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This image depicts Melvin Purvis (pictured left) with his boss, J. Edgar Hoover (pictured right). Image online via the U.S. National Archives.

A young man from South Carolina, with a law degree and no law-enforcement experience, Melvin Purvis joined the Bureau of Investigation in 1926. Hoover liked him, so the transplanted Southerner had lots of promotions. By 1932, he was Special-Agent-in-Charge (SAC) of the Bureau's Chicago office.

The director sometimes teased Purvis about his good looks. Bryan Burrough, author of *Public Enemies*, describes his voice and overall appearance:

At five-feet-seven, with delicate facial bones and a high, reedy voice, he could pass for a teenager. He was Hoover's favorite SAC. (Burrough, *Public Enemies*, page 65.)

On the 6th of March, 1934, Hoover contacted Purvis. He was about to assign him a fame-making job. Three days earlier, John Dillinger had escaped from an Indiana jail. Captured in Tucson, then transported east by plane, Dillinger was supposed to stand trial for the murder of Detective O'Malley. Johnnie, however, had other plans.

After landing at Chicago's Midway airport, Dillinger was driven to the jail at Crown Point, where reporters greeted him. That night he became a national celebrity.

Peppering the escaped convict with questions, reporters asked Dillinger—known for leaping over a bank's railing as he robbed it—how long it took to get-out with the cash. Chuckling, Dillinger responded: "One minute and forty seconds flat."

Journalists weren't used to affable gangsters. Neither hard-faced nor angry, Dillinger was a gum-chewing, easy-quipping, lopsided-grinning, charismatic guy. Surely no jury would condemn this man to death in the electric chair?

Even the person who brought the gangster back from Arizona—prosecuting attorney Robert Estill—obliged reporters by posing with Dillinger. It was a move he and Sheriff Lillian Holley (who assumed the job after her husband died) would soon regret. As he was led away, Johnnie scored even more points when he told reporters:

I am not a bad fellow, ladies and gentlemen. I was just an unfortunate boy who started wrong.

Almost immediately, Crown Point officials worried that Dillinger would try to escape. Police officers surrounded the jail (which was connected to the sheriff's home), in an effort to keep Johnnie inside. Law enforcement officials wanted to transfer him, but Dillinger and his lawyer knew he was far better off at Crown Point. His legal team, led by attorney Lou Piquett, won that argument in court.

Within a month, Dillinger had settled into his new surroundings. Life seemed normal, so officials greatly reduced the intensive security forces which had surrounded the Crown Point jail. It was just the development Johnnie needed.

On a rainy Saturday in early March, about two weeks before his trial would begin, he reportedly used a homemade wooden gun to force his way out of custody. Aided by Herbert Youngblood (another inmate), Dillinger found what he needed most to get out of town: Sheriff Holley's V-8 Ford.

As long as the men drove the car in Indiana, the feds still had no jurisdiction over Dillinger. But when the escaped convicts crossed state lines, in a stolen vehicle, Hoover had the right to get involved.

The director's call to Purvis was just the beginning. A newly formed "Dillinger Unit," based in Chicago, was charged with finding the fugitive.

The Bureau of Investigation's war on crime, however, was initially known for its agents' embarrassing mistakes. Purvis, Hoover and the entire Bureau would soon realize, firsthand, the importance of proper training and law-enforcement experience.

"Little Mel," as Hoover sometimes called Purvis in those years, was about to personally orchestrate one of the worst episodes in his professional life. Today, historians reference those events as "The Disaster at Little Bohemia."

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/MELVIN-PURVIS-Public-Enemies>

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Media Stream



Dillinger - Captured in Tucson, Arizona

AP Photo, online courtesy U.S. National Archives.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Dillinger-Captured-in-Tucson-Arizona>



Dillinger - En Route Plane Journey

AP Photo, online courtesy U.S. National Archives.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Dillinger-En-Route-Plane-Journey>



Dillinger - Transferred by Plane to Indiana

Photo online, courtesy archives of the Indiana Department of Corrections.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Dillinger-Transferred-by-Plane-to-Indiana>



Dillinger - Crown Point Jail

Photo online, Indiana Department of Corrections.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Dillinger-Crown-Point-Jail>



Dillinger - Appearance in Crown Point Court

AP Photo, online courtesy U.S. National Archives.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Dillinger-Appearance-in-Crown-Point-Court>



Louis Piquette - Dillinger Lawyer

Image online, courtesy the *Chicago Examiner*, from Chicago Crime Commission.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Louis-Piquette-Dillinger-Lawyer>



Dillinger - Charged with Murder in Court

AP Photo, online courtesy U.S. National Archives.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Dillinger-Charged-with-Murder-in-Court>



Crown Point Escape - Wooden Gun

Photo online, courtesy Indiana Department of Corrections.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Crown-Point-Escape-Wooden-Gun>



Dillinger - Posing with Prosecutor in Crown Point Jail

Photo online, courtesy FBI.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Dillinger-Posing-with-Prosecutor-in-Crown-Point-Jail>

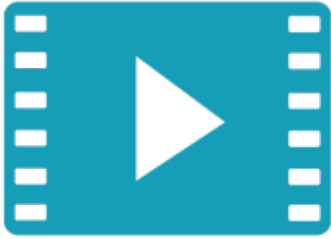


Dillinger - Posing with Sheriff Lillian Holley

Photo online, courtesy FBI.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Dillinger-Posing-with-Sheriff-Lillian-Holley>



Dillinger - Escape from Crown Point Jail

Clip from Gangster File - The Sensational Truth: Bonnie & Clyde / Al Capone / Dillinger. Online, courtesy yakidk89's channel at YouTube.

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