

# Smugglers Trapped by Radio

## Ingenious Apparatus which was the Downfall of the Operators



RECENTLY there appeared in these pages a photograph of the radio transmitting and receiving equipment used for purposes of secret communication by the bootlegging gang recently apprehended in America. A short description of the apparatus was also given, but now the detailed account of the smugglers' plant is to hand, and an extract from this appears below.

A "PIRATICAL" stronghold heavily armed and nestled high on a promontory overlooking the sea—smugglers running in their burdens under cover of night—speedboats loading up in the fog, and hastily returning to their bases before dawn—heavily-laden ships meeting by previous arrangement in sheltered coves—then, suddenly, the long-planned raid, with its simultaneous assaults on widely separated smugglers' retreats scattered along miles of coastline. Brigands under arrest!

Then the discovery that radio had trapped them.

It sounds like a page out of Stevenson! Smugglers, guns, hidden caves, forbidden bounty, night watches, running chases, revolvers and old swords—all the scenic accessories for a sequel to "Treasure Island."

But this is no story out of fiction. It is an actual happening, a thrilling narrative of modern piracy, with the cunning law evader outwitted by the modern use of radio.

This episode has all the dramatic suddenness and the fanciful variations of a Stevensonian adventure, brought up to date by the introduction of high-speed boats, machine guns with concrete defences, and radio. It was enacted only a short time ago along the Atlantic Coast within a few miles of the busy metropolis of New York.

At thirty-five different points along the shore, from Atlantic City to the eastern end of Long Island, probably old haunts of the smugglers of yore, the Government agents swooped down at the "zero hour" of four-thirty a.m. to surprise the lawbreakers. By six o'clock that same morning the job was done and thirty-two alleged bootleggers were in the hands of the law.

Among their booty prohibition officers found cases of liquor, pistols, guns, magazines, automobiles, records, books, boats, and a real "stronghold." But most interesting was the wireless equipment discovered in the mansion of the "million-dollar" outfit that operated six boats, a fleet of speedboats and a trucking system for transporting the liquid goods. Among the prisoners was the radio operator of the bootleggers' station that directed this fleet for the master-mind of the rum-ring.

As the details of the sensational raid were disclosed it became evident that radio had played a big part in the location of the various rum quarters, revealed its operations, and finally helped to close in on them. It is probably the first time that radio has

been used on such a big scale, both by the bootleggers for their criminal practices and by the Government for their location and apprehension.

ON top of Beacon Hill stands the mansion. It was there that the radio station, with the operator at the key, was found. To the average person it is an ugly, lone house, left unoccupied for the last fifteen years. That single wire, coming out of a window and running to a thirty-foot pole on the estate, might have been anything, including an aerial to pick up broadcast programmes. When the Government sleuths approached it, and

together with a wave-meter and code books, were taken also. Even a copy of the coastguard's secret code book was found on the operator's desk.

It is not exactly certain at this time what the frequencies were on which the signals were sent, over the rum runner's radio network. Frequency changes, however, were often made, and the code they employed frequently altered besides.

UNDOUBTEDLY the bootleggers' own cleverness defeated them. Radio is not commonly used by smugglers, and any signals of suspicious character are usually reported by

It was possible to train compass direction finders on the emanations, but due to the frequency variations and the short waves that this station used, instruments designed for lower frequencies did not operate accurately.

AFTER weeks of work, instruments were brought to within a mile or so of the suspected station. It wasn't realised even then that the station was engaged in assisting the unlawful traffic of liquor, but the department was convinced that the operator was a violator of the law which requires stations and operators to be licensed. It was therefore its business to locate the station and silence it. It was soon clearly established that there was some definite relation between the station's signals and the shipments of liquor. It seemed strange, for instance, that the set was constantly working when trans-Atlantic traffic was busiest. Many messages were intercepted, and though they were difficult to copy, the first transcripts were sent down to Washington for decoding by the army experts.

It was an amazingly clever code, the main secret of which was the use of long words instead of short ones, and vice versa. Three of the code books were found during the raid, together with the copy of the coastguard smuggled in from a spy "planted" in the Government service. Thus, it was an easy matter for the operator at Highlands to intercept messages sent by unsuspecting Treasury officials to the Coast Guard ships and bases and to turn them over to the bootlegger chiefs. Thus informed, arrangements for the shipment and distribution of liquors could be made without interference.

THE charges faced by the rum-runners' wireless operator are for the violation of the Volstead Act and for transmission without either a station or an operator's license. It is said that this is the first time that the Radio Act penalties will be applied to such an offender.

With the discovery of the main transmitter of the radio rum ring, the prohibition forces have crippled the communication system built up at great cost by the bootleggers. It is said that the message warning the sea-going boats filled with liquor to turn back because of the raid was flashed by another secret installation which has not as yet been found.

In their fleet of six ships clearing from St. Pierre to Bermuda, but allegedly making side trips to within the harbour lights of New York, and a swarm of ten speed boats to do the unloading and fast ferry-work between the "mother ships" and shore, the bootleggers had a very comprehensive radio network, the extent of which probably will never be learned by the authorities. It is thought that all the ships, including the speed boats, were equipped with radio, and were directed in their moves by the main station located in the house captured on the Highland hill top.



Miss Marjorie Skill, a lyric soprano from Sydney, where she is in great demand as a broadcast artiste and concert singer. Miss Skill appeared at 2YA during the Christmas season.

watched the operator at the key, they knew, from the information provided by the radio service of the Department of Commerce, that this was a transmitting station.

What they found, when they finally reached the radio room, so quietly that even the operator on watch was undisturbed, was a typical station of the amateur type.

Months of patient listening-in on the station that turned out to be an illicit one, enabled the expert to pick up the thread of the code message, and continue the radio conversation with the ship at sea. It was nearly decoyed into the net of waiting coastguard ships specially detailed to watch the landing spot, to which the rum runner was directed by the Government's radio expert.

It was a short-wave set that was doing the damage—probably costing not more than a thousand dollars to build. The transmitter, of the conventional design, was panel-mounted and of fairly neat construction. Together with this working transmitter, the raiders seized another set in the course of being assembled. Receiving apparatus,

amateur's who are listening in on practically every wave length below the broadcast bands. It is not surprising then that amateurs in the surrounding district should have promptly noticed and reported to the Government radio inspector strange signals transmitted within their wave bands.

Though it was impossible for these amateurs to locate them definitely, the strange tactics of a station which they believed to be of an amateur ownership suggested to them questionable use of a device that they respected greatly. Complaints were lodged, and a search was then made by the Government Department which has charge of policing the air—the Radio Division of the Department of Commerce.

For months a young engineer member of the staff of the Second District listened to the signals. The call letters used corresponded to no known amateur's station that was lawfully operating at the time. The fact that the station would send for hours at a stretch, at one time being "on" for a full eighteen hours, aroused further suspicion.