



Catching Hit-Runs

By Myron M. Stearns

A CROWD of Cleveland children started running across a street from the rear door of their school building the moment school was out. A car traveling too fast to stop ran through the group and struck a boy. When officers reached the scene all that the children could tell them was that the car was gray. Police headquarters ordered all available accident squads to canvass garages and service stations. In one garage officers saw a gray touring car in a stall. They felt the radiator and the engine; both were cold. There was no other gray touring car in the place. As the officers were about to leave, one of them thought of feeling the car's exhaust pipe. It was warm!

Rolling the car over the oiling pit they examined the underbody and found threads of cloth on the king bolts. When compared with the injured boy's clothing, they were found to be identical.

Confronted with this evidence, the garage manager admitted that one of his men had driven the owner of the car home and struck the boy while returning to the garage. The radiator had been flushed with fresh water to cool the engine.

At Waterbury, Connecticut, officers investigating a hit-run fatality reasoned that the guilty driver lived in a certain suburb of the city, because no one but a resident would be speeding along that stretch of road where the accident occurred late at night. On the theory that the guilty person might have been going to the city to shop with his car and might be afoot in his own vicinity now, grocers and other storekeepers were asked if they had been selling to any new customers.

Nearly two weeks after the accident a grocer told the officers that a postal employee who had lived for years only a short distance away had begun for the first time to buy groceries from him during the past fortnight. Officers went to his house; the small garage at the rear was empty. For two days they waited for the car to be brought back. Then they called the man to his front door and asked him where his car was.

"Why, in the garage!" he said.

They said the garage was empty.

"But I left it there only a little while ago!" he said. "Somebody must have taken it."

Knowing that the man was lying, the officers took him, with his wife, to headquarters, and questioned them separately. Finally they confessed. They had hidden their hit-run car, with tell-tale marks of the accident still on it, in the woods near their home.

Driving one rainy night along a road near Indianapolis, a motorist narrowly missed crashing into a wrecked car lying halfway across the road. Three people were unconscious, badly hurt. None of the three knew what had hit them. No witnesses had heard the crash or seen the accident. A downpour had washed out all tracks. But, on the scene, state police found straw litter, sawmill shavings, a piece of board and scrapings of blue paint left on the wrecked car by a hit-run machine.

When Every Second Counts

The bits of litter indicated that the hit-run car was a stock truck. Careful examination revealed that the litter contained nettles found in certain black-soil areas of the state. Checking stockyards, sale barns, gas stations and garages in the nearest one of these areas, the investigators found a blue truck, the owner of which proved to be the guilty driver.

Expert hit-run detectives become so interested that they keep going, to the point of exhaustion, to crack a case. Officers on night duty double up and take day duty also, while the day men work into the night—putting the whole squad on almost a 24-hour basis until a case is solved.

The first step is to get to the scene of the accident as quickly as possible. Witnesses who may have seen the escaping car and driver will soon be gone. Clues that might lead to the identification of the missing car or driver may be lost; tire tracks may be obliterated. In Trenton, New Jersey, when two-way radio equipment was installed on all squad cars, the percentage of hit-run arrests rose from less than three out of five to nine out of ten.

Stepping on the gas doesn't do a hit-run driver much good today. New methods of detection will track him down from the evidence he invariably leaves behind

ILLUSTRATED BY D. R. FITZPATRICK

As soon as they reach the place of accident, give first-aid to the injured and warn approaching traffic, officers go after the driver involved in the accident. That is not always simple. In both city and country, crowds immediately collect around any accident. Inexpert investigators will sometimes lose as much as fifteen minutes before they find out that the guilty driver is missing. Not infrequently, even after the officers are on the scene, a driver who has stopped after causing an accident will slip away and try to escape detection. Experienced officers have learned also to keep a sharp eye on overcurious bystanders. A guilty driver will often, after turning a couple of corners, come back to see what actually happened, and decide whether or not he'd better give himself up.

The scene of an accident must be thoroughly searched for clues. From even a small piece of a headlight lens, its exact size and manufacturer can usually be told. Bits of rubber torn from the running board sometimes can be identified. There are parts catalogues with detailed pictures of each nut and bolt, each lamp bracket or angle iron, for almost every car that has ever been built. From the motor-vehicle bureau, a list can be secured of all cars in the state of the make and year indicated. One by one these may be carefully investigated and checked off until finally the car involved in the accident is located.

Near Manchester, New Hampshire, a middle-aged dairy hand walking home from work was struck and killed by a run-outer. Near his body traffic detectives picked up dozens of small glass fragments. These were carefully examined, preserved, and labeled. They were identified as coming from the

headlight of a small 1936-model truck. Shortly afterward a farmer was seen buying such a lens from a local agency. Detectives went over every foot of his barnyard. They found two little triangular pieces of glass that exactly fitted against fragments picked up at the scene of the accident, positively identifying the hit-run car.

When unable to uncover any evidence through a thorough search at the scene of the accident, investigators may canvass houses in the neighborhood for witnesses who might have heard the crash or seen a speeding car. Saloons, garages and filling stations on both sides of the accident, sometimes over an area of many miles, may be visited.

It Pays to Come Back

In one baffling Midwestern case, officers, assuming that the hit-skip car had been damaged, inquired at garages over a radius of nearly twenty miles without uncovering any further evidence. Two days later an officer returned to the scene and, as he put it, "tried to figure what I would do if I were trying to run out of an accident at that spot." He turned off the highway at the first cross road, and talked with delivery boys and other regular route men. Presently he heard from a milkman about a filling-station proprietor who had sold gasoline to a party in a damaged car, in which there was an injured girl. This led to a check-up of doctors throughout that vicinity, and presently one was discovered who had treated a girl for injuries. She was found, and the owner and driver of the hit-run car was identified.

A novel trick never thought of in early cases is to revisit the scene of the

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OUR NEW ARMY

DESIGN FOR LEAVING: Some of the 17,000,000 potential members of our new Army might like to know that Lieutenant Colonel Joseph E. Nelson, Minnesota's adjutant general, is largely responsible for the neatness and dispatch with which they were, or will be, bundled off to barracks. It's this way:

The World War Selective Service law worked better than anyone expected, but there were a lot of weak spots in it: insufficient information about eligibles, draft boards dominated by politics, useless red tape, time lags in the operation of the law. Eight years ago Lieut. Col. Nelson set about to exterminate the bugs, and he did such a good job that the result became Minnesota's Selective Service plan.

But the minute the plan was finished it disappeared faster than a scared rabbit. Two copies were locked up in the deepest archives of the War College in Washington, and the author was advised to keep his own copy so thoroughly bedded down that no newsman, congressman or stray citizen could possibly get his nose into the text. The idea of compulsory military training wouldn't have stood the light of publicity in 1933—the country was much too busy fighting a depression.

The secret thesis didn't stay hidden very long, though. A couple of years after the document had been popped into a vault the War Department yanked it out and made mimeographed copies—marked confidential—for the adjutant general of each state. Military men began to discuss the idea in larger and larger groups; and finally, in 1936, a Chicago newsman got wind of the plan at a summer camp—and the lid was off. When President Roosevelt asked Congress for a selective-service bill last year, copies of the Minnesota plan (which has become, in essence, the plan of every other state) were in the hands of every state adjutant, complete with charts, books, maps and details. It was ready to go and it went.

A good many of Lieut. Col. Nelson's forty-four years were spent in the railroad business; but as an Army man he has been a part- and full-time soldier since 1914, having served in the Minnesota National Guard infantry (Mexico), artillery and air corps (France), on the general staff, in the War College, adjutant general's department and Selective Service, of which he is now Minnesota's director. He quit civilian life in 1926 when he emerged a major from the infantry school at Fort Benning, Georgia. The next year brought him the rank of lieutenant colonel and the job of full-time assistant adjutant general of Minnesota. If the Army runs true to form he'll soon be a full colonel, then a brigadier general and adjutant general.

Present trainees over twenty-five will find little consolation in the fact that the man who doped out M-day doesn't believe they ought to be in camp at all. He has figures to prove that fewer than twenty-five per cent of Class A-1 selectees come from brackets above the twenty-five-year mark. But Lieut. Col. Nelson is a soldier—and the trainees soon will be. "We do what Congress orders us to do," he says, "even if we don't like it."

SOUTH: When construction ceases at Blanding it will be one of the biggest training camps in the country. Just to give you an idea: This Florida reservation, sprawling twelve miles from first to last sentry, embraces 134,000 acres located fifty miles southwest of Jacksonville, and facilities are contemplated for 75,000 men. There was a time when an Army division contrived to

struggle along with 1,035 trucks, but the 31st (Dixie) Division—Alabama, Florida, Louisiana and Mississippi National Guard—now at Blanding, has more than 2,000, and the monthly cost for vehicle parts alone is a quarter of a million dollars.

As is the case in other sections of the country, sleeping accommodations near Florida's gigantic cantonment are worth their weight in mattresses. Many of the 20,000 construction workers commute daily from as far away as Ocala, a seventy-five-mile stone's throw. Amidst the shambles a sprinkle of trainees is beginning to arrive, and the vanguard of the 43d Division—Connecticut, Maine, Rhode Island and Vermont National Guard—is expected in March. Three thousand Negro draftees are slated, too. It ought to be quite a settlement.

PRIZE outfit of the 31st Division is Company F, 156th Field Artillery, from Breau Ridge, Louisiana. Every one of Company F's 120 officers and men speaks French, and most of the commands are given in that language when the higher-ups aren't around. Capable of serving as interpreters, too, are most of the personnel of Companies E, G and H, respectively of Jeanerette, New Iberia and Lafayette, also of Louisiana's Evangeline country.

But there is some muttering in the French outfits. The Army's brand of coffee may be all right for the average trainee, but it's just plain insipid to the members of the Pelican State contingent. They're used to a brew that's black as ink and strong enough to bend a crowbar. From home they brought French-drip coffee gadgets, and with them they contrive to produce a potion that will knock your hat sideways.

Aside from the java problem, Sgt. Henry Castille can't understand the quartermaster's mental processes. "Look at that," he said, pointing to a row of bottles on the mess-hall counter. "We requisitioned tabasco pepper sauce and they sent us pickled peppers. *Sacre bleu!*"

Like the chefs in the three neighboring outfits, First-Class Cook Dorsey Broussard, of St. Martinsville, boss kitchen mechanic for the Breau Ridge company, puts a French twist on everything in his pots and pans. They're the same groceries supplied the Mississippi, Alabama and Florida units, but when they reach the ultimate consumer they just aren't the same vittles. It may be that word of this will get around, and inspecting officers will get into the habit of dropping in at mealtime—"Well, well; just in time for chow!"—but First-Class Cook Broussard undoubtedly won't be caught napping. He probably has in mind an extremely delectable gumbo made of pine shavings and sawdust.

BLANDING is a paradise for the water-sports-minded. Troop quarters are established along the shore of Lake Kingsley, a nearly perfect circle in outline and has a diameter of two miles. Within the reservation are ten large and nine smaller crystal-clear lakes with white-sand beaches, all of them teeming with big-mouth black bass and other fish. Some of the bass weigh eighteen pounds—that's what it says here on the report.

MOUNTAIN: Any man who can keep 700 other men soup-happy on forty cents a day each will make a helpful husband when he gets around to matrimony. At least, Lieut. Eugene C. Light, mess officer for the 252d Quartermaster Company at Fort Douglas, Salt Lake City, thinks that trudging home from a

supermarket with a week's supply of groceries will be a pipe, after what he's been through. In his Army capacity last month he bought five and a half tons of beef, four and a quarter tons of pork, 605 pounds of turkey, 548 pounds of fish, 1,350 dozen eggs, 2,196 gallons of milk, three and a half tons of bread, a couple of tons of butter and nearly ten tons of fresh vegetables. Oh—and twenty-four pounds of marshmallows.

SEVERAL prospective draftees in Murray, Utah, turned up at Fort Douglas in a new National Guard unit. It could hardly be called larceny, but—Selective Service officials had an idea that the National Guard was using the draft lists in seeking candidates to fill vacancies caused by resignations of men having dependents or essential jobs. Selective Service men finally admitted it was okay for draftees to elect to serve a year's training in the Guard: "They'd all wind up at Camp San Luis Obispo, anyway." Incidentally, since we reported three weeks ago that construction work at that California camp had been delayed by heavy rains—Chamber of Commerce or no—mobilization of Utah's 40th Division has again been postponed.

Meantime, the old-time Regulars at Fort Douglas are calling the draftees "S-men"—but without sarcasm. Fact is, you can usually tell a soldier with six to twenty years of experience by the pleasant way he addresses everybody. November draftees who try to put on the dog by ordering the February selectees around are dead giveaways, yet it goes on in every camp in the country.

MIDWEST: Mechanization note: There's no bugler at Scott Field, Illinois, twenty-four miles east of St. Louis, but that's no excuse for overtime ear-pounding. As befits the principal radio school of the Army Air Corps, reveille is an electrical transcription, sounded from a record via a cluster of loud-speakers.

THE 7,500 radio-communication students thus needed to wakefulness are in different stages of an eighteen weeks' course. In addition, there are 4,200 correspondence scholars who send their papers in franked envelopes to Scott Field's Air Corps Institute. There's a waiting list of 1,900. The courses were bought by the government from a private correspondence school which furnished some of the civilian staff now running the A.C.I. It's a break for the Air Corps boys—some of the lessons cost civilians \$200 a set.

ST. LOUIS hockey and wrestling crowds contain from 200 to 800 Scott Field boys, and in the nearer town of Belleville, Illinois, they are sometimes entertained socially. One of a group of noncoms recently gave the hostesses the low-down on their insignia. "This HG service badge with the yellow propeller blades on the blue background means a man's married," he said, "and these 'hash marks' on the sleeve indicate the number of children." The hostesses went on being polite until a sergeant, not from HG, put in an appearance wearing no badge but boasting four service stripes.

THERE'S plenty of prairie mud around Splinter City, the big new cantonment on the far side of Scott Field, and WPA workers from Belleville are trying to clean it up by building roads. One group of these laborers regularly arrives in a hearse. No explanation. *C'est la guerre.* G. W.



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BY IFOR THOMAS

