

Bootlegging Booming In Backwoods Of Kentucky

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (UPI) — The Kentucky moonshiner may not be the splay-footed, big-nosed, unshaved character depicted in cartoons and movies, but he remains very much in existence today.

No exact figures are available, but there is good evidence that the moonshining industry is booming in the backwoods and hill country just as it did 20 years or more ago, and perhaps is doing even better.

Agents of the Alcoholic & Tobacco Tax Division of the Internal Revenue Service — "revenooers" — arrested twice as many moonshiners during the last six months of 1958 as they did in the last six months of 1948.

That was partly because the IRS was trying harder, but it also indicated there was just as much moonshining going on as ever, if not more.

During those last six months of '58 agents in Kentucky made 415 arrests. They confiscated 164 stills and seized 50 automobiles.

No other type of violation has remained such a persistent characteristic of the people of the area as illicit whiskey distilling.

As printer's ink seems to get into the blood of a journalist, so does the smell of souring mash and the burning twang of a good shot of 'shine get into the blood of the moonshiner.

Records show that many — perhaps 8 out of 10 — arrested on the charge are repeaters. Some have been arrested five or six times.

To many of these people, especially in the mountain sections, moonshining is a livelihood, a hobby, an art and a way of life all in one. They do not really think of it as a violation of law, even though they know it is.

To them, in a land where the only agriculture is subsistence farming and the only industry is digging coal deep in the dark channels of a mine, moonshining is a must.

Do they know they will be caught? Of course they do. But they're willing to risk the consequences in matching wits with the law to live life as they like it.

One reason moonshining is not dying out is the continuing economic depression of the mountain areas. Many small coal mines have

been closed down, and many miners are out of work. They can either leave their homes and the land they know in favor of a Northern industrial city as many of their young folks do, or they can turn to moonshining for cash as their fathers did before them.

Eastern Kentucky mountaineers are friendly and hospitable souls except to those prying into what is considered none of their business.

Not so long ago there were many parts of Kentucky where the automobile had never been seen. Revenooers were strangers, and when they came snooping around, they ran a good chance of being shot at.

There are still a few such localities, but for the most part the constant push by the officers

against illicit distilling has brought a better understanding, or maybe it's fear, to the moonshiners.

Agents now are seldom fired upon, because the moonshiners know the added penalties of having a gun around the still. In addition, many of them have become acquainted with the agents and respect them.

Sometimes they have even become friends, each knowing all about the other, and playing a good-natured game of "catch, me if you can."

If the moonshiner loses, he'll shake hands with his captor, congratulate him and go along to court without protest.

One agent who for many years worked along the Big Sandy River — the stream that forms the border of Kentucky and West Virginia and was the boundary line in the Hatfield-McCoy feuds of half a century ago — tells this story:

One morning he and two other officers lay in wait and watched as a father and his two teen-age sons

came along, fired up their improvised furnace and put the still in operation. The agents came out of their hiding place and arrested all three.

The father and his sons watched as the raiders used axes and sledges to break up the still, and shook their heads more in sorrow than in anger as the gallon jugs of "white lightning" were smashed against rocks and trees.

The job one, the party wound its way back down a narrow mountain path to the family cabin where the mother and daughters had a hot dinner ready for all hands—including the agents.

Knowing that refusing a mountaineer's hospitality is a deep insult, the agents sat down to a hearty meal of boiled potatoes, hominy grits and corn bread — with a small glass of "white lightning" for an appetizer.

The revenooers are inclined to be a little less tolerant in sections where there are more opportunities to make a legal living. One

agent in south central Kentucky reports that in his 15-county area there are not more than 10 per cent of the number of stills there were a decade ago.

This is because new industry has come to the region, the farming is good, and the IRS agents have kept up a constant drive against moonshining.

Most important of all, the agent says, is the attitude of the Federal judge in the area, because "without convictions, we cannot combat the moonshine situation." During 1958, of all those arrested for moonshining in the United States, 27 per cent were not convicted.

Some of those who are arrested and sent to prison make good use of their time. They are well behaved and eligible for parole early. They also learn a trade in prison, such as sheet metal work, plumbing or mechanics.

So, when they come out, they are able to build bigger and better stills.



Don't Miss the Local News or your favorite Herald and News Features, Comics and Articles!

TAKE ADVANTAGE

of the H&N

VACATION PACK

A FREE Herald & News Service!

Call the Herald and News Circulation Department, 4-8111 and tell us . . .

1. "Have our paper forwarded to our vacation address while we're there."
2. "Have our papers saved while we're gone and delivered on our return in your neat Vacation Pack."

*Don't forget! Call ahead of time and give us your instructions. There is no extra charge for this service. Thank You.

YOUR CARRIER

Herald and News

Telephone TU 4-8111



TAKES THE CAKE — Four-year-old Mark Ruthe tries out dad's underwear while sitting on a 300-pound cake of ice in the heat of Miami Beach, Fla. Army Maj. H. G. Ruthe had just returned from assignment in the Arctic.