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Gun-Blast Memory

By

Charles Marquis Warren

Author of "Murder Setup."



Shyster Dawson boasted that his brilliant strategy in court could cheat Detective Brad Sanders of any prisoner. But the big copper had a photo memory that clicked for a quick trigger blast into the past.

DETEKTIVE SERGEANT BRAD SANDERS' two-hundred-and-ten pound body came up out of his squeaky swivel chair in a hurry. One bulky hand pushed a slab of shaggy, gray-flecked hair from over his blue eyes, the other balled into a massive fist and crashed upon

the stained blotter of his desk.

"Get out of here, Dawson," Sanders' voice, ordinarily a rich bellow that rumbled deeply from his washboard stomach, was soft and level, and indicated to those who knew him that Sanders was extremely annoyed.

"Sanders, the trouble with you is, among other things, you can't take it." Dawson's voice was just as oily as his appearance. The little lawyer's snap-brim hat was glued to pomaded dark hair, his wasp-waisted, flashy suit, and loud two-toned sport shoes, evinced in their expensive make a prosperity with which his cheap taste was unfamiliar.

"Sit down, Sanders," he continued. "Cool that brute body off. Mustn't let your naughty temper upset you. You can't order me out of headquarters. You're a lousy sergeant and I been seeing Captain Lanahan. Just thought I'd drop in to see how the famous Sanders photographic memory was functioning during this lull in crime activity."

Sanders grinned slowly, sat down, ran a hand through his rumpled hair, said:

"Sorry. Guess I lost my temper. Shouldn't have. But whenever you come in here and start ragging me about my memory, and comparing it to that two-for-a-penny elocution of yours, it gets me."

Dawson snorted, frowned. A police stenographer working at a small desk across the room, looked up, growled:

"I don't blame you, Brad. I'd do worse than lose my temper if I had to listen to this shyster blow off his mouth in envy every time he comes down here."

Dawson's dark eyes burned, his voice rose several pitches, became shrill.

"Shyster, eh! Listen, typewriter, you know how many defense cases I've had the last six months?"

The stenographer grimaced, rapped:

"Who doesn't? You try hard enough to splash 'em in the headlines. You've had twenty."

"Twenty! And you know how many I won?"

"Yeah. Twenty."

"Twenty out of twenty! Does that

sound like a shyster's record? Does it?"

"I don't know. Does it?" The stenographer bent over his typewriter.

Dawson glared, spun around and faced Sanders, his slender manicured hands gripping the edge of the desk as he shoved his thin face in front of the detective. He snapped:

"Twenty wins out of twenty cases is the result of brilliance. It's the result of a keen mind, not a keen memory. You say it's elocution, but I got to be plenty smart to make that elocution force juries to render a verdict in my favor—twenty times out of twenty. Brilliance does it, and I got brilliance!"

Sanders nodded wearily.

"All right. So you're brilliant. Now clear out of here and let me get some work done in my own stupid way."

Dawson, angry and primed for an argument, glared at each of the men, saw that no argument was forthcoming, moved hesitantly to the door.

"I'd like," he muttered, "just once, to pit my brilliance against that memory of yours, Sanders. Just once. I've made a monkey out of the memories of your cops so many times in court. I'd just like—"

"Dawson," Sanders growled, "get out of this office before I kill you." He made a murderous face at the little lawyer. "Boo. Scat."

Dawson purpled. The stenographer stopped tapping the typewriter keys, remarked blandly:

"Don't let the big, bad man scare you, shyster. And don't be sore because Brad gets more credit for his photo memory for faces than you get by screaming your twenty lousy wins to every paper that'll print 'em. His long-range recollections have put more hoods behind the iron than your cheap tricks have ever been able to get free. You're just beefing because there's

actually one man in this city who gets more publicity than you do.”

Dawson came slowly back in the room, face white, lips twitching. His voice was harsh with rage.

“Listen, you wise birds. Once and for all I’m going to prove brilliance can knock hell out of anybody’s memory, *anytime*. Get this carefully. I don’t know the next lug who’s going to be yanked in here. Neither do you. But—get this, punks—*whoever* he is, providing he’s not a homicide case, I’m going to spring him, defend him, and get him off free!”

Dawson’s nostrils were white, quivering; he stood rigid, a thin, triumphant smile twisting his lips. The police stenographer looked up, stared. Sanders serenely chewed his pencil.

“Y’ understand that?” Dawson rasped. “I’m going to get him off free—whoever he is! None of us know who it’ll be, so it’s on the square. Then we’ll know for good and all whether a simple dick’s memory can compare with brilliance. We’ll see who makes a fool out of who—and who rates the publicity in this city!”

“Why you cheap little front page hunting shyster,” the stenographer said.

Sanders spat out a splinter of the pencil, said:

“Go on, little man, go have a busy day.”

Dawson opened the door, his lips curling.

“Remember,” he barked loudly, “the next one that comes in—he goes free!”

The door slammed. The stenographer said:

“Brad, that worm can cause a lot of trouble for you.”

Sanders began to go through a pile of work on his desk.

“Let him rave. He won’t be able to go through with it, and it won’t hurt anybody

if he makes a fool out of himself.”

IT was late in the afternoon, and Sanders was clearing up the last of his work and getting ready to go home, when Danny Mahon of the *Examiner* poked his head in the office, waved a paper, said:

“I hear you been playing games with Dawson, Brad, Naughty, naughty. You ought to know Dawson’s too slick for your bulldog type.”

Sanders grinned.

“Hiyah, Danny. Did that little wart tell you about it already?”

“Tell me about it? Hell, it’s buzzing all over headquarters—all over town! Some cub even got a two-column spread about it on page two.”

Sanders’ deep voice rumbled lurid language as he read the story.

The first part of the article was a resume of his own prowess and keen memory that had sent so many hoodlums—at the point of going free—up the river to the pen, because of some long-forgotten, incriminating detail that Sanders resurrected out of his indelible memory. It was the rest of the article, depicting Dawson’s boastful challenge, and his serious intent to carry it out, that frosted Sanders’ trenchant-blue eyes, brought his big body swinging up from the chair. He moved to the door.

“Danny,” he said, “come along and be witness to a murder. I’m going to stop that little baboon’s mouth before—”

“Too late, Brad. He’s already pulled the stunt. Half an hour ago he produced a writ of habeas corpus and sprang the first mug who was brought in.”

Sanders turned, deliberately scratched his jaw. His voice was brittle.

“Who was it?”

“Guy named Joe Delano. Brought in for attempting to knife some gambler down at

the Palais Casino. The dicks have him dead to rights on the charge of assault, but with Dawson's tricks it'll be a cinch the guy goes free. Sorry, Brad, old potato, but it looks like he's gonna have the laugh on you."

Sanders nodded, went out the door. He ambled along a marble-floored corridor, sauntered through a door marked *Chief of Detectives* into a big room which was three-quarters filled with rows of straight-backed bench seats, a small wooden railing dividing a large dark-oak desk from the seats. A few blue-uniformed men were strung out about the room, lolling idly in various chairs. Reporters, waiting for police calls to cover for their respective sheets, swapped dirty stories, in low tones, near the desk. Everyone looked up, smiled knowingly and winked as Sanders came down the middle aisle.

"Hear Dawson's put the finger on you, Brad."

"Tough luck, sarge, you had such a nice rep with the tabs, too."

"Hey, Sanders, yuh think a photo memory can compete with brilliance, or should I ask Dawson? He's got brilliance!"

Sanders grinned, but otherwise ignored their remarks. He stopped at the desk, stood respectfully in front of lean-faced, gray-headed Captain Lanahan.

"Chief," he said slowly, "who's this guy Joe Delano?"

Lanahan rubbed his hawklike nose, grinned, said:

"Forget it. Brad. No need to follow this thing up. We don't need publicity."

"I'm not hunting publicity, chief. You know that. This is a personal matter."

"Besides—" Lanahan studied his blunt fingernails— "this isn't too serious, Brad. After all Delano did not kill anybody. Just a brawl. He picked the knife up from a table—wasn't carrying it. Dawson'll

probably use a cheap trick and get him off. You haven't a chance."

One of the reporters jumped up, hollered:

"Wait'll I put that in my sheet! Captain Lanahan admits Sanders doesn't have a chance. Wow!"

Lanahan's wiry brows contracted over his bleak gray eyes.

"You put that in your lousy sheet, Stevens," he said, "and I'll—"

The reporter smiled ruefully, sat down. Sanders said:

"What's the record on Delano, chief?"

Lanahan shook his head.

"No record. The name Delano's undoubtedly an alias—doesn't mean anything. None of the boys recognized him. Just a tall thin guy with skin the color of brown wrapping paper. Like I said, the offense wasn't serious."

Sanders face clouded. He nodded slowly, turned and moved up the aisle. The reporter, Stevens, yelled:

"Too bad, sarge. No chance to demonstrate the photo memory this time. Dawson's got undisputed right to the front page from now on."

"I," muttered Sanders, "will clout your dirty ears, Stevens. Shut up."

Stevens laughed.

"I'd look lovely with a cauli—" The reporter's eyes sparkled. "Say, Brad, that brings to my observing newshawk's mind that Delano had one beaut of a cauliflower ear."

Sanders stopped abruptly, his eyes narrowing.

"Are you kidding?"

"S'help me, honest. I noticed it when he was leaving. Now there's an infinitesimal clue for your ace memory, kid. Try and use it!" Everyone in the room laughed.

Sanders muttered:

“Tall, brown skin, a cauliflower ear.” Suddenly his leathery face broke into a grin, his voice sounded as joyful as it ever sounded. “Boy, I’m thanking you. I hope it’s the guy. I only hope it’s the guy!”

He turned and lumbered down the aisle, kicked open the swing door and disappeared. The men in the room looked at each other, grinned, tapped their foreheads significantly. Stevens said:

“Captain Lanahan, the trouble with your department is—you employ nuts.”

EARLY Fall night was settling over the city as Sanders walked into the basement garage under headquarters. A police chauffeur was dozing, hunched awkwardly on the running board of a big police touring-car. Sanders prodded him with his fist.

“Wake up, Dinty. If I’m not disturbing you, I’d like to be driven down to the freight yards.”

Dinty wobbled to his feet, climbed in behind the wheel.

“You ain’t disturbing me, Brad,” he mumbled, “so long as the trip is peaceful and pleasant.”

Sanders got in beside him. The car roared, backed up, shot out of the garage into the lighted boulevard. Sanders reached under his coat, took his heavy .38 from its shoulder holster and inspected it. Dinty glanced at the gun.

“I can see,” the chauffeur observed laconically, “it might be a pleasant trip—but it ain’t going to be peaceful.”

Satisfied with the inspection, Sanders bolstered the pistol.

“Not,” he said, “for a certain Mr. Joe Delano.”

In fifteen minutes the car had careened across the city, lurched over the cobblestones of a shabby tenement district, poked into the dark, track-strewn outskirts

of a railroad yard. Bulky shadows of box and freight cars hulked in the night. Over on the far side of the yard, a glow of fire and sparks from a warming up locomotive shot into the black sky.

The police car came to a stop immediately outside the yard. Dinty cut the motor, switched off the lights, said:

“I’m afraid you’ll be wanting me to so in with you, huh?”

Sanders loosened his holster, got out of the car.

“No. Stay here. If you hear anything funny, come a-running.”

“I was afraid of that,” Dinty said.

“I hope it’s the guy,” Sanders grinned in the darkness. “Dinty, you hope it’s the guy, too.”

“I hope,” said Dinty, “that I don’t hear nothing funny. Because you’re just goofy enough to get us both killed. Remember, a photo memory ain’t no use in a pitch-black freight yard.”

“The hell it isn’t,” Sanders said softly.

He moved away, propelled his big bulk quietly through the maze of shadowy cars. Moving in the general direction of the glowing furnace from the locomotive, he stepped gingerly over dull, rusty tracks, keeping his head bent low, his eyes searching for rails that glistened and looked as though they had been used recently. It would be the shiny tracks, he knew, on which would stand the cars that would go out soonest.

No sound, except the intermittent wheezing and blowing of the stoking locomotive, issued from the yard. The stark, tomblike images of the stationary gondola cars loomed hugely grotesque and foreboding, as he picked his way warily around them.

An air-splitting screech rent the night. Sanders froze, then let out his breath in relief. It was whistle of the locomotive. The

engine began puffing with staccato regularity, and the metallic sounds of lurching cars and wheels squeaking on rails came across the yard. The locomotive was backing up in a slow, wide circle that would eventually bring it deeper into the yard.

Sanders moved hurriedly. The engine was coming in to pick up a coupled line of freight cars, preparatory to hauling them out of the state. He wanted to be on the line it picked up.

Something silvery at his feet glinted slightly in the reflected light from the distant locomotive's boilers. The glint was from shiny rails. He stooped, examined it closely. This track had been used recently, and in all probability the line of side-door gondolas resting on it would be hauled away as soon as the engine twisted through the maze of interlaced track in the yard. This then was almost the end of his search.

His gat came out in his hand, safety flung off. Stealthily he moved to the gaping, black mouth that was the open door in the rear gondola. Pressing his ear to the side of the car next to the door, he listened intently. No sound.

"Matzden!" he whispered sibilantly.

He heard nothing but the metallic rumbling of the approaching locomotive. Sticking his head cautiously around the door-opening he made out the dim four walls of the car. It was empty.

He moved quietly to the next car, whispered hoarsely:

"Matzden!" The second car was also empty.

Sanders stared into the shadows, made out the vague shapes of five or six more cars ahead, all coupled together. If each proved to be empty, then Dawson would undoubtedly have the laugh on him. His big jaw jutted. His eyes squinted a little desperately as he sidled along the third car,

stopped at the yawning black door, hissed again:

"Matzden! Matzden!"

For a moment the rumbling of the locomotive was his only answer. Then he started, a chill clamminess seeping down his spine as he heard a slight, stealthy sound. It was a vague, muffled scraping.

The gun flipped up in his hand as he edged his eyes slowly around the side of the open slide-door.

"Matzden!" he hissed. "Come out before I start drilling."

Silence. His eyes, becoming accustomed to the dark interior of the car, saw that it was as empty as the others.

THE eerie scraping began again, seemed to come ominously close. Sanders felt icy beads of sweat forming on his forehead. Jerking his gun around, he peered into the dense shadows of the surrounding night. The scraping was coming closer, getting loud. He moved catlike to the next car, hesitated. He could now barely hear the weird scraping.

"Matzden!"

The car was empty. The sound was coming again, closer, more distinct—as though something were shuffling awkwardly, following him. He felt his blood turn to ice, felt his nerve slipping, as the muffled, deadly scraping seemed to come right up to him.

With a hoarse oath, he lashed with his gun-hand into the enshrouding darkness. The shuffling continued, more difficult to hear because of the nearness of the oncoming locomotive.

Sanders felt himself running to the next car, felt his arm shoving the pistol in the cavernous slide-door. The shuffling had become faint. He had left it. Then it was coming again, closer to him, louder.

The car was empty—and the next. He

could see the monstrous body of the locomotive, coughing sporadic plumes of fire and cinders, as it crept along the rails, wending its tortuous way between stationary gondolas a few hundred yards away.

He took a deep breath, tightened his jumping nerves as he moved to the door of the last car. If this one were empty

The shuffling was louder than ever, bearing down implacably upon him, scraping its slow, methodical way, as though a malignant doom were stalking him. He pressed his face close to the side of the door.

“Matzden! *Matzden!*”

The scraping shuffle came up to him, as though something chilling, unseen were in front of him. There was nothing. He leveled his gun, his head poking into the black frame of the open door. He crouched tensely for the spring that would carry him up into the black depths of the car.

The rumbling of the engine seemed deafening. Nothing moved inside the car. He stiffened.

“Matzden, I’m coming in!”

Silence.

“Drop that gun, Sanders, or I’ll blow your face down in your shoes.”

The deadly soft viciousness of the voice caused Sanders to swing around, cursing.

There was no one.

“You’re gonna get it, copper!”

Even as his gun flipped upwards, Sanders cursed himself for not discovering sooner the source of that peculiar, scraping shuffle. A man had been crawling along the *top* of the cars, while he had been searching the interiors.

Flame jetted from the car roof, even as Sanders’ own gun bucked his palm and roared lead at the tall, thin, figure crouching above him.

Something hot and sharp crashed against the side of Sanders’ forehead. Another slug ripped into his right shoulder, spun him around, sent him stumbling to his knees.

Then a ten-ton truck seemed to hit him between the shoulders, crashed him to the ground. Lean fingers gripped his throat, tightened.

A rasping voice pounded into his ears.

“I got away from you once before, Sanders—by hooking up on a freight. That memory of yours told you I’d try it again, so you come down here. You did wrong this time, copper. Your memory walked you right into the morgue.”

Sanders tried to struggle, to shake the constricting fingers from his throat. But the wound in his forehead was hammering, sending him slowly into a black, helpless void. He still clutched his gun. If he could—

But his torn shoulder was numb; his arm could not lift the automatic. The fingers were meeting around his throat. He went limp, helpless, felt himself being dragged over the ground, over blunt ridges of steel.

For a moment things were sickeningly black. Then a thundering roar filled his ears, seemed momentarily to clear his head. Red and green lights flickered over his body. Weakly he raised his head, had a fleeting glimpse of a tall, thin figure disappearing into the night. His gun wobbled up, fired once, twice.

The incessant roar pounded his temples, filled his ears with a metallic ring. Dully he wondered what it was. His eyes caught the red-and-green flickering. The locomotive.... He shifted his head weakly, saw—as from a great distance—his body lying sprawled across the glistening rail. The engine was backing down, toward him, gathering speed, so that the impact of the

freight cars would couple it with them.

He tried to squirm, to crawl. He managed to get clear of the track except for one leg. One more effort. His weakened body refused to respond, he sagged among the cinders, gasping. The engine roared over him, jammed with a loud screech against the foremost freight car.

Dully he looked down at his leg.

The tip of his shoe rested not more than an inch from the rail. That last sagging sprawl had carried it across. A shudder ran through him as he realized how close the grinding wheels of the locomotive had come to it.

A nasal voice pounded at him.

"Jeese, Brad, you all right?"

"Yeah, Dinty. Okay."

"I heard the shots, and I come a-running. But I guess I arrived too late for the fireworks."

"Yeah. All over."

"There's a guy lying over here. Dead. Friend of yours?"

"That's Joe Delano. Right name's Joe Matzden. Pile him in the car, and we'll take him along. Here, help me up. This body of mine is weak as hell."

THERE was quite a commotion in Captain Lanahan's office when Sanders, resplendent in a huge wad of adhesive tape over his eye, and his right arm hanging loosely in a sling, walked down the middle aisle—grinning.

The blue-uniformed men, and the busily scribbling reporters, were intent upon the two figures haranguing loudly at the desk. Captain Lanahan's lean face was twisted in a frown, as he coldly eyed the wildly gesticulating figure of Dawson, the little lawyer, who was so enraged that his voice came in a series of wild screams. But the silence of a tomb settled over the room, as the big figure of the detective sergeant

was noticed. Lanahan eyed Sanders quizzically, Dawson stared in unabated rage and humiliation.

Sanders stopped in front of the desk, grinned, said quietly:

"You don't have to worry about your client Delano, who jumped his bail, Dawson. His name's Matzden, and he is at present on his way to the morgue."

A hum of surprised voices stirred through the room. Dawson blinked, sputtered:

"How the hell—"

Sanders nodded to Stevens, the reporter.

"When Stevens told me Delano had a cauliflower ear, and the chief said he was tall and thin and dark-skinned, I remembered raiding a counterfeit money-making joint in a down-town office building three years ago. Matzden ran that outfit. He got away from me that time by skipping a freight. He didn't get away tonight."

With his good hand, Sanders slapped his knee; deep laughter came rolling out of his thick chest.

"What tickles me," he said finally, "is that you sprang a counterfeiter, the counterfeiter politely paid you your bill in fake money, and now you're going to chill your carcass in a cell tonight for passing counterfeit dough!"

Dawson's face was white. He snarled like a little rat-terrier at bay. Reporters started running for phones. Sanders turned to go out, said:

"Your brilliance won't keep you from spending tonight behind bars, Dawson, but a photo memory would—because for two months you saw Matzden every day of your life. The rooms he used for his fake money-making were right next to your own office!"