

## Suisun ranks in top western train robberies

By Kristin Delaplane

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Engineer Jack Marsh sat in the cab of passenger train No. 10 as it pulled out of Benicia on the night of April 16, 1910. It was warm and the full moon cast a bright glint on the oily, tawny waters.

Although he was running late, the peaceful scene of cottonwood groves in the flat of the small valley reassured him that he could make up the lost time by speeding between Benicia and Suisun.

As Marsh turned and reached for an oil can on the shelf, he suddenly found himself staring into the muzzles of two automatic pistols. Two hooded men were facing him and the fireman. They had obviously boarded the tender at Benicia.

"Step down from the throttle. I'll run the engine," one of the bandits said as he walked over to the engineer, menacing him with the pistol. The other bandit ordered fireman Jim Blakely to keep up steam.

When the train reached a point about 1 mile west of Goodyear in a low, flat, marshy country, one of the robbers said, "That will do. Stop here!"

The other man applied the air brakes, bringing the train to a stop. As soon as the train had halted, the engine crew was asked the position of the express car. The engineer replied the train did not carry an express car since it was a mail train.

The masked men took the engineer and fireman back to the mail car and had the engineer call to the mail clerk to open the car. The mail clerk wouldn't obey, and put out the lights in the car. One bandit threatened to blow up the car. The door was then opened and sacks of second-class mail thrown out. The two mail clerks were told to throw out registered matter and about 15 sacks of this class of mail were thrown to the ground. The mail clerks and engineer were ordered to pack this mail to the engine cab, and while they were doing so, the fireman was forced to cut the engine from the train.

When the mail had been loaded on the engine, the bandits departed on the locomotive. When they reached the Goodyear bridge, the engine was brought to a stop and a number of the mail sacks quickly carried down and loaded into a boat. Then the engine was turned loose with the throttle opened. News of the holdup had been telegraphed ahead to Tolenas, and when the conductor of a freight train on a siding there noticed

there was nobody in the locomotive cab, he opened a switch, heading the engine into the siding, where it collided with two freight cars.

The robbery was immediately reported to Southern Pacific officials at Oakland Pier, as well as the sheriffs' offices of Solano and Contra Costa counties. A search was made and sacks of mail were found lying alongside the track at Goodyear, Cygnus, and at Joyce islands. The sack found at Joyce was cut open but evidently none of the contents had been removed. A long black overcoat worn by one of the bandits was left in the cab of the engine.

The morning following the robbery, Southern Pacific officers found 41 sticks of No. 2 dynamite in the grass at points near the robbery scene. Shortly afterward a sawed-off shotgun with a belt containing 20 shotgun shells was found under a bridge crossing Goodyear Slough. As the shore of the bay could be reached quickly from this point, it was concluded the bandits walked over the marsh to the Carquinez Straits and made their escape in a boat.

Working on this theory, a thorough search was made of the Contra Costa shore. It was learned that two young men had taken possession of a deserted cabin on what was known as the Frazier Ranch on the outskirts of Martinez about the first of April. These men caused considerable comment since their only occupation seemed to be rowing about the Carquinez Straits in a skiff. This continued for about two weeks at which time they became slightly acquainted with a Mrs. Hoadley who lived on a ranch nearby. One of them cleaned up her yard in exchange for foodstuffs.

A farmer living near Bullshead Point discovered the skiff that had been used by the two men. It was floating about 40 feet offshore in some rocks. There were very plain marks showing where two men had scrambled up the bank. A search was made of the cabin they had occupied. Under the floor the officers found more dynamite similar to that discovered at the scene of the robbery. Where the boat was floating they found a pair of rubber boots like those worn by the men. Close by on the bank was a Colt Army model .38-caliber pistol.

When the boat was pulled ashore, two cards were found covering registered letters, which had been mailed on train No. 10. A farmer informed the officers that the last time he had seen the young men around the boat was about 11:30 a.m. on the 16th when they climbed in the boat near his place. At this time, one of them had a large package concealed by a long black overcoat similar to that found in the locomotive and the other carried the boots.

The officers then learned that a horse and buggy belonging to Mr. J. Hoadley had been stolen on the night of the robbery. A description of the horse and buggy was broadcast

by telegraph and telephone to all officers in the bay district.

Checking in Martinez, railroad detectives learned that one of the bandits had left a watch to be repaired at a local jewelry store. On the same day the robbers inquired about the purchase of dynamite at the McNamara Store. The clerk explained that the dynamite was stored at the McNamara warehouse. Investigation at the warehouse disclosed that the greater portion of a box of dynamite had been stolen.

Southern Pacific's chief special agent Kindelon checked with the manufacturers of the shotgun found at the bridge and learned it had been sold to the Riverside Cycle and Arms Company in Riverside. Following up with this company, it was discovered that the shotgun and four Colt revolvers were a portion of the loot in a recent burglary. The numbers of the stolen guns were obtained and furnished to all officers on the Pacific Coast.

Southern Pacific offered a reward of \$5,000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the robbers, and circulars with the best available descriptions of the robbers were widely distributed.

Although numerous other clues were followed up, none led to the arrest of the bandits. It was learned that the watch left in Martinez had also been stolen from the store at Riverside, as well as a pair of field glasses, which were found on the bank near where the boat was floating. Further search of the cabin disclosed several shirts and underwear bearing a laundry mark "825" and others bearing the laundry mark "D-33." Efforts to trace these laundry marks were made all over the United States.

On July 15, Constable Michael Judge of Sacramento arrested two men driving a horse and small wagon. He believed the buggy to have been stolen. The specific charge upon which they were arrested was theft of a bale of hay. After the prisoners had been taken to the city jail, a search was made of their wagon. To Judge's surprise, three revolvers were found and their numbers matched the guns stolen from the Riverside store.

The men gave their names as Joseph C. Brown and Charles B. Dunbar and denied participating in the train robbery. They were taken to Fairfield and questioned further by the district attorney and sheriff of Solano County, as well as by railroad police.

On the evening of July 19, Brown was brought into the sheriff's office at Fairfield and questioned by district attorney Raines, Sheriff McDonald and assistant chief special agent Harrold of the Southern Pacific Company. After being informed that witnesses were ready to identify him, he broke down and made a complete confession and implicated Dunbar.

In his confession, Brown admitted the burglary of the Riverside Cycle and Arms Company and also stated that after the train holdup they drove to Riverside County in the stolen rig, rented pasture for the horse and remained in that vicinity for some time. They then stole a horse and wagon and burglarized the post office at Armada in Riverside County in June of 1910. In the post office burglary they obtained a small amount of stamps, \$20 of the postmaster's personal funds, a shotgun and a pair of field glasses.

On July 22, both men were brought before justice of the peace W. W. Reeves for preliminary examination on the train robbery charge. Each made a full confession. They were bound over to the superior court and held in the Solano County jail.

On August 22, Dunbar and Brown were tried before Superior Judge Buckles at Fairfield. Each entered a plea of guilty to the charge of train robbery. Dunbar was sentenced to serve 45 years in the California State Prison at San Quentin and Brown to serve 45 years in the California State Prison at Folsom.

Brown escaped from a prison road camp on May 11, 1917 and was never apprehended. Dunbar was paroled Dec. 24, 1919.

In conversations with Kindelon, Brown and Dunbar admitted these were not their true names since both came from very high-class families. Brown stated that his father had a very good government position in Texas. Dunbar, whose true name was believed to be Bishop, claimed to be the scion of a prominent Connecticut family.

These men were prosecuted by Joseph M. Raines, who was at that time district attorney of Solano County and known as one of the most able prosecutors in California. When the men entered pleas of guilty, Raines informed the court that by reason of the pleas they had saved the state considerable time and expense and requested the Court to take this into consideration with fixing the sentence. Judge Buckles said he would make allowance for this action by Brown and Dunbar and that it had been his intention to sentence each to 50 years, but in view of what Raines had stated would reduce sentence to 45 years.

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