

THE LONG ARM OF UNCLE SAM

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MANY OF THE MAJOR OPERATIONS OF THE WORLD WAR HAVE NEVER BEEN WRITTEN—MANY OF THEM HAVE NEVER BEEN HINTED AT—FOR THE REASON THAT THEY WERE UNDERTAKEN BY THE SECRET OPERATIVES OF THE DIFFERENT DEPARTMENTS OF THE GOVERNMENT.

FOR THE PAST TWO YEARS A FORCE INCLUDING HUNDREDS OF MEN AND WOMEN HAS BEEN WORKING DAY AND NIGHT, ROUNDING UP THE ENEMIES WITHIN—JUST AS THE GOVERNMENTAL AGENTS ARE ALWAYS KEPT BUSY BY THE FORCES OF THE UNDERWORLD WHO CONSIDER UNCLE SAM FAIR PREY. SMUGGLERS, COUNTERFEITERS, MAIL THIEVES AND MOONSHINERS NEVER APPEAR TO TIRE OF TRYING TO GET MONEY WITHOUT WORKING FOR IT.

BUT UNCLE SAM'S ARM IS LONG AND HIS MEMORY RETENTIVE. SOONER OR LATER HE NAILS THE MAN WHO BREAKS HIS LAWS, THOUGH IT OFTEN ENTAILS MONTHS OF WORK AND FEATS OF DETECTIVE GENIUS WHICH FAR OUTSTRIP THOSE OF FICTION.

THOUGH WRITTEN IN NARRATIVE FORM, THE ARTICLES IN THIS SERIES ARE ALL BASED ON FACT—FACTS, IN MANY CASES, AVAILABLE ONLY SINCE THE CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES. NAMES AND LOCATIONS HAVE HAD TO BE ALTERED, BUT A FULL REPORT OF EACH CASE WOULD BE FOUND IN THE ARCHIVES OF THE DIFFERENT DEPARTMENTS IF THEY WERE THROWN OPEN TO PUBLIC INSPECTION, FOR THESE ARE BUT A FEW OF THE INSTANCES IN WHICH THE LONG ARM OF UNCLE SAM HAS REACHED TO SEIZE THE MEN WHO BREAK HIS LAWS.

XI.—“Lost—\$100,000!”

“I STOPPED on my way here to-night and laid in a supply of something that I don't often use—chewing gum,” said Bill Quinn, formerly of the Secret Service, as he settled back comfortably to enjoy an evening's chat. “There are some professional reformers who maintain that the great American habit of silently working the jaws over a wad of chewing gum is harmful in the extreme, but if you'll look into the matter you'll find that agitators of that type want you to cut out all habits except those which they are addicted to.”

“Personally, I'm not a habitual worshipping at the shrine of the great god gum, but there's no one denying the fact that it does soothe one's nerves occasionally. Incidentally, it has other uses—as Elmer Allison discovered not very long ago.”

“Yes?” I inquired, sensing the fact that Quinn had a story up his sleeve and was only awaiting the opportunity to spring it. “Didn't you mention a Post Office case in which a wad of gum played a prominent role?”

“That's the one,” said the former Government operative, easing his wounded leg into a less cramped position. “Here, have a couple of sticks just to get the proper atmosphere and I'll see if I can recall the details.”

For some reason that's hard to define—Quinn went on after he had peeled two of the diamond-sticks and commenced work on them—crows in general and amateur crooks in particular seem to regard the United States mails as particularly easy prey. Possibly they figure that as millions of dollars are handled by the Post Office Department every year, a little here and there won't be missed. But if they knew the high percentage of mail robberies that are solved they wouldn't be so keen to tackle the game.

Lifting valuables, once you have passed into the hands of a postman, is a comparatively easy crime to commit. There are dozens of ways of doing it—methods which range all the way from fishing letters out of a post-box with a piece of string and a hair-pin, to holding up the mail-car in a deserted portion of a railroad track. But getting away with it is, as our Yiddish friends say, something else again.

The annals of the Postal Inspection Service are filled with incidents which indicate that the High Cost of Living is down around zero compared to the High Cost of Crime, when said crime is aimed at the mails. There are scores of men in Atlanta, Leavenworth and other Federal prisons whose advice would be to try murder, forgery or arson rather than attempt to earn a dishonest living by stealing valuable letters.

The majority of persons realize that it pays to register their money and insure their packages because, once this precaution has been attended to, the Government exercises special care in the handling of these and makes it extremely difficult for anyone to get anywhere near them. If a registered letter disappears there is a clean-cut trail of signed receipts to follow and somebody has to bear the burden of the loss. But even with these precautions, the Registered Section is looted every now and then.

One of the biggest cases of this kind on record was that which occurred in Columbus when letters with an aggregate value of \$100,000 just vanished out of thin air. Of course they didn't all disappear at one time, but that made it all the more mysterious—because the thefts were spread out over a period of some five or six weeks and they went on just as regularly as clockwork, in spite of the precautions to the contrary.

Big Sum Vanishes.

The first of the losses, as I recall it, was a shipment of \$10,000 in large bills sent by a Chicago bank to a financial concern in Columbus. When working on that single case, of course, the officials of the Department were more or less in the dark as to the precise place that the disappearance had taken place, in spite of the fact that there were the usual assigned slips indicating that the package had been received at the Columbus Post Office. But clerks who are in a hurry sometimes sign receipts without being any too careful to check up the letters or packages to which they refer—a highly reprehensible practice, but one which is the outgrowth of the shortage of help on the part of the Department. It is quite within the bounds of possibility, for example, for the package to have been abstracted from the Chicago office without the loss being discovered until Columbus checked up on the mail which was due there.

But, a week or ten days later, came the second of the mysterious disappearances—another envelope containing bills of large denomination, this time enroute from Pittsburgh to Columbus. When a third loss occurred the following fortnight, the headquarters of the Postal Inspection Service in Washington became distinctly excited and every man who could be spared was turned loose in an effort to solve the problem. Orders were given to shadow all the employees who had access to the registered mail with a view to discovering whether they had made any change in their personal habits, whether they had displayed an unusual amount of money within the past month or whether their family had shown signs of exceptional prosperity.

It was while the Chief was waiting for these reports that Elmer Allison blew into Washington unexpectedly and strolled into the room in the big grey-stone tower of what was then the Post Office Department Building with the news that he had solved the “poison pen” case in Kansas City and was ready to tackle something else.

Allison's Little Joke.

The Chief, to put it mildly, was surprised and inquired why in the name of the seven hedges of Hades Allison hadn't made his report directly to the office by mail.

“That was a pretty important case, Chief,” Elmer replied, “and I didn't want to take any chances of the findings being lost in the registered mail! Then, grinning, he continued: “Understand, you've been having a bit of trouble out in Columbus?”

“Who told you about that?” growled the Chief.

“Oh, you can't keep things like that under your hat even if you do succeed in keeping them out of the papers,” retorted Allison. “A little bird tipped me off to it three weeks ago and—”

“And you determined to leap back here as soon as you could to get what you'd be assigned to the case, eh?”

“You guessed it, Chief. I wanted a try at the Columbus affair and I was afraid I wouldn't get it unless I put the matter personally up to you. How 'bout it?”

“As it happens, you lost about two days of valuable time in coming here, instead of wiring for further instructions from Kansas City,” the Chief told him. “I had intended taking you off that anonymous letter case by noon tomorrow, whether you'd finished it up or not, for this is a far more important detail. Somebody got on away with \$50,000 so far and there's no—”

The Poker Face.

“Pardon me, sir, but here's a wire which has just arrived from Rogers in Columbus. The right word like to see it at once,” and the Chief's secretary laid a yellow slip face upward on his desk. Allison, who was watching closely, saw a demonstration of the reason why official Washington maintained that the Chief of the Postal Inspection Service had the best “poker face” in the capital. Not a muscle in his countenance changed as he read the telegram and then glanced up at Allison, continuing his sentence precisely where he had been interrupted.

“Reason to suppose that the thief is going to stop there. This wire from Rogers, the postmaster at Columbus, announces the loss of a fourth package of bills. Fifty thousand this time. That's the biggest yet and it brings the total deficit up to \$100,000. Rogers says that the banks are demanding instant action and threatening to take the case to headquarters, which means that it'll be spread all over the papers. Congress will start an investigation, some of us will lose our official heads and in the mix-up, the man who's responsible for the losses will probably make a clean get-away.”

Then, with a glance at the clock which faced his desk, “There's a train for Columbus in twenty minutes, Allison. Can you make it?”

“It's less than ten minutes to the station,” replied the operative. “That gives me plenty of leeway.”

“Well, move and move fast,” snapped the Chief. “I'll wire Columbus that you've been given complete charge of the case; but try to keep it away from the papers as long as you can. The Department has come in for enough criticism lately without complicating the issue from the inside. Good luck!” And Allison was out of the door almost before he had finished speaking.

Allison Reaches Columbus.

Allison reached Columbus that night, but purposely delayed reporting for work until the following morning. In the first place there was no telling how long the case would run and he felt that it was the part of wisdom to get all the rest he could in order to start fresh. The “poison pen” puzzle hadn't been exactly easy to solve and his visit to Washington, though brief, had been sufficiently long for him to absorb some of the nervous excitement which permeated the Department. Then, too, he figured that Postmaster Rogers would be worn out by another day of worry and that both of them would be the better for a night's undisturbed sleep.

Nine o'clock the next morning, however, saw him seated in one of the comfortable chairs which adorned the Postmaster's private office. Rogers, who did not put in an appearance until ten, showed plainly the results of the strain under which he was laboring, for he was a political appointee who had been in office only a comparatively short time. A man whose temperament resembled the attacks launched by the opposition and who felt that publication of the facts connected with the lost \$100,000 would spell ruin, both to his own hopes and those of the local organization.

Allison found that the Chief had wired an announcement of his coming the day before and that Rogers was almost pitifully relieved to know that the case was in the hands of the man who had solved nearly a score of the problems which had arisen in the Service during the past few years.

“How much do you know about the case?” inquired the postmaster.

“Only what I learned indirectly and from what the Chief told me,” was Allison's reply. “I understand that ap-

proximately \$100,000 is missing from this post office (here Rogers instinctively winced as he thought of the criticism which this announcement would cause if it were made outside the office), but I haven't any of the details.”

No Clues in Sight.

“Neither have we, unfortunately,” was the answer. “If we had a few more we might have been able to prevent the last theft. You know about that, of course?”

“The \$50,000? Yes. The Chief told me that you had wired.”

“Well, that incident is typical of the other three. Banks in various parts of the country have been sending rather large sums of money through the mails to their correspondents here. There's nothing unusual in that at this time of the year. But within the past five or six weeks there have been four packages—or, rather, large envelopes—of money which have failed to be accounted for. They ranged all the way from \$10,000, the first loss, to the \$50,000 which disappeared within the past few days. I purposely delayed wiring Washington until we could make a thorough search of the whole place, going over the Registry Room with a fine tooth comb.”

“That warning every man in it that he was under suspicion,” muttered

Few Results Shown.

“No, only one or two of the highest—personal friends of mine whom I could trust to keep silent. I didn't care to swear out search warrants for the residences of all the people who work here and that's what it would have meant, if they had raised any objection. In their cases the investigation was confined to inquiries concerning their expenditures in the neighborhood, unexpected prosperity and the like.”

“With what result?”

“None at all. From all appearances there isn't a soul in this building who had had ten cents more during the past six weeks than he possessed in any life period for two years back.”

“Did Boyd or any of the other Department operatives ask to see the plans of the post office?” inquired Allison, taking another tack.

“The what?”

“The plans of the post office—the blueprint prepared at the time that the building was erected.”

“No—why should they?”

“I thought they might have been interested in it, that's all,” was Allison's answer, but anyone who knew him would have noted that his tone was just a trifle too nonchalant to be entirely truthful.

“By the way,” added the operative, “might I see it?”

“The blueprint?”

“Yes, you will probably find it in the safe. If you'll have someone look it up, I'll be back in half an hour to examine

There, spread upon the desk, was the missing blueprint, creased and dusty from disuse.

“First time you ever saw this, eh?” Allison inquired of the postmaster.

“The first time I even knew it was there,” admitted that official. “How'd you know where to find it?”

“I didn't—but there's an iron-clad rule of the Department that plans of this nature are to be kept under lock and key for just such emergencies as this. But I guess your predecessor was too busy to worry you with details.”

Rogers granted it was an open secret that the postmaster who had preceded him had not been any too friendly to his successor.

Allison did not pursue the subject but spread the plan upon an unoccupied table so that he could examine it with ease.

“If you'll be good enough to look that door, Postmaster,” he directed, “I'll show you something else about your building that you didn't know. But I don't want anybody else coming in while we're discussing it.”

The Government's Precaution.

Puzzled, but feeling that the Government detective ought to be allowed to handle things in his own way, Rogers turned the key in the lock and came over to the table where Allison stood.

“Do you see that little square marked with a white star and the letter ‘L’?” asked Elmer.

“Yes, what is it?”

“That's this large room next to it,” countered the operative.

help us in the slightest. How did the thief get the mail containing the money out of the building? You know the system that maintains in the Registry Room? It's practically impossible for a sheet of paper to be taken out of there, particularly when we are on guard, as we are now.”

A Long Wait.

“That's true,” Allison admitted, “but it's been my experience that problems which appear the most puzzling are, after all, the simplest of explanation. You remember the Philadelphia mint robbery—the one that Drummond solved in less than six hours? This may prove to be just as easy.”

There Allison was wrong, dead wrong—as he had to admit some ten days later when, worn with the strain of sitting for hours at a time with his eyes glued to the ventilator which masked the opening to the lookout, he finally came to the conclusion that something would have to be done to speed things up. It was true that no new robberies had occurred in the meantime, but neither had any of the old ones been punished. The lost \$100,000 was still lost, though the Department, with the aid of the Treasury officials, had seen that the banks were reimbursed.

“The decoy letter,” thought Allison, “is probably the oldest dodge in the world. But who knows, it may work again in this case—provided we stage-manage it sufficiently carefully.”

With the assistance of the cashier of one of the local banks, Elmer arranged

the whole affair—the jaws of the clerk which Allison had previously and unconsciously noted were always hard at work on a wad of gum now were at rest for the first time since the operative had entered the lookout! The chewing gum and the dummy packet had disappeared at the same time!

It didn't take Elmer more than thirty seconds to reach Rogers' office and he entered with the startling announcement that “an envelope containing \$100,000 had just disappeared from the Registry Room.”

“What?” demanded the Postmaster. “How do you know? I haven't received any report of it?”

“No, and you probably wouldn't for some time,” Elmer retorted. “But it happens that I saw it disappear.”

“Then you know where it is?”

“I can lay my hands on it—probably the rest of the missing money—inside of one minute. Let's pay a visit to the Registry Room.”

“Before entering the section, however, Allison took the precaution of posting men at both of the doors.

“After I'm inside,” he directed, “don't allow anyone to leave on any pretext whatever. And stand ready for trouble in case it develops. Come on, Mr. Rogers.”

The Showdown.

Once in the room devoted to the handling of registered mail, Allison made directly for the desk under the lookout. The occupant regarded their approach with interest but, apparently, without a trace of anxiety.

“What letter?” he queried.

“You know what one?” snapped Allison, dropping his suave manner and moving his hand significantly toward his coat pocket. “Will you produce it or shall I?”

“I—I don't know what you are talking about,” stammered the clerk.

“No, Well, I'll show you” and the operative's hands flashed forward and there was a slight click as a pair of handcuffs snapped into place. “Now, Mr. Rogers, you'll be good enough to watch me carefully as your evidence will probably be needed in court. I'll show you as simple and clever a scheme as I've ever run across.”

With that, Allison dropped to the floor, wormed his way under the table, tugged at something for a moment and then rose, holding five large envelopes in his hands!

There's your lost \$100,000,” he explained, “and a dummy packet of \$50,000 to boot. Thought you could get away with it indefinitely, eh? It required of the landlocked clerk, if you'd stopped with the \$100,000 as you'd probably intended to do, you might have. But that extra letter turned the trick. Too bad it contained only blank paper—and he ripped the envelope open to prove his assertion.

“But—but—I don't understand,” faltered Rogers. “How did this man work it right under our eyes?”

The Explanation.

“He didn't,” declared Allison. “He tried to work it right under mine, but he couldn't get away with it. The plan was simplicity itself. He'd slip an envelope which he knew contained a large sum of money out of the pile as it passed him—he hadn't signed for them, so he wasn't taking any special risk—drop it on the floor, stoop over and, if he wasn't being watched, attach it to the bottom of his desk with a wad of chewing gum. You boasted that you went over the room with a fine tooth comb, but who would think of looking on the under side of this table. The idea, of course, was that he'd wait for the storm to blow over—because the letters could remain in their hiding places for months, if necessary—and then start on a life-long vacation with his spots as capital. But he made the error of over-capitalization and I very much fear that he'll put in at least ten years at Leavenworth or Morzantown. But I'd like to bet he never chews another piece of gum!”

“That,” contained Quinn, as he tossed another pink wrapper into the waste-basket, “I consider the simplest and cleverest scheme to beat the Government that I ever heard of—better even than Cochran's plan in connection with the robbery of the Philadelphia mint because it didn't necessitate any outside preparation at all. The right guy, a piece of gum and there you are. But you may be sure that whenever an important letter disappears nowadays one of the first places searched by the Postal Inspection operatives is the lower side of desks and tables. You can't get away with a trick twice in the same place, as Papers and Boyd Ed discovered when they tried to work the ‘double code’ once too often.”

“The double code?” I asked. “What one was that?”

“I doubt if you ever heard of it,” was Quinn's reply, as he arose and stretched himself, preparatory to saying good night. “It was one of the instances in which the Germans—and a certain very scholarly man in the Navy Department shot it full of holes, just because he chanced to have read some of Jules Verne's romances. I'll tell you about it sometime.”

“The Double Code”—the Twelfth in “The Long Arm of Uncle Sam” Series—Will be Published Next Sunday.



HUGHES
“He Clamped the Handcuffs on the Clerk's Wrists.”

Allison.

“What was that?” Rogers inquired.

“Nothing—nothing at all. Just talking to myself. Far from a good habit, but don't mind it. I've got some queer ones. You didn't find anything, of course?”

“In the building? No, not a thing. But I thought it best to make a thorough clean-up here before I bothered Washington with a report.”

“What about the men who've been working on the case up to this time?”

“Not one of them has been able to turn up anything that could be dignified by the term clue, as I believe you detectives call it.”

“Yes, that's the right word,” agreed the operative. “At least all members of the Detective-Story-Writers' Union employ it frequently enough to make it fit the case. What lines have Boyd and the other men here been following?”

“At my suggestion they made a careful examination into the private lives of all employees of the Post Office, including myself,” Rogers answered, a bit pompously. “I did not intend to evade the slightest responsibility in the matter, so I turned over my bank book, the key to my safe-deposit vault and even allowed them to search my house from cellar to garret.”

“Was this procedure followed with respect to all the other employees in the buildings?”

“That's the—why, that's the Registry Room!”

“Precisely. And, concealed in the wall in a spot known only to persons familiar with this blueprint, is a tiny closet, or ‘look-out.’ That's what the ‘L’ means and that's the reason that there's a strict rule about guarding plans of this nature very carefully.”

“You mean to say that a place has been provided for supervision of the Registry Division—a room from which the clerks can be watched without their knowledge?”

“Exactly—and such a precaution has been taken in practically every post office of any size in the country. Only the older men in the Service know about it, which is the reason that neither Boyd or any of his men asked to see this set of plans. The next step is to find the key to the lookout and start in on a very monotonous spell of watchful waiting. You have the bunch of master keys, of course?”

“Yes, they're in the safe where the plans was kept. Just a moment and I'll get them.”

When Rogers produced the collection of keys, Allison ran hurriedly over them and selected one which bore, on the handle, a small six-pointed star corresponding to the mark on the blueprint.

“Want to go up with me and investigate the secret chamber?” he inquired.

“I certainly do,” agreed Rogers. “But there's one point where this room won't

to have a dummy package of money forwarded by mail from New York. It was supposed to contain \$35,000 in cash and all the formalities were complied with precisely as if thirty-five thousand-dollar bills were really inside the envelope, instead of as many sheets of blank paper, carefully arranged.

On the morning of the day the envelope was due to reach Columbus, Allison took up his position close to the grill in the lookout, his eyes strained to catch the slightest suspicious movement below. Hour after hour passed uneventfully until, almost immediately below him, he saw a man drop something on the floor. Two envelopes had slipped from his hands and he stooped to pick them up—that was all.

The First Clue.

But what carried a thrill to the operative in the lookout was the fact that one of the envelopes was the dummy one from New York and that, when the man straightened up, he had only one of the two in his hands. The dummy had disappeared!

Allison rubbed his eyes and looked again. No, he was right. The postal clerk had, in some manner, disposed of the envelope supposed to contain \$35,000 and he was going about his work in precisely the same way as before.

“Wait a minute,” Allison argued to himself. “There's something missing besides the envelope. What is it?”

A moment later he had the clue to

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