

**“My God, you’re Dillinger!”**

*“.....a classic auto chase across half of Chicago with Dillinger gunning his Terraplane between two converging trolley cars at one point.”*

*“He was a cocky man, sure of himself, an admirer of Douglas Fairbanks and Clark Gable. Humphrey Bogart played him later under many different names.”*

*“He robbed with imagination and flair, his hairbreadth escapes were daring and colourful. . .”*

*“Dillinger was not homosexual, just over-sexed... when he couldn’t get women Dillinger sought relief with men.”*

*“Honey, this is a holdup”, Dillinger told teller Margaret Good. And using the ledge of her cage as a step, he vaulted smoothly over the six foot barrier.”*

*“The bullets rattled off Dillinger’s bulletproof vest.”*

# EAT MY DUST

*the story of John Dillinger*

Four bullets had struck Dillinger, one in the back of the neck, virtually at pointblank range. He had been driven forward and down, landing on his face in the alleyway, his own gun still uncleared. Purvis leaned over him and spoke. There was no answer.

Anna Sage and Polly Mamilton hurried away. Under the marquee lights the older woman's orange skirt looked red-blood red.

The next day an anonymous scribbler added the finishing touches to the legend—four lines scrawled in chalk on the brick wall of the alleyway where Dillinger had fallen:

“Stranger, stop and wish me well,  
Just say a prayer for my soul in Hell.  
I was a good fellow, most people said,  
Betrayed by a woman all dressed in red.”

Dillinger was as big a hit in death as in life. A pushing, shoving mob dipped handkerchiefs in his blood, and later at the morgue thousands streamed by his body, continuing “on through the night,” according to the Associated Press, “in a seemingly never-ending line.”

The funeral, a few days later in Mooresville, was another madhouse scene with thousands trampling down flower beds in an effort to reach his coffin. “Instead of keeping the usual mourners’ pace on the way to the hearse,” News-week reported, “(the pallbearers) had to travel at a dogtrot, using one arm for carrying and one for fighting off spectators.”

The Justice Department was pleased at the outcome of the “greatest manhunt since Pershing chased Pancho Villa.” Said Attorney General Cummings: ‘Organized society has triumphed, as it must over one who would defy its laws.’

The FBI didn't totally escape criticism for its method of dispatching Dillinger, however. One Virginia newspaper assailed the killing as the work of cowards. “Any brave man,” the editorial said, “would have walked down the aisle and arrested Dillinger ... why were there so many cowards afraid of this one man?”

Actually, when the Justice Department embarked on its “shoot to kill” campaign, Dillinger had committed no offense under Federal law except to drive a stolen car across a state line, for which, as Turner Catledge of The New York Times observed acidly, “the offender is seldom shot on the spot.”

Even such mild criticism made J. Edgar Hoover bristle. “He was just a yellow rat that the country may consider itself fortunate to be rid of,” he said of Dillinger.

He carried a heater and he pointed it at people during holdups. But he used it as a persuader rather than a weapon. Shooting was a last resort with him. If there was any other way out of a “pickle,” he went for it. His driving skill got him out of plenty of situations that Clyde Barrow would have solved with lead. He also used his gun butt and his fists. And sometimes talked his way out of tight spots. And when everything else failed, he ran. He used his gun only when cornered. And even then he didn't shoot to kill. Of the eleven killings that are usually linked with his name, only one can personally be laid at his doorstep—and then there are some who claim that he wasn't responsible for that one either. All this is pretty hard to square with the mythical picture of Dillinger, submachine-gun in hand, mowing down scores of cops as he rasps, “Come an' get me, you dumb flatfoots.”

That was a picture created by the lawmen who chased Dillinger. An Indiana policeman named Matt Leach started it, the press took it up, and the FBI completed it. Dillinger wasn't any “Prince of Desperadoes,” and he certainly wasn't what the FBI said he was: “the most brazen killer this nation has ever known.”

What Dillinger was was a tough, competent heist man of the old school. He robbed with imagination and flair. His hairbreadth escapes were daring and colorful. So was he, personally. He was a cocky man, sure of himself, an admirer of Douglas Fairbanks and Clark Gable. He thought of himself as a kind of latter day Jesse James and enjoyed living up to the role that law men had created for him. He had an innate sense of theater and a tough, rather sardonic view of things. Humphrey Bogart played him later under many different names: Duke Mantee in *The Petrified Forest*, Roy Earle in *High Sierra*. The two men even resembled each other physically. It would be interesting to know how much of Bogart's character was really Dillinger. Dillinger was out of step with most of his lead spewing contemporaries. He would of been more at home with the Harvey Bailey-Eddie Bentz crowd—those cool, calm artisans of bank robbery who rarely spilled blood. The Denver Mint caper, the \$1 million Lincoln National Bank and Trust Company kick-in, those were jobs that would have tickled him. It was Dillinger's misfortune to come along late in the game, however after Bailey and Bentz had been locked up, and after banks had equipped themselves with alarms and safety devices, and after the big city police forces had been beefed up to meet the Depression crime wave. It was his misfortune, too, to work with some of the most violent men of the whole Public Enemy Era. The Dillinger manhunt was the biggest, the most famous this country has ever experienced. Dillinger himself was the most publicized criminal in the nation's history, bar none. Even today he remains the FBI's most famous single case. A white plaster facsimile of his death mask hangs outside J. Edgar Hoover's office in Washington, staring empty eyed at all who enter, the “prize scalp,” as one critic has put it, in the Director's collection. Because Dillinger is so central to the FBI's myth of infallibility, he has himself been a target of the Bureau's critics. Some of them have pictured him as a small

It worked out to a measly \$4,800 each. But he was right. It was Dillinger's last job.

He returned to Chicago, hungry-as always-for a woman. A cabdriver steered him to the home of Mrs. Anna Sage. Mrs. Sage sent for Polly Hamilton Keele, a shapely twenty-six-year-old redhead, "I was crazy about him," Polly said later. "He had a marvelous personality. He really couldn't have been kind and good and do the things he did, but he was kind and good to me."

Polly eventually moved into the Sage apartment. So did Dillinger. They were with each other almost constantly during the last two weeks of his life. Dillinger called himself John Lawrence and posed as a clerical worker at the Chicago Board of Trade. Both women knew his real identity, though; they had guessed it almost immediately. "I don't think he was careless," Polly said later. "He just made one mistake. He trusted her" (meaning Anna Sage).

Anna had problems. Twice she had been arrested and convicted for running disorderly houses in Gary and East Chicago, Indiana. Twice she had been pardoned by the governor. Then had come a third arrest-and Anna, who was born in Rumania, now faced deportation by the Federal government. Anna didn't want to go back, but she had no bargaining power-none, that is, until the most wanted man in America dropped into her lap.

She went to see an old friend in East Chicago, Police Sergeant Martin Zarkovich, and presented her proposition: she would turn Dillinger over to the law in return for the \$10,000 reward and a promise that she wouldn't be deported. Zarkovich took her proposition to his superior, Captain Timothy O'Neill, and O'Neill telephoned Melvin Purvis,

Hoover had sent Samuel N. Cowley from Washington to take supreme command of the FBI's special Dillinger squad, but Purvis still ran the Chicago office. Purvis conferred with Cowley and then, with Hoover's approval, met with Anna Sage. Deportations, he explained to her, were handled by the Labor Department, not the Justice Department, but if she helped, he would do all he could to help her.

Anna Sage agreed, and now events began to move swiftly. She told Purvis that she often accompanied Polly Hamilton and Dillinger to neighborhood movie houses. They were going, she thought, the next night. She would wear an orange skirt so that they could see her in the crowd.

Cowley summoned all the FBI agents in the Chicago area to a meeting and briefed them on the trap,

The night of July 22 was suffocatingly hot. The mercury had climbed to 108 degrees at the municipal airport that day and no relief was in sight.

He hated Navy life, went AWOL, and was thrown in the brig. It was his first taste of prison: ten days' solitary on bread and water with full ration every third day. Dillinger jumped ship and came home. He got married. At the same time he fell in with Ed Singleton, an older man with a criminal record. Needing money, he agreed to join Singleton in the stickup of a neighborhood grocer.

The two men were caught. Dillinger's father advised his son to plead guilty. He did-and received a sentence of 1020 years on charges of conspiracy to commit a felony and assault with intent to rob. Singleton, whose idea the robbery had been, got off with only a two-year sentence. As Indiana Governor Paul V McNutt wrote years later: "There is no question whatever that this obvious injustice had much to do with the bitterness which Dillinger developed... A mistake by a court probably made Dillinger what he was."

He was an obstreperous prisoner at the Pendleton Reformatory and tried repeatedly to escape. Caught each time, he had additional months added to his sentence. In 1929 his wife was granted a divorce. This increased his bitterness. He requested a transfer to the state penitentiary at Michigan City, an odd sort of request. The reason he gave was that he wanted to play on their baseball team.

The request was granted. But Dillinger played no ball at the Big House. He was too busy getting an education-in crime.

His job at the pen was working a "tomcat" in the prison shirt factory. The men who worked alongside him were a type penologists have since labeled "Elders of the Tribe" hardened repeaters who form the aristocracy of a prison's population. They are the custodians of underworld culture, heroes to the young apprentices, the teachers who shape their minds.

Two of the most powerful influences on Dillinger at Michigan City were John ("Three-Finger Jack") Hamilton, a stocky, muscular con with an irregular scar running down his forehead, and Charles Makley, a veteran Ohio bank bandit serving a 1020 set for armed robbery.

"Fat Charlie" shared the same cell with Dillinger for some time. His influence on the younger man was incalculable. A "prison library intellectual," he resembled Major Hoople of the comic strips, and he strengthened that impression with his "gadzoos, kaf, kaf" style of delivery. But his easygoing exterior masked a cold, ruthless personality. The prison classification director described him as "dangerous, with strong antisocial tendencies."

The course he taught was the standard prison one. First lesson: "If you're not a bull, then you'd better be a fox. Wise up, Johnnie. This world is a joint where the bulls and the foxes live well and the lambs wind up head-down from the hook." And Lesson No. 2: "Take any official, any policeman, anybody else that's doing everything in the book and getting by with it, then

It was—in Attorney General Homer Cummings’s words—a rather depressing episode.

The FBI was attacked on all sides. Once again there were rumors that Hoover would be replaced. A petition circulated in Mercer County demanded Melvin Purvis’s head and protested the “irresponsible conduct of federal operatives” for having raided the lodge in such a stupid manner as to bring about the deaths of two men and injury to four others—none of them criminals.

The only reply from the Justice Department was an “admission” on April 23 that Federal agents would probably kill Dillinger on sight rather than risk another gun battle by trying to take him alive.

Dillinger was hiding in Chicago with members of the Barker-Karpis gang when he heard the execution order passed. He had tried to get Doc Moran, the Barkers’ sawbones, to help Hamilton but had been turned down flat. Gangrene set in, and on April 29 Hamilton died in Volney Davis’s apartment in nearby Aurora. He was buried in a gravel pit outside town. As Dock Barker and the others watched, Dillinger poured lye on Hamilton’s face and hands to prevent identification. “I hate to do this, Red,” he said “but I know you’d do the same to me.”

The Justice Department now declared Dillinger “Public Enemy Number One.”

Ironically, he had never been more popular with the public. In Mooresville a petition was gotten up urging Governor McNutt to issue Dillinger a pardon if he surrendered and pledged to remain within the law. The petition cited a precedent—the pardon of Frank James in Missouri—and declared that Dillinger “has never manifested a vicious, revengeful, or bloodthirsty disposition, there being considerable doubt as to whether he ever committed a murder.” It added that “many of the financial institutions of the State have just as criminally robbed our citizens without any effort being made to punish the perpetrators.”

There’s evidence that Dillinger was so heartened by this petition that he tried to arrange a “truce” with Indiana authorities through his lawyer. There was talk of a “peaceful surrender” and of “amnesty.” The lawyer said later that pressure from the Justice Department torpedoed the negotiations in their opening stages.

The Department was gravely concerned at the rising tide of Dillinger’s popularity. They appealed to President Roosevelt, and he took to the air shortly after this to ask the public’s cooperation in the war against crime. “Law enforcement and gangster extermination,” said FDR, “cannot be made completely effective while a substantial part of the public looks with tolerance upon known criminals, or applauds efforts to romanticize crime.”

Pierpont and Van Meter hated each other. Rivalry had something to do with it, of course. They were the two leading contenders for the “toughest-con-in-stir” award. But their personalities dashed, too. They were opposite types. Pierpont believed in open, naked aggression; Van Meter preferred the sly dig, the innuendo. Each man thought the other a fool. The only friend they had in common was Dillinger, who thought Homer was very funny and who respected Pierpont’s criminal record—an extensive one that already included several bank robberies.

Sometime around 1931 Van Meter decided to get a parole. He had a sharp mind. He knew how to make the system work for himself, and he knew the poses he would have to adopt in order to exploit that system. He spent every available hour in the prison library. He volunteered for extra duties. He stopped ridiculing the guards. And he wrote letters to the parole board, each one a masterpiece. The one that finally got him sprung concluded: “My plea is—be big enough to cast aside the musty archives dealing with the follies of an unthinking boy before the needs of a dean matured man.... This is the age of the new deal. I place my destiny in your hands. You can restore a sterling citizen and a sound matured man to freedom.”

The parole board rose to the occasion. Van Meter was restored to freedom on May 19, 1933. Dillinger followed him out three days later. The two men had talked frequently in the past few months. Homer had promised to show Dillinger how to make “the big money” on the outside. Pierpont had talked to Dillinger, too, and had given him a list of banks to rob plus the names and addresses of some reliable accomplices. The understanding was that Dillinger would put some of the money to work on a crash-out by buying guns, arranging hideouts, and bribing guards.

Dillinger went home to Mooresville first to see his family. They barely recognized him. Prison had changed everything about him, even his face. It was a stranger’s face, smooth and hard, trained to indicate nothing to a prison guard, neither resistance nor slavishness. He said little to them and when he joked at all, he had a “twisted smile.”

A few days later he left for Indianapolis, where he looked up some of Pierpont’s contacts. The first jobs he worked with them were minor—supermarkets, sandwich shops, gas stations. There were lots of things he still had to get used to, The new cars, for instance. And the feel of a gun in his hand.

Finally he felt ready for Pierpont’s list. But when he checked it out, he found half the targets boarded up, gone out of business. It was 1933, and the Depression had hit bottom. There were bread-lines everywhere, Hoovervilles, untenanted shops, and dosed-down banks.

He hit the targets that were still open, then swung over to Ohio and raided a bank fingered by Homer Van Meter—the New Carlisle National. The bookkeeper was so unnerved by the sight of the three men, their faces

At Rhinelander the two forces borrowed five automobiles and set out along the rutted, back-country roads. They had no local lawmen with them and therefore had only the haziest notion of where they were going.

The FBI men reached the lodge around seven. The attack plan called for five agents to dose in from the left, five from the right. This left only the rear of the lodge uncovered, but since the building was on a lake and there were no boats, the agents didn't worry about that.

Local lawmen could have told them that there was a steep bank along the lake shore that would effectively mask the gang's flight around the ends of the FBI pincers. They could also have warned them that there was a deep ditch along the left side of the lodge and a barbed wire fence along the right, and that the lodge was guarded by a couple of husky watchdogs.

As the FBI men approached, the dogs began to bark furiously. With all chance of surprise gone, the agents sprinted toward their assigned stations on the wings of the lodge. Those on the left plunged into the ditch. Those on the right became entangled in the barbed wire fence. As they were struggling to extricate themselves the front door of the lodge opened, and three men came out. They were the gas station operator and two CCC men on their way home. Two bartenders also stopped outside to see why the dogs were barking.

Seeing five men emerging from the lodge together, the FBI agents concluded that they were the Dillinger gang and called on them to halt.

Upstairs the gang heard shooting and left immediately by the rear windows.

Purvis's account of the raid would later tell of heavy fire from within the lodge, fire that continued for some time. According to Wanatka, that was unadulterated poppycock. He was in the bar when the shooting began and heard the gang's footsteps overhead. "They cleared out right away," he said. "They didn't waste any time shooting back,"

Wanatka rushed to the cellar with his two bartenders to escape the murderous FBI fusillade that now came pouring into the lodge itself. He was joined there by Helen Gillis, Marie Conforti, and Jean Delaney Crompton.

The male members of the gang, meanwhile, went sliding down the steep bank to the lake's edge and slipped off into the night.

Tommy Carroll walked from Little Bohemia to Kuhnert's Northern Lights resort in Manitowish Waters. He stole a Packard from the front yard there and drove to St. Paul.

Dillinger, Hamilton, and Van Meter walked through the woods, circling the attacking forces, then crossed the road to a resort run by E. J. Mitch-

The beginnings were small-limited to the Munde area, where Dillinger appeared in the local headlines as "Desperate Dan, the Bandit Man." But bigger things were on the way.

One was a press agent's dream. Dillinger and Van Meter cooked it up between them that summer. It was based on an original idea by John Hamilton and it featured three gangs operating separately in Indiana, Ohio, and Kentucky under a centralized command based in East Chicago.

A tristate network of parolees were ready to shield them, act as fences, use their homes as drops, refueling stations, and hideouts. The three gangs operated along this network like trains shuttling between hideouts, robbing banks along the way, working in small, separate bands, converging only when a job needed a large force or when an expected dash with police called for more strength. It was John Hamilton's dream of a "super gang" come to life, and, if all went well, he, Pierpont, and Makley would soon be joining it.

Between bank jobs Dillinger and Van Meter drove the back-country roads of northern Indiana, mapping out an isolated route from the pen to a hideout in Indianapolis. They made a 14 page "crawl" of the route, noting down every curve, bump, and landmark along its 155-mile length. It was timed to the second and so detailed that it even included such night-driving details as reminders to douse the car's headlights 800 yards before coming to main highways.

Before the crash-out itself could be rigged, however, money would be needed for guns, bribes, and additional hideouts. Lots of money, So Dillinger looked around, searching for a nice, fat target.

On the morning of September 6 the assistant manager of the State Bank of Massachusetts Avenue in Indianapolis was talking on the telephone when he heard someone say quietly, "This is a stickup." He glanced up to see John Dillinger sitting cross-legged on the seven-foot high barrier. A straw hat was tilted cockily on his head. An automatic was pointed at him. "Hang up," said the outlaw, "and raise your hands."

The assistant manager did just that, Dillinger leaped down and went swiftly from cage to cage, sweeping money-including \$500 in half dollars into a white sack while the second man, a handkerchief over his face, covered the staff and the customers with a machine gun in the lobby.

When Dillinger was finished, the two men backed out and got into a waiting car. It roared away. The story about Dillinger pausing in the doorway to shout, "Tell the home folks little Johnnie Dillinger staged this," is just that—a story. It was a Matt Leach invention. Another brick added to the growing Dillinger legend,

lawn. John was as relaxed as anyone could be. He never seemed concerned except when the airplane pulled over. When a car came into the driveway, he grabbed a gun off the bed and said, "You get in back of the house. I'll take care of this." But it backed out and went away."

Mary Hancock, his favorite niece, recalled walking through the woods with him that afternoon. "We walked hand in hand for a long time, a couple of miles along the lane, not a soul but he and I. He said, "You believe what's in the papers if you want to, but take it from me, I haven't killed anyone and I never will." He said, "Take about half of it with a grain of salt, believe half of what's left, and you've got it made."

He and Billie returned to Chicago that night. The following day he had an appointment in a tavern at 416 North State Street. When he went to keep it, he found out how really extensive Eddie Green's ramblings had been. He sent Billie in ahead to look things over, and she never Game back out. A squad of Feds led by Melvin Purvis had grabbed her.

Dillinger got out of town-fast. He went to Fort Wayne, where he hid out with Homer Van Meter. Both men were now low on money, but before they could hit a bank, they had to build up their arsenal once again.

Shortly after midnight on April 13 Dillinger and Van Meter invaded the Warsaw, Indiana, police station. They disarmed the lone duty officer and departed with three bulletproof vests and several submachine guns.

By dawn 5,000 lawmen were combing the northeast corner of the state. All highways had been sealed off. That day the Associated Press counted two hundred separate Dillinger "sightings" in half a dozen states.

Dillinger was on everybody's mind, everybody's lips. There was even a Dillinger fan club now, its members busy writing poems celebrating his deeds. And the hucksters were moving in on the legend, too. A Pennsylvania restaurant-owner had erected a billboard that read: HELLO, DILLINGER YOU'LL LIKE LEE HOFFMAN'S FOOD! LEE HOFFMAN'S TAVERN, LORETTO, PA.

Dillinger was far away, though, in the north woods of Wisconsin.

The gang had assembled at the Little Bohemia Lodge, thirteen miles south of Mercer, to discuss upcoming jobs.

Baby Face Nelson had returned from the West Coast, bringing his wife with him. Homer Van Meter was there with Marie Conforti. Hamilton had come from Sault Ste. Marie with Makley's old flame, Pat Cherrington. Tommy Carroll had driven in from his tourist cabin hideout near Cedar Rapids, Iowa. He had Jean Delaney Crompton with him.

On September 11 Dillinger visited Mary Kinder in Indianapolis. Mary, a tiny, twenty-two-year-old redhead, was an old friend of Pierpont's. She agreed to help with the crash-out if her brother, Earl Northern, was added to the list of escapees. Dillinger said he would arrange it, and Mary agreed to find a hideout for the boys.

A week later Dillinger visited her again and gave her \$150 saying that the group would arrive on September 26. Then he drove to Chicago, bought four guns, and turned them over to another conspirator. This man went to a factory in Indianapolis where he bribed an employee to open a box of thread addressed to the prison shirt shop. The two men hid the guns under the thread, resealed the box, and marked a big X on it in stencil ink.

The trusty in charge of incoming goods at the prison had agreed to get the weapons to the gang if he and three of his buddies were included in the crash-out group. This added four lifers to the party: Walter Detrich, serving it for bank robbery Joe Fox for the same, James Clark for automobile banditry, and Joe Burns for murder.

Dillinger's part was finished. He headed to Dayton for a little relaxation with his "sweetie pie," Mary Jenkins Longnaker. Ohio authorities had learned of his frequent visits from a stole, however, and had placed Mary's West First Street rooming house under 24-hour observation. Within minutes of Dillinger's arrival on the morning of September 22, a force of thirty cops had the place surrounded.

Four detectives, carrying rifles and submachine guns and wearing bullet-proof vests, moved cautiously up the stairs and kicked in the door. Dillinger was in bed. He just shrugged as the cops came pouring into the room. "I'd have been pretty stupid to go for my gun," he told reporters later.

On the afternoon of September 26 the escape party gathered in the basement of the shirt factory at Michigan City. There were ten cons in the group altogether. (Earl Northern wasn't among them. He was in the prison hospital, dying of tuberculosis.)

They subdued and gagged the shop foreman, then turned their guns on Superintendent G. H. Steven's and Day Captain Albert Evans. "We're going home," Pierpont snarled at Evans, "and you're leading us out. Try anything and you're dead. Get it, you big, brave man?"

Quickly they moved out, each con carrying a bundle of shirts to make the troop look like a routine work detail led by two officers. No one tumbled until the crash-out brigade readied the front gate-twin barred doors ten yards apart. There the shirt bundles dropped. "Open up," rasped Jack Hamilton. Guard Guy Burklow gaped at the automatics pointed at him and obeyed. The cons swarmed through, slugged Fred Wellnitz, the outer gate turnkey, and grabbed his keys.

The FBI had been on Dillinger's trail almost three weeks now, with nothing to show for it but bad press notices. As Will Rogers remarked acidly: "They had (Dillinger) surrounded in Chicago, but he robbed a bank in Sioux Falls that day. So they was right on his trail. Just three states behind."

By the end of March the Feds had the search area narrowed down to St. Paul. On March 30 the manager of the Lincoln Court Apartments phoned the U.S. Attorney's office. He had a suspicious tenant in Number 303—never went out, never let anyone in.

It was just one of many Dillinger reports. FBI agents R. L. Nalls and R. C. Coulter checked it out. They watched the building that night, then decided on a closer look the following morning. Together with city detective Henry Cummings they climbed the stairs to apartment 303 and knocked on the door.

Billie Frechette opened it a crack. "We're police," said Cummings.

"I'm not dressed," said Billie. She slammed the door and bolted it, and ran in to tell Dillinger.

"Keep your shirt on and get dressed," he said brusquely. Then, seeing that she was petrified, he added soothingly, "Never mind, never mind."

At that moment Homer Van Meter appeared at the head of the stairs. "Who are you?" demanded Coulter. "A soap salesman," said Homer, smiling. "Where are your samples?"

"In my car. Come down there and I'll prove my identity to you." Van Meter started down the stairs followed by the FBI agent. At a turn Homer suddenly bolted. When Coulter reached the ground floor, Van Meter's gun was out and blazing. He missed the FBI man but gained enough time to sprint out the rear door and leap onto a passing ash wagon. He pulled the surprised driver's cap off, put it on his own head, and went clip-clopping out of danger. When he left the wagon at Fourth and Pleasant, he was still wearing the cap.

Upstairs the gunfire flushed Dillinger. He came out with his submachine gun blazing, driving Nalls and Cummings around a corridor corner. Then, as Billie ran down the unguarded rear stairs and out the back way with a suitcase, Dillinger followed unhurriedly, covering their flight.

Cummings took careful aim and fired, wounding Dillinger in the leg. It didn't seem to bother him. He waited calmly, facing the building, as Billie frantically backed a big Hudson out of the garage. Then he got in, and they roared off.

Dayton authorities warned Sheriff Jess Sarber that Dillinger's friends would probably try and spring him and that he had better take some precautions. Sarber laughed, calling his new prisoner "just another punk."

At 6:20 P.M., October 12, Pierpont, Makley, and Clark entered the jail. "We're officers from Michigan City," Pierpont told the sheriff. "We want to see John Dillinger." "Let me see your credentials," said Sarber.

"Here are our credentials," said Pierpont, pulling a gun. Sarber lunged at it, and Pierpont shot him twice. The sheriff tried to rise, and Makley slugged him with the butt of his pistol. The sheriff died.

Dillinger, who had been playing cards with another prisoner, got up when he heard the shots and put on his hat and coat. Pierpont entered, tossed the keys to a deputy, who unlocked the cell, and Dillinger walked out.

The nation's most famous crime wave had begun.

Two days later the gang descended on the Auburn, Indiana, police station. They got a submachine gun, two steel vests, and 1,000 rounds of ammunition.

On October 20 the gang hit the City Hall in Peru, Indiana. This time the take was two machine guns, six bulletproof vests, two sawed-off shotguns, four .38-caliber police specials, two .30 .30 Winchester rifles, three police badges, and another 1,000 rounds of ammunition.

Officials got hysterical. Several prominent ones stated that the escapees had declared "open warfare" on the state. The Marion County sheriff predicted that the gang would try to break into the state pen to enlist an army of desperadoes. The Indianapolis Times sent a telegram to U.S. Attorney General Homer S. Cummings, asking for help, saying that the situation was too much for state authorities to handle.

Leach, meanwhile, continued to grind out Dillinger. His avowed purpose was to make Pierpont jealous, to stir up a battle for leadership that would destroy the gang.

In Chicago, where they were hiding out, the men laughed at his efforts. Pierpont was grateful to Dillinger for springing him and vice versa. There was no struggle for leadership. Decisions were reached democratically, with every man putting in his two bits and being listened to in respectful silence.

The gang's first order of business was money. They needed some. Pierpont and the others had hit a bank in Makley's home town, St. Mary's, Ohio, on October 6. They had withdrawn \$14,000, but they were heavy spenders and that money was already gone.

dough. Van Meter laughed sarcastically, and Nelson leaped toward his submachine gun. Dillinger quickly stepped between the two men, and they simmered down.

The next day Dillinger got still another taste of what he was in for. Nelson was driving him over to Van Meter's place when he ploughed into another car. Eddie Green, who was with them, told what happened. The driver of the other car, Theodore Kidder, a young salesman, climbed out of his machine and came over. "Are you blind?" he said angrily. "You had a stop sign"

Nelson whipped out his .45 and shot Kidder between the eyes. As they roared away, Dillinger said, "Did you have to do that?"

"Hell, yes!" squeaked Nelson. "He recognized you."

"Well, a citizen got your number back there," said Dillinger, looking out the rear window.

Nelson cursed wildly and almost lost control of the car a second time.

That night he sent John Paul Chase to dean out his old apartment, had the plates switched on the car and sent Helen to Bremerton, Washington, to stay with relatives. "I'm going to be busy as hell for the next few weeks," he told her.

The following day, March 6, the gang hit the Security National Bank and Trust Company in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Jack Hamilton was the wheelman. Tommy Carroll held down the front of the bank. Dillinger led the other three inside. Nelson triggered the job by shouting shrilly, "This is a holdup. Lay on the floor."

A clerk pushed a button and the burglar alarm on the side of the building began clanging. Dillinger, Van Meter, and Eddie Green ignored it as they scooped up bills from the cages. They worked quietly, methodically, Dillinger pausing occasionally to ask a teller, "is this all of it?"

Baby Face, meanwhile, was hopping around the lobby like Yosemite Sam. "I'm going to kill the man who hit the alarm!" he screamed over and over.

Dillinger and Van Meter finished off the cages and went to work on the vaults.

Suddenly Nelson spotted an off-duty policeman in the crowd outside. He hurdled a railing, jumped atop a desk, and began firing through the plate glass window. The policeman fell, four bullets in him. Nelson leaped up and down excitedly. "I got one of them!" he shouted gleefully. "I got one of them!"

It was a rather modest description of what was actually a classic auto chase across half of Chicago, with Dillinger gunning his Terraplane between two converging trolley cars at one point, and vanishing down a nearly invisible alleyway on a dead end street at another. "That bird can sure drive," said the man who did the chasing-age police driver, John Artery.

A few days later the gang hit the American Bank and Trust Company in Racine, Wisconsin. Things didn't go as well as at Greencastle. A teller kicked an alarm. Cops came, and a crowd gathered outside. The money gatherers Dillinger, Pierpont, and a Lebanon, Indiana, gunman named Leslie Homer—neither bolted nor panicked. They kept right on stuffing the loot into bags.

When they had it all, they started out. Makley, the center fielder, and Russell Clark, holding down the door, herded the bank president and two women employees ahead of the group as shields.

There was some shooting anyway, and a policeman named Wilbur Hansen was wounded. The group headed around the corner to where John Hamilton sat waiting in the getaway car. They got in and drove slowly out of town with the hostages on the running boards. The take was disappointing: \$27,789 plus securities. Dillinger was philosophical about it, though. "You can't strike twelve every time" he observed.

It was around this time that Ed Shouse left the gang—by invitation. Shouse had made a couple of serious mistakes. He had made a play for Billie Frechette and he had tried to talk Hamilton into pulling some private jobs on the side. "There's your money," Dillinger told him, throwing down a roll of bills. "Now get your ass out."

Shouse left, taking Russell Clark's car with him.

Now it was Hamilton's turn to pull a boner. On December 14 he took his car to a North Side repair shop to have a fender straightened. The repairmen recognized him and called the police. Sergeant William T. Shanley and two patrolmen staked the place out. Hamilton returned that night. Elaine Sullivan Dent Burton DeKant was with him. Shanley braced them. Hamilton didn't fool around. He drew fast, shot Shanley dead and bolted. Mrs. Dent Sullivan, etc., was caught. She was all outraged innocence.

"He certainly deceived me," she told police. "I thought he was a rich man's son. Why I never heard him say 'damn.' And dean! He'd take two baths a day."

Shanley's killing caused a big flare-up. The "Dillinger Squad's" new instructions were "shoot to kill shoot first." Captain Stege said: "We'll either drive the Dillinger mob out of town or bury them. We'd prefer the latter."

Hoover immediately spoke out against “sob sisters” and “sentimental yammerheads.” Dillinger was a “craven beast,” a “public rat,” and those who aided him “vermin,” “vultures,” and “scum from the boiling pot of the underworld.”

Although Hoover’s bestiary didn’t really fit Dillinger, it did the man with whom he was about to join forces.

Baby Face Nelson was something out of a bad dream. Compared to him, Clyde Barrow was a snowbank. Barrow killed to avoid capture, but Baby Face killed for the sheer hell of it.

He was the most blood-smeared figure-of the Public Enemy Era, the only one about whom nothing decent can really be said. The underworld itself spoke of him in Hoover-like terms: he was a “bedbug,” a “crazy cockroach,” a “poisonous toad.” The consensus was: “Don’t prod that squirt-he’s poison.”

Nelson’s real name was Lester Gillis, and Chicago made him. He was the only major Depression bandit who was city born and bred, and for that matter, the underworld never considered him a professional thief, anyway. He was a gangland torpedo who had fallen on hard times, a refugee from organized crime.

Gillis was a stocky five foot five, a strutting little tough with a face shadowed by a cap, a lit cigarette usually dangling from his lip. He had a squeaky voice and, beneath the cap, a peach-smooth angelic face-hence the famous nickname.

It was worth a man’s life to call him it, though. Typically enough, Gillis wanted to be known as “Big George” Nelson. He would answer to plain George, though, and even to Jimmy.

He was born near the Chicago Stockyards in 1908, the son of a tanner. He didn’t have to go to jail to learn the facts of life. They were right there, openly on display in the seamy South Side neighborhood where he was raised. He got his start heisting bookie joints and brothels, then selling protection to the places he had knocked off. Later he became a Capone gunman.

A spark of decency, of human emotion, entered his life with Helen Wawzynak. She worked in the neighborhood Woolworth’s. He called her his “Million Dollar Beauty in the Five and Ten Cent Store.” In 1928 he married her. She bore him a son, He didn’t really deserve her, but in his own queer way he actually cared for his sickly, sad-faced child bride. There were other women, of course, but Helen always forgave him. She knew that sex, and plenty of it, was the only foolproof prescription for his vicious temper.

In 1931 the cops nabbed Nelson for a jewelry heist, and the mob, who had warned him about his extracurricular activities, refused to spring him. He

“There’s some cops outside,” he called to Hamilton. “But don’t hurry. Get all that dough.”

When the two were ready to leave, they took a couple of bank officials along as hostages. As they emerged from the bank, one of the hostages leaped aside, giving Patrolman William Patrick O’Malley a dear shot at the man later identified as Dillinger. He fired. The bullets rattled off Dillinger’s bulletproof vest. Dillinger pushed the other hostage aside and fired a short burst at O’Malley’s legs, O’Malley fell-into the line of fire. A bullet tore through his heart, killing him instantly.

With the hostages out of the way, the other officers opened fire. One slug ripped through a weak spot in Hamilton’s vest. He fell. Dillinger turned around and came back for him. He helped him to his feet, picked up the money bag with his other hand, and the two men ran toward a car parked in the middle of Chicago Avenue. They climbed into it and managed to get it started despite bullets slamming into them from three directions. The car roared away.

Dillinger had killed his first man.

If he actually was the second bandit.

Dillinger always maintained that he wasn’t. “They can’t hold me for that,” he told reporters later. “When that job was pulled, I was in Florida. I never had anything to do with that East Chicago stickup.”

He told his family the same thing. Today, thirty-five years later, Mary Kinder still swears that Dillinger heard the news of the holdup over the radio in Daytona Beach. And Mrs. Emmett Hancock, Dillinger’s sister, maintains just as firmly that she was once told by an FBI man that her brother had never killed anyone.

Against this, we have the sworn statements of police officers and bank officials in East Chicago, plus the fact that some cash from the robbery was later found in Dillinger’s possession.

On January 17 Dillinger and Billie Frechette showed up at his father’s Mooresville farm. John said that he had just returned from Florida and that they were headed west. They visited with friends and neighbors, and Dillinger openly walked the streets of Mooresville, as was his custom, greeting the townspeople.

A few days later they left for Tucson, Arizona, where they were to rendezvous with the rest of the gang.

Makley and Clark had gone on ahead of the others. Without Pierpont or Dillinger to keep an eye on them, the two began to spend freely and drink too much.

“Right,” snapped Dillinger. “So do as I tell you.”

The car pulled out of the garage and headed north on Main Street. As they passed the First National and Commercial Banks,

Dillinger chuckled and said that he was tempted to stop and hold them up. “Then he began asking about highways,” Blunk recalled later. “He wanted to turn west on State Route 8, but I was past it, so we turned on the macadam road just north of the Pennsylvania Railroad tracks on the edge of town. Dillinger was as cool as could be. He hummed and whistled ‘The Last Roundup.’ As we were driving away from Crown Point he showed me a dummy gun and said, ‘You wouldn’t think a guy could make a break with a peashooter like this, would you? Then he laughed. I looked at it, but I couldn’t see much but the machine gun. Every time we hit a bump the barrel of the machine gun bumped me in the side.’”

Controversy still surrounds the wooden gun escape—as it does every other event in Dillinger’s career.

A Lake County grand jury decided that the outlaw’s only gun, at least when the break started, was a wooden one that he had fashioned from a washboard during his endless whittling sessions. Dillinger brought such a gun home to Mooresville in April, and was photographed holding it. It remained in his sister’s possession until 1959, when a souvenir hunter walked off with it. “Johnnie wouldn’t have been apt to go to all the trouble of making a wooden gun for our benefit,” she told reporters later.

The Justice Department thought otherwise. After an independent investigation they announced that Dillinger’s lawyer, Louis Piquett, paid \$3,900 to “a small town Indiana police official and a Crown Point man” and that a real gun was sneaked to Dillinger by Evelyn Frechette, who also made the final arrangements for the delivery and a hideout.

A third investigation, made by the Hargrave Secret Service of Chicago, differed on the amount of money and to whom it was paid, but agreed that the gun was real.

Real or not, Dillinger was out and heading west in what must have been the most leisurely getaway of the whole Public Enemy Era. “Take your time,” he kept telling Blunk. “Thirty miles an hour is enough. There’s no hurry. What’s time to me?”

“We went on the Peotone road about two miles,” Ed Saager later remembered, and Dillinger said, “There ain’t no telephone along here. It’s a good place to let you guys out.” So we got out and he shook hands with us and he handed me four dollars for carfare. “I’d give you more,” he said “but I only got fifteen dollars. But I’ll remember you at Christmas.” Then Dillinger slipped behind the wheel and told Youngblood to lie down in the

Every state, county, and city wanted Dillinger for itself, but it was Lake County, Indiana, that finally got him. And they did it by practically kidnaping him out from under the other lawmen’s noses.

Dillinger braced his feet against the bars of his cell and struggled against the combined efforts of five East Chicago policemen.

“Where’s my mouthpiece?” he shouted. “He told me this was illegal! They can’t take me East without a hearing!”

They did, though. They flew him by charter plane to Douglas, Arizona, and from there by American Airways. The plane touched down at Fort Worth, Dallas, Little Rock, and Memphis, and at each airfield there were large crowds waiting to catch a glimpse of the country’s most famous outlaw.

Pandemonium reigned at Chicago’s Midway Airport as he stepped from the plane, Sixty policemen tried to hold back the surging crowds. Dillinger blinked as a host of photographers set off flash powder. Thirty-two Chicago cops wearing bulletproof vests and carrying rifles and machine guns dosed around him and rushed him through the crowd toward an unmarked sedan.

It was part of a thirteen-car cavalcade that would take him to Crown Point, Indiana, where he was to be held for the murder of Patrolman O’Malley. In addition to the Chicago police, there were twenty-nine heavily armed Indiana troopers in the escort party

The motorcade pulled away. Lieutenant Frank Reynolds sat beside Dillinger, a submachine gun pointed at his heart throughout the trip. His orders were to kill the outlaw at the first sign of a rescue attempt.

There wasn’t any, though. The small army readied the Lake County Jail in Crown Point without incident,

It was the airport scene all over again, with crowds pressing against the police barriers and reporters running alongside Dillinger as he was rushed past them. One of them pointed at the gangster’s bare head and asked him if he was “going collegiate.”

“Hell, no,” said Dillinger, grinning. “Somebody swiped my hat in Tucson, just as they did my money.”

Dillinger was taken into the sheriff’s office. It was packed solid with reporters and photographers, all vying for his attention. Someone asked him what he thought of President Roosevelt. Dillinger said, “You can say that I’m for him all the way, and for the NRA—particularly the banks.”

There was a roar of laughter. Then, as powerful lights flashed on, the newsreel cameramen began to film the impromptu press conference. Dillinger

## INTRO

The following text is taken from a book published in 1969 called 'Pretty Boy, Baby Face I Love You' by Lew Louderback. The book covers the lives and careers of America's most notorious Depression gangsters. Chapter five of the book is titled 'John Dillinger the Fastest Mind and the Slowest Gun in the Midwest.' This was by far the most outstanding tale for several reasons; the legendary coolness, the heroic exploits, the sex and violence. Above all we chose Dillinger because he was the complete outlaw. The title that we've used 'Eat My Dust' refers to a comment that Dillinger once made in praise of the Ford Motor Company, their vehicles enabling him to get away from the law so easily and so often.

Dillinger was what many people at the time must have dreamt of being. Many more must have cheered him on. With America in the middle of the Depression, poverty had ground down countless ordinary folk. During these very poor times, Dillinger represented real life glamour, and for this reason he was supported and cheered on by the people as he and his gang ran rings around the cops and the Feds.

Sixty years on from the end of Dillinger's career, and 1994 still sees us living in the shite. This time round, though, we haven't got colourful characters like him to cheer on (Gazza just isn't the same is he?) While there are many accounts of the life and crimes of John Dillinger, this particular tale is more than sympathetic, emphasizing the lack of bloodshed on Dillinger's part (at least of 'real' people!) and his role as anchor within a volatile group of villains.

Eat My Dust is a riotous adventure which gave us a good laugh. It is also a statement as to the desperate and 'by any means necessary' lengths that the state will go to nail its most intelligent and persistent enemies.

At the end of the day Dillinger was a hero, and heroes are remembered for their stunts, bravery, glamour, sex appeal, and for the entertainment that they provide. He was the complete antihero, larger than life, possibly staging his own death. 1 The stuff that legends are made of! We hope that you enjoy reading this as much as we did.  
Thanks Jack O.

## John Dillinger

### *The Fastest Mind and the Slowest Gun in the Midwest*

If Dillinger actually did link up with Floyd to pull the South Bend job, as witnesses claim, it was against his better judgement. For John is on record as having said of the Oklahoma bandit: "That bird's too fast with the fireworks." But then that was Dillinger's opinion of practically every major figure of the Public Enemy Era. John was the slowest gun in the Midwest by choice.

And when an aide, in private, suggested that "rat" was perhaps an undignified word, Hoover demanded, "Well, wasn't he a rat? Wasn't he everything that was low and vile? Didn't he hide behind women? Didn't he shoot from ambush? Wasn't his whole career as filthy as that of any rat that ever lived?"

And then, almost as an afterthought, he added: "There are other rats still to be gotten, however."

## ALIVE AND WELL?

There the story ended, until Jay Robert Nash and Ron Offen published 'Dillinger: Dead or Alive' in 1971. On a visit to the Dillinger museum at Little Bohemia, Nash had been shown a letter sent to Emil Wanatka Jr on 30 July 1963 by a man purporting to be Dillinger. A photograph was enclosed but, unsurprisingly, no return address. The envelope was postmarked Hollywood and contained information about Dillinger that was not readily available at that time. It claimed that the man shot was indeed Jimmie Lawrence, who had been impersonating the outlaw.

Once Nash had tracked down the autopsy report, which had eluded researchers for 35 years, it confirmed that the dead man had brown eyes Dillinger's were blue-grey and had none of Dillinger's identifying scars, which could not have been removed by plastic surgery. The heart showed signs of childhood rheumatic fever, something from which the athletic Dillinger had never suffered.

Further investigation showed that there was some doubt over whether the surgically-altered fingerprints filed under Dillinger's name were actually taken from the body, and that the dead man's personal effects he wore prescription glasses when Dillinger had perfect eyesight could not have been Dillinger's.

His conclusion is that Dillinger and Louis Piquett both of whom had contacts with organized crime in Chicago had set up a minor hoodlum who looked like him, using Zarkovich and O'Neill to make sure that he did not live to deny he was Dillinger. Nash also believed that the gangster lost his taste for crime, and that Dillinger then went to Hollywood and settled down to live quietly under an assumed name.

## Out now:

Boris Dumont "Fighting to Win"  
Robert Taylor "Pissing In The Same Pot"

## Out soon:

The Best Of Anti ClockWise  
"Time Is The Enemy, Pleasure Is The Aim"

time gungel inflated out of all proportion by FBI publicity flacks, a mere hanger on of gangs actually lead by other men. This is as false a picture of him as the "mad dog" concept of the '30s.

The actual facts are these: There was no single "Dillinger gang." What there was was a constantly shifting coalition of forces as men were killed or arrested, or drifted away. It's true that Dillinger was not the leader of these forces. He was an equal partner in the sharing of loot and the making of decisions. There was no leader. Everyone had his say. What Dillinger was, however, was a unifying force. Many bandits who otherwise would not have worked together did so because they liked Dillinger and trusted him. In this sense there could have been no gang without him.

He was a lot like Butch Cassidy- that calm center of the stormy group known as the Wild Bunch. They too were a "coalition of forces" rather than a single gang. And it was Cassidy's judgment and calm good nature that held them together. Vicious gunmen like Kid Curry and the Sundance Kid would have been at each other's throats in a second if it hadn't been for Cassidy's presence.

That's how it was with Dillinger. He kept Homer Van Meter and Harry Pierpont from drilling each other on a number of occasions, and he even managed to get Homer and Baby Face Nelson to work together with some degree of efficiency.

In the end, however, Dillinger will be remembered because of something else. His own life. It's a classic of its kind-the dearest, best documented, step-by-step example that we have of how a society goes about creating its own worst enemies.

He was born in Indianapolis in 1903, the son of a grocery store owner. His mother died when he was three. The father remarried shortly after that, and in 1920 the family moved to a farm outside Mooresville, Indiana.

Young Dillinger (the family pronounced it with a hard g) was really an admirable sort of boy, normal in every way. As typically Hooder as Penrod or Sam. He hunted and Wed and was mighty with a rifle, as were all boys in the American heartland in this period. He was strong, popular, and interested in mechanical things; and he was a first-rate baseball player.

His first brush with the law, at age seventeen, was a typical Andy Hardy scrape. He was arrested for speeding and paid an eleven-dollar fine. His second brush, in 1923, was a little more serious. He was refused permission to marry his uncle's pretty stepdaughter (the uncle favored a well-to-do Greencastle boy). Young Dillinger brooded about it. He got drunk, stole a car, and went for a joyride. The owner refused to press charges, but Dillinger was embarrassed about the whole thing and ran away to join the Navy.

Crowds thronged the beaches along Lake Michigan. Taverns and air-cooled movie houses did a brisk business.

At 7 P.M. Anna Sage called the FBI office. "He's here," she whispered. "He's just come. We'll be leaving in a short while. I still don't know if we're going to the Biograph or Marbro." She hung up.

Purvis led a squad to the Biograph while Sergeant Zarkovich and four East Chicago officers accompanied other FBI agents to the Marbro. Cowley and the main squad waited at headquarters for the final word.

Dillinger selected the Biograph. Manhattan Melodrama was playing, and he was a Clark Gable fan. The FBI men and East Chicago police converged on the theater. Dillinger and the two women were already inside, watching the film. The Gmen decided they would get him on the way out.

Purvis took up his station in a doorway just to the left of the entrance. In his hand he held a cigar. As soon as he spotted Dillinger coming out, he was to light the cigar as a signal to the agents to dose in.

The crowd of strange men around the theater got the management nervous. They phoned Chicago police. Three plain clothes men were sent to investigate. They were quietly but firmly informed that the strangers were there on "government business."

The movie ended, and Dillinger and his two companions strolled out. They turned to the left-as expected. As they walked past Purvis he raised a match and lighted his cigar. The ring of FBI agents started to dose.

None of the government men spoke, but Dillinger suddenly sensed that something was wrong. Anna Sage had dropped behind the other two. Polly Hamilton, seeing men with guns, also broke away, Purvis later claimed that he shouted something like "Stick 'em up, Johnnie," and that Dillinger pulled his gun and darted down an alleyway.

Eyewitnesses tell a different story. Mrs. Esther Gousinow's account is typical. She was sitting in the window of her second story apartment at 2427 Lincoln Avenue. She had been watching the front of the Biograph for some time and had noticed a group of men waiting, as though for girl friends.

"Then I saw a young man walk out of the theater, accompanied by two girls," she told reporters later. "They were only about ten feet from the alley and I was looking right down at them when I saw three men walk up behind them. I heard two shots-there may have been more-and the man with the two girls fell to the sidewalk. I thought at first that it was a holdup and that the victim was killed. Then I thought of Dillinger, and because it appeared to me that the three men shot without giving a warning, I thought immediately that the victim was Dillinger."

take your square john working his heart and soul out, and if he misses three days at work, he's three months behind-it's so foolish."

John Hamilton's course was a postgraduate one. He was convinced that there was still time to organize one last unbeatable gang before the two-way radio and the airplane ended the old style of bank "kick-in" once and for all. J. Edgar Hoover would later credit him with originating the idea of an interstate network of parolees and hideouts, and would call him "Dillinger's tutor, the most cunning crook in the gang."

There was only one hitch to Hamilton's ambitious plans, He was serving twenty-five years for automobile banditry and wouldn't be up for parole until 1950. Dillinger's case, on the other hand, would be reviewed in 1933. Now if Johnnie kept his nose dean, he would be released on schedule and could get things organized on the outside . . . Dillinger had already decided to pursue a criminal life. As he told a reporter later: "They took away nine years of my life, and I decided to do some taking of my own when I got out. "The idea of working with Hamilton and Makley in a "super gang" impressed him. So he took the older man's advice and started doing "his own time."

He stayed away from two former Pendleton buddies in particular Harry Pierpont and Homer Van Meter. Prison officials had labeled the two "confirmed criminals of the most dangerous type." Their records were filled with disobedience, insolence, refusal to work. Most of their stay, both at the Reformatory and Michigan City, had been spent in "the hole." Their ability to endure hunger and to absorb beatings was so exceptional that they had won the awed respect of every con at the State Pen.

Pierpont was the more openly defiant of the two. He was a slender, good-looking man in his late twenties. His dear blue eyes, wavy chestnut hair, and fair complexion gave him the handsome collegiate look of an F. Scott Fitzgerald hero. He was a highly dangerous man, however, with an almost pathological hatred for authority of any kind. If he could get his hands on a prison guard, Pierpont would try to kill him. So most of the time he was kept in the segregation block on Red Card, the maximum security classification.

Van Meter, almost six feet tall but weighing only 125 pounds, had a sleepy-lidded down's face. He was the prison "comedian." His specialty was mimicking the guards. He spent months at a time in "the hole," where he received nightly beatings with a blackjack. He would come back with his teeth missing and his body covered with bruises-but still joking. Pendleton's Director of Research examined him and reported: "Moral sense is perverted and he has no intention of following anything but a life of crime.... He is a murderer at heart and if society is to be safeguarded, his type must be confined throughout their natural lives."

On May 26 the governors of five midwestern states each posted a \$1,000 reward "to provide additional incentive" for Dillinger's capture. Shortly after that the U.S. Attorney General announced that the Federal government was posting a reward of \$10 000 for Dillinger's capture or \$5,000 for information leading to it. That put a total of \$20,000 on his head. It ended any lingering hopes that he may have had of an amnesty.

On May 27 Dillinger asked his lawyer to find a doctor who would be willing to alter his face and mutilate his fingerprints. Piquett did so, and Dillinger paid this underworld surgeon \$5,000 to reshaped his cheeks and eyebrows and carve up his fingertips.

Homer Van Meter underwent a similar operation.

Neither man was pleased with the results. Dillinger complained of "looking like he'd been in a dogfight." But Piquett put a reassuring arm around his shoulder and said "John, you look wonderful. Nobody would recognize you," Dillinger was placated and paid the balance of what he owed,

The molls who had been captured at Little Bohemia were released, meanwhile. The Feds hoped that they would lead the law to their men. Marie Conforti went home to her parents, and Helen Gillis was smart enough to stay away from her husband. But Joan Delaney Crompton went rushing to Tommy Carroll's side at Waterloo.

"Spotted for a bullet the day he was born," early acquaintances had said of Tommy. He absorbed six of them altogether and still lingered on long enough to whisper to lawmen, "Take care of the little girl. She doesn't know what it's all about. I've got seven hundred dollars on me. Be sure she gets it." She didn't She got a year at the Federal Reformatory for Women in Alderson, West Virginia, instead.

Dillinger made plans to escape to Mexico. A Chicagoan was to drive him there for \$3,500 in advance and \$6,500 on crossing the border. He was to pose as a member of the man's family.

To raise the money Dillinger joined Van Meter, Baby Face Nelson, Pretty Boy Floyd and (some say) John Paul Chase in a raid on the Merchants National Bank in South Bend, Indiana.

It was Homer's baby. He had fingered it, cased it, and had worked out the details right down to the farmer's straw hats and overalls that the gang wore to distract attention from their faces. But Nelson made his presence felt, too. It was one of the wildest, bloodiest shoot'em-ups of '34- a vintage year for violent bank robberies.

The take was disappointing. Homer had figured it for \$20,000 a share. "This will be the last one, John," he'd told Dillinger as they had strapped on their bulletproof vests that morning. The take was nowhere near that.

masked by handkerchiefs, that he couldn't get the safe open. "Let me drill him," growled one of Dillinger's companions. "He's stalling."

Dillinger ignored him. "Take your time, Pop," he said soothingly.

While the bookkeeper was struggling with the safe, a woman bank clerk entered. Dillinger spread a banker's smock on the floor for her and apologized as he trussed up her hands and feet with wire. "I hope this doesn't hurt you," he said.

When the bookkeeper finally got the safe open, the trio removed \$10,600 from it and fled, leaving a trail of roofing nails along the highway to discourage pursuit.

During the next three weeks the gang looted some ten banks in five states. Then, in mid-July, the police trapped them in Muncie. Dillinger, who was driving, reversed gears and shot backward out of the trap—faster, according to one of the gang members, "than some people drive forward." He had apparently got the hang of the new '33 cars.

On July 17 Dillinger and another man strolled into the Daleville, Indiana, bank. "Honey, this is a holdup," Dillinger told teller Margaret Good. And using the ledge of her cage as a step, he vaulted smoothly over the six-foot barrier while his companion covered the customers in the lobby.

The take was small—\$3,500—but that Douglas Fairbanks-like leap over the barrier was to put Dillinger into the big time. It marked him as a bandit with a certain distinctive flair—and that was exactly the kind of bandit that Captain Matt Leach of the Indiana State Police was looking for at that moment.

Leach was a remarkable man—shrewd, self-educated, desperately ambitious. He had a carnival advance man's instinct for publicity. The press loved him. He could always be depended on for colorful angles, exciting copy. Fellow lawmen detested him. "To disclose confidential information to (Leach)," wrote one disillusioned detective, "is to jeopardize the success of any important investigation."

Leach's discovery of Dillinger was almost as great a moment in the history of press agency as of crime. Dr. Charles R. Bird, the Indiana State Police Surgeon who was present when it happened, remembered Leach's saying: "John Dillinger's methods are unique and something new in the criminal world. He stands out as a unique character. I am going to publicize him—watch him go. Then he added: "I'll wager you police stations themselves won't be safe in the future."

"Which proved to be true," Dr. Bird added, "as a prophecy."

ell. They knocked on the door, gained admittance and, after jerking the telephone connection loose, demanded a car. They got one, a Model A, plus the owner's services as a chauffeur. "For an outlaw," Mitchell later said, "that Dillinger was a gentleman. He made the others behave. No foul language and cool as a cucumber."

The same couldn't be said for Baby Face Nelson, who at that moment was hopping up and down like an enraged bantam rooster at Alvin Koerner's store, a few miles down the road from Little Bohemia. "I want a car and I want it fast!" he squeaked.

One of the men he was covering, George LaPorte, said that his Ford was standing outside. "Let's go, then," snarled Nelson, herding LaPorte and a couple of hostages out the door,

At that moment, two FBI men, Agents J. C. Newman and W. Carter Baum, came driving toward Koerner's store. With them was Carl Christensen, a constable from Spider Lake who had been called in to aid them. The three had heard there was "trouble at Koerner's place" and were on their way to investigate.

As they approached the store they saw the men getting into LaPorte's car. They pulled up beside it and said, "Halt! We're Federal officers."

Nelson came running around the front of the car, pulled the door open, and snarled, "I know you bastards are wearing bulletproof vests, so I'll give it to you high and low!" His gun, a .45 Colt converted into a machine gun with a long clip and a pistol grip, blazed away. Newman was hit over the eye by a bullet and rolled out. Baum and Christensen piled out the other side and started running. Baum was killed by a bullet through the throat. Christensen caught slugs in the lungs, liver, chest, hip, arm, and ankle but somehow survived. Baby Face looked around for new targets, saw none, jumped into the FBI Ford, and roared off.

Dillinger and his companions had dropped their chauffeur off near the Pixley power station, meanwhile, and were on their way to St. Paul.

Near Hastings, Minnesota, they ran into a roadblock. When they went roaring through it, the lawmen gave chase. During the gun battle that followed, a bullet fired by one of the deputies hit a fender brace and ricocheted into Jack Hamilton's back. It proved to be a mortal wound,

Back at Little Bohemia the FBI men now had the lodge surrounded. In Washington J. Edgar Hoover announced that Dillinger's end was imminent. When daylight came, the government agents moved cautiously toward the silent lodge. They tossed tear gas into the building. Out came the three women, coughing and crying, their hands in the air.

The bandits had struck the bank on the Real Silk Hosiery payroll day, so the take was lush: \$24,800—the second largest holdup in Indianapolis history,

Dillinger took his share of the loot and got down to work on the crash-out.

He was in communication with the boys on the inside through a former cellmate, James Jenkins. Jenkins, a Floyd County hillbilly serving life for murder, had a sister named Mary who lived in Dayton, Ohio, and Mary was Dillinger's present girlfriend. She visited her brother frequently and interspersed a lot of harmless chitchat about their Pentecostal Preacher Dad and the family dog with such terse instructions as "Give Blue Eye a C," and "Ray is in crock," and "Sit tight."

Dillinger wanted Jenkins included in the crash-out party. Pierpont, now in command on the inside, vetoed the idea. Jenkins was a smalltimer. There were also rumors that he had been Dillinger's "old lady."

To Pierpont, this indicated a weakness of character. It was like Homer Van Meter's propensity for "kidding around." There was no room for sex or levity in Pierpont's list of priorities. He was all business—and the business at hand was busting out, then hitting every bank in sight. The fun and games could come later. Maybe.

Pierpont was an ascetic at heart. He mistrusted anyone who suffered from weaknesses of the flesh. And that included Dillinger, as infirm a vessel of day as one could find. Dillinger was not homosexual, just over-sexed. When he had to go a day "without it," he once confided to a fellow prisoner, he felt as if there were an iron band around his head, "squeezing" his brains out. When he couldn't get women, Dillinger sought relief with men. When he could get women, that's all he went for—and no risk was too great if it ended in satisfaction. Pierpont had often prophesied that his strong sex drive would be his undoing. And he was right, of course. It would be.

Dillinger's demand that Jenkins be included in the escape party had nothing to do with sex, however. He had given his former cellmate his word and he intended to abide by it. As he told reporters later: "I stick to my friends, and they stick to me." He refused to rig the crash-out unless Jenkins was in on the play. So Pierpont was finally forced to give in.

The crash-out party continued to grow. Another friend of Pierpont's was now added to it—Russell Lee Clark, a big, powerful, sleepy-lidded Detroit bank bandit. Clark's prison record was a bad one. It included participation in the strike of '29, refusal to work, trying to foment a revolt, trying to escape, trying to kill his guards en route to prison.

Ed Shouse, a former dirt track racer with twenty-two years left of a robbery term, was also included. There was always room for a good wheelman, and Shouse could make a car do everything but sit up and beg.

The lodge's owner, Emil Wanatka, was suspicious. Late April was too early in the season for tourists. Snow was still heaped in the timberlands; the roads were rivers of mud. But the men were friendly and easygoing, and the women pitched in and helped Mrs. Wanatka with the food, so he kept his suspicions to himself.

That night, as he was playing poker with the men, the one called "Johnnie" leaned forward, and his coat opened. Wanatka saw two guns in shoulder holsters. He excused himself, went to the kitchen, and checked the pictures on the front page of the Chicago Tribune. The next morning he took "Johnnie" aside. "ou're John Dillinger," he said.

The man looked at him calmly and said, "You're not afraid, are you?"

"No. But everything I've got is tied up in this place. I don't want a shooting match."

"Emily" said Dillinger, "all we want is to eat and rest for a few days. We'll pay you well and get out. There won't be any trouble."

"From then on we got very friendly," Wanatka remembered later "He even tried to satisfy me by playing pinochle with me, and I cheated him every hand. It was very friendly."

But Wanatka decided to turn him in anyway. He thought he would be in more trouble with the authorities if he didn't than with the gang if he did.

On Sunday, April 22, Melvin Purvis's phone rang in Chicago. A man who identified himself as Mrs. Wanatka's brother-in-law said, "The man you want most is up here."

"You mean Dillinger?" snapped Purvis.

The brother-in-law, Henry Voss of Rhinelander, Wisconsin, said that's who he meant and he added that the gang was planning to leave that night, so the G-men better hurry.

A phone call to Wisconsin authorities would have expedited matters at this point, but Purvis was under strict instructions to bring no one else in on the Dillinger case. The "Nation's Number One Menace" was to be the FBI's baby and theirs alone.

Purvis phoned the Bureau's St. Paul office and told Assistant Director H. Hugh Clegg to round up all available men and to meet him in Rhinelander. Then he and eleven other Chicago-based agents took off for the wilds of Wisconsin in two chartered planes,

Four of the cons—Detrich, Fox, James Clark, and Burns—seized a sheriff who had just delivered a prisoner and fled in his car. These four never joined the Dillinger gang. All were subsequently recaptured.

The others—Hamilton, Makley, Pierpont, Russell Clark, Ed Shouse, and James Jenkins raced across the prison grounds and flagged down a passing car. Two elderly women were hustled out of it. The driver, also elderly, was kept at the wheel. But minutes later, with the needle still under fifty and the car weaving erratically, he was forced out, too, and Shouse, the expert wheelman, took over.

Motorist Glenn Green, who sighted the car a few minutes later, told police that it was doing at least ninety and taking curves on two wheels.

At 6: 45 that night millions of Americans heard H. V. Kaltenborn open his news broadcast with a tense, “Ladies and gentlemen, Indiana is in a virtual state of siege tonight.”

In dipped, measured tones, he quickly filled in the picture: “State and local police, sheriffs, deputized citizens, and National Guard units are manning every highway, bridge, and crossroads in the northern part of the state after ten dangerous, long-term convicts shot and dubbed their way out of the Indiana State Penitentiary at Michigan City this afternoon.”

In Indianapolis Matt Leach was busy linking Dillinger to the crash-out. He told reporters that Ohio authorities had refused to let him examine the documents found in Dillinger’s possession when he was arrested, and that these documents contained information connected with the break. It’s true, the documents did—but Ohio authorities claimed that Leach had seen them and had refused to act on the information.

Leach’s office, meanwhile, sprayed reporters with an unceasing rat-tat-tat of items about Dillinger. The press used them all. His Ohio mug shot—a classic of its kind—was reproduced over and over in newspapers throughout the nation. Dillinger was wearing a double-breasted pinstripe suit and a pearl-gray fedora in it, and the smile on his puss was the smug, sardonic one of a man who knew he was going to be sprung.

Between September 26 and 29 the escaped cons dodged around Indiana and Ohio, engaging in numerous shootouts with lawmen.

James Jenkins split from the main group on September 29 and made his way south toward his native hills. At Bean-blossom, in Brown County, a posse braced him, then blew his head off when he tried to draw.

On September 29 Dillinger pleaded guilty to a Bluffton, Ohio, bank robbery, and was transferred to the Allen County Jail in Lima, a very flimsy institution.

The press called it a “Justice Department fiasco.” It wasn’t a total loss, though. Agents found Eddie Green’s phone number among Dillinger’s papers. They raided his apartment. Eddie and his wife, Bess, weren’t home, but the place contained clothes and luggage. The Feds took up residence. Pretty soon two women appeared—Holden-Keating gang molls. They were all innocence. They had been told to take the clothes and luggage to their place. Somebody would pick them up that afternoon.

A small army of agents staked out the neighborhood around the molls’ apartment. The G-men were still smarting from the criticism they had received for letting Dillinger get away. Eddie Green wasn’t going to get away, no matter what happened.

He didn’t. When he stepped out of his car late that afternoon, they drilled him.

They told a coroner’s jury later that Green had been shot when he had ignored a shouted command to halt, and that he had reached for his hip as though to pull a gun. He had no gun, though. He was unarmed. Despite a lot of criticism, the coroner’s jury decided that the G-men had been justified in their actions. (The case continued to attract controversy for some time afterward. In 1936 U.S. Secret Service agents began an investigation of Green’s death, a move that was interpreted in the press as an effort to discredit the FBI men as trigger-happy amateurs. By 1936 the Bureau was sacrosanct, however, and nothing came of the investigation.)

Justified or not, Eddie Green’s shooting turned out to be the luckiest break the FBI had ever had.

Eddie took eight days to die. He had been shot through the head, and the bullet had short-circuited some wires in his brain. He couldn’t remember being shot. He thought he had been in an auto accident. He thought the nurse was his wife, and that the FBI men around his bed were fellow gangsters. He talked freely, babbling incoherently at times, lapsing into a coma at others, but giving the agents enough information to fill a book. Names, dates, places. The works.

It was the turning point in the Dillinger case.

John was already on the run. He had been recuperating from his leg wound in an underworld sanitarium in Minneapolis, but news of Green’s capture had sent him fleeing first to Chicago, then on to Mooresville with Billie Frechette.

There was a family reunion at the Dillinger farm on Sunday, April 8. “I made him coconut cream pie,” his sister remembered later, “fried chicken, everything that goes with it. All our family was there, There must have been a dozen of us. The FBI played all around the place, and a plane came down and nearly knocked a piece off the house while we were walking across the

So, on October 23, they raided the Central National Bank in Greencastle, Indiana.

Pierpont had sketched its interior, laid out the escape route. Makley had fingered it, knew it would be plump that Monday because merchants had done brisk business over the weekend with homecoming alumni of DePauw University. Hamilton stayed outside the door as the “tiger-the lookout. Dillinger and Pierpont took the cages; Makley held down center field with a submachine gun. The take was lovely \$74,782.09 in cash and negotiable bonds. And not a shot fired. It was heady stuff.

Back in Chicago the gang relaxed. Dillinger had a new girl friend now—Evelyn (Billie) Frechette, a French-Indian beauty born on the Chippewa Reservation at Neopit, Wisconsin. Billie had raven-black hair and a trim figure. She had a husband, too, but he was in Leavenworth on a mail robbery rap. Dillinger asked her to move in with him. She did, quitting her job as a hatcheck girl in a Chicago nightclub.

The others had acquired girl friends, too. Mary Kinder was now keeping house for Harry Pierpont. Makley was living with Pat Cherrington. Her sister, Opal Long, was paired off with Russell Clark. John Hamilton had a girl with a name that sounded like a tin can rolling down a flight of stairs—Elaine Sullivan Dent Burton DeKant. And Homer Van Meter was on the scene too, with his girl, pretty Marie Conforti.

The men didn’t hide in their apartments but moved freely around Chicago, looking like prosperous businessmen out on the town. They went to nightclubs and to movies (Dillinger’s favorite was *The Three Little Pigs*), and they ate at the best restaurants.

They had to keep on the move, though, for Chicago was full of cops looking for them. Matt Leach was there with a group of Indiana State Police detectives, and Forrest Huntington, a former Pinkerton agent now working for the American Surety Company, had come to town with his extensive army of stool pigeons. The Chicago police had also formed a special “Dillinger Squad.” It was made up of forty handpicked men, the toughest on the force, armed with machine guns, bulletproof vests and tear gas bombs. They were on round-the-clock duty and divided into two watches one led by Captain John Stege, the other by Lieutenant Frank Reynolds.

“Those were exciting times,” Dillinger reminisced later to reporters. “We moved from house to house, rented one, stayed a few days, and moved on when the neighborhood got too hot. Stege and Reynolds and the rest of the police were sure hot on our trail. Just about a day behind, I guess. They almost got me once, out on Irving Park Boulevard. That was because a stool pigeon turned me up to the police. His name is Art McGinnis. I fed him and clothed him when he was broke, but he squealed on me. The police found me in a doctor’s office where Art had sent them. They shot at me and I shot at them, but my car was too fast and I got away.”

Outside, even Tommy Carroll was surprised by that one. He had already captured two carloads of police, including the chief, without firing a shot.

Dillinger, Green, and Van Meter were ready now. They had collected \$49,500. They rounded up ten employees as hostages and moved out.

A crowd of more than a thousand pressed around them as they emerged. “It’s Dillinger” they shouted excitedly. Baby Face Nelson swung around and fired over their heads angrily, starting a wild stampede that almost resulted in some serious injuries.

There was a wild auto chase after the gang dropped the hostages off, but they switched cars and made it back to the Twin Cities in one piece.

There, disaster almost struck again. They were in Green’s apartment for the division of the loot. Baby Face saw Eddie dividing the money into six equal piles. He leaped toward his submachine gun. “Let Jimmy count it,” Dillinger suggested diplomatically.

Dillinger’s share came to \$7,600 in currency and bonds. Faithful to his friends as always, he sent \$2,000 of the cash to Mary Kinder. It was to help Pierpont and the others pay for an attorney. “Maybe later I can get them out,” he wrote.

The same thought had occurred to the authorities in Lima, Ohio, where the three were being tried for Sheriff Sarber’s killing. The jail was ringed by barbed wire, Machine guns had been placed at strategic intervals behind sandbag barricades. They were manned by grim-faced Guardsmen with steel helmets, gas masks, and drawn bayonets. At night searchlights restlessly probed the darkness, searching for what one newspaper called “the fearsome Dillinger and his underworld hordes.”

Dillinger and his ‘hordes’ were far away, though—in Iowa. On March 13 they hit the First National Bank in Mason City, Iowa.

The take (\$52,000 was bigger than at Sioux Falls, but so was the trouble. A bank guard sitting in a bulletproof enclosure over the lobby dropped tear gas on them, and then snipers opened up at them from the roofs of nearby buildings as they emerged from the bank. Hamilton was hit in the shoulder; Dillinger in the left leg.

Baby Face, who had already shattered a retired school teacher’s legs with a Tommygun burst, sprayed both sides of the street with fire. Windows tinkled, masonry flew. Bystanders scurried in panic.

Back in St. Paul Eddie Green took Dillinger and Hamilton to an underworld sawbones. He patched their wounds and prescribed rest.

The gang got the message and left Chicago, heading to Florida for an extended vacation.

The day they left, Ed Shouse was bagged at Paris, Illinois. There was a gun battle and a cop was killed not by Shouse, but accidentally by another policeman.

Shouse was eager to talk, and Matt Leach brought the reporters in to listen. The tale Shouse told was worthy of the old maestro himself. The Dillinger gang was constantly on the alert, he said. They slept in their bulletproof vests. They held nightly drills in preparation for a police attack. "They're a kill-crazy mob," he warned solemnly. "Every man knows just what to do when the police come to the door. They'll shoot it out to the last bullet."

In Florida the gang relaxed in the sun. Dillinger had rented a two-story house at Daytona Beach from a Chicago agency. He and Billie shared it with Russell Clark and his girl, Opal "Mack Truck" Long. Pierpont and Mary Kinder stayed at a nearby hotel, and on December 21 Homer Van Meter and Charlie Makley arrived to join the fun.

The eight of them swam a lot, and went down to Miami to view the air races, and on Christmas Day gifts were exchanged. Johnnie gave Billie a diamond ring.

On New Year's Eve, as they sat listening to the radio in the living room, they heard a newscaster announce that John Dillinger and his gang had struck again. They had raided the Beverly Gardens, a roadhouse near Chicago, slugged the doorman, and ruthlessly shot two policemen in a gun battle.

"That goddamn Leach," seethed Pierpont.

Dillinger merely shrugged. "Now they'll blame everything on me," he said.

Leach's incessant hammering had already done its work. The name Dillinger was on everybody's lips. Every crime in the U.S., and even a couple in Europe, were being blamed on the gang. Any criminal who had ever served time at Michigan City was labeled a "Dillinger mobster."

On January 15 the First National Bank in East Chicago, Indiana, was held up by two bandits wearing bulletproof vests under their bulky overcoats. The bank's customers and staff later identified the men as Hamilton and Dillinger. Hamilton took the cages, they said, while Dillinger covered everyone from the lobby with a submachine gun. As Hamilton was scooping \$20,376 into a Federal Reserve sack, the bank's vice-president sounded the alarm. Dillinger looked casually out the window and saw policemen hurrying down the street with drawn guns.

did some time at Joilet, then escaped and went to California, where he became a hired gun for the Joe Parente mob.

It was there that he picked up his faithful sidekick, John Paul Chase—later described by J. Edgar Hoover as "a bit of human vermin with a poetically patriotic name," Chase, a former speakeasy operator, became Nelson's general handyman. He chauffeured him places, delivered messages, arranged hideouts, and even cleaned up after him.

When Repeal came along, Parente went out of business, and Nelson decided that if hicks like the Barrows and Pretty Boy Floyd could stick up banks, so could he.

He went back east and set up headquarters at Long Beach, Indiana, a haven for Chicago hoodlums along the shores of Lake Michigan. There he recruited a gang. Tommy Carroll, a happy-go-lucky ex-boxer, became the center fielder, and Eddie Green, a former Holden-Keating gangster, became the jug-marker—the man who fingered the banks that they were to rob.

The gang was fairly successful. They hit some good-sized banks in Wisconsin, Iowa, and Nebraska during the fall and winter of 1933. Nelson was beside himself, though—each job that he pulled was credited to the Dillinger gang.

He finally decided that if he couldn't beat them he would join them. He approached Homer Van Meter with the idea of a merger in December. He was turned down flat—the Dillinger boys didn't know him, didn't trust him.

But by February 1934 the picture had changed. Hamilton and Van Meter were the only Dillinger gangsters still at large. So this time it was Van Meter who approached Nelson with the idea of a merger. He told Baby Face that Dillinger would be busting out of Al any day and that he would "want action fast."

Nelson said that he had the action—a Sioux Falls job and a Mason City one, both fingered by Eddie Green. But, he added: "Can Dillinger take orders?"

The implication was dear. Van Meter was furious. So was Hamilton. But there wasn't much they could do about it. Nelson's was the only big-time game in town. "Johnnie will go along with it," Van Meter said quietly.

The five of them met at Eddie Green's apartment in St. Paul the morning after Dillinger's Crown Point escape. It was an edgy gathering, Nelson, obviously in awe of Dillinger but doing his best to hide it, blustered and ranted as he explained his theories of bank robbing. They were pretty simple: come in the door shooting, kill everybody in sight, and grab the

On the night of January 22 the Congress Hotel in Tucson caught fire. Clark and Makley, who were registered there with Opal Long, tipped a couple of firemen fifty dollars to rescue their luggage. "If the saps had made it only a couple of bucks," Dillinger grouched later, "we'd still be safe-and happy."

The firemen took a good long look at the generous strangers. The next day, while leafing through a copy of True Detective Magazine, they came across pictures of the two. They rushed to Police Chief C. A. "Gus" Wollard. He told them to keep the information to themselves for the time being. "Maybe we can get the whole gang," he said, "one at a time."

That's exactly what the Tucson police did, too-smoothly, quietly, without firing a shot. After a couple of days of discreet checking, they plucked Makley out-of a downtown radio shop, curbed Pierpont in his car, and took Clark in his North Second Avenue bungalow.

Dillinger hadn't yet been spotted, but Chief Wollard had Clark's bungalow staked out as a precaution. Just after dark a car pulled up in front. Dillinger was at the wheel. Billie Frechette sat beside him, holding a Boston bull puppy on her lap. Dillinger got out and started up the walk-into leveled riot guns.

As he was being searched, his hands, only shoulder high, began to drop slowly. One of the policemen, "Swede" Walker, pulled the hammer back on his gun. "Reach for the moon," he said, "or I'll cut you in two." Dillinger grinned-and readied.

News of the gang's capture spread like wildfire. Lawmen from every state in the Midwest rushed to Tucson to share the spotlight. Matt Leach arrived, but the crush of reporters, photographers, and newsreel cameramen kept him from reaching the side of the celebrity that he had himself created.

He tried again the following morning and got through, but all he had time for was a quick handshake and a "How are you, John?" before he was pushed aside by jostling news photographers.

This was the first dose-up look the press had had of "America's Number One gangster." They were frankly puzzled by the amiable, easygoing man who sat in his cell signing autographs and urging gawkers to vote for Pima County Sheriff John Belton. "Dillinger has none of the look of the conventional killer," wrote one reporter. "Given a little more time and a wider circle of acquaintances one can see that he might presently become the central figure in a nationwide campaign, largely female, to prevent his frying in the electric chair,"

back, and they took off south ... I never saw him again. They got him before Christmas. I was hoping they wouldn't. I thought he'd come through. He seemed like an honest fellow,"

The national reaction to the Crown Point escape was strangely divided. Politicians, law enforcement officials, church leaders, and prominent newspapers all thundered their outrage. "An object lesson of scandalous futility or corruption or the two in combination," The Literary Digest editorialized, and J. Edgar Hoover Galled it "a damnable outrage." The head of the Chicago Crime Commission said, "I'm speechless! The idea of a man with a record like his getting away! I can't understand it!"

But the voice of the people-or at least that portion of it that made itself known in the letters-to-the-editor columns-reacted differently:

"Why not give Dillinger a gold medal and a pardon?" a typical letter said, "He deserves both. Hurray for you, John. May you never be caught!"

"These politicians can sit in a nice little office every day," said another, "and make comments about a fellow who does get caught doing something in the open when they sit around plotting to keep the people from finding out what they really are."

Dillinger drove Sheriff Holley's car across the Indiana line into Illinois, abandoning it on the outskirts of Chicago, There he parted company with Youngblood. (Thirteen days later Youngblood would be slain in a gun duel in Port Huron, Michigan, taking a local sheriff along with him.)

Dillinger went straight to his lawyer's office, where he met Billie Frechette. "I told him it was my duty to advise him to surrender," Piquett said afterward, "and to let me take him to Town Hall station. He said he would do it later."

He and Bille left the same night for St. Paul, where John Hamilton and Homer Van Meter were waiting for him.

In crossing a state line in a stolen car, Dillinger had committed a Federal offense. The FBI now swung into action. Typewriters blazed, and the headlines were suddenly filled with the Glamor of a "great all-out federal war" on the new national menace Dillinger. "Act first, talk afterward," Hoover told his men, ordering them "to shoot straight and get the right man." Attorney General Cummings rubber-stamped the execution order: "Shoot to kill-then count ten," he advised.

A few thoughtful people objected to this kind of talk. Clarence Darrow, the famed defense attorney, was one. He said he didn't believe that Dillinger should even receive a life sentence if caught, and criticized the government's "shoot to kill" policy.

denied taking part in the East Chicago job. He said that John Hamilton was dead. "I wasn't with him when he got shot," he said, "but one of the boys told me about it. Hamilton's got some kids. Before he died, he sent me some money to take to them. It was in one of the sacks that the Tucson police took away from me. I guess it was about sixty-eight hundred dollars."

Reporters were skeptical but had to admit that it was a neat explanation of how the East Chicago loot happened to be in his possession.

On Dillinger's right stood Robert Estill, the prosecuting attorney. On Estill's right was the Lake County Sheriff, Mrs. Lillian Holley, filling out the term of her late husband. A reporter asked Dillinger what he thought of them. "I like Mr. Estill," he said, "and Mrs. Holley seems like a fine lady."

One of the photographers shouted to Estill. "Bob, put your arm around him." Estill didn't hear him, but Dillinger did. He rested his right elbow on the prosecutor's shoulder. Estill automatically put his arm behind the gangster's back. Photographers snapped away as Dillinger grinned sardonically at the man who was going to prosecute him for murder.

It was the end of Estill's political ambitions- and the beginning of an even more audacious Dillinger legend.

The man who had started it all was still on the outside, however, looking in. Matt Leach had been effectively blocked from the main action by his political enemies. The best he could manage was the journey back to Indiana by train with the rest of the captured gangsters. There were fair to middling crowds along the route, and press conferences were held at each of the larger whistle stops. At one a U.S. Senator came aboard to meet the captives, and Harry Pierpont got off a widely quoted line. He said, "My conscience doesn't hurt me. I stole from the bankers. They stole from the people. All we did was help raise the insurance rates." But, all in all, it was small potatoes compared to what was going on at Crown Point.

Whole armies seemed to be deployed there.

Sheriff Holley had buttressed her defenses with armed members of the local Farmers' Protective Association. A squad of National Guardsmen had been called in. At night floodlights illuminated the area around the large, three-story brick jail. A patrol plane circled the Crown Point area by day, on the watch for motorcades of gangsters bent on releasing Dillinger.

"There will be no jail delivery," announced the Lake County Star "there will be no repetition of the Lima, Ohio, jail delivery in which Dillinger was liberated . . ."

"A hundred men couldn't get him out of that jail," added Judge William Murray, who was scheduled to try his case.

Dillinger said nothing. He just sat whittling on a piece of wood in his cell in the jail's new second-floor escape-proof section.

Between him and the street were a half-dozen barred doors, more than fifty armed guards.

He was arraigned for trial on February 6, 1934. Prosecutor Estill said that five men had positively identified Dillinger as Officer O'Malley's killer. Dillinger's lawyer, Louis Piquett, announced that he had six Florida residents who would testify that his client had been living in Daytona Beach as late as January 14.

Dillinger told the press, "I'm innocent, but it looks like I'll get the works, though. They got me charged with everything from strangling gold fish to stealing the socks off a blind man."

A woman identified only as "Mrs. Dillinger" was allowed to visit him for a few minutes on February 26. The jailer who monitored their conversation could make little sense of it-it was mostly numbers. Later, the "mystery woman" was identified as Billie Frechette.

Around 9 :15 A.M. on March 3 Dillinger suddenly jammed something that felt mighty like a gun into the back of cellblock turnkey Sam Cahoon. "Open up," he ordered. Cahoon opened. "Call Blunk," he said. Cahoon called. As Deputy Sheriff Ernest Blunk approached, Dillinger leaped out from behind Cahoon and leveled what looked like a real gun at him. "Call Baker," he ordered. Blunk called. As Warden Lou Baker entered, Dillinger braced him.

And so it went-with the outlaw methodically working his way through the half-dozen barred doors and fifty armed guards.

Only one other inmate chose to accompany him to freedom-Herbert Youngblood, a Negro from Gary awaiting trial for murder. Youngblood was armed with one of the submachine guns that they had taken from a couple of National Guardsmen. Dillinger had the other. Driving Ernest Blunk ahead of them, the two men strolled out of the jail and into the back door of the Main Street Garage.

"Which is the fastest car here?" Dillinger asked mechanic Ed Saager. The mechanic, thinking that they were members of a posse, pointed to Sheriff Holley's V8. "Okay, get inside," Dillinger told him. Saager said he was busy.

"Better do as he asks," said Blunk. Saager climbed into the back seat resentfully, thinking that he had been deputized.

Dillinger told Blunk to drive. Youngblood got in the back seat with Saager. Gradually the truth of the situation began to dawn on the mechanic. "My God, you're John Dillinger" he said.