Sometimes the sheriff has to come to my rescue. A policeman from a small California city, riding the train with his wife and two children, thought the holdup was real and yanked out his gun. Mine was but a .22 filled with blanks; his was a

.45 and loaded. Deputy sheriffs intervened and corroborated my explanation that the holdup was included in the price of the train ticket.

While surprise is part of my act, nothing will compare with the shock I got not long ago when I kicked open the coach door. A passenger clutched his chest and slumped over into the aisle. I thought he was dead from a heart attack brought on by my shots. But when we arrived at the depot he got up, brushed himself off, laughed in my face, and strode off the train.

My heart wasn't in my work the rest of the day.