

November 28, 1934

MEMORANDUM

RE: LESTER E. GILLIS, WITH ALIASES

Lester E. Gillis, with aliases: Alex Gillis, Lester Gillis, George "Baby Face" Nelson, "Big George", Jimmie Williams, James Rogers, James Burnell, is wanted by the Division of Investigation, United States Department of Justice in connection with the shooting of Special Agent W. Carter Baum in Vilas County, Wisconsin, on April 22, 1934.

Gillis began his criminal career in 1922, when only fifteen years old. He was arrested in Chicago for the theft of an automobile, and because of his age he was sent to the Illinois State School for Boys. After a period of approximately two years, he was paroled in April 1924. He was returned to the institution the following September for violation of his parole, but was granted a second parole in July 1925. Gillis again violated his parole and was returned to the State School in October 1925. He remained there for his third term until July 11, 1926, at which time he received his third and final parole.

Following this, Gillis became active in Chicago's tire theft "racket" and later went into illicit distilling. About 1930 he became active in hold-ups and robberies. Gillis has been an associate of Tony Touhy, Ed and Ted Bents and other notorious hoodlums. He has been definitely identified as one of two machine gunners who perpetrated a \$32,000 bank robbery in Brainard, Minnesota, in October 1933. Following Dillinger's escape from the Lake County Jail, Crown Point, Indiana, on March 3, 1934, he joined with Gillis, John Hamilton, Homer Van Meter and Thomas Leonard Carroll and robbed the securities National Bank at Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on March 6, 1934, obtaining approximately \$49,500. The following week, March 13, 1934, they robbed the first National Bank at Mason City, Iowa, securing approximately \$52,000. Gillis has been identified by the Sheriff's Office of Hennepin County, Minnesota as the individual who murdered Theodore W. Kidder, at Minneapolis, Minnesota, March 4, 1934.

He has been definitely identified as the Jimmie Williams who was with Van Meter and Carroll in San Antonio, Texas during November and December 1933, at which time they were in contact with H. B. Leberman, who had been engaged to convert automatic pistols into machine guns and to supply this gang with firearms. It was during this visit to San Antonio that Carroll shot and killed City Detective H. C. Farrow. During the early part of 1934, Gillis is known to have been in the vicinity of San Francisco, California, associating with one John Paul Chase, a California bootlegger.

Wanted by Carter Baum

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Lester M. Gillis' only prison term resulted from his implication in the robbery of the State Bank of Hillside, Illinois, for which he was arrested by the Police Department, Chicago, Illinois, on January 15, 1931. Shortly thereafter, he was sentenced for this offense to serve a term of one year to life in the Illinois State Penitentiary, Joliet, Illinois. He was received at this institution on July 17, 1931, and remained there until February 1932, when he was removed from prison to stand trial at Wheaton, Illinois, on a charge of robbing the Itasca State Bank of \$4,000. He was found guilty and received another sentence of one year to life on February 17, 1932. The same day, while being returned to the Illinois State Penitentiary, Gillis effected his escape.

On the night of April 22, 1934, following the escape of Gillis, Dillinger, Van Meter, Hamilton, and Carroll from a raid conducted at the Little Bohemia Lodge, a resort near Manitowish, Wisconsin, Special Agents J. C. Newman and W. Carter Baum, accompanied by Constable Carl C. Christensen, proceeded to the residence of Alvin Koerner, located about two miles from the scene of the raid. On approaching the Koerner residence, the Agents noticed a car parked in front, which car Christensen recognized as one belonging to a local resident. In view of this, the Agents drove up beside the car, at which time an individual, who has since been identified definitely as Lester M. Gillis, asked who was in the Agent's car. Upon being advised that they were Federal officers, Gillis emerged from the automobile in which he had been holding several local residents at the point of a gun, covered the Agents and Constable with an automatic pistol, and commanded them to get out of their car. Immediately following this command, Gillis fired point blank at Agent Newman, the bullet striking him in the forehead and rendering him unconscious for a few minutes. Gillis continued to fire at Agent Baum and Constable Christensen, with the result that Baum was instantly killed and Christensen severely wounded. Gillis then escaped despite the return of fire by Agent Newman.

A Vilas County, Wisconsin, Coroner's jury, at an inquest at Mercer, Wisconsin, on April 28, 1934, held that Agent Baum had died as the result of gunshot wounds inflicted by Gillis.

Accompanying Gillis during his stay at the Little Bohemia Lodge was his wife, Helen, who was taken into custody early the following morning, April 23, 1934, together with Marie Marion Conforti and Jean Delaney, alias Mrs. Edward A. Crompton, the paramours of Homer Van Meter and Tommy Carroll, respectively. Helen Gillis was arrested by the Sheriff's Office at Madison,

Wisconsin, on April 23, 1934, and turned over to the United States Marshal, Madison, Wisconsin, on April 25, 1934, charged with harboring the fugitive John Dillinger. On May 19, 1934, a Federal Grand Jury, sitting at Madison, Wisconsin, returned two indictments, the first charging Gillis, Hamilton, Van Meter, Albert W. Beilly, Dillinger, Marie Comforti, Jean Delaney, Mrs. Helen Gillis and Patricia Young with harboring and conspiring to harbor the fugitive Thomas Leonard Carroll. The second indictment charged Gillis, Carroll and the others named above, excepting John Dillinger, with harboring and conspiring to harbor Dillinger. On May 25, 1934, Helen Gillis was sentenced in the United States District Court, Madison, Wisconsin, to serve a term of eighteen months; the sentence was suspended, and she was placed on probation for a like term. Upon her failure to properly report to the probation officer, her probation was revoked on June 12, 1934, and a warrant was issued for her arrest.

Gillis and his wife, who are but twenty-five and twenty-one years old, respectively, have two children, a boy five and a girl four. The boy has been seen with Gillis on several occasions in various sections of the country. The fugitive has been described as a nervous, shifty individual, who is continually on the move, yet cautious and wary of his contacts.

During the last few days of May and the early part of June, 1934, while Dillinger and Van Meter were undergoing operations on their faces and fingers in the home of James Johnson Probasco, Chicago, Illinois, Gillis visited these fugitives, but received no such treatment himself. On one of these visits, Gillis related to Dillinger, Van Meter, Probasco and others present his version of the escape from the Little Bohemia Lodge, telling in detail how he surprised three officers, whom he believed to be Federal agents, and fired upon them.

Shortly after the death of Dillinger, on July 22, 1934, Gillis was seen in the vicinity of San Francisco, California, and he is known to have been in that section of the country during the latter part of August, 1934.

On November 27, 1934 Special Agents of the Division, on assignment at Lake Como and Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, learned of the presence of Gillis in that vicinity and reported the information to the Chicago Division Office. Inspector S. P. Cowley and Special Agent H. E. Hollis, acting on this information, proceeded to the vicinity of Barrington, Illinois, where they encountered Gillis, an unidentified male companion, and a woman fitting the description of Mrs. Helen Gillis. A gun battle ensued, resulting in the instant death of Special Agent Hollis and Inspector Cowley died at the Sherman Hospital in Elgin, Illinois from wounds received. Gillis and his companions fled from Barrington, Illinois in the Hudson sedan belonging to the Division of Investigation. This sedan was recovered on the morning of November 28, 1934 at Winnetka, Illinois and what appeared to be human bloodstains were found on the front seat of the car.

An unidentified body recovered in the vicinity of Elias Center, Illinois on the afternoon of November 28th has been positively identified from his fingerprints as that of Lester M. Gillis, who was apparently also fatally wounded in the encounter with representatives of this Division at Barrington, Illinois.