

Once again Ed Hertel takes us back to Texas. Sometimes all the research in the world will not match the initials on a chip to the buyer of the chips or a club name. This appears to be one of those times. Who was TJ? *vbg* My guess and a contest for a free TJ chip will be at the end of this story.

Take it away Ed.

Today's IOTD is an example of one of those frustrating chips that even though much is known about the club, the initials just don't make sense. Regardless of that, the story of this chip seems pretty easy to follow, even if the puzzle isn't completely assembled.



TJ1

Shipped to:
W.R. Holt
107 San Antonio St
El Paso, TX
Sep/Oct-1939 (2 orders)

Before we get to 1939, we need to turn the clock back three years and set the scene.

During the middle of the 1930s, Texas' westernmost city was a wide open town full of vice and lawlessness. The traditions of the old west and its free-for-all attitude were at a high and the law abiding citizens of El Paso were starting to get tired of it. As the end of 1936 drew near, El Paso Mayor R.E. Sherman decided it was time to make a statement. In December, orders were signed for prosecution of illegal gambling and the raids started in earnest. In one night, four clubs were hit; the City Club, Mesa Club, Shamrock Inn and the Annex Bar. Gambling equipment was seized in all of them and everyone was arrested.

In the Annex Bar, 204 Mills St, we find first mention of our W.R. Holt who was charged with operating the gambling at the club. In the raid the police seized a blackjack table, \$31 dollars and poker chips. (It would be interesting to know what these chips were, but none have ever been identified as coming from the Annex.) Holt was booked and released on a \$25 bond (which he eventually forfeited instead of fighting it).

Now that we've been introduced to Holt, it's time to shift our focus to the address of the chips. A year later in October 1937, "107 San Antonio St" enters into the gambling scene for the first time. The Bingo Palace was the brainchild of Leon Gillespie and Mannie Herksowitz, who promoted the new club as "entertainment only" and had nothing to do with gambling. The mayor wasn't buying it and after a couple months of action he ordered it closed and the owners put on trial.

**BINGO PALACE
OPENS TONIGHT**

**Will Start Charging for Game
Of Chance Formerly
Played Free**

The Bingo Palace at 107 East San Antonio street will be opened officially tonight.

For the last few days, Leon Gillespie and Mannie Herksowitz, the operators, have been running the game free to acquaint players with it. Boxes of candy were given to the winners.

Patrons will be charged 10 cents each to play the game. They can win merchandise as prizes.

Rev. W. H. Mansfield of Trinity Methodist Church attacked Bingo as gambling in a sermon. He received an opinion from County Attorney Mulcahy in which Mulcahy said Bingo is a violation of the State gambling statute.

Mulcahy said he will take complaints if anyone wishes to prosecute. Mr. Mansfield said he will not file complaints.

"That is up to law enforcement officers," he said.

TJ2

In the media, Gillespie and Herksowitz claimed to welcome the investigation and were confident in their eventual vindication. They said they had nothing to hide and the concept of their club had been proven legal in Texas and all over the country. Their defense was largely based on the idea that winners were not paid in cash or prizes, but instead in "free play tickets" for future games. It was argued that without a financial benefit, there could be no illegal gambling.

Their confidence however was soon weakened when the owner of the El Paso Bookshop walked into the courtroom. The bookshop, which was next door to the Bingo Palace, was a known bookie joint that specialized in selling racing tip sheets. Testimony disclosed that it was also in the business of purchasing free play tickets from Bingo Palace winners. Although both sides claimed that the bookshop was exchanging vouchers for money completely on its own, the damage was done. The Bingo Palace was

deemed illegal and the \$11,000 worth of seized equipment was ordered destroyed. Its short life was over almost before it got started.

BOOK SHOP OPERATOR TESTIFIES HE CASHED BINGO GAME TICKETS



TJ3

The year 1938 did not fare much better for El Paso's gamblers as the clamp was tightened around the city. The mayor was claiming victory and stating that he believed all gambling had been eliminated. On the other side, proprietors of bars and lounges were vocal in that they couldn't stay open without the time honored revenue they used to receive from bootleg whiskey and slot machines. What was good for the city's image was bad for the city's businesses.

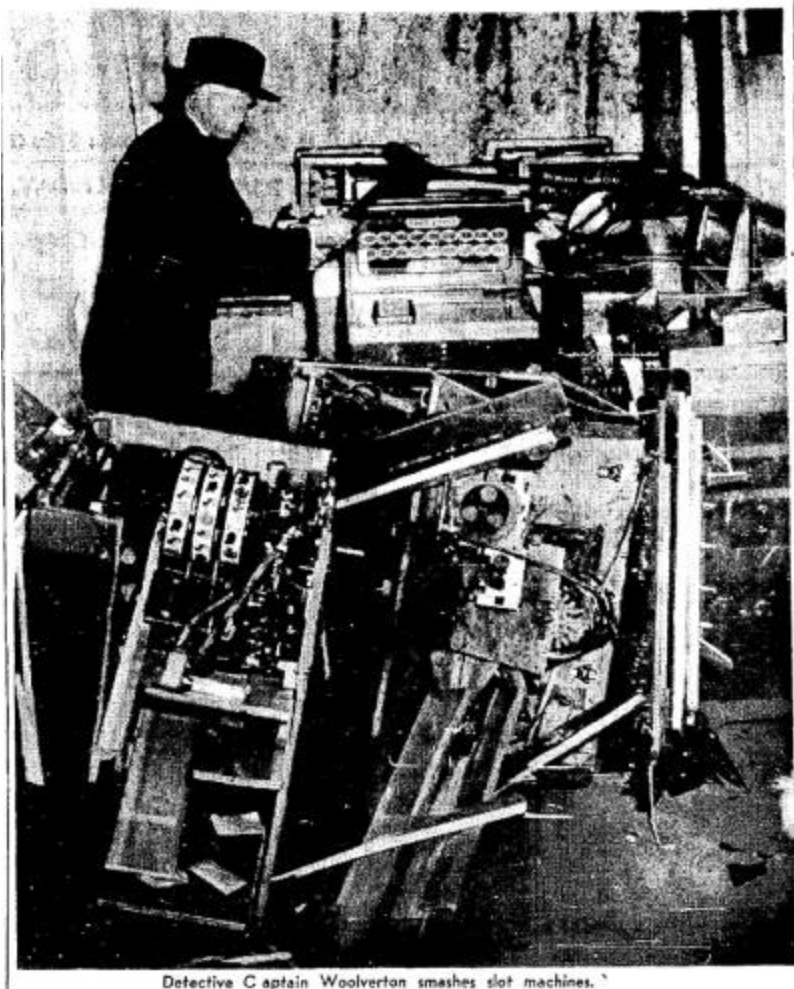
It was during this year of moral progress that the "Bill Kellett's Bar" opened at the old Bingo Palace building of 107 San Antonio. Although no gambling charges are found, the bar was a regular stop for the state liquor agents. By mid-1939, it was being cited monthly for charges of selling hard liquor. At first only the name Pat Chubback was listed as owner, but by November the addition of Walter R. Holt was added as offender. This timing coincides with the ordering the "TJ" chips from the Mason Co.



TJ4

One month later, the Bill Kellett's Bar disappears and in its place is found the Embassy Club. Within weeks of forming, we get our first mention of gambling on December 4, 1939. That evening, raiders hit the town for a little clean-up and the Texas Club, Plaza Club, the Annex, Cattleman's Club and the Embassy were all raided. Walter Holt was listed as owner of the Embassy and the club was forced to close temporarily.

Walter Holt wouldn't stay at the Embassy for long, leaving the next year and turning over the reins to a man named Huddleston. In the proceeding few years he found himself in trouble on occasion dealing cards or running a little backroom action. By 1944 he was at the helm of the Turf Bar at 110 West San Antonio and finding life on the other side of the street just as difficult. City raiders in April 1945 found a slot machine in the Turf Bar and further humiliated Walter by smashing it with a sledgehammer in front of a group of reporters.



Detective C aptain Woolverton smashes slot machines. ' 3

TJ5

My note: Once again we see a crusading city official making his mark closing the illegal clubs. The good news is it helped create many of the illegal collectables we crave today. Many of the chips we have come out of raiding policemen's estates. *vbg*

The worst news would come soon after when he was diagnosed with terminal cancer. On October 23, 1946, Walter Robert Holt died and was buried in his home town of El Paso. He was sixty years old.

And that brings us back to the "TJ" chip. What does TJ stand for? No idea. It doesn't stand for his name, his wife's name (Genevieve), known partners or the names of any of his clubs. It's pretty clear that the club they were used in was the Embassy, since he ordered the chips at the exact time the club changed names and was raided for gambling. I'm confident with this attribution even without clearing the "TJ". Maybe in time something from Walter's past will slip out and we can tie up this last loose end. Until then, I'm moving on.

My notes: TJ chips ordered in 1939, Holt passes on in 1946. Once again we have chips that may have lasted through a number of clubs for 7 years. Depends on when the Mayor got his grubby hands on them. *vbg*

Here is my guess! TJ was W.R. Holt's dog. *vbg* Wonder if Ed checked the AKC records? Anyone else got a better guess?

Contest: Best guess posted for what TJ stands for gets a free TJ chip. Reply's in this thread only. Contest closes at noon on Sunday the 23rd, Ed and I are the judges for best guess prize. *vbg*