

The Federal Policeman, a Newcomer

UNCLE SAM LOOKS TO HIM TO KILL OR CAPTURE THE FREIGHT CAR BANDITS. BOTH CAN SHOOT STRAIGHT AS AN ARROW AND BOTH HAVE PLENTY OF OPPORTUNITY TO SHOW THEIR SKILL. WHO WINS?

HAVE you ever heard of the federal policeman?

The federal policemen are the men who guard the government's traffic lines. They are men who take the greatest risks of life and limb in the performance of their daily tasks, yet they get no distinguished service crosses, no citations for bravery and no commendation for heroic conduct except the approving nod of a superior and the satisfaction which emanates from the knowledge of duty well done.

When a business corporation takes measures of defense it must do so with one eye on the expense account, so that the cost of protection will not mount beyond the profits or even the income of the business. But when the Department of Justice sets itself to the task of chasing criminals and breaking up criminal practices, it does not need to worry over anything but the end in view. And it does not let the matter of expense stand in the way.

Public Familiar With Passenger Train Robberies.

Train robbing is no new thing. Tales of daring bandits who stop fast passenger trains to loot the mails and the passengers are about as old as railroading itself. We are accustomed to stories, and now to movies, in which we find the accounts of robbers "going through" trains. But all the romance, all the picturesqueness of this form of crime has been exploited in tales of the robberies only of passenger trains. That thieves find more profit in attacking freight cars has been overlooked—perhaps because, when the situation is investigated, it is found out that freight train robbing is a pretty common matter.

To remove the freight traffic of the country from the attacks of thieves, or, in any event, to lessen the damage done, the Railroad administration has established a force of federal policemen in all the railroad centers of the country. New York, Chicago, Denver, San Francisco, Pittsburg, St. Louis and all the other cities which are shipping and receiving centers for the various railroads have branches of this police system for the protection of goods in transit from one point to another.

It is not altogether the matter of playing hide-and-seek with thieves across a state which concerns the government's railroad policemen. The chief losses occur right in the yards around the large railroad concentrations. Opportunity is greater there than out on the line somewhere. When cars are lying on a siding awaiting the formation of a train they are in far more danger than when creeping along the rails behind a sweating, panting old mogul.

Last June, realizing the vital need for fighting the criminals who infest railroad yards, the government organized its railroad police force, centering squadrons of men, varying in size to suit the demand of a particular locality, at the transportation centers of the railroad systems of the country. The new force did not supply the men who had previously been employed by the railroads. The new force was created in addition to the protection already being utilized by the railroads.

When the force was first established it experienced the difficulties always encountered by new organizations. The men did not know exactly how to combat the thieves. Although all the men employed on the force were experienced men, some of them being expert detectives, their knowledge of the methods employed by their new foe was not very great. So, for a time, they had to devote themselves to a study of the situation and of the habits of the freight-car thieves.

Crooks who rob freight cars are no burglars. They do their work with such skill and proficiency that a car may start from, say, St. Louis, with all the entrances sealed and even nailed down and arrive in Peoria next day apparently as intact as when it started. But upon examination the contents will be found to have been liberally removed. Where the robbery was committed, how it could have been done without breaking the seals of the car, what sort of criminals were doing the job—all had to be analyzed and studied by the federal agents before they could begin an effective campaign against the outlaws.

The officers were not long in ascertaining the differences in method which were due to the different environment in which the robberies were committed.

Criminals are very much alike; it is only an occasional exception where work does not follow certain definite precepts. Sizing up the situation, the officers quickly learned how their prey worked; and they also learned that they were to encounter a bold and determined type, men who carried guns and who could and did shoot upon occasion.

Advantage Is With Thief In Freight Yard.

Many circumstances peculiar to freight yards were taken advantage of by the thieves. They make very good use of an empty box car standing beside a loaded one. Once gaining entrance to the loaded car, such goods as are desired can be removed and placed in the empty. When the loaded car is switched out of the yards the stolen goods remain in the empty and may be taken away at leisure. A dark end of the yards is a bad place to leave a loaded car. As occasionally when an engine or two are standing so that their lights illuminate the track and yards ahead, the cars behind suffer, for the light of the engines serves both to prevent observers from seeing movements around the cars and to permit a sentinel to see anyone coming down the tracks, so that the thieves can withdraw at the approach of an officer.

In order to circumvent the advantages gained by the thieves' strategy, the detectives have had to resort to tactics which has called for all the attributes of courage and heroism. They have had to lock themselves in the cars, have had to lie in wait behind piles of ties, on the roofs of cars or on the tracks under cars. And a little thing like a battle of guns is rather the customary thing.

There are several classes of criminals who molest the cars. The hardest one to deal with is the eminently skilled type which empty a car and leave it to all appearances untouched, seals intact and the doors "spiked." Another class is one which goes after a comparatively safe haul, breaking open the door of a solitary car and leaving everything in the greatest disorder. Bunglers who play the game in this manner are mere beginners. They run at the first noise and make no effort to cover up their work. And another class of thieves is the negro element, which is to the skilled workman what a pickpocket is to a first-class safecracker.

During the war, when labor was scarce, a lot of "boomers" entered the game and played it from the most insidious standpoint possible—from the inside. A "boomer" is a man who, just released from prison, gets temporary employment when help is badly needed. These "boomers" were a source of considerable trouble, but were not as hard to trace as the more polished craftsmen.

T. J. Sullivan, the chief special officer in charge of the Flying Squadron of one of the largest yards in the country, relates the story of a "boomer" who, for his assiduous work in removing various articles from freight cars as they passed through East St. Louis, returned to the Federal Prison at Leavenworth exactly one year after he had been released from that institution.

The man, after his release, drifted about for a long time until he finally landed in a certain city, and because of the shortage of men got a job as yard clerk just before the war ended. He was not very long at work until an irregularity appeared among the cars which he checked. A freight car containing clothing and shoes came

into the yards one evening. When it entered the yards records showed that it was sealed on both sides with a Baltimore and Ohio seal, and the doors were spiked. Instead of giving the car a place on the next outgoing train, this "boomer" allowed the car to stay over until the second night, when he checked it out under a Baltimore and Ohio seal on one side and a different seal on the other, with both doors spiked.

Admits Part In Theft And Returns to Prison.

When the car arrived at its destination word was immediately wired back that it had been robbed. The records were viewed, and suspicion fastened upon the clerk when the irregularity of his records appeared. He was arrested and questioned. As was to be expected, he denied any knowledge of the missing contents of the car. But his room was searched and in it the officers found much of the stuff reported missing. The man then admitted his guilt, and confessed that, with the aid of outside accomplices, he had robbed the car. He even confessed that his two accomplices and he planned a prolonged engagement at that particular yard, where he could use his inside position to aid in robbing cars. He resumed his acquaintance with Leavenworth three weeks ago.

Sullivan states, however, that the "boomer" has about passed with the availability of honest men to pick from and with the return of old railroad men who have been in the army or the navy.

The man who makes robbing of freight cars a profession means business, in the cowardly way in which he does business. He is invariably armed with a good-sized, workable six-shooter, which he knows how to use. He takes advantage of night's darkness, usually maneuvers so that he will have a favorable position if attacked, and is willing to give battle if need be.

The work for the night is decided upon in the daytime. The Jesse James of the freight yards utilizes the day to spot the cars which he will rob at night. That the robbers are among the many hangers-on around the yards

the police are certain. But the officers can not make arrests on a supposition of that sort, no matter how obvious it seems to be. Then men who prowling about freight yards in the daytime, paying no particular heed to anything, are undoubtedly the men who come at night and break into cars. They select their objective in the daytime. And they do their work so

casually that they do not seem to be on any criminal mission. Let an officer of the government be moving around the yards, and every stranger in the place knows of it. A few signals are passed around the tracks, and everybody becomes a model of discretion. One signal which the yegmen have is the flapping of the arms to indicate "Flying Squadron." Another is the tapping of the breast as two crooks pass each other. This means that there is an officer about—the tapping being an indication of the officer's badge which is worn under the coat.

Having chosen a promising car, the bandits return at night to reap the harvest of their selection. But they want more than the mere darkness to aid them in their work. They are certain to pick a favorable or strategic position. If a loaded car is standing alongside of an empty, or if the car to be attacked is in an out-of-the-way corner of the yards, or if an engine's headlight or the light of a building illuminates the approach to the car so that from the dark beyond the robbers can detect anybody coming in their direction, then they consider that the setting is favorable enough to go to work.

One Man Killed, Others Are Sent to Penitentiary.

In the last month two men went to the Federal Penitentiary for stealing a quantity of whisky and cigars. The third member of the bandit trio which "pulled" the job was buried two days after the affair. The police noticed during the daytime that a car was receiving particular attention from a pair of strangers. Just after dark an officer, well wrapped in a big overcoat, crawled underneath the car to await events. Another found a spot

behind a pile of ties near by. The expected happened. Three men came to the car, forced the door, and one of them climbed in and began to hand out the cigars and whisky to his confederates. While the three visitors were busily engaged, the officer crawled out from his position on the tracks under the car and, covering the two men outside, placed them under arrest. The lad in the car however, not suited with the turn affairs had taken, opened fire on the officer. But he was not as good a shot as Uncle Sam's agent. He was the man later.

whose funeral was held two days after. On another occasion the officers discovered a quantity of rubber tires cached in an out-of-the-way corner of a railroad yard. They immediately inferred that the articles had been freshly stolen. Upon examination the records showed no notice of the theft of the tires had yet been received. The conclusion made was that the thief would return that night to carry the tires away.

Accordingly two officers were detailed to watch the cache all night. Past midnight a wagon containing four men drove up and three of the men dismounted.

The three men approached the stolen tires and began to carry them back to the wagon when the officers stepped out and called on them to halt. The man in the wagon immediately whipped the horse and drove away. The other three began to fire, but when one man went down, the other two surrendered. They are now serving their terms in the federal prison, and the wounded man is slowly recovering to go to trial for his share of the party.

One of the hardest cases that the federal agents assigned to the St. Louis and East St. Louis district had to meet resulted in the death of one of the robbers. For ten weeks in succession a car which bore a daily consignment of merchandise from St. Louis to Peoria, was broken into and robbed without any visible sign of the robbery remaining on the car. When the consignment arrived at its destination, the receiver invariably found that the car had been entered, and a part of the goods stolen.

In order to catch the thief or thieves, two of Chief Sullivan's men were ordered to lock themselves in the car one night and await developments. The chief was the only outsider who knew of the move. The car was loaded as usual and just before it was sealed the two detectives slipped inside. They had with them a jug of water, a day's ration, their revolvers, with spare ammunition, and a pair of axes with which to cut their way out of the car in the event that the regular schedule of the trip miscarried and a serious delay ensued.

The two officers selected a position at one end of the car and settled themselves behind a barricade of boxes and crates. Presently the car was picked up and switched back and forth while the train was being made up. The regular trip of the car was to Peoria, where it was to be delivered to the C. P. and St. L. Railway for delivery at some point along the line of that road.

Opens Door With Out Breaking the Seal.

Finally the train began to move out and it went as far as the Bremen avenue yards in St. Louis before it made another stop to add more cars to the

load. The officers, of course, had no idea where they were. They heard voices outside the car. Someone began to work on the door. Gradually under the pressure of a crowbar, the back shoes of the door were lifted without breaking the seals the door was opened outward from the rear. A man entered the car. Once inside he lit a lantern which he brought with him. Then he began to examine the contents of the car.

The shipment in the car was made up of shoes and clothing. That the bandit knew this the officers, who were watching his every movement, decided. He proceeded to pass from one box of shoes to another until he found the size he sought. He broke open the shipping box and reached down for a pair of shoes. Evidently satisfied with them, he put the shoes under his arm and turned to see what clothing he wanted.

At this moment the officers stood up and commanded the robber to throw up his hands and surrender. He whirled around as he heard them and raised his lantern over his head to fling it at the two officers. Before he could succeed in this one of the detectives had fired, striking the arm which held the lantern. The robber immediately pulled his gun and returned the fire.

In the narrow confines of a freight car which was fairly well filled with goods, the three poured the contents of their revolvers at each other. The policemen found five empty chambers in the bandit's gun and three marks on his body where their shots had found the target. As the man dropped he fell across the pair of shoes he had stolen, dying with the purloined goods in his hand.

