

# Trunk Mystery Solved

By C. S. Van Dresser

[Author's note—In this case, Nathan Cohen, known as "Little Natie," a well-known New York gangster, and believed to be the American "brains" of an international drug-smuggling ring, was at liberty under \$15,000 bond, awaiting trial, when the article was written. The two Shvirianskys, dope smugglers, and the contingent of the ring located in France, were under indictment in Paris, while customs officials in America sought further evidence against them for extradition purposes. Philip Eidelman, the "runner" of the gang, is now serving a six-year sentence at the Federal Penitentiary at Lewisburg, Pa.]

WHEN United States customs agents swooped down on a suspected dope-runner on board the steamship Deutschland in New York Harbor on March 6, 1936, and seized a load of smuggled heroin, they fired the opening gun in a campaign that was to uncover the machinations of a heretofore unsuspected international drug ring of gigantic size.

So well organized were the narcotic racketeers, that opium smugglers in far-off Yugoslavia supplied two dope traffickers in Paris with raw opium which they converted into highly concentrated heroin and smuggled the deadly finished product from France into the United States by a "runner" who delivered it to an agent in New York City. A complete and smoothly running set-up that had functioned without detection for several years.

After existence of this new smuggling ring became known to the United States customs officers, their speedy and clever work, coupled with the co-operation of French authorities resulted in the conviction in New York of Philip Eidelman, dope-runner extraordinary of the vicious gang. He is now serving a stiff sentence in the Federal penitentiary at Lewisburg, Pa.

In France, Michel and Alexander Shviriansky, father and son, the Parisian unit of the international band, were indicted. Likewise Nathan Cohen, alias "Little Natie," the "brains" of the American contingent, was indicted and held under \$15,000 bond, awaiting trial in New York City.

Once again did astute customs agents crack down on mankind's foulest enemy—the drug racketeer.

During 1934 and 1935 several of the world's largest gangs of dope smugglers were completely smashed. It then began to appear as if running of the dread opium into America was on the wane. But a little more than a year ago, unaccountably narcotics were being smuggled into the United States in increasing amounts. Operatives of the Narcotic Division of the Federal Government were picking up retail peddlers of heroin in alarming numbers in most of the large cities on the Atlantic Seaboard.

The detection of heroin smugglers presents a problem of singular difficulties for the men of the customs service. Heroin is a derivative of opium, but so concentrated that but a few ounces of it are equal to many pounds of opium. The vitally important seizure on the steamship Deutschland was less than fourteen pounds and it was readily concealed in a false compartment of only one trunk. But there was enough of the drug in that single piece of luggage to poison the entire population of a fair-sized city—50,000 "shots."

Previous to this discovery, Uncle Sam's operatives contended chiefly with the smugglers of raw and smoking opium who are forced to run their contraband into America in bulky lots; but now, heroin, the very essence of the evil drug, was appearing in the vice centers of the Nation in unprecedented quantities.

Where was crude opium being converted into concentrated heroin? Who was doing it? How was it being smuggled into the United States?

United States customs agents had certain knowledge that a band of opium runners were operating in Yugoslavia



When Customs Agents discovered heroin in Eidelman's trunk, he was very much surprised—then he told them the inside story

and were contacting racketeers in Paris. Officials of Yugoslavia co-operated at the request of the United States Government by giving, in so far as possible, the names of known dope runners who were likely to be using the railways of their country to smuggle opium to France.

In the report from Yugoslavia were the names of Michel and Alexander Shviriansky, two suspects then living in Paris. This was interesting information to Ace Supervising Customs Agent Gregory O'Keefe, of the New York City detail, for the Shvirianskys had been on his black list for more than five years. The two were believed by the authorities or almost every civilized nation in the world to be engaged in opium smuggling, but so far, nothing had ever been proven on them. O'Keefe immediately phoned the United States customs agent in charge at Paris and asked him to watch the Shvirianskys.

But let's go back a little further.

The whole case started in the Summer of 1933 when young Philip Eidelman, soon to become the runner of the international drug mob, was working in a cheap little trunk factory owned by his father in New York's lower East Side. How "Little Natie," big-time New York gangster and possessor of an unsavory police record, ever became interested in innocuous young Eidelman is not known, but became interested he did.

Early in August of 1933 "Little Natie," as Nathan Cohen was known, asked the young factory hand to construct a trunk for him containing a secret compartment. Eidelman complied and received \$65 for the job. When the trunk was completed to his satisfaction, "Little Natie" offered Eidelman \$300 if he would take it to Paris to a certain Michel Shviriansky, leave it in his possession for a day or two and bring it back to America.

This is another of the series of "inside" true stories on how the United States Customs Agents wage a successful war on dope racketeers and smugglers.

Eidelman successfully completed his first round trip in September of 1933, going over on the Europa and returning on the Bremen with the secret compartment of the trunk packed with heroin. He got his \$300 and thought he was a smart guy. Some months later "Little Natie" asked that the young man construct two more trunks with secret compartments.

How many trips Eidelman made between September of 1933 and March 6, 1936, is not accurately known. He confessed to three, the second being during October of 1935, when he made the round trip on the Aquatania, and on the third he took the Isle de France over and the Deutschland back.

If Eidelman thought that the United States Customs Service was suspicious of him it should have been on his final trip. Heretofore he had had no difficulty in getting the dope from the Shvirianskys in Paris; it was waiting for him when he arrived; for during his previous absences from France the two heroin manufacturers were receiving regular shipments of raw opium from their confederates in Yugoslavia and converting the drug into the highly concentrated form.

While all this was going on, the chief United States Customs agent of the Paris division of the service was doing some investigating due to O'Keefe's telephone conversation from New York two weeks previous. It seemed evident to the Paris agent from the reports from Yugoslavia that some person or persons were suc-

ceeding in getting large quantities of heroin out of France and into the United States, and by early 1936 the Shvirianskys were definite suspects in Paris.

Eidelman was a much worried young man when Uncle Sam's customs inspectors made a business call on him in his cabin when the Deutschland docked on March 6, 1936, in New York. And when the heroin was discovered, he talked—to save his skin. He implicated the Shvirianskys in short order and Customs Supervisor O'Keefe got on the trans-Atlantic telephone again and talked to Paris.

The Paris agent informed officers of the Surete in the French capital of the news and they raided the home of Michel Shviriansky and discovered a complete heroin plant in his residence in the suburbs of Paris on the Seine River!

At his trial in New York, Eidelman would not definitely involve "Little Natie." "I don't know where he is and I can't identify him," was about all he would say. Federal men are convinced that he was afraid of the gangster and in terror of retaliation from his mob, would in no way assist in his capture.

However, "Little Natie" was rounded up by the authorities, indicted and released on a \$15,000 bond. In Paris, the Shvirianskys were arrested and placed under heavy ball awaiting trial or possible extradition to the United States, where a stiffer sentence awaits them on a conspiracy charge.

Eidelman was sentenced to six years in the Federal Penitentiary at Lewisburg.

As far as the men of the Customs Service are concerned, the case is not closed. They are amassing further evidence against "Little Natie" and the Shvirianskys, so that those dope racketeers can join their pal at the Lewisburg pen.