

## **THE INFAMOUS JOHN DILLINGER**



**John Dillinger (1903 – 1934)**

John Dillinger became infamous after committing a series of violent crimes in the Midwestern United States during 1933 and 1934. In less than a year, Dillinger and his gang killed 10 men, wounded 7 other men, robbed numerous banks and police arsenals, and committed 3 jail breaks.

At the age of 22, Dillinger committed his first armed robbery shortly after which he and his accomplice were caught by police. Dillinger's accomplice pleaded not guilty and was sentenced to two years in prison, while Dillinger pleaded guilty and received joint sentences of 2 to 14 years and 10 to 20 years in prison. This harsh sentence caused Dillinger to become very bitter and resentful, so much in fact that in prison he formed a gang of criminals.

Dillinger was released from prison 8.5 years after his robbery conviction. Very soon afterwards, he robbed a bank in Ohio. He was arrested by police and held in an Ohio county jail. Police found a document on Dillinger detailing a prison break, but Dillinger denied any knowledge of this. However, this plan was used by eight of his friends to escape from an Indiana prison. These prison escapees disguised themselves as prison guards and went to the county jail in Ohio where Dillinger was at and asked for his 'return' to the Indiana prison. The sheriff became suspicious and was killed, while Dillinger and his friends escaped.

Dillinger and his gang soon robbed many banks in several states, stole weapons from two police arsenals in Indiana, freed captured gang members from two different police stations, and killed several police officers.

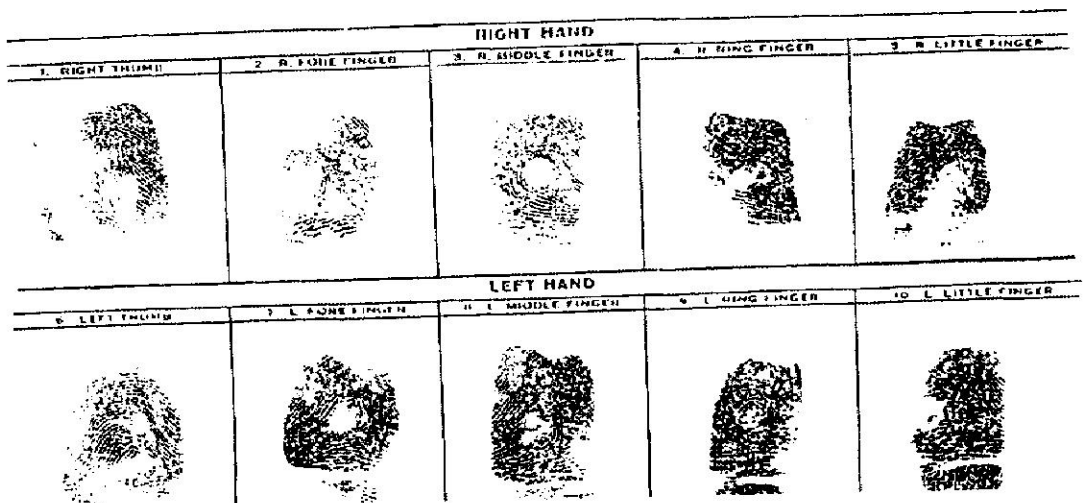
Police in Arizona apprehended John Dillinger and three of his gang members shortly after he killed a police officer during a bank robbery in Indiana. Dillinger was sent to a county jail in Indiana to await his trial. It was there his most famous escape occurred. Dillinger had his lawyer smuggle in a gun carved from wood that he used to force guards

to open his cell. He then took two machine guns, stole a guard's car, and fled to Illinois. This led the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to become involved and declare that John Dillinger was "public enemy number one". Also, the FBI established a \$50 000 reward for information leading to his arrest.

After this dramatic escape, Dillinger and his gang continued to rob banks in several states. While in Chicago, Illinois, Dillinger decided to have plastic surgery to change his facial features and his fingerprints. Two doctors, each having criminal records, performed the procedures. A strong acid was applied to the tips of Dillinger's fingers in an attempt to destroy the ridge patterns.

A month after his plastic surgery, Dillinger was turned in by a prostitute he had contacted. As Dillinger walked out of a Chicago movie theater with the prostitute, FBI agents surrounded him. When he grabbed his gun and ran toward a back alley, FBI agents fired a volley of shots which hit and killed Dillinger. After Dillinger was pronounced dead at a local hospital, his fingerprints were taken. Despite his attempts to alter his fingerprints, Dillinger's prints were still successfully identified because each print still had enough individual ridge characteristics that matched his original prints (see above). (In fact, it is likely that with time that all the skin damaged on Dillinger's fingertips would have grown back resulting in his original fingerprints).

Eventually, twenty-seven individuals were convicted of harboring and aiding John Dillinger and his fellow gang members during their crime spree.



Above = John Dillinger's fingerprints taken after his death in 1934.

Image from: Cummins, H. *Attempts to Alter and Obliterate Fingerprints*. *Journal of the American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology*, May-June 1934 - March-April 1935, Vol. XXV, North Western Press, pp. 983.

## The Infamous John Dillinger: Related Questions

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. John Dillinger and his gang committed a series of violent crimes over a period of
  - A. one year
  - B. ten years
  - C. two years
  - D. thirty years
  
2. John Dillinger is said to have become very bitter at the age of 22 because he
  - A. was beaten by police while in custody for shoplifting
  - B. escaped from prison and was caught twenty-seven days later
  - C. was found guilty of a crime he did not commit, while the true culprit escaped
  - D. spent 8.5 years in prison for robbery, while his accomplice spent only 2 years
  
3. Who helped John Dillinger in his dramatic escape from an Ohio county jail?
  - A. His lawyer.
  - B. Two doctors.
  - C. Some of his gang members disguised as prison guards.
  - D. Some of his fellow prisoners dressed up as FBI agents.
  
4. What type of device did John Dillinger use to escape from county jail in Indiana?
  - A. A strong acid.
  - B. A detailed map.
  - C. A gun carved from wood.
  - D. A knife carved from stone.
  
5. After John Dillinger escaped from an Indiana jail the FBI then
  - A. offered a one million dollar reward
  - B. classified him as "public enemy number one"
  - C. arrested him after a dramatic car chase in Chicago
  - D. captured all of his gang members in movie theater
  
6. Who led the FBI to the exact location of John Dillinger in Chicago?
  - A. A prostitute.
  - B. A plastic surgeon.
  - C. A fellow gang member.
  - D. A movie theater employee.