

Ken

APRIL 21, 1938

THEY STILL WANT TO GET IN

BY OREN ARNOLD

Our immigration border patrol has one man to every eight miles of Mexican frontier. These sharp-shooter psychologist-detectives have to keep hep to the methods invented by an ever-changing army of body-smugglers. For a few hundred dollars any alien can have himself flown or pick-a-backed across the Rio; some even used to ride over as brakemen, waving at the border patrol as they passed. Because a smuggler can be taken only with the body on him, old and known contrabanders can carry on their tantalizing hide-and-seek under the noses of the guards. Smugglers-by-plane have one sure way of dropping the bodies, when they get tipped that their cargo is spotted.

IT is a heart-rending thing to have yearned for happiness and freedom and prosperity in magnificent America, to have paid anywhere from \$200 to \$2000 to be smuggled across,

CONTRABANDERS

and then be captured and deported back to starve in your native land. Along our 2,300 miles of Mexican border, aliens of every color and character are constantly looking for cracks.

The opportunity to get into America without official welcome is very good. Mrs. Perkins and her predecessors in the Labor Department have seen fit to place about 300 guardians along the international line from Brownsville, Texas, to San Diego, California. That's only one man to every eight miles, so you can discount him if you have a nice bomb-throwing uncle you want to bring in via Mexico, or if your Chinese cook would like to bring his family in.

"Listen, Uncle Malignovitch," you can write him, "you come on to Tampico and then to Matamoros, see. Then you put on some old overalls and a denim cap, take a brakeman's billy and climb right up on top of the first east-bound freight train heading for the bridge over the Rio Grande. Just stand right up on a freight car. Wave a friendly greeting to the border immigration men, there in that little house on this end of the bridge. Then drop off around the curve and go on to the main Brownsville hotel, where I'll have a room reserved for you. Nothing to it."

Precisely that racket was worked for nobody knows how many months—or years—until some alien on this side got arrested for burglary. When they put the screws on him he told the whole thing. Said he had paid a "smuggler chief" in Chihuahua \$300 to guarantee his safe crossing into the U. S. A. The immigration men arrested the next two or three who posed as brakemen, but the smuggler chief wasn't caught.

Of course, too, you will want your

CONTRABANDERS

Precisely that racket was worked for nobody knows how many months—or years—until some alien on this side got arrested for burglary. When they put the screws on him he told the whole thing. Said he had paid a “smuggler chief” in Chihuahua \$300 to guarantee his safe crossing into the U. S. A. The immigration men arrested the next two or three who posed as brakemen, but the smuggler chief wasn’t caught.

Of course, too, you will want your Chinese cook’s family to be brought in. “Listen, Ong,” you back him up in the pantry corner some night. “You send your wife about 500 smacks, see. Tell her to grab a boat and head for Guaymas, on the Mexican coast; then come on up to Hermosillo. Tell her to noise around she wants to get in. Some Mex will hear her, and offer her a seat in a night plane. . . . Fly her right over the line at 2 a.m. and put her down around Phoenix or Tuscon.”

It is a safe guess that there is at least one such airplane crossing a night. Each ship will bring five to ten chattering or scowling Chinese, Russians, Japanese, Hindus or Mexicans. The flier’s profits are large even without the usual heavy additional shipment of narcotics in his cockpit.

If Mrs. Ong and her little Onglets never get here, however, the following true and somewhat routine frontier incident may suggest a reason:

One of the aviators, an adventurous young American with a duly licensed plane, was soaring high in the starlight above Sonora one night when his radio phones came to life.

“Calling plane six-six-six, plane six-six-six,” the radio voice was saying. “Pilot of plane six-six-six, your mother has just died. Funeral arrangements await your instructions.”

CONTRABANDERS

Tch-tch, that was bad news. The young aviator naturally was quite upset about it, but he shed no tears. He looked out the cabin window, verified that he was soaring over Sombrero Canyon which is 30 miles or more from any town or village. So—he reached for a certain extra lever in his cockpit, gave it a terrific thrust.

An unholy screaming reached him, even through the motor and wind noise. His lever had opened a trap door in the cabin behind him. Six aliens huddling there were dropped without warning. Their bodies splattered somewhere on the jagged rocks a mile below.

The plane went on into Tucson and landed casually. Federal officers met it, searched it, questioned the aviator.

“Me? I took some American sportsmen down near Hermosillo to hunt jaguars,” the young man explained. “What’s all this about?”

The officers could only apologize. Must be some mistake. A year later an under-cover operative worked into the man smuggling racket and got the full story. The smugglers and the aviator collected their fees in advance.

IT was one of those under-cover federal men down in Mexico who brought back the final chapter in the career of Domingo, called “El Coyote, King of the Smugglers.”

Domingo functioned in and around Juarez and El Paso back in the time (before 1928) when immigration men were called Line Riders instead of Border Patrol.

A stretch along the river up by the smelter, above the Southern Pacific tracks was Domingo’s favorite playground. One day Domingo collected about 200 pesos from each of three aliens (really petty money

CONTRABANDERS

for him) and told Immigration Officers Swartz and McIntyre that he would cross with his charges before bedtime. The Americanos accepted his challenge. Rain started at sundown, but at 7 p.m. the two were crouched right down in the river water, there at the end of the shack street called Smuggler's Row. Distant smelter lights cast a faint glow, the only illumination. They shivered and cursed and swore to resign tomorrow, but they kept their eyes near the water level, staring through the rain at the smelter's dim glow. Sure enough, a form presently was silhouetted just above the water.

"It's nothing but a dog," ruled Swartz, after studying it.

"It's a powerful big dog," McIntyre countered.

The dog, or whatever, made for Domingo's cabin on the American shore. Two more dogs followed.

The federal men sloshed out, took opposite sides of the cabin. They pushed in, pistols drawn. Nothing happened.

"*No sabe nada, señor,*" the brown-black woman inside simpered. "*Domingo no esta aqui.*"

They looked everywhere. Domingo really wasn't there, nor was anybody else. Not in the closets, under the beds, in the shallow attic.

The two men, stymied, stood outside in the rain, flashing their electric torches. Half a broken barrel leaned against the adobe shack. McIntyre's light beam picked up a streak of white behind it. He went over and kicked out a groveling but well-dressed Chinese, whose white collar had caught the light.

"Belong here, belong here—see my feet, they are not wet. My shoes and stockings are dry. I have not waded

CONTRABANDERS

across. Belong here, belong here." The Chinese patted his feet.

A smuggler, wading the river, carries his human contraband on his shoulders after tying sox and shoes in a waterproof roll around his neck. The officers knew that trick. They took the Chink in.

But they never found the others, nor saw anything of Domingo, even though they searched until dawn. A week later Swartz and McIntyre, off duty and loafing in Juarez, encountered Domingo in the Big Kid's Bar. Ever sociable, he bought their drinks.

"Why you no feel joost over your head on thee roof, señor?" Domingo purred at McIntyre. "I wass lay there, right above thee broken barrel. I could easy have keel you, but—does one shoot one's fran's? Here, señores, have thee anawther glass!"

Domingo made monkeys of the border force for six or eight years. Then he went in for ammunition smuggling because it paid more, for a while. Pancho Villa gave him \$5,000 once to bring in guns. Domingo brought in \$3,000 worth, pocketed the \$2,000 change.

Pancho knew too much for that, however. He socked Domingo in the *carcel*. "Bring me the \$2,000 he stole, if you want to see him out of the jail," Pancho told the family.

The Domingo relatives began to take up a collection all around Juarez and El Paso. Some of the immigration men even chipped in a dollar each; they wanted to resume their game with the old devil. Finally the wife, sons, daughters, brothers et al got the \$2,000 and traveled to Villa's headquarters.

"Ah, you have come!" greeted Pancho, grinning. "You shall now

CONTRABANDERS

Pancho, grinning. "You shall now see Domingo outside the jail, as I promise."

They saw him taken out and stood against the jail wall. Saw him crumple when the bullets struck; then took him out and buried him.

"In another year," said Swartz and Mac, sadly, "we'd have caught Domingo surely."

THE trouble with a human being, however—be he Russian, Mexican or Chinese—is that he weighs up to 200 pounds and is annoyingly bulky; moreover, he seldom has more than \$500. On the other hand, opium, cocaine, heroin and marijuana equal to a very sizeable bank account can be packed into a couple of ordinary tomato cans.

This astute reasoning convinced Mr. Leo Markheim, lately of Los Angeles, that he should go in for concentrates. First, he made a deal with one Andres, who lived just over the fenced international line near Tijuana, Baja California, on the American side. Next he leased a plain looking adobe house just opposite on the Mexican side, and built a board wall around the back yard to keep his chickens in.

Mr. Markheim undoubtedly had considerable success with his chickens; he began to put and take rather flashily in the big green room at Caliente, and to wear a checkered sport coat, at the beautiful race track there. All of which interested federal officers.

One day up the road somewhere about Chula Vista, the speed cops bore down on a young Mexican driver who was singing loudly and twisting all over the highway.

He came out of his car fighting like a Sonoran javalina, conked one

CONTRABANDERS

of the policemen and laid him out cold, drew a gun and would have killed the other one but for a snappy bit of jiu jitsu application. When they finally got him in the jug the doctor said he was laden with marijuana, and he didn't deny the charge.

"Where'd you get it?" the sergeant demanded.

"From Leo, what you t'ink—BOOM! BOOM-BOOM! POW! Smart as hell, eh gringo?"

"Leo who, Mex?"

"Hunh?"

"Leo who? Where is Leo?"

"Shooting his cannon. BOOM-BOOM, POW! Lemme outar this, I gotta get to Angelina's, goddamn you gringos. Angelina—she's got what it takes, she gives you the breaks, she's. . . ."

"Sign off that yodeling! *Leo who?*"

But you can't stop marijuana raving, and when an addict comes to his senses he won't talk. The federal dicks knew at least one Leo. But what about that boom-boom, pow?

The Border Patrol boys watched Mr. Leo Markheim and eventually got the answer to the *boom-boom, pow*. The kid was right. Leo had a cannon. The sleuth crept up to Leo's poultry fence at midnight and saw it shoot. Leo himself put the tomato can on one end of an eight-foot lever. He dropped a weight on the other end and the tomato can went catapulting through the darkness, right over the international fence into Andres' own back yard!

DOPE has been smuggled across our Mexican border by submarine—pulled under the Rio Grande in sealed cans. It has been flown over in airplanes, even dropped from kites. On one occasion it was found tied in horses' manes and tails. It is often

CONTRABANDERS

concealed in automobiles, more often tied to dogs who are trained to swim the river with it at night, constantly shipped over with other commodities such as tomatoes, peppers, baskets, pottery, beans. To combat this as well as the traffic in human contraband, Uncle Sam is sending bright young men to officers' schools, teaching them to shoot, to ride, to speak foreign languages, to know the law. Given another ten years and the Border Patrol may be as efficient as the FBI and the Secret Service.

Another instance in El Paso proves the worth of the young agents. Cocaine had been coming in through a new and undetected channel. Veteran sleuths on both sides of the river settled pretty soon on a woman who was repeatedly crossing the river with her little girl. The child carried a doll and mothered it, and smiled at the other passengers on the international trolley car, and sometimes sang cute little songs.

No matter, they picked up the couple anyway and took them to jail.

"See what they got, please ma'am," the customs officer ordered the matron.

That matron missed no bets, ever. She took the mother in and gave her the once over externally and internally. Then she called the little girl in and gave her an inspection too. But it was wasted effort.

Nevertheless an officer tailed the couple persistently. They had a chance to be getting dope, and to dispose of it. Old timers on the force worked at it and gave it up.

Then the young officer took the job. He stayed with the mother and daughter for four days, three times crossing the border and back, watching every move made, admiring the little girl because he had little daugh-

CONTRABANDERS

ters of his own at home.

On the fourth day, in the trolley car, he suddenly had his inspiration. He arrested the mother and child again, took them to jail and immediately revealed a doll stuffed not with sawdust but with drugs.

“My little kid at home gets all sorts of dolls,” he explained. “However, she’s crazy about just one, clings to it everywhere she goes even though it’s ragged. But I suddenly noticed this kid on the street car had a *new* doll every day!”