



“Con Edison crooks — This is for you”

By R. Marc Kantrowitz

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The first bomb was planted in mid-November 1940. Placed on the windowsill in a Consolidated Edison plant in Manhattan, the crudely made device was discovered before it detonated. Indeed, it appeared that it was never intended to explode, as a note accompanying it would have been destroyed.

In distinctive block letters, the missive read: “CON EDISON CROOKS — THIS IS FOR YOU — THERE IS NO SHORTAGE OF POWDER BOYS.” It was signed F.P.

A second dud, this one without a note, came the following September, five blocks from Con Ed headquarters. Little attention was paid to the non-explosions

despite the bomber's best efforts to publicize his actions through an onslaught of letters to Con Ed, the police, newspapers, department stores, hotels and clothing stores, all of which were ignored, probably due to more pressing matters in Europe.

When the U.S. entered World War II, another uniquely flavored letter found its way to the police. It read: "I WILL MAKE NO MORE BOMB UNITS FOR THE DURATION OF THE WAR — MY PATRIOTIC FEELINGS HAVE MADE ME DECIDE THIS — LATER I WILL BRING CON EDISON TO JUSTICE — THEY WILL PAY FOR THEIR DASTARDLY DEEDS ... F.P."

A man of his word, F.P. did just that. For some years following the war, his only assaults consisted of a renewed and heightened onslaught of letters sent, as before, to the police, newspapers, Con Ed and others. Hearing nothing back, he elevated his game.

Soon bombs were going off everywhere — at Penn and Grand Central stations, Radio City Music Hall, the New York Public Library, the Port Authority, subways, buildings and movie theaters often packed with thousands of patrons.

The attention he craved finally came to fruition with the police, under siege from a scared and demanding public, launching a not uncommon "largest manhunt in police history."

'Mild-mannered man'

Of medium height and stocky, George Metesky was a mild-mannered man, an anonymous one really, whose entrance and departure from any room garnered little notice, which is probably what he preferred. Shy if not reclusive, he dressed well, looking more like one teaching in a school.

Born in 1903, he primarily lived in Waterbury, Connecticut, with his two stern, unmarried sisters. Upon honorable discharge from the Marine Corps, he found employment at Con Ed just at the start of the stock market crash of 1929.

Although keeping to himself and not caring about making friends, the ever-agreeable Metesky became a model employee, working a highly dangerous job in an atmosphere swimming with dust and other pollutants. Despite the horrific working conditions, Metesky excelled — until Sept. 5, 1931.

A sudden boiler explosion knocked him down, engulfing and infusing him with toxic poisons. Coughing violently and uncontrollably, he struggled for air as three fellow employees rushed to his aid.

When he gained his composure, he reported the incident to his supervisor, who ignored him and ordered him back to work. Within 20 minutes, he was again on the floor writhing in pain, where he remained alone and secluded for two hours. Finally, he struggled to his feet and made it home.

Uncontrolled coughing, pulmonary hemorrhaging, pneumonia and exhaustion kept him in the hospital for two weeks and at home for nearly a year, with minimal improvement.

Doctors convinced him to seek specialized care in Arizona, where he was treated for almost three years. While his physical symptoms improved somewhat, he greatly suffered mentally, fueled by the actions of Con Ed, which never reported the incident to the Workmen's Compensation Board. While the company provided some financial assistance, it was not enough to cover his rising costs.

In response, he sent hundreds of letters to Con Ed, which coughed up some money but again not enough. Soon, all help ended, and he was fired. Told to seek workers' compensation, Con Ed sent him the applicable form. When he took the company's advice and filed a claim, they vigorously and successfully opposed him, arguing that the one-year statute of limitations barred the action.

Barrage of letters

With nowhere to turn and back living with his supportive sisters, a still-sick Metesky fired off hundreds of lengthy and bitter missives to various government officials, newspapers and, of course, Con Ed. He also invented an electric snow shovel and an electric lawnmower that came to be featured in the magazine Popular Science, and secured a patent for a unique circuit breaker.

While finding employment and again working admirably, he had to leave when his health deteriorated. Lonely and miserable and viewing himself as the “unknown man battling for justice,” he turned his growing rage to those who failed to address his plight. Only grand gestures would gain their attention.

And so, it began. Bomb after bomb. Letters written, phone calls made, warnings issued. By F.P. Many duds, either by design or happenstance. Always though with a desire not to kill.

Despite hundreds of leads and false reports overwhelming an overworked and stressed police department, nothing turned up, even after a review of the records of disgruntled Con Ed employees, as the search was hampered by the destruction of many earlier employee files.

With no leads, the police sailed into uncharted waters, seeking the assistance of a noted psychiatrist, the “Bow-tied, Mustachioed and Natty” Dr. James A. Brussel, who was sympathetic and concerned about the plight of the mentally ill and who recognized a link between crime and psychiatry.

Reviewing all that was known, Brussel carved out a profile of the bomber. It had not been done before. In the end, it was highly accurate. Still, it did not lead to an arrest. What did was an ingenious ploy by the editor of the New York Journal-American.

On the day after Christmas in 1956, the paper dedicated its front page to the bombings, ending with “AN OPEN LETTER TO THE MAD BOMBER,” beseeching him to surrender and promising aid if he did so.

Metesky took the bait, corresponded with the paper, and, in so doing, provided more and more information about himself, including the date and details of his catastrophic injury. He was quickly identified and arrested.



As always, he was cooperative and accommodating, freely admitting all that he had done. Beaming to the cameras, he presented a sympathetic portrait. Found to be incompetent and insane, he was given a one-way ticket to the Matteawan State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, where those confined were essentially housed but not treated, finding themselves, as one judge put it, “marooned and forsaken.”

Finding the conditions intolerable, Metesky resorted to what he did best: writing a never-ending barrage of letters,

covering the 15 years he resided there. Eventually, he joined a class action. In 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court in a landmark ruling decided that those sent to Matteawan and such facilities could not be held indefinitely and were entitled to certain rights, including a jury trial and treatment.

Epilogue

In 1973, Metesky was freed, whereupon he returned to Connecticut to live with his elderly surviving sister. Although sickly throughout his adult life, and at one point thought to be at death’s door, he cheated them all, making it to 90, outliving all his adversaries.

He also ushered in the now common and recognized practice of criminal profiling. In the end, he got what he wanted. Fair play, F.P.

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