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Fugitive Minutemen Never Aroused Suspicion in

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TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES.

N.M., July 19—The stranger with the thick, black beard looked like another of "those prospector fellows" to some of the citizens of this remote section of southern New Mexico.

None dreamed, even after he had been around nearly six months, that the man was Robert Bolivar DePugh, founder of the ultra-right Minutemen. None suspected that the modest, single-story, white stucco house he rented on the Rio Grande south of here contained an arsenal of weapons and ammunition large enough to supply a guerrilla force for months of battle.

After two days of searching the two-bedroom house and a small corral and barn on the stony hillside under the mesa, the Federal Bureau of Investigation listed last night 48 rifles, carbines, shotguns, pistols, revolvers and other weapons found on the premises.

Guns in Every Corner

The inventory included thousands of rounds of ammunition, drums of explosives, a home-made antipersonnel mine, large quantities of dynamite, home-made hand grenades, bombs fashioned of pipe and powder and nails and blasting caps, cases of fuses, cans of tear gas, homemade silencers, high powered rifle scopes, and stacks of bandoliers and magazines loaded with cartridges.

Weapons were stacked in every nook and corner. They included a signal pistol for flares, equipment for remote detonation of explosives, even bows and arrows equipped with impact grenades. There

were handcuffs and hunting knives and survival kits.

The F.B.I. surprised and arrested Mr. DePugh, 46 years old, and his "executive assistant," Walter Patrick Peyson, 27, as they started to drive away from the house last Saturday night. They were taken to Albuquerque and jailed pending transfer to Kansas City to face earlier charges of violating Federal firearms regulations.

Thomas J. Jordan, special agent in charge of the Albuquerque F.B.I. office, said in an interview they would also be charged with multiple violations of the new Federal Gun Control Act of 1968 if any items in the cache at the house were found to be unregistered or illegally made or altered.

The two also face charges of conspiracy to rob four banks in the Seattle area, allegedly to help finance the Minuteman program of stockpiling weapons against the day when members expect to have to take to the hills to lead a rear-guard resistance movement against a Communist take-over of all governmental machinery in the United States.

For 18 months following issuance of warrants for their arrest in Seattle, Mr. DePugh and Mr. Peyson capitalized on their survival training and expertise to ekude a massive manhunt led by the F.B.I.

Sheriff Supplied Key

Using numerous disguises, they moved from place to place, aided at times by the right-wing underground. They rented the house on the Rio Grande last December. They were trapped when Sheriff Charles Cox of Sierra County, who lived up the Palomas Canyon from them,

spotted at their house a 1957 Jeep station wagon the F.B.I. was looking for. He notified the bureau.

"There were some of the most beautiful guns in that house I've ever seen," the envious sheriff told a visitor.

The presence of the bearded men had aroused no doubts among the 4,200 residents of Truth or Consequences, a town accustomed to seeing new arrivals. Until it changed its name in a 1950 radio program promotion, it had been Hot Springs, a bathhouse spa with "curative" waters that attracted not only the afflicted but also the "healers" of various persuasions as well.

"There was no reason to be suspicious of them," said Neal Baird, operator of a radio station here in the county seat.

"We're used to new faces. People come for their health, because of the dry climate. And there have always been prospectors poking around in the hills."

Legend has it that gold bars stolen by Indians from the Spanish conquistadores, who blazed a trail up the Rio Grande Valley in the 16th century, are buried nearby. Copper is produced commercially in the area.

The house the Minutemen rented from an out-of-town owner had a history of unusual occupants. Nobody paid much attention when "Ralph Cooper" and "Jim Cooper" came along as uncle and nephew.

A chiropractor from India, known locally as "the swami" because of his interest in yoga, built the bungalow in 1948. A naturopath and reflexologist came later.

"We've had whores and thieves and everyone else in that house," said 72-year-old Autry Bumgardner, only neigh-

bor of the bearded newcomers. The rest of the Cooper "family," not there regularly, were women and children and other friends and relatives the Minutemen became bold enough to bring to the house, which for a time was used as a headquarters for production of anti-Communist literature.

About a mile down the lonely road, at the Valley Inn Bar, the proprietor, Pinky Davis, expressed his surprise at the disclosures.

"I didn't recognize him in the newspaper pictures without his beard," he said of Mr. DePugh.

The Minutemen had visited the bar frequently, Mr. Peyson to drink beer and his chief to use the pay phone.

"We really liked them," said Mr. Bumgardner. "Best neighbors you could have."

Mr. DePugh, in advisories to Minutemen, has written extensively of the need to establish "a second identity" as a cloak to outwit "our enemies."

The Coopers bought their gasoline and groceries from Mayor Henry Powey in the crossroads village of Williamsburg between the hideout and Truth or Consequences.

"He looked husky enough to be a prospector," Mr. Powey said of the elder "Mr. Cooper" today. "Or they could have come here for arthritis, as I did. They were considerate, friendly, fine people, both the men and the women. They never volunteered why they

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moved here and nobody asked. They never talked politics or offered their views on anything. They always paid cash. When not here to buy something, they stayed to themselves: I can't say anything bad about them."

Mr. DePugh said in an interview at the Bernalillo County Jail in Albuquerque Thursday that his final hideaway had not become Minuteman headquarters and that the supersecret organization was set up to function as well without him as with him.

But with the printing press and arsenal, the red-roofed house on the gravelly New Mexican hillside impressed authorities as at least temporary headquarters for the national, paramilitary group of right-wing extremists.

And for the occupants it offered not only isolation and privacy but scenery as well. For hundreds of miles around, the bleak and stony desert of arid tundra is relieved only by such dry-gulch plants as the yucca and mesquite.

The Minutemen, by contrast, looked down upon the green banks of the twisting Rio Grande just across the road. Beyond the river the jagged outline of the Caballo Mountains became a multihued canvas with each evening's sunset.

Mr. DePugh says that even if he never sees the light of day again he will treasure the man-hunt months as a period free from Federal "harassment."