

Victor Lustig was born in 1890 in what is now the Czech Republic. As a **youngster** he studied languages. He also studied people: their habits, mannerisms, and especially their weaknesses, and decided to do something in that field instead. By the age of twenty he was a **confirmed conman**. By the age of thirty he was a confirmed wanted man **on the run** from police in several European countries.

He started over again in the United States and called himself 'Count' because it sounded important. One **dupe** he conned was Al Capone; the most dangerous criminal in America *at that time*. The Count knew that the crime lord couldn't be **taken in** like the others; he would get **revenge**.

Lustig planned something different for the *underworld boss*. The count asked Capone to invest \$50,000 in a **swindle** that he said he was working on. Lustig promised *to double his money* in sixty days. The **homicidal** Capone gave the cash - and a warning of what would happen to Lustig if there was a **double-cross** Lustig let the money *sit in the bank* for sixty days. At the end of that time he went back to Capone with a look of disappointment. He told his investor that the deal **fell through**. Just before Capone was about to explode, Lustig handed back the \$50,000. The crime boss was so impressed with Lustig's honesty (!?) that he rewarded the conman with a thousand dollars. Which is what Lustig expected Capone to do.

In 1925 Lustig was back in Paris with his new friend Dapper Dan, *relaxing* at an outside cafe. They were in need of money just as they read in the newspaper that the Eiffel Tower was *in need of* repairs. While others said what was really needed was to **tear down** the 985foot structure. Almost immediately, the Count thought up a scheme; he would sell Paris' most famous landmark to a scrap metal dealer.

He gave himself the title 'Deputy Director-General of the Ministry of Mail and Telegraphs'. Dapper Dan would be his secretary. They typed-up letters with Lustig's title printed on them and mailed them out to the five leading *scrap metals dealers* in Paris. They were asked to come meet with Lustig and his secretary at their room in the **fashionable** Hotel Crillon.

The buyers were told that it had become too *costly* to repair the Eiffel Tower and that the 7,000 ton steel structure would be sold to the highest **bidder** to be torn down. They were also told to *keep the meeting secret*; if the public found out too soon there would be an **outcry**. The secret bids meant nothing to Lustig. He talked to each client and *picked out* the man **most likely to fall for the scam**; the one who seemed most anxious to get ahead. A week later, the chosen victim, Monsieur Poisson, showed up at Lustig's place. He was handed a **phony** contract that stated that he owned the Eiffel Tower while Lustig was handed a real check. The Count and Dapper Dan quickly cashed their *earnings* and just as quickly **fled** France for Austria. Lustig never did say how much he got paid for France's top tourist attraction.

Resting in Vienna they *scanned* the newspapers to see if Poisson went to the police; he didn't. Poisson was too embarrassed to tell anyone what happened. After a month's *vacation* Lustig and Dapper Dan decided to do it again. This time they used the same techniques but with different results. The scrap metal dealer who was **fleece**d reported his loss of \$100,000 to the police. Once again the Count fled to America. *The law caught up with Lustig* when he tried to *pass off counterfeit dollars*. In 1935 he was sentenced to twenty years in Alcatraz prison where he died of pneumonia in 1947. While in prison he was protected from *harm* by orders from another prisoner... Al Capone.

**WORDS**



- |                 |                   |                |                             |
|-----------------|-------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. habit        | a) demolish       | 9. counterfeit | l) cheat                    |
| 2. conman       | b) state, declare | 10. confirm    | j) one who deceives, cheats |
| 3. con          | c) fake, forged   | 11. claim      | k) offer, proposal          |
| 4. take in      | d) run away       | 12. to hand    | l) fake, forged             |
| 5. homicidal    | e) cheat          | 13. flee       | m) bloodthirsty             |
| 6. fall through | f) custom         | 14. tear down  | n) verify                   |
| 7. outcry       | g) give           | 15. bid        | o) not succeed              |
| 8. phoney       | h) protest        |                |                             |

**Vocabulary**

counterfeit money is not real money  
 bidder is someone who takes part in an auction  
 bid means to offer, propose (like offer money in an auction)  
 flee - fled - fled means to run away from something