

OUR GLOBAL WAR ON NARCOTICS

BY FREDERIC SONDERN, JR.

IT WAS late afternoon and the regular patrons of the little café near the United States Consulate in the ancient city of Istanbul were gathering. High on a nearby minaret, a *muezzin* was calling the Faithful to evening prayer. Street vendors, beggars, people of every race and dress jostled along the Rue Cabristan. No one paid much attention to the workmen digging a ditch along the curb, or noticed that several of them kept glancing guardedly up at a window on the floor above the café. Suddenly, the blind on that window jerked up. Immediately, a dozen ditch-diggers dropped their tools and boiled into the café and up its stairs, pistols in hand. Whistles shrilled and several large police cars lurched up to the door. In a few moments, onto the sidewalk from the café, surrounded by the erstwhile laborers, emerged four cursing men prodded forward by a fifth — an American seaman. Before a crowd could gather, the police cars had whisked them off.

Within the hour, Commissioner

Harry J. Anslinger of the U. S. Treasury Department's Bureau of Narcotics received a cable from the seaman with the gun — U. S. Narcotic Agent George White: "Able today to buy quantity of pure heroin from biggest ring of dealers here and arrest same. Received full and brilliant support from Turkish police who have seized large refining plant and 875 ounces of narcotics, source of large shipments to U. S."

Agent White's assignment and success in a city on the other side of the globe against one of the most dangerous gangs in the Middle East was not too unusual a project to the Narcotics Bureau. A small, tightly knit, and largely anonymous organization of some three hundred highly qualified officers, the Bureau deals with one of the most intricate law enforcement problems — with shrewd and sinister gangs whose criminal activities often extend over several continents.

With the end of World War II, the old evil traffic in habit-forming narcotics began to flow again toward Eu-

FREDERIC SONDERN, JR., was formerly the chief European correspondent for McClure's Syndicate. He has been a frequent contributor of articles on crime to the *MERCURY*.

rope and the United States. The dope racketeers of the Far East began reforming their distribution networks for Chinese and Indian opium and its terrible derivatives — morphine and heroin — through the Pacific area to the west coasts of South and North America. In the Middle East, the poppy farmers of Iran and Turkey, the hashish and coca-leaf growers of the Persian Gulf and Lebanon, did a booming business with the Egyptian syndicates which resell the raw narcotics to clandestine refineries in Algiers, Naples, Marseilles, and other Mediterranean ports. On the American hemisphere itself, operators in Peru and Bolivia looked with envy on the huge business in opium and marijuana which Mexican racketeers had built up with our underworld during the war, and decided to share in the bonanza.

In the United States, the drug traffic climbed rapidly back toward the prewar levels. By 1949, more than 10 per cent of the population of our Federal prisons were men and women convicted under the narcotics laws. Drug trafficking and addiction were contributing more and more to crime of all kinds — from gang warfare and murder to prostitution and larceny by addicts in need of money to satisfy their expensive craving. Due to the work of the Narcotics Bureau during the past twenty

years, drug addiction in the United States has dropped during that time from 1 in 1000 to 1 in 3000 — according to the most reliable estimates. But the battle goes on.

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Some months before the raid in the Rue Cabristan, Supervising Agents of Eastern and Midwestern field offices of the Bureau of Narcotics began reporting to Washington that large quantities of heroin, the most vicious of the opium derivatives, were getting into the illicit market from an apparently new source. Commissioner Anslinger wasted no time.

From the unpretentious and quiet offices at 1300 E Street, a vast intelligence network spreads out across the country and the world. Not only the Customs Bureau — whose corps of expert agents work hand in glove with the Narcotics men — and other Federal agencies, but police departments all over the United States give Anslinger and his self-effacing men wholehearted cooperation. As a result, most developments of importance in the underworld reach the Commissioner's desk with extraordinary speed and accuracy.

Underworld talk indicated that most of the new "junk" was coming from Turkey. Bureau Agents arrested several peddlers said to be selling a "new line" in New York and Chicago

and sent samples of their stocks to the Bureau's laboratory. Microscopic and chemical examination showed the heroin to be of Turkish manufacture. Narcotics Squad detectives of New York's Police Department ferreted out a Greek sailor and two friends, who seemed to be doing most of the business. They were shadowed to their cache — an old suitcase in the parcel room of a bus terminal — where the detectives closed in. The sailor did not break down easily — retribution is likely to be swift in the dope fraternity — but he finally told of a big heroin ring in Istanbul which sold to seamen at reasonable prices.

Commissioner Anslinger decided to push forward right into the enemy's camp. Even five years ago, that would have been very difficult. Due, however, to the work of the United Nations and its commission on Narcotic Drugs, on which Anslinger sits as the American delegate, new weapons have been put into the hands of the men who fight the illicit drug traffic. Anslinger telephoned the chief of the narcotics section of the Turkish police, then sent for Supervising Agent George White of the San Francisco field office. White received the kind of terse orders to accomplish the apparently impossible for which the stern, big Commissioner is famous among his Agents. Like their chief, they have strong feelings about their

job. "You break a narcotics case," Malachi Harney, Anslinger's executive officer said to me, "and you haven't only nabbed some of the nastiest specimens in existence, but you've saved a lot of people from a lot of misery. An ounce of cocaine sold in New York may well account for a crazed holdup man killing a peaceful citizen in Dallas or a doped-up driver ramming a school bus in Ohio."

A few days later in Istanbul, the Turkish police welcomed their American colleague with enthusiasm. They briefed White on the figures of the Turkish underworld who might be involved, on their habits and headquarters, warning that undercover men had a way of being found in the Bosphorus with their throats cut.

Soon, White, disguised as an American merchant sailor, began frequenting certain waterfront bars. He dropped cautious hints that he had money to spend, had "connections" in New York, and was open for business if the profits were right. The scouts of the dope syndicate reacted almost at once. For more than a week, White remembers shudderingly, he was put through a grueling inquisition. Questioned and cross-questioned in curtained café booths and smoky back rooms by Turks, who seemed to know a great deal about our underworld, he was constantly aware that one slip would mean a quick

bullet or a knife in the back. "Where did you see Joe last?" an inquisitor would ask. "We heard that he was in the can at Lewisburg." White's answers, based on an encyclopedic knowledge of our criminal elements, passed muster, but he had some nasty moments. He was finally taken to the café where, in a heavily guarded room with lowered blinds, he met the four men he had come five thousand miles to catch. After more hours of harrowing investigation, they agreed to let him have \$6000 worth of heroin the next day.

The gangsters arrived at the appointed hour. White was to signal the ditch-digging police squad outside by raising the window shade when the deal was consummated. After endless delays and arguments, the precious carton containing the drugs was produced. White said that he wanted to examine his purchase in better light. And then — the shade stuck. White fought with it — too violently. The others reached for their guns. But the Agent managed to get his own out first. It was stalemate; gang lieutenants were waiting outside the door. The room was deathly still while he tried to decide what to do. And, then just as his tight-lipped quarries started shifting for position, the disturbed shade flew up with a bang. That, and the pounding feet of the police on the stairs, were the most welcome sounds,

White says, that he has ever heard.

Simultaneously, other raiding squads converged on other headquarters and plants of the gang in and near the city — to which police shadows had trailed the various gang lieutenants who had been contacting White. It was a clean sweep, the biggest catch in recent years, and dealt the illicit Turkish drug trade a severe blow.

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Almost as soon as a gang in one of the drug capitals is knocked off, another takes its place. With heroin selling on the underworld market in New York or Paris for \$300–\$500 an ounce — approximately eight times its cost to an Egyptian syndicate and five times the price paid by a Marseilles middleman — the returns for the drug racketeers are high. They have begun smuggling by airplane for the first time. A single shipment of heroin which U. S. Customs inspectors found not long ago in the tail assembly of an Air France plane at La Guardia Airport would have been worth over \$1 million in the underworld trade.

The narcotic experts here and abroad had seen this coming. For years, men like Harry Anslinger, Russell Pasha of Egypt, Colonel Sharman of Canada, have watched and studied the catastrophic blight which widespread addiction has brought to every country it has touched, and have

fought with might and main to stop the production of the insidious social poisons at their sources. When the United Nations was established, Anslinger and his supporters who had been active in the anti-narcotics work of the old League of Nations, saw the opportunity to create a new, streamlined and powerful international control. Now, at Lake Success, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs makes the UN's over-all policy, the so-called Supervisory Body decides specifically what narcotics and how much each country may produce for the legitimate medical market. The Permanent Central Opium Board investigates to see that those quotas are not exceeded. One of the most concrete results to grow out of the UN's work is the tightening teamwork between police forces all over the world.

When Charles Lucania ("Lucky Luciano"), former vice overlord of New York, was deported to Italy in 1946, after serving ten years in prison, he had big plans too. His underworld connections here and abroad were still good, and, arriving in Rome, he began to recruit an organization. His reputation attracted the cream of Italian black marketeers. Having arranged for shipment of drugs from the eastern Mediterranean and a trans-shipment point in Italy, he was ready for the next step. He obtained an Italian passport and permission to visit Cuba.

In Havana, the suave Signor Lucania began to establish contact with correspondents in Miami, New York, and Chicago. "Lucky" was in business again, so he thought.

Actually, into Commissioner Anslinger's office — from New York, Rome, Havana — had ticked almost every move that the gangster had made; the Bureau knew all about his plans before he even left Italy. They let him carry them out — up to a point — to see what contacts he would make. When the Commissioner knew all he wanted to, he suggested to the relieved Cuban authorities that Luciano be sent back to safer shores. So just as "Lucky" saw his dream of another great empire coming true, a pair of polite Havana detectives appeared at his door one morning and asked him to pack; his plane was leaving shortly. The gangster never knew what hit him.

This swift and silent international wig-wagging often results in underworld catastrophes that seem like sheer magic to the drug rings. The steward known as "Louis" was nervous as the *S. S. Santa Luisa* from South American ports steamed into Charleston harbor not long ago. He was carrying a big load this trip. The Customs men made their usual careful search, apparently found no contraband, and cleared the ship. Louis was relieved. The next day, he decided

that the coast was clear. His runner, a colored newsboy, had come aboard and the two sauntered to the cleverly concealed cache in the forepeak. No one was around except a steam-fitter who seemed absorbed in his work. Quickly Louis opened the cache, the boy slipped several small bags into his clothing and shuffled off. The steward had just closed the compartment when he felt a hand on his shoulder. It was the steamfitter, but he had a badge. The newsboy found agents waiting for him at the foot of the gangplank.

Louis' cache had been under guard from the moment Customs searchers had found it — not many minutes after they had come aboard. A message from Narcotic men in a Latin-American country, who had been watching a big new syndicate that was building up a coastal trade, told Washington that the ship was "hot." They had not been able to identify the runner, however, and Anslinger wanted him. So, from the time the ship landed, Narcotic and Customs agents dressed as electricians, steam-fitters and longshoremen took turns staying in sight of the cache until their quarry sprung the trap.

IV

A nemesis to many a narcotics trafficker who thought himself perfectly safe far away from his home police has

been the invaluable International List of Narcotics Violators, which is kept up to date by the Bureau of Narcotics from reports sent in by the narcotic bureaus of other nations — with complete descriptions of all known illicit drug traders and their methods. The Book has a long memory and a long arm.

A Narcotic Agent making one of his periodic tours of the New York waterfront hangouts not long ago happened to notice a hungry-looking, diminutive French seaman. The Agent felt sorry for the wizened little man and was tempted to dispense some charity, when the sailor suddenly disappeared. The government man became suspicious about the hasty retreat; at the same time, the face began tugging at his memory. He looked in The Book and — sure enough — there was the emaciated sailor: one of the biggest Mediterranean drug operators. When the sad little man was behind bars, it was found that his distribution system for French heroin had netted him \$1.5 million in four months.

Besides names and faces, The Book lists every unusual smuggling trick that has been tried in recent years. There are some classics. An Egyptian syndicate discovered a new method of concealing narcotics in the camel trains which they dispatched across the Sahara Desert to the ports of

Casablanca and Tangier. Metal capsules containing morphine and heroin, fed to the camels, would lodge in their storage humps. Each animal could carry tens of thousands of dollars worth of drugs. At the end of the journey, the camels were slaughtered and the capsules recovered. It was an expensive way of doing it, but the return justified the investment.

The Egyptian customs inspectors, expert as they are with camels, missed this one for quite a while. Then the price of camels went up sharply, an officer investigating the phenomenon had a bright idea, fluoroscopes were installed at the stations where the camel trains were examined, and — the syndicate had to look for a new method.

Most of the men and women catalogued in *The Book* are shrewd operators. It takes time, infinite patience, and ingenuity, to build up the kind of ironclad cases against them for which the Bureau is known. Joseph ("Pip the Blind") Gagliano — a sleek Italian who liked loud ties — was until recently Number 121 on the International List. His headquarters on the upper East Side of New York were modest, but he did an enormous business. From the back room of a bar on East One-hundred-and-seventh Street, his organization spread from coast to coast. His Mexican

runners smuggled opium across the border, where other messengers picked it up and brought it to New York to be converted into heroin in his secret factories. From here another system of dealers and peddlers fanned out across the country.

The Bureau knew about Gagliano for several years before they were able to devise a method of getting at him. Pip the Blind never actually handled dope himself and would discuss a deal only in the fastness of his back room, with no witnesses present. And he was not sociable. One undercover Agent finally succeeded — after months of work — in developing a slight degree of intimacy with the forbidding gangster. With infinite care, Agent Jackson — ostensibly a prosperous racketeer from the West Coast — gradually extracted from Gagliano details about the organization of his gang, which other Agents then used as leads for more investigations, until the picture of the entire operation was complete. But to convict Gagliano himself, the Narcotic men had to get him to hand over narcotics and accept payment, or to order one of his men to do so — before witnesses.

Agent Jackson drove up to the gang's headquarters one morning and honked his horn. One of the Boss' musclemen responded to the summons. "I've got to see Pip. Big deal. But I've banged up my leg. Can't

walk on it," said Jackson exhibiting a foot swathed in bandages. Crutches leaned against the seat. "Pip don't never talk to nobody on the street," scowled the gunman. "But since it's you, I'll see what he says." The Agent held his breath. Behind his seat, in the reconstructed baggage compartment, crouched another Agent with his eyes at a peep-slot from which he could see and hear anyone who came to the side of the car. Across the street, in an innocent-looking truck, were more Agents and a camera.

Jackson let out a gusty sigh. Pip

the Blind was walking toward the car with his chief henchman. What he said in the next few minutes and the orders he gave his assistant sealed his doom and brought his dope empire crashing down. The next day, Jackson and his helpers repeated the process with his two principal lieutenants who supervised the actual delivery and pay-off. The case was complete. Police traps snapped shut from New York to the Mexican border.

A few days later, Pip the Blind hanged himself in his cell.

NO TRESPASS

BY LESLIE NELSON JENNINGS

With that communal instinct which resents
A stranger and is jealous of its own,
Neighbors were quick to come to her defense.
A woman who has lived so long alone
May find that hospitality can err.
Suspiciously they watched, and when they could
Hinted at certain pitfalls laid for her,
Who still enjoyed a solvent widowhood.

So with deliberate shears they cut the thread
That might have shown a way from bondage more
Dreary than what they warned of, might have led
To benefactions not accounted for
By those who peer behind a shade half-drawn
And see a cloven hoofprint on the lawn!