



Few traffic courts can match Judge John J. Griffin's brand of justice. Though confronted by 450 cases a day he runs his court with fairness and efficiency

# Our Reeking Halls of Justice

By MORTON SONTHEIMER

## PART I OF A TWO-PART ARTICLE

*Many hard-boiled and stupidly incompetent judges are imposing a barbarously low grade of justice in our lower courts—terror for poor or helpless defendants, but laxity for hardened criminals. If you take it for granted that you automatically get a fair hearing and treatment in these American courts, you may have a surprise in store for you.*

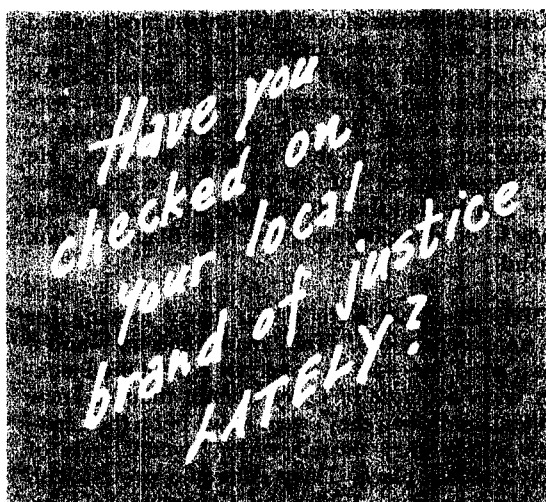
**T**HEY are called—with more significance than intended—the inferior courts. To them, in each community, comes the ordinary citizen to seek protection, to look for justice.

In one of these municipal courts stands a man accused of assaulting his wife. This man is of doubtful mental condition and the court is considering a recommendation that he be sent to the Psychiatric Clinic for examination.

The defendant speaks: "I'm good to my wife and kids when I'm sober, Judge. I just can't seem to stop drinking. I want to, but I can't seem to."

"Do you know what I'm going to do to you?" asks the judge. The defendant lowers his head.

"I'm not just going to send you to the work-house," His Honor resumes. "Over there they have a snake pit, deep and with slimy sides that you can't



climb. I'm going to have them throw you in that snake pit!" The judge stands up and leans over the bench toward the defendant, then he runs wriggling fingers toward his own nostrils and over his face, and sneers:

"Those snakes will crawl in and out your nose! And your eyes! And ears! And mouth! I'm going to keep you there for six years! Bailiff, take him

away! And be sure to mark 'Snake Pit' all over his papers!"

As the bailiff leads the prisoner out, the judge laughs. He turns to reporters and a social worker standing beside his bench and in open court, he says, "My God! Ain't that a hot one?"

This occurred in a domestic relations court, that keystone of social importance where disintegrating families first turn for help in a society that holds the family to be of sacred value. When I witnessed this scene in a Chicago court I couldn't comprehend how much of the judge's graphic oration on the defendant's fate might have resulted from his having seen too many movies or how much of it was actually true, although I knew that he had no power to sentence to six years.

After court, I asked a bailiff about this "snake pit" at the county jail.

"Aw, there's no such thing," the bailiff explained. "The judge was just having fun with that guy. What was actually written on his papers was 'Psychiatric Clinic,' that's all. The judge is always pulling stunts like that. You oughta hear him when he's got a nonsupport case before him. He tells 'em: 'I'm going to sentence you to the prison bakery to work and have them sew your lips shut so you'll know what it's like to be hungry.' And if they got

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PHOTOGRAPH FOR COLLIER'S BY WAYNE MILLER

# Willow Woman

By BENNETT FOSTER

**It was the Indians' opinion that the only good white man was a dead one. But Davy Connor and the chief's daughter could not agree—Davy was the white man**

**D**AVY CONNOR smoked a pipe in the shade beside Dull Knife's tepee. Near by, a small drum thumped an invitation and at the edge of the shade a dog chewed happily on a large greasy bone. From the lodge a shrill Cheyenne voice issued commands and the scent of stewing meat came filtering. The Cheyenne with their friends and allies, the Arapaho, had made the fall buffalo hunt, Dog Soldier discipline was now relaxed, and the camp babbled cheerfully. Davy knocked out his pipe and cased it.

Above Davy's head, a brand-new Blackfoot scalp dangled on a pole planted in front of the lodge. And in the lodge Davy's Hawken gun, his belt with knife and pistols, his powder horn and bullet pouch hung high against the back wall. Davy's horses, five of them, grazed with the Cheyenne herd, and south about ten miles, four packs of trade goods were cached by the forks of Lodgepole Creek.

A passing Arapaho buck paused to stare poisonously, and Davy returned the look, unblinking. Arapaho, the scalp, his weapons, the horses and the hidden packs comprised Davy's troubles. He was in the middle of a fix. Anybody with half an eye could see hard doin's ahead for young Connor.

It had begun a month ago at Fort Atkinson when Davy outfitted. He was fixing to trap the Madison River, and a Pawnee named Wolf's Shoulder had agreed to go along. Davy bought a considerable amount of trade goods, allowing that he would make his fall hunt on the river and then spend the winter trading with the Crows. But when he told Henry Bronte his idea, Henry was scandalized.

"You'll lose your scalp," Henry warned. "That's Gros Ventre country an' them Big Bellies are bad. An' takin' a Pawnee!" Henry clucked his amazement. "They ain't to be trusted, Davy. That Wolf's Shoulder would put you under for a dram of liquor. He'll stick Green River in your lights an' take your trade. You crazy?"

"No," Davy answered with asperity. "I ain't. There's fur up there an' no Gros Ventre is goin' to lift hair from this child. The Pawnee is all right, too. I know him. Better come with me, Henry."

But Henry shook his head, prophesying darkly. So Davy and Wolf's Shoulder left Atkinson without company. . . .

Two weeks along the trail, nearing the edge of the Cheyenne hunting grounds, Henry's forecasts began to come true. Wolf's Shoulder turned bad as spoiled meat and in an early-morning hour, imagining that his companion still slept, came at Davy with a Green River knife and murderous intent. Davy, who kept an eye skinned, shot Wolf's Shoulder through the belly and left him for the coyotes.

A fearful man might have turned back then, but Davy was an old *hibernant*, a mountain man and a free trapper. He headed for the Madison and he kept going. But when he crossed the Niobrara and the South Fork, he became more and more concerned, for the country abounded in horse tracks

and there were travois trails running every which way. All the Indians were out, hunting buffalo, and Davy began to think he might have picked a more opportune time for his journey. So he hurried along, wanting to get to the Crow country. The Absarokas were friendly—it was their boast that they had never killed a white man—and Davy craved their company.

At the forks of Lodgepole Creek there was sign of a traveling village, and Davy saw two scouts. Hoping that he had not been seen, but taking no chances, he dug a hole in the bluff above the creek, lining it with robes and saving the sods. He carried the dirt to the creek so that it might be washed away, and carefully put his trade goods in the hole. Rain, falling while he replaced the sods, obliterated all traces of his work.

Davy was thankful for the rain, but he could not bury his horses. He stayed up in the thickets, emerging only at night and never building a fire, until four Cheyenne young men found the *caballada*, searched half a day for its owner, and departed, driving Davy's horses before them. Davy cursed and followed. He couldn't go anywhere without his horses.

The horse trail led to a Cheyenne encampment and bad news. There were Arapaho with the Cheyenne and the Arapaho weren't friendly. Early in the spring a band of their young men had jumped a little party of trappers and tried for scalps and loot, whereupon the hard-bitten mountaineers stood off four charges and emptied six saddles. That made a blood feud, and no Injun that Davy ever heard of differentiated between one white man and the next.

Given Cheyenne alone, Davy might have walked into the camp, sought out the chief and paid a visit. He might, with proper gifts, have redeemed his horses. But with Arapaho present, valor gave way to common sense. Davy stayed hidden, trying to scheme out a way to steal back his livestock. He had things figured out; he knew where his horses were and he had the horse guard located. He was ready to do some business when the Blackfeet took a hand.

**T**HE Blackfeet were a war party looking for horses and glory. They made their try—and it was a good one—at daybreak. Of course the Blackfeet knew no more of Davy Connor than he knew of them, and when they swept down upon the Cheyenne village they passed within twenty rods of Davy's hiding place. Davy entered a protest with his Hawken gun. While the Cheyenne held his horses he had a chance of retrieving them, but if the Blackfeet were successful, the horses were long gone. Davy's shot upset a pony, surprised the Blackfeet and roused the Cheyenne camp. Following it, things were pretty thick, but at the windup the Blackfeet were hightailing north, the horses were secure, and Davy was surrounded by Cheyenne and Arapaho. . . .

Dull Knife, emerging from the lodge, joined



Davy in the shade beside the tepee and sat unmoving for a time, then signed that he would smoke. Davy produced pipe and tobacco. The fact that he understood no word of Cheyenne was not a handicap, for Davy could sign-talk with the best, and the sign language was complete and expressive. Loading the pipe, Davy struck steel on flint, ignited the tobacco and took three puffs. Dull Knife, receiving the pipe, also puffed three times, then placed the pipe across his knees and began a conversation.

Soon, he signed, he would dance the Blackfoot scalp; all those who had taken part in the fight would dance. Dull Knife did not mention Davy, but diplomatically Davy signified his pleasure.

Continuing, Dull Knife stated that he was a very powerful warrior. He bragged a while, and then became serious. When could he expect presents from his guest? All white men were rich and it was fitting that a rich visitor give presents to his host.

"I am a poor man," Davy's hands moved swiftly in answer. "I have nothing here. If my father will allow me to depart I will go to my people. When I return I will bring many gifts. I will take my weapons and go now."

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