

Chicago's Car Barn Bandits

Relentless Killers, They Met Relentless Law

By WILLIAM SHINNICK

THERE were three of them, and Jesse James was their only hero.

The Chicago of thirty-six years ago, which knew and dreaded them as the car barn bandits, never grew sentimental over them. It recognized them for what they were—youthful criminals without redeeming qualities—and let the law make an end of them.

An atmosphere of cold ferocity clung to the trio, who had grown up together in a north-west side neighborhood, even when they stood in the shadow of the gallows. They were completely anti-social. They robbed for little sums as readily as for big, and they killed when killing served no purpose.

It was their boast that they had slain thirty-three persons. Doubtless this was an exaggeration. But they certainly murdered eight, and probably at least four others.

Quiet hung over the car barns at 61st and State streets at 3 a. m. on Aug. 30, 1933. Occasionally a horse-drawn truck lumbered past on the cobblestones. Now and again a car arrived. Conductors quickly turned in their receipts and departed. A few motormen, arriving early to go out on their runs, talked desultorily in a waiting room. One dropped asleep.

Without preface three strangers broke in upon this peaceful scene. Their appearance told their aim. Masks in the form of hoods, made of old underwear cloth, covered their heads and dropped to their shoulders. Slits had been cut in these masks, and sharp eyes glinted above weapons of a new type (the automatic or magazine pistol was not familiar then even to members of the police department).

The first man, who also carried a sledge hammer, walked into the office and confronted three employes. One was a clerk, Francis W. Stewart, who

had been tallying receipts and placing the money in a strong box drawer. The second bandit took station at the office window, and the third stood as a sentinel at the door of the waiting room.

"I want that money," said the hammer man.

Later it was recalled that his voice was melodious. But it carried authority. Stewart did not resist. He remained quiet, seated. This did not save him. The man at the window fired at him twice. Both bullets took ef-



Marx

Van Dine

fect and the clerk fell, fatally wounded.

The gunman continued his shooting. The other two employes, each wounded, fled through an inner door. The window man, seemingly without reason, sprayed bullets recklessly into the walls and ceiling.

Aroused by the noise, the sleeping motorman, James B. Johnson, sat up jerkily. He had not realized what was going on, but the sentinel standing a few feet from him took no chances. He fired. A bullet crashed into Johnson's head and he was killed instantly.

Then more shooting. A general fusillade. The robber in the office dropped the hammer and stuffed all the money he could carry into a sack and his pockets. Much of it was silver, and the total loot was \$2,250. Fleeing to the street, still shooting,

the masked men ran through a vacant lot.

They had escaped. No one knew what they looked like. Nevertheless the bandits had left clues behind them. There was the hammer, which bore the initials of the Chicago and North Western railroad; and there were copper cartridge shells from the automatic pistols. These were different from the type in general use; yet others just like them had been found at the scene of a double killing in a north side saloon.

A policeman of the Sheffield avenue station, William Blaul, who later was a lieutenant and deputy chief of detectives, became interested in the investigation and after some weeks discovered the identity of the men.

There was an element of good fortune in this. A watchman, Paul Karkut, told him that he had seen three young men at target practice in a vacant lot near Belmont avenue and Robey street, and that when they went away he found automatic shells.

Blaul (he is now retired from the Chicago police and working as a state's attorney's investigator) saw the significance of this. Karkut helped him further. He knew the target shooters as young neighborhood toughs. Further, he knew their names—Gus Marx, Peter Neidermeier, and Harvey Van Dine. The sledge hammer cleft fitted, too; Van Dine had worked for the North Western. Immediately Blaul and his partner, John Quinn, began a relentless hunt for the trio.

On Nov. 20 the policemen learned that Marx, Neidermeier, and Van Dine would meet the following night in Manny Greenberg's saloon at Addison and Robey streets and go together to

an icemen's ball. At 8 p. m. on the 21st Blaul, looking over Greenberg's swinging door, saw the tall, raw-boned Marx standing alone at the bar.

Quickly adopting a plan of campaign, the policemen entered simultaneously, Blaul from the side door, Quinn from the front. Marx, surprised, whirled about and shot down Quinn, but two bullets from Blaul's pistol



William Blaul as he looked shortly after the capture of the car barn bandits.

struck him. Still he battled on until Blaul, a noted athlete, struck him on the head with a pistol butt and put him out.

Neidermeier and Van Dine, upon learning of the fray, went into even deeper hiding. There was still another murder added to the gang's list, for Quinn died a few hours later.

Marx's wounds were not serious and after they had been dressed he was taken to the Sheffield station.

"I killed Quinn," he growled, "and I'll be hung for it. But you'll get no more out of me."

For more than a day Marx persisted in silence. The police of that era were not gentle. He went through the first, second and third degrees of persuasion. His eyes were so swollen that he could not see. One of his questions, "What time is it?" was repeated so frequently that the police, shrewdly attaching significance to it, deceived him. They told him it was Tuesday morning when it was only Monday morning. He was convinced.

"All right," he said, wearily, "those rats haven't kept their word with me, and I'll talk about them. Van Dine and Neidermeier were with me in the car barns. Neidermeier killed Stewart. I shot Johnson, and Van Dine carried away the money, which we divided in Jackson park. They were with me when Ben La Gross and Adolph Johnson got killed in the saloon. . . ."



When street cars were the chief means of transportation in Chicago. A traffic jam at Dearborn and Randolph streets. (Acme photo.)

It was a long confession. Marx told also what he meant by his remark that the others hadn't kept faith. They had all agreed that if one was captured the others would storm the police station and rescue him or die in the attempt. It appeared later that Van Dine and Neidermeier actually toyed with this plan.

But none of their fantastic plots came to fruition and on Nov. 25, when the Marx confession was made public, they understood that their confederate wasn't worth fighting for any longer and fled from the city.

Neidermeier and Van Dine went to the dunes country near Gary, which was much wilder then than now. With them they took another young criminal, Emil Roeski, who was little better than half witted. They hid in a crude dugout near Clarke, Ind. But they had to have supplies and they were suspected by a country storekeeper when they entered his place.

Eight detectives were sent to investigate. They found the dugout empty, but in the early snow they saw tracks and followed them to a second dugout west of Calumet Heights. Smoke was coming from its tin chimney. Cautiously the detectives approached, and when the hideout was surrounded Policeman John F. Sheehan cried, "Come out; we're deputies." From the interior was shouted the sinister message, "Come carry us out!"

The door swung open. There was a blast of pistol fire. Detective Joseph Driscoll fell, a bullet in his abdomen. The wound was fatal. Policeman Matt Zimmer, later a supervising captain, was struck on the forehead and right ear in an exchange of shots with Van Dine.

The bandits were too well protected, too handy with their weapons, for the depleted besieging force to overcome them. One man was sent on a handcar to Miller, Ind., where he telegraphed for help. Soon 75 more policemen were on their way.

But while some of his mates were attending Driscoll, the bandits slipped out, crawled through a ravine and walked four miles to East Tolleston, Ind. There Roeski deserted the others. He had no part in the last stages of the battle. Instead he went on foot to Aetna, Ind., fell asleep in the railroad station and was captured.

In a gravel pit at East Tolleston a train was being loaded. The engineer was off the locomotive when Neidermeier leaped into the cab and confronted Albert Coffey, the fireman, and L. J. Sovea, a brakeman.

"Uncouple," he commanded Sovea.

The brakeman hesitated, and doom overtook him. Neidermeier shot and killed him. Then



Neidermeier

Roeski

Coffey complied with the order to detach the engine.

"Get out on that main line and go like hell," ordered Van Dine.

Coffey protested that a limited train, westbound, was due soon. The order was repeated and he obeyed. The engine with its unwelcome load sped east. Tragedy was averted, however, when the engineer wired ahead and the wild engine was shunted into a siding at Liverpool. The bandits ran into a cornfield.

There the final act in the drama of blood was staged. The entire countryside had been aroused. Farmers had seized their shotguns and rifles and formed posses that rode the highways in buggies and spring wagons. When they heard Coffey's story they gathered, encircled the field and poured buckshot freely into the withered cornstalks. The weary fugitives,

each struck several times with bird shot, but not seriously wounded, walked out with upraised hands. The hunt was over.

Back in Chicago they vied with Marx in confessing. Some of their tales were palpably false; some were plausible; some were certainly true. The police never believed that they actually killed thirty-three persons; yet they knew they had slain eight: Stewart and Johnson of the car barns, La Gross, Adolph Johnson, and Otto Bauder, another saloonkeeper; Policemen Quinn and Driscoll, and Sovea.

At their trial, which cost the state \$60,000 and lasted more than two months, a vast amount of evidence was produced against the four men, for Roeski was included. He was found guilty of the Bauder murder and sentenced to life imprisonment. Later he was adjudged insane and died in an asylum.

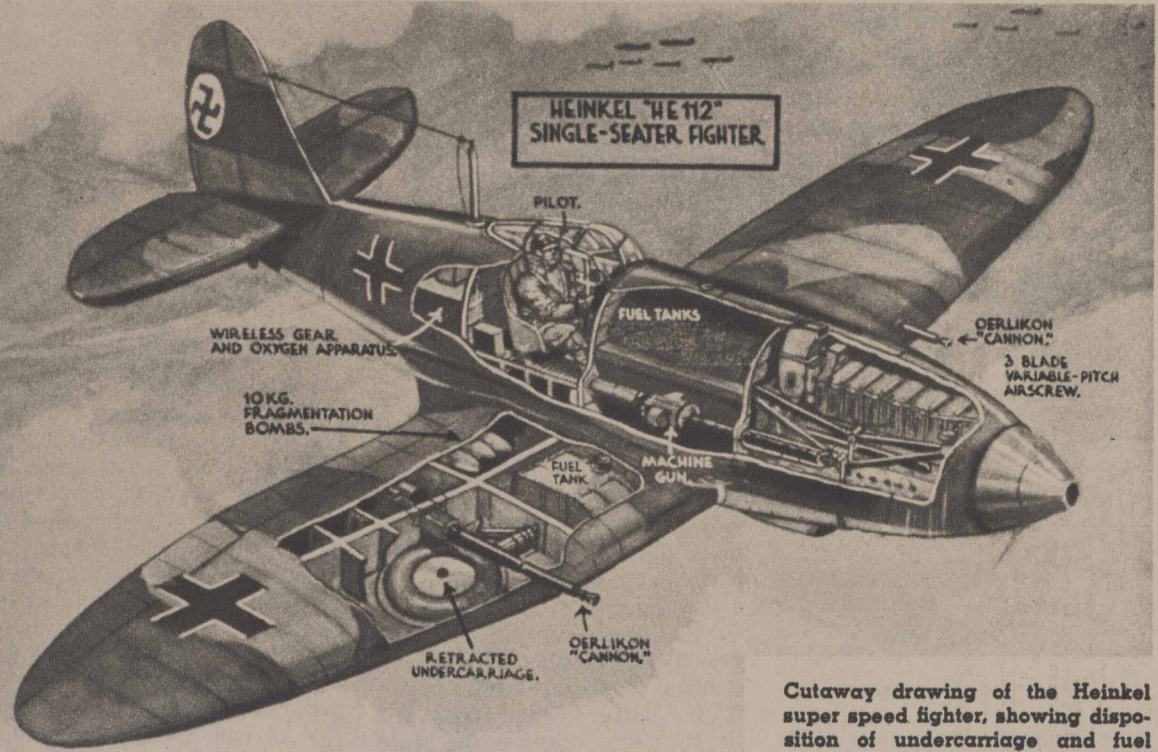
No evidence was offered in behalf of the three principals. Lawyers made eloquent pleas for them, called them unfortunate boys maligned by the police and driven by brutality into making false confessions. But Assistant District Attorney Harry Olson stripped away the sentimentality when he forcefully voiced their philosophy: "Kill first and rob dead men. Kill the witnesses of your robbery and the law will reward you."

The sentence of each was to be hanged by the neck until dead.

Perhaps Van Dine softened just a little before he went to death. He turned to religion. "Though I shall die on the scaffold, I hope to go to heaven," he said piously.

There was no retreat from their hardness by Neidermeier and Marx. Marx died calmly, a sneer on his lips. Neidermeier, admittedly an atheist, attempted to commit suicide by swallowing matches. In his last moments he snarled at the law. He wouldn't walk to the gallows and deputy sheriffs carried him.

Super Speed in Air



Cutaway drawing of the Heinkel super speed fighter, showing disposition of undercarriage and fuel tanks, etc.

By WAYNE THOMIS

DR. ERNST HEINKEL, one of the world's greatest aeronautical engineers and the chief manufacturer of German military airplanes, in a lecture in Berlin on airplane speeds has made many startling predictions about the limits to which airplane speeds can be pushed.

He also gave out information hitherto kept secret concerning the performances of some of Germany's latest fighting planes. He declared, for example, that the standard Heinkel 112U monoplane, being built in large numbers as a single-seat fighter, is capable of flying at 440 miles an hour. In substantiation of that statement Maj. Gen. Ernst Udet has flown one of these little bullets for 62.5 miles around a circuit at an average speed of 394 miles an hour.

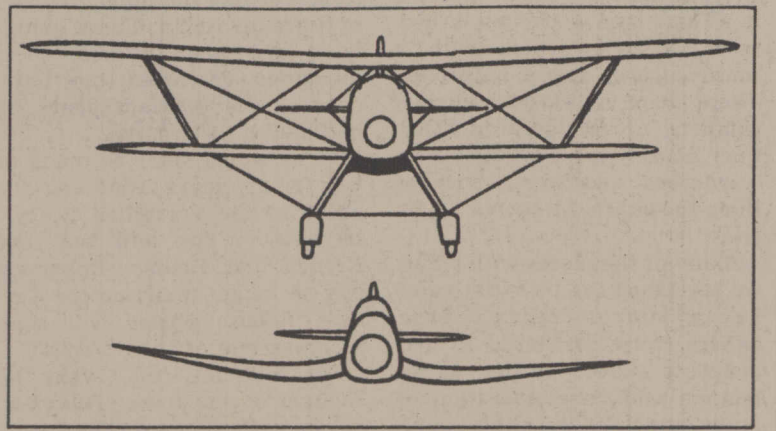
In discussing the 112U, Heinkel compares its speed with that of the Italian Macchi seaplane that holds the world's absolute speed record at 440 miles an hour. The Italian plane had a double Fiat engine, liquid cooled, that developed 3,000 horsepower.

The Heinkel monoplanes are being fitted with Junkers or Daimler-Benz engines that give for record-making purposes horsepower of only 1,700 at sea level. The additional speed Dr. Heinkel attributes to refinements in building of the air frame—wings, fuselage, landing gear, tail surfaces, motor installation, etc. A factor, he admits, is the development of the highly supercharged engine with a low weight-power ratio.

He illustrated his point in re-

gard to power by showing that by increases in motor power alone the speed of airplanes—particularly land planes—would have been increased since 1920 from 160 miles an hour to 260 miles an hour. But with refinements in the air frame the speeds have soared to the 440-mile-an-hour bracket. In 1920 the drag (or resistance) set up by the various items in an airplane other than the wings, fuselage, and tail represented 46 per

(Continued on page nine.)



Comparative head-on view of Heinkel He-51 biplane and the He-112 monoplane, both single-seat fighters.

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