



Corsica: Friend of Crime

Newsday Senior Editor Robert W. Greene and reporters Les Payne and Knut Royce spent three months in France last fall as part of a nine-month investigation into the business of heroin. They were joined there by two other Newsday reporters, Christopher Cook and Pucci Meyer. This is another in the series, The Heroin Trail.

Ajaccio.

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Fifty-five miles from Italy and almost twice that far from mainland France, the Mediterranean island of Corsica is off the heroin trail, geographically. But it is the homeland of most of the French underworld's top heroin racketeers—Francisci, Orsani, the Venturis, Mondoloni, Simonpieri, Marignani, Albertini. And though these men moved to Marseilles to do their work, Corsica remains their spiritual home.

Corsica has long been ruled by foreigners—Greeks, Phoenicians, Romans, Moors, Spaniards, Genoese, and, beginning in 1768, French. Plunder has left the Corsicans poor and has instilled in them a steely clamminess, a credo of personal account-settling, a suspicion of outsiders and government officials.

When we told Paul Knight, head of the European office of the U.S. Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, that we intended to go to Corsica, he replied: "Well, I'm glad you're going to do it. I sure wouldn't; it's too damn dangerous." He proved to be right.

There are about 1,000,000 Corsicans in France—a third on the island, two-thirds on the mainland. In Marseilles, where 600,000 Corsicans live, the blood bond is strong. The islanders come to the city and take jobs. Once established, they send for relatives and friends living in poverty on Corsica.

The same pattern prevails in the French underworld, the milieu. A young Corsican thief goes to Marseilles, recruits a trio of prostitutes, establishes himself as a pimp. To find lieutenants he can trust, he turns to friends and relatives back on Corsica. Soon the young hoodlum, working the well-lighted bars around Marseilles' opera, may begin to make contact with the bigger-time criminals of the city who deal with drugs and smuggling. Smuggling has always been a profitable trade for the Corsicans, who have been seafarers for centuries.

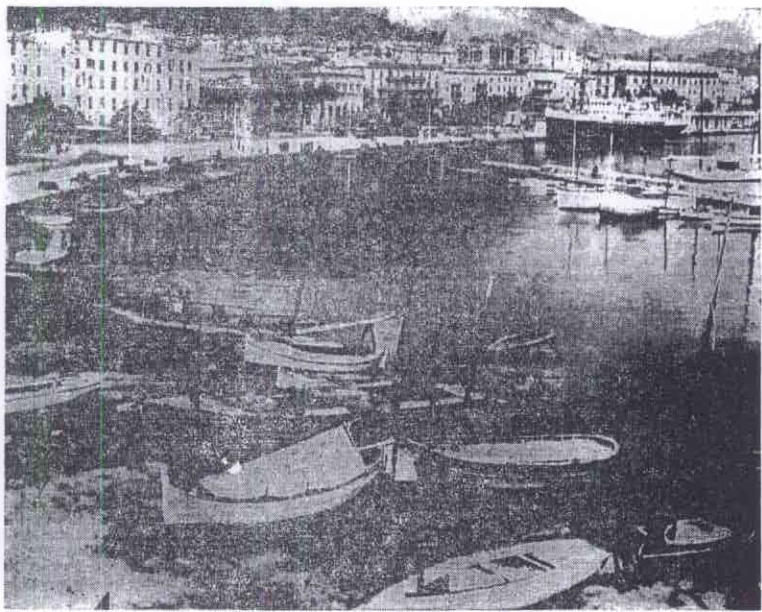
Another activity the Corsicans seem to find compatible is fraudulent voting. On election day in 1968, the French newspaper, *Le Monde*, wrote of 6,000 ghost voters of Bastia alone. "In some villages of 700," the paper noted, "there are 2,000 electors on the register." Corsica, with a population of 212,000, recorded 185,000 registered voters in the 1968 election.

Whatever unsavory things might be said of Corsica, most residents don't want to hear outsiders say them. While working with a Corsican source in Ajaccio, we were warned not to discuss the major heroin racketeers in the presence of the man's wife. "He will discuss the criminals with you," we were told, "but never talk about Corsican hoodlums in front of his wife. She would not stand to let a foreigner say bad things about a Corsican."

Because of the bond among Corsicans, the island remains the spiritual home, and sometimes a physical

'Well, I'm glad you're going to do it [visit the island of Corsica]. I sure wouldn't; it's too damn dangerous.'

—Paul Knight,
Head of BNDD in Europe



The city of Ajaccio, capital of Corsica

AP Photo

shelter, for wealthy heroin merchants. They know that when they have to go there, they will be taken in.

Ange Simonpieri, a major drug merchant, went home to the island when the French police were seeking him in 1970. For months, he faked illness, with Corsican doctors concurring, and hid out in Pila Canale, a stronghold for criminals.

The cohesiveness of the French-Corsican underworld has led some observers to speak of a monolithic Union Corse of heroin traffickers. Ian Fleming was probably the first to use the term. In the James Bond novel, "On Her Majesty's Secret Service," a ranking French hoodlum says: "I am the head of the Union Corse." Fleming's novel proceeds to call the group "more deadly and perhaps even older than the Unione Siciliano, the Mafia." But according to American and French officials and our own investigation, no such group exists. The Corsicans are linked not by an organization, but by intense loyalty.

Corsica has only two high schools, one in Bastia, one in Ajaccio. Corsicans who share alma maters and childhood friendships remember them when, in the course of their careers, Corsican judges or policemen meet Corsican hoodlums, or journalists, or mayors or ministers of state.

Marcel Francisci, France's top heroin racketeer, was a high school classmate in Ajaccio of Jean Bozzi, secretary of the French National Assembly and the elected deputy from Corsica. The two men attended Fesch School in Ajaccio. They remain close personal friends.

As intensely loyal as the Corsicans are to one an-

other, they are more intensely hostile to outsiders, especially those seeking information about top Corsican drug merchants. The European arm of BNDD does not have a single agent operating there.

Outside critics are unwelcome. On Jan. 29, Catherine Lamour, author of a book that accused Corsicans of dominating the French heroin traffic, arrived by invitation to address a group at the city-owned Youth and Culture Auditorium in Ajaccio. But she found that city officials, without explanation, had locked both her and an audience of 350 out of the building. Later, at Ajaccio airport, she was approached by Francisci, who told her: "Your book should be seized."

A veteran Marseilles reporter was shocked when we told him of our plans to investigate Corsican heroin merchants on the island. "As soon as the Corsicans spot you," he said, "the word will be out [he snapped his fingers] just like that."

We told him we wanted to visit Pila Canale and take some pictures of the Corsican drug merchants' home villages. "Look," he said, growing more disturbed, "they will know what you are up to. They don't believe in tourists over there."

To satisfy our doubt, the reporter called a friend of his who worked for a newspaper on Corsica. "You must be mad," the editor said. "I will not get involved; I won't be responsible."

He said that the week before he had sent a photographer to Pila Canale to take pictures of a local annual festival. "It had nothing to do with gangsters or drugs," he said. "My photographer was met at the top of the hill and escorted away from the village by a

AP Photo/Newsday

Dead on Long Island: Richard Sullivan

Richard Sullivan's father knew his son was involved with heroin. It was a habit he had picked up in the U.S. Navy. "But I can beat it," Sullivan had told his father.

On the morning of July 14, 1972, Richard (Rick) Sullivan, 21, returned to his parents' Oyster Bay Cove home sometime after 1:30 AM. He had been on a date with an old girlfriend. The following morning at 8:15 AM, his body was found on the bathroom floor by his brother Jonathan. Dressed in jeans and a T-shirt, he was lying in a fetal position. A needle was found on the floor, just beyond the hand of his partially outstretched right arm.

"He was known to have used heroin in the past," the medical examiner's report stated. Cause

of death was listed as acute narcotism with traces of morphine disclosed in the autopsy.

Rick Sullivan enlisted in the Navy after graduation from St. Dominic's High School in Oyster Bay. He was the oldest of six children. In August, 1971, he was honorably discharged from the service and returned home to 66 Cove Rd. It was then that his parents became aware of his involvement with heroin, his father, Richard S. Sullivan, said.

When Rick first got home, his father said, his attitude was "I don't give a damn . . . you live in your world, I'll live in mine." Rick moved out at his father's insistence, found an apartment in Bayville and a laborer's job in a boatyard.

Six months before his death, Rick moved back

home. He had come down with a severe case of hepatitis, according to the Nassau medical examiner's report. "His was doing pretty well," his father said later. "For six months, I thought he was beating it." The day before his death, Rick had lunch with his father, with whom he had been working as a clerk in Sullivan's clothing store. "He was in great spirits that day," his father recalled. So his son's death came as a total shock, he said. But he added: "Rick lived in two worlds. . . . It is difficult for a parent to accept."

His message to other parents: "Tell your children this about drugs . . . tell them you can't beat it once you're on it."

—Tony Schaeffer and David Behrens

And Foe of Investigation

car full of armed men." We had heard of another newspaper photographer who tried to take pictures at Antoine Guerini's funeral in 1967; some men there broke his leg.

"Over there the Corsicans have what they call a 'Pinute.' That is anyone who is not Corsican. And they don't talk to Pinutes," the reporter said, adding gravely, "but then they are not too talkative, the Corsicans."

Friday, 9 AM—Flying into the Ajaccio Airport we could view the points of a dozen mountains. The island was warmer than the mainland, warmer even than Nice due north across the sea.

We took a taxi into downtown Ajaccio and checked into the Fresch Hotel, where we were assigned rooms on the top floor. The radios in our rooms played for the first half hour and then both went dead.

12 Noon. Walking through town we saw store windows lined with souvenirs, handcrafts, and many long knives and short swords. We went to the Royal Bar for an appointment with a Corsican source. It was the bar where Simonpieri used to sip pastis while evading the French authorities. It was across the street from the main Ajaccio police station.

One tall and lean man walked out of the bar with his left hand bandaged about the knuckles and wrist. Three of his fingers had been recently cut off at the first joint. The scar tissue was still raw and red.

12:30 PM—Our contact parked his car across the street and walked to the bar. After speaking with friends on the patio he walked over and introduced himself.

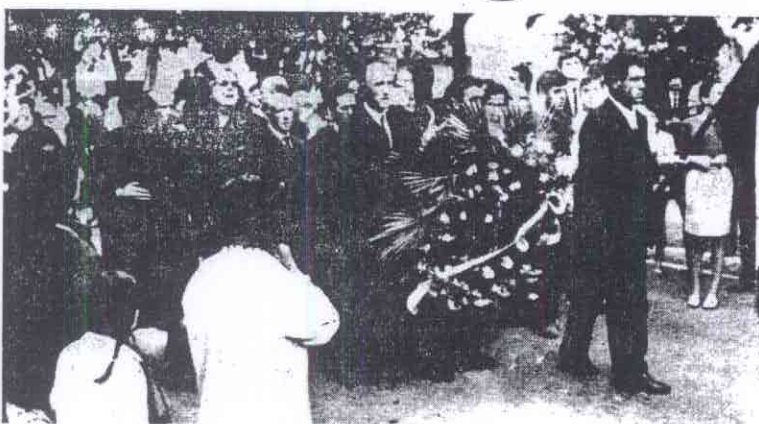
He was a medium-built man with dark hair and broad shoulders. "Okay," he said after the introduction, "what do you want to know about Corsica?"

We told him about our investigation into drugs throughout Europe. "You know, you must not say that all of the gangsters are Corsican," he quickly warned. "Journalists say this over and over, but it is not so."

We told him about the gangsters we had learned of who were not Corsican. And we finally asked him softly about Marcel Francisci.

He held his head still and searched the patio with his eyes. "Be very, very careful when you discuss him," he said. "This is Francisci country; he is home when he comes here. There are some people in this city that would kill and even die for Francisci."

We would move to a nearby restaurant where we dined with two Corsicans on the second floor. We talked about Francisci and his family in Ajaccio, about



At Antoine Guerini's funeral, his son Felix embraces a crying Corsican woman

his counsel generalship in Zicavo. But whenever the writer came up the stairs we changed the subject.

The two Corsicans were knowledgeable about the major drug merchants. One promised to compile a dossier on the Corsican heroin merchants; their backgrounds, schooling, friends, associates, property holdings on the island. We gave them a list of questions; they promised answers.

7 PM—We met the two men again at the Royal Bar. We were joined by an uninvited third Corsican, a man later described as a "law student from a good family here in Ajaccio."

He pressed his case. "Why are you here in Ajaccio? How long will you be here? Why did you come this time of the year? . . ."

The two contacts grew nervous; they signaled that we were not to reveal our identities; we wore tourists on a very short visit. One of the contacts became so nervous at the "law student's" inquiry that he excused himself and coded that he would see us the following day.

The "law student" insisted on buying a final round of drinks. He ordered, asked more questions, and left without paying.

8:30 PM—We dined with the remaining Corsican contact. But we couldn't discuss the heroin gangsters. "We can't talk here," he said. "I don't know those people there at the other table."

The following day. We were to meet the contact at the Royal Bar at noon. After breakfast, we sat on a park bench, and got out the small Minox camera to photograph the Grand Val Cafe, scene of a 1967 shootout between Francisci gang members and a minor underworld rival. As soon as we sat down a lookout from the second floor window stared in our direction and signaled a second man who walked to the front of the outdoor cafe.

The second man was dressed in black pants and a black shirt open to the waist. He paced in and out of the cafe several times, each time staring and pointing over at us.

Corsicans strolling in the park milled menacingly around our bench.

The man in black finally came to the front of the cafe and trained a motion picture camera on us.

"Hey, that guy has a camera, he's taking our picture," one of us said.

We walked away, slowly, in the opposite direction. We were soon followed from the Francisci gang's cafe by two men. We walked past our hotel and up a block-long alleyway. Two men ran behind us up the alley.

We evaded them for 15 minutes and went back to our hotel. We had planned to clear by noon. We packed and watched the people on the street six floors below. The female desk clerk crossed the street and chatted with a man in a turtle-neck sweater who had recently taken a seat at the outdoor shop across the street from the hotel.

We checked out of the hotel and called a cab. We canceled our planned trip to Pila Canale and Bastia, 162 kilometers away. We had established plans for our contact to meet us in Nice the following week with the requested information.

We were watched closely by the man in the turtle neck sweater, until our cab pulled away.

The flight back to Marseilles somehow seemed shorter.

Sunday: Heroin and U.S. Customs

Among the many routes that heroin follows from Marseilles to New York, one of the most important is through South America, where U.S. and South American officials made a dent, although no one knows how big a dent, by breaking a smuggling ring last year. Once the heroin gets to the U.S. border and Customs, however, it usually has an easy time getting through. Some excerpts from tomorrow's installment:

"Why is much heroin routed through Latin America instead of being shipped directly to the

U.S.? John Bacon of the BNDD's Office of Strategic Intelligence explained it this way: "They found that it was a secure means of moving heroin. Heroin moves like water: It follows the path of least resistance. . . ."

"Heroin has come into the country in false-bottom suitcases; in the heels and soles of travelers' shoes; strapped inside the thighs of 'mules' or couriers; sealed into tins supposedly containing fish; in maternity corsets on women who are not pregnant; in ski poles; in picture frames; in the luggage of diplomats."