

MELODRAMA IN REAL LIFE

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ON the TRAIL of TRAIN THIEVES.

First Complete Story of the Hold-up of the Fort Worth Express



THIS is the thrilling story of the chase and capture of five desperate train robbers by two determined representatives of the law. Fragments of the case have appeared in print from time to time, but the present narrative is the first full and complete account of one of the most hair-raising adventures that have ever occurred in the southwest section of the United States.

One night the Fort Worth Express, which was due to meet the north-bound train at Oliphant, a small station in that section south of Newport, pulled into the siding in order to permit the north-bound train to pass that place. While the train was waiting on the siding, the conductor, McConnell, whistling and in the best of spirits, stepped off the first car and began walking up and down the platform beside his train. Suddenly, without the slightest warning, he found himself surrounded by armed men. Without a moment's hesitation he pulled out his pistol and began shooting. The strangers, who were masked, returned the fire, and the result was that the plucky conductor found himself pierced by several Winchester bullets. The thieves immediately brought the fireman, engineer, brakeman and porter off the train, and then began a systematic exploration of the express car. Nothing of value was found, however, and they proceeded to go through the day coaches and relieve the passengers of their valuables. Having finished this function, they mounted horses and disappeared in the woods.

ON THE TRAIL

The incident caused a great deal of excitement at the time and the railroad officials immediately put two of their best men on the case, with instructions to apprehend and punish the train robbers at any cost. Two days later C. O. Eames, Chief Special Agent of the Missouri Pacific Railway, and G. H. Thiel were at Oliphant making an investigation. They were fortunate enough to get on the trail almost immediately, and within two hours had captured two



C. O. Eames,
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of the robbers named John Brady and Albert Mansker. These two men were found in the woods and, at the point of the pistol, confessed that they were part of the gang that had robbed the Fort Worth Express. After a little further persuasion, they admitted that the gang had been organized in a little town in the western portion of Arkansas, bordering on the Indian Territory, and said it was composed of six men, consisting of themselves, Samuel and Pennyweight Powell, James Wyrick and John Padgett. They confessed that they had hidden in a lumber wagon across two hundred miles of rough country for the purpose of holding up the north-bound train that usually went on the siding at Oliphant and which, as a rule, carried a large amount of money.

The two men were placed in prison and then the officers started out to round up the remainder of the gang. They organized a posse consisting of United States marshals and deputy sheriffs—men who were noted for their fighting qualities and who would

die before they would surrender. They learned that five members of the gang had started across the country on stolen horses, leaving two animals for Brady and Mansker. These two worthies had paused at the town of Batesville long enough to call upon two young ladies with whom they were acquainted—a call which resulted in their arrest.

A HARD LEAD.

The railroad officers started out in the intention of covering every road, every bridge path and searching every town and every house in that section of the country. They divided their party into four squads of five each for this purpose. The country was hilly and rough, and they met with almost unparalleled hardships. The trip lasted for five weeks and there was scarcely an hour of any day during the time it lasted which was not filled with thrilling adventure.

On the morning of the third day they met for consultation at a farmhouse which was located in a sort of hollow next to a hill. They had breakfast at this place, and afterwards en-

gaged in a conference regarding the program for the day. While they were talking, the five-year-old daughter of the farmer came in and said:

"Papa, I want to ask you something."

"What is it?" asked the father.

"I want to know what the five men in the spring house are going to get for breakfast."

If a gun had been shot off in that little room, it could not have caused more excitement. Eames and Thiel and their assistants jumped to their feet and, feeling for their pistols, started out to the springhouse. But the men in hiding got the alarm and had a little start on the deputies. They chased the fugitives through the woods on foot, firing and being fired at, constantly. Finally, they reached an open cornfield but the robbers had sought refuge behind a hill and after a while secured their horses and dashed away.

The journey was resumed and although the officers and their men were very much wearied, they never for a moment entertained the thought of giving up the chase. Finally they reached Siloam Springs, where the gang of train robbers were supposed to have been organized. They discovered that James Wyrick and John Padgett had not been seen in the locality for many days, but that Pennyweight Powell and his brother Samuel had been in the vicinity within the previous twenty-four hours. Officers Eames and Thiel divided their men up and permitted them to obtain a much-needed rest.

A DUEL WITH PISTOLS.

Hour after hour and day after day passed, and still the men who were wanted did not make their appearance. Just as the pursuers were beginning to give up hope, however,

Pennyweight Powell made his appearance in the community. He came to his home one night and was immediately spotted by the men who were on guard. He managed to leave his house with a satchel, but was followed by Thiel. He got as far as Denver and then a duel with pistols took place between the desperate criminal and the determined officer of the law. Thiel, however, managed to arrest his man and placed him in jail, but in the encounter he was shot in the knee, which caused his death.

A day or so after that the pursuers got on the trail of Wyrick and Padgett. They came to a house far away from any railroads where the men had stopped for breakfast. The farmer who owned the place said that his visitors had black silk handkerchiefs which they had used as masks, and from their talk, he was satisfied that they were train robbers. This was a sufficient clue to work upon, and the officers and their assistants went into the woods, following the trail which had been indicated by their informant. The chase lasted all of that morning and part of the afternoon. Towards dusk Eames and Thiel became separated from the remainder of the party, and at that critical stage of their journey they suddenly and unexpectedly came upon the two men of whom they were in search. Instantly they raised their pistols and, leveling them at the two men, demanded their surrender. But desperate characters of this kind are not subdued by the mere sight of a gun. They fear neither man nor devil, and the prospect of hot lead has less terror for them than the thought of imprisonment or death at the hands of the authorities. After the first exchange of shots, Wyrick and Padgett started to run through the woods with Eames and Thiel close on their heels.

"If you don't stop," shouted Thiel, "we will shoot you down in your tracks."

"Shoot away and be hanged," was the cheerful response.

Still the chase kept on, the fugitives sometimes gaining, sometimes losing. Up hill and down dale they ran, stumbling over rocks, falling into ravines, every now and then pausing to level their pistols and send a shot back at their pursuers. All this had continued for nearly an hour, when the two robbers stopped short and

waited for the officers. Once more a hail of shot filled the air. All of the bullets, strange to say, missed their mark, but presently pursuer and pursued came to close quarters and then came a hand-to-hand fight which resulted in the capture of the two train robbers. They were bound and taken to the nearest town, where they were placed in jail preparatory to their trial.

CAUGHT BY STRATEGY.

The Powells, Sam and Pennyweight, were still at liberty, and it was desirable to secure them before the authorities would go on with the trial of the other bandits. Incidentally, it might be remarked that while these notorious criminals were evading their pursuers, they were whiling away the time by minor hold-ups in different parts of the country. Pennyweight Powell was the most industrious in this respect, and it was resolved that he should be obtained by means of a little strategy. Information was spread broadcast that at a certain hour on a certain night one of the rich men in that vicinity would take a journey in his carriage, going from one town to another and carrying with him a large amount of money in gold and bank notes. The train robber heard of this, and his professional instincts were immediately aroused. It was a moonlight night, and an hour before the time the carriage was to pass a point three miles out of the town he was on hand with one or two confederates. In the meantime the carriage, which was a closed one, started on its journey, but without the gold and bank notes. Officer Eames, however, and several of his assistants tucked themselves snugly in the interior and waited for developments. In the meantime another squad went into the woods and, by making a detour, managed to get in the rear of the place where Pennyweight Powell proposed to make a stand. It was a clear, crisp night, and the train robbers, who looked on the prospective hold-up as rather an amateur proceeding, were in the best of spirits. Presently the carriage came jingling along—because to add to the humor of the situation, they had placed sleigh bells around the horses' necks. Just as it reached the place appointed Pennyweight raised his rifle and shouted in stentorian tones:

"Halt! Your money or your life!" A peal of laughter came from the closed carriage. While the astonished bandit was wondering what had happened, the sound of shooting in the rear attracted his attention. He turned to find what was the matter. A half dozen deputy sheriffs were rapidly approaching, firing in the air as they came near to their man. Before he had time to recover from his astonishment, Eames and his assistants had leaped from the carriage and the famous hold-up man was their prisoner.

Train robbery is punishable by hanging in Arkansas, and summary justice was meted out to all of the captured men. Brady, Mansker and Wyrick were hanged, while Pennyweight Powell and Padgett each received ten years in the State Penitentiary. Thus ended one of the most famous criminal hunts in American history.