

## COOKIE

BY JAMES COLLINS

Highbridge was a 48 square block enclave in the Bronx near the Yankee Stadium between the Harlem River and Jerome Avenue. The ethnic makeup was Irish, Jewish, Italian and German and a large portion of the population consisted of immigrants from these various countries. In the 1950s, America was going through a boom time right after World War II. Unfortunately, with so many of the fathers in the military during World War II, many of the teenagers had grown up with little or no supervision. A few had turned to a life of crime. The great majority of the people worked hard at blue-collar jobs. Many were involved with the police, the fire department and the sanitation department. Because of this great intermix of disciplines the criminals learned about the weaknesses of the Police Department. They learned, for example, that the Bronx the police did not have good communication with the Manhattan police and neither of these departments interacted with the police in the state of New Jersey.

Highbridge is critically located on the west side of the Bronx connected by the Hamilton bridge to Manhattan and a half a mile further on by the Washington bridge to the state of New Jersey. It was quite simple to drive from Highbridge to New Jersey in 20 min. A group of innovative criminals decided that they could hold-up liquor stores in New Jersey and get away safely back to the Bronx. They studied the plan; discussed the pluses and minuses, the risks and alternate solutions. They ended up with a relatively simple plan, which they all agreed could not be modified. Their plan was rigid because they would follow exactly the same steps each time.

First, they would steal a non-nondescript car either from another area in the Bronx or from Yonkers in Westchester County late in the afternoon. Then they would pick up their crew in Highbridge. Guns were no problem. Nazi pistols were available all over New York City. They had a P 38, 2 Lugers and a 45 caliber automatic. Then they would drive across the Hamilton bridge go through Manhattan onto the George Washington Bridge and then on to the Thruway in Jersey. By this time it would be dark and they would then locate a liquor store. The driver kept the car running and two or three members would go to the liquor store; show guns; clean out the register; rush out to the car and disappear in traffic. They would then reverse their trip drop the crew off in Highbridge and a designated driver would then dump the car way way outside the neighborhood in another part of the Bronx. They were never supposed to keep the car more than a few hours. The plan worked for several months. New Jersey never contacted New York, and if they did, they would talk to headquarters in Manhattan not the Bronx. The Bronx police believed they had a series of

stolen cars, probably by joy riders. The cars were eventually found, but the police never tied them to the liquor store holdups in New Jersey. All was well with the gang and then they got careless.

The youngest member, flashy Eddie, was assigned to steal a car in the Bronx. In the plan, the emphasis was on the word 'nondescript'. This did not really register with flashy Eddie. He spotted a Buick that he thought would be the kind of car he would love to own. It had spinners of various colors. A racing stripe on the hood, on the sides, and on the back in 4-inch high gold letters, it had the word "COOKIE". Ed stole the car. When he went to pick up the crew he received a real dressing down. He had violated the plan. However, this was Friday night and a lot of money would be in the liquor stores. It was too late to get another car, so this would have to do. The stickup went without a hitch and everybody returned safely. Flashy Eddie was to get rid of the car.

Unfortunately, he had fallen in love with the car and could not bring himself to dump it. Therefore, he parked on a side street and planned to drive it around on the weekend to impress the girls. Alas, the Bronx police in one precinct did indeed talk to the Bronx police in other precincts. They were looking for joy riders who were stealing cars in the Bronx on regular basis. An all-points bulletin had been put out on the car with the unique designation of "COOKIE". At each precinct just before sending the men out on patrol, all-points bulletins were read to the assembled officers and, if available, photographs were present to them. The owner of the "COOKIE" marked Buick had a couple of photographs of his beloved car with the writing prominent on the back end. Patrolman Doyle took note and went off on his foot patrol. Lo and behold, here was the wanted car parked on a street in line with another hundred cars. Patrolman Doyle went to the nearest call box and notified the desk sergeant that the wanted car was parked on a street in Highbridge. The detectives decided to see if there might be evidence in the car that would point to the perpetrators. They waited until three in the morning to break into the car and discovered an arsenal of guns underneath the front seat. This changed everything. Now that a stolen car and many illegal weapons were found, they staked out the car and the following night they caught flashy Eddie. He panicked; blurted out the information on the stickup's; New York contacted New Jersey; and a large number of stolen cars and liquor store holdups were immediately solved. Flashy Eddie and the remainder of the gang each got 7 1/2 to 15 at Sing Sing prison Ossining, New York. Crime does not pay.

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