

THE FRENCH CONNECTION REVISITED: THE CIA, IRVING BROWN, AND DRUG SMUGGLING AS POLITICAL WARFARE

BY DOUGLAS VALENTINE

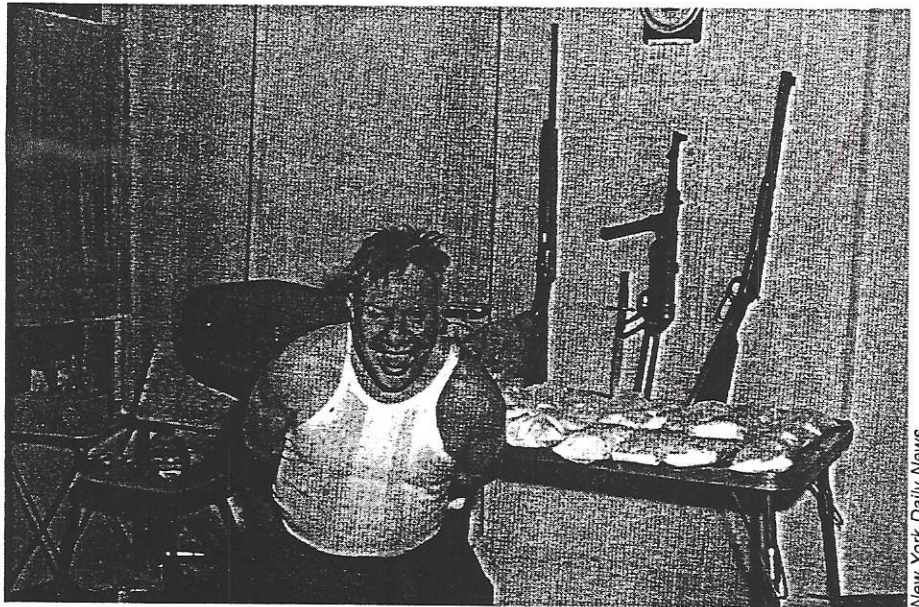
When they hear the words “the French Connection,” most people think of the 1971 Gene Hackman movie, in which a rough and tumble New York City detective corralled a group of Mafia heroin traffickers in January 1962, but failed to capture the suave, insouciant Frenchman who was their source of supply. Indeed, most people think of “the French Connection” as an action-adventure story—not as an example of political warfare. But, in fact, the French Connection is a keyhole through which to view the CIA’s use of the underworld in its larger strategy of political and psychological warfare.

Simply stated, this secret war is a function of American capital’s use of organized criminals in the employ of its private police force, the CIA, to smash Communism everywhere; to suppress labor and undesirable minorities at home; and to expand its influence worldwide, at the expense of unfriendly and friendly foreign nations alike.

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Indeed, based on four newly discovered documents, generated by the defunct Federal Bureau of Narcotics (1930-1968), it is now evident that the U.S. government, through the CIA, has historically employed drug smugglers to effect its unstated domestic agenda.¹ The French Connection is a prime example, and a principal player in that sordid episode was labor leader Irving Joseph Brown, the American Federation of Labor’s chief overseas representative from 1945 until 1962.

Brown had a long history of involvement with the CIA, gangsters, and drug smugglers; but it was not until April 1962



New York Daily News

The front-page Daily News photo that made the French Connection famous: Joe Fuca, father of mobster Pasquale “Patsy” Fuca, arrested in New York in 1962 with assorted weapons and 24 pounds of pure heroin. Others arrested at the time were later found to be associated with Irving Brown.

that he first came to the attention of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics (FBN).² The circumstances are both bizarre and revealing, and center on Etienne Tarditi, a short, potbellied, Corsican drug smuggler, who first implicated Brown in drug smuggling activities.³

Tarditi’s job in the 1950s was twofold: on behalf of his underworld sponsors, he purchased morphine base in Lebanon and smuggled it to France, where it was converted into heroin; then he “recruited” diplomats to smuggle the heroin to Mafiosi in America.⁴

Tarditi’s operation began to unravel, however, in mid-1960, when a rival drug smuggler told the FBN Agent in Beirut that a diplomat named “Maurice” was carrying heroin to America.⁵ The ensuing investigation revealed that the diplomat, whose luggage was passed through U.S. Customs without being checked, was Maurice Rosal Bron, Guatemala’s Ambassador to the Netherlands. Rosal, it was discovered, had an unrestrained sexual desire for young

boys—a fatal flaw which Tarditi used to blackmail the dapper diplomat into carrying heroin to America. Further investigation revealed that Rosal made frequent trips to America, often with Tarditi, and that he always left with less baggage weight than when he arrived. The investigation itself climaxed in October 1960 in New York City, when FBN agents busted Rosal, Tarditi, TWA purser Charles Bourbonnais, and Nick Calamaris of the Gambino Mafia family.⁶

The bust netted 100 kilograms of pure heroin, and the intelligence take provided the FBN with enough leads to keep it busy for the next five years. Most of the information, notably, came from Tarditi, who identified his sources in France, and claimed that he “was involved in intelligence work beneficial to American interests.”⁷ Tarditi would also, after 18 months of steady interrogation, implicate labor leader Irving Brown in drug smuggling activities.

Meanwhile, two related cases unfolded. One was the famous French Connection case of January 1962, in which FBN

Douglas Valentine is the author of *The Hotel Tacloban* (Westport, Conn.: Lawrence Hill, 1984; North Ryde, Australia: Angus & Robertson, 1985; New York: Avon, 1986) and *The Phoenix Program* (New York: Wm. Morrow, 1990; New York: Avon, 1992). For those interested in learning more about the French Connection as a facet of political warfare, see the author’s forthcoming book, *The Strength of the Wolf: The Federal Bureau of Narcotics 1930-1968*. Copyright © 1999 by Douglas Valentine.

2. *Ibid.*, Report 1.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*; and see Tom Tripodi, *Crusade* (New York: Brasseys, 1993); Jill Jonnes, *Hop Cats, Narc and Pipe Dreams* (New York: Scribner, 1996).

5. Confidential FBI source.

6. Rosal was arrested Oct. 3, 1960; an article appeared on the front page of the Daily News on Oct.

4. See Andrew Tully, *The Secret War Against Dope* (New York: Coward McCann, 1973), pp. 142-43.

7. Jonnes, *op. cit.*, n. 4, p. 185.



AFL-CIO News

Pierre Ferri-Pisani, Marseilles drug smuggler (standing left), Irving Brown (standing center), and George Meany (seated clapping).

Agents and NYPD detectives busted Mafioso Patsy Fuca, along with his father Joe, French heroin smuggler Francois Scaglia (co-leader of the Trois Canards Gang in Paris), and Scaglia's unsuspecting courier, Jacques Angelvin, the host of a popular French television show. Eluding authorities in the case were Jean Jehan, the debonair mastermind of the plot, and mystery man Jacques Mouren, who was never identified.

Another case

Another occurred in March 1961 (right after French President Charles de Gaulle decided to negotiate with nationalist rebels in Algeria), when Air France stewardess Simone Christman was arrested by U.S. Customs agents for smuggling heroin in her brassiere. Christman said the powder, which she thought was perfume base, had been given to her by a Mr. Mueller in Paris.

In March 1962, Christman was sentenced to four years in prison—but at the intervention of an unknown outside force, she was quietly and quickly released.

According to an FBN agent on the scene at the time, Christman was, in fact, a spy for the Secret Army Organization (OAS), a group of French soldiers who, with the support of the CIA, were fighting the forces of President de Gaulle in Algeria.⁸ The OAS was known to be financing its operations through the drug trade, and, being “a good soldier,” Christman “took a small fall to protect her bosses”—who in return continued to receive CIA support.

In addition to Christman's quiet and quick release, the FBN agent stationed in Paris was told not to investigate the mysterious “Mr. Mueller.” The agent was told that U.S. Customs was handling the case; but he knew that the CIA had, in fact,

8. Confidential FBN source.

blocked the investigation in order to conceal its involvement with the protected OAS drug smuggling ring.⁹

Likewise, it is conceded by FBN agents that they were not allowed to follow up leads relating to Jean Jehan and Jacques Mouren in the French Connection case, for the very same, intelligence-related reasons.

“MR. MUELLER” UNMASKED

The unexpected does happen, however, and just as Customs agents had inadvertently uncovered a protected CIA drug route when they busted Simone Christman, “Mr. Mueller's” identity was revealed in April 1962, when Etienne Tarditi, seeking leniency in his case, named Irving Brown in connection with the busts of Ambassador Rosal in October 1960, and of Simone Christman in March 1961.¹⁰

Like most professional crooks, Tarditi's allegations about Brown (as well as his own work for U.S. intelligence) normally would not have been believed. But all of the information he had provided about the drug smuggling milieu had proven accurate, so in May 1962, FBN agent Andrew Tartaglino launched an investigation of Irving Brown.¹¹ And through a routine background check, Tartaglino learned that Brown (who was then the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions' representative to the United Nations) frequented a restaurant owned by George Bayon in Paris. Tartaglino subsequently learned that Irving Brown was Bayon's friend; that Bayon used the alias “Mueller”; and that Bayon's restaurant was used by drug smugglers to “recruit” diplomats, like the hapless Ambassador Rosal, as couriers in their drug smuggling ventures.

9. Interview with Andrew Tartaglino.
10. *Op. cit.*, n. 1, Report 1.
11. Interview with Tartaglino.

These facts fueled the agent's curiosity, and his investigation of Brown was widened; and after checking with other government agencies, Tartaglino learned that Brown had been granted port privileges in New York (meaning that his baggage was never checked by Customs); that his wife, Lilly, was a secretary for Carmel Offie, a CIA agent who owned an import-export business in Manhattan; and that there was “a possibility” that Brown himself was “connected in some manner with the CIA.”¹²

The implications were unmistakable, and at this point in June 1962, Tartaglino was told to drop his investigation; that another Agency was handling it.¹³ Which begs two questions: 1) who were Irving Brown and Carmel Offie, and 2) were they smuggling drugs for the CIA?

THE ANGLETON CONNECTION

In regard to the second question, leads to the CIA's notorious chief of counter-intelligence, James Jesus Angleton, had emanated from the Rosal case. Specifically, inside Ambassador Rosal's pocket at the time of his arrest was the address of Stig Wennerstrom, a former Swedish military attaché to the United States, and a close friend of Philippe de Vosjoli. De Vosjoli at the time was the French intelligence service's liaison to Angleton. But more importantly, de Vosjoli was also a double-agent working for Angleton against his own country.

By de Vosjoli's account,¹⁴ Wennerstrom was “an associate” of several French intelligence officers stationed in Washington. De Vosjoli's charge led Angleton to believe that the Soviet intelligence service, the KGB, had penetrated the French intelligence service, SDECE. In Angleton's mind, this belief was confirmed in December 1961 by the famous KGB defector, Anatoly Golitsyn. And for this reason, Angleton, who had long been associated with Irving Brown,¹⁵ apparently decided to penetrate the French drug smuggling milieu, as a way of uncovering further evidence that SDECE, which had long been involved in smuggling narcotics out of Indochina, was penetrated by the KGB. And Angleton's use of drug smugglers as counter-intelligence agents brings us back to the first question: who were Irving Brown and Carmel Offie?

Briefly, Irving Brown was a disciple of Jay Lovestone, who in the 1920s was the leader of America's Communist Party. But

12. *Op. cit.*, n. 1, Report 1.
13. Interview with Tartaglino.
14. In his autobiography, *Lamia* (Boston: Little Brown, 1970), pp. 314-15.
15. Tom Mangold, *Cold Warrior* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), pp. 314-15; confidential sources.

after a dispute with Stalin in 1929, Lovestone defected, and with Brown's help, began rooting Communists out of American labor unions. In return for his counter-espionage work, Brown was assigned as the AFL's representative to the War Production Board during World War II, and afterwards began to work for the CIA under AFL cover in Europe and Africa.

Using CIA money, Brown established a "compatible left" labor union in Marseilles with Pierre Ferri-Pisani. On behalf of Brown and the CIA, Ferri-Pisani (a drug smuggler connected with Marseilles crime lord Antoine Guerini), hired goons to shellack striking Communist dock workers. According to Brown's case officer, Paul Sakwa, Ferri introduced Brown to Guerini; and according to one of Brown's associates, Ferri also introduced Brown to Maurice "Le Petit" Castellani. A comrade of Ferri's from the French Resistance, Castellani, along with the aforementioned Francois Scaglia (busted in the French Connection case of January 1962), headed the Trois Canards Gang, whose members often met for homestyle bouillabaisse at George (a/k/a Mueller) Bayon's restaurant in Paris.¹⁶

Brown's association with Maurice Castellani, co-leader of Les Trois Canards, supports the theory that Brown was involved in the French Connection, Rosal, and Christman cases. So it is worth noting that, according to Alain Jaubert,¹⁷ the Trois Canards gang was formed by an erstwhile Marseilles policeman, Robert Blemant. During the War, Blemant worked for French intelligence in North Africa, and afterwards for the Surété in Marseilles. Ostensibly fired in 1947, he went underground with his files, formed Les Trois Canards, and set up a chain of nightclubs across the Mediterranean with his old informant, Antoine Guerini.

By 1954 Blemant was in Tangiers working with the American Mafia's French connection, Jo Renucci; and when Renucci died in 1958, Blemant reportedly took over his operation and began acquiring narcotics from drug smuggler Marcel Francis in Lebanon. Author Steve Rivelle claims that by 1960 Blemant's influence included "narcotics trafficking from Turkey to the U.S."¹⁸

The timing of Blemant's descent into the underworld is intriguing, for it happened at the same time that Brown, having neutralized the Communists in Marseilles, moved to Italy, where cash he sprinkled

from the CIA's black bag bought votes and funded media blitzes that kept the Communists out of power. In 1953, according to former CIA labor officer Paul Sakwa, Brown also contacted the CIA's Mafia affiliates in Sicily—at approximately the same time Trois Canards founder Blemant formed associations with the American Mafia. When the CIA's subsidies to Brown stopped in 1953, Blemant's heroin business was self-sustaining, and Brown himself began to operate under the aegis of James Angleton.

Moreover, according to author Alfred McCoy,¹⁹ the CIA in the mid-1950s, through its South Vietnamese ally, inherited SDECE's drug smuggling allies in Indochina. Likewise, according to the diaries of FBN agent George White, Angleton in 1953 met with FBN Commissioner Harry Anslinger and former OSS chief William Donovan regarding the narcotics situation in Southeast Asia. Considering that the U.S. would snatch hegemony in the region from France in 1954, after the fall of Dienbienphu, there is ample circumstantial evidence to indict James Angleton, Irving Brown, and the CIA in an international drug smuggling conspiracy.

CARMEL OFFIE'S GUIDANCE

It was also during the mid-1950s that CIA operator Irving Brown came under the guidance of Carmel Offie. A Foreign Service officer in Honduras in the mid-1930s, who later served as an aide to Ambassador William Bullitt in Russia, Offie took a CIA contract after World War II. From his base in Frankfurt he formed refugee groups and ran agents posing as black marketeers behind the Iron Curtain. And through a Radio Free Europe front, he also smuggled Nazis to Argentina. In both of these smuggling-related endeavors, Offie worked closely with James Angleton.

Carmel Offie was also involved in labor activities in postwar Europe, and as political adviser to the AFL's Information Service, he guided Irving Brown in Europe until 1954 when, amid rumors of pouch abuse and gun running, he was ostensibly fired from the CIA. He may, however, have simply gone under deep commercial cover, opening an import-export company that did business in France, South Vietnam, and Italy. According to author Burton Hersh, Offie also bought a piece of a mining company in North Africa in 1957, at the same time Brown was both representing the AFL at the Tunis labor

conference, and recruiting Algerian students for the CIA while directing them as *agents provocateurs* against France.²⁰

When his subversive activities were discovered by SDECE, Brown became persona non grata in France and Algeria. He returned to New York and in 1962 set up an office near the U.N., while his wife, Lilly, became a secretary at Carmel Offie's import-export firm. As head of the African American Labor Center, Brown started working closely with Algeria's first chief-of-state, Ahmed Ben Bella, as well as with Roger Faulques, the commander of Moise Tshombe's forces in the Congo. And his covert war against the French continued apace.

Here it must be noted that during this turbulent time, the People's Republic of China (PRC) was being blamed by FBN Commissioner Harry Anslinger as the main source of America's heroin problem. In June 1962, at the same time the FBN's first investigation of Irving Brown was obstructed, Anslinger told the United Nations that heroin was being moved from the PRC on horse caravans to Burma.

That particular myth, however, was becoming increasingly hard to defend, for in his 1960 book, *The China Lobby*, Russ Koen had claimed that Nationalist Chinese were smuggling into America, "with the full knowledge and connivance" of their government. "[P]rominent Americans have participated [in] and profited from these transactions," Koen said. But after Anslinger denounced the book, the publisher stopped printing copies, and Koen was remanded into obscurity.²¹

Then in his 1962 book, *Treasury Agent*, Andrew Tully told about a CIA officer arriving in Burma from Taiwan. The CIA officer saw no soldiers, only a vast plantation. "You see," said the Kuomintang colonel in charge, "it takes money to run an operation like this and so...we're growing opium."²²

"Up until 1962 we thought the source was Turkey," FBN agent Tom Tripodi explains. "But the French were taking drugs out of Southeast Asia. French Intelligence was running the show. Thirty to forty people were involved, including Rosal, who was being blackmailed by Tarditi, who was part of the Brown-Lovestone-Angleton net."²³

20. *The Old Boys* (New York: Scribners, 1992). According to Jonnes in *Hep Cats*, *op. cit.*, n. 4, p. 184, after the Rosal case, the Treasury Secretary asked Secretary of State Dean Rusk to raise the drug issue with the French, but Rusk was told by the French that no extra men could be assigned until the problem in Algeria was settled.

21. John McWilliams, "Seeing Red," unpublished manuscript, p. 22.

22. Andrew Tully, *CIA: The Inside Story* (New York: William Morrow, 1962), p. 197.

23. Interview with Tripodi.

16. *Op. cit.*, n. 1, Report 1; confidential sources.

17. *Dossier D...comme Drogue* (Paris: Alain Moreau, 1973).

18. Steve Rivelle, "Death of a Double Man," *National Reporter*, Spring 1987, p. 49.

19. *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia* (New York: Harper Row, 1972) and *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade* (Brooklyn: Lawrence Hill, 1991).

According to Agent Tripodi, Brown's friend, handsome Maurice Castellani, was the net's operations manager. And as another FBN agent, Francis Waters, suggests, Castellani, whose nickname was "Le Petit Maurice," may even have been mystery man Jacques Mouren in the French Connection case. "Patsy Fuca talked about Le Petit Maurice with great deference," Waters recalls.²⁴

"On one occasion I followed Patsy to the garage where [Jacques] Angelvin's Buick was stashed," Agent Waters continues. "I saw Patsy talk to Toots Shoenfeld, and I did some checking and found that Toots was connected to the guy who was bankrolling Jean Jehan's operation. A few years before we'd found the same address (to the apartment where Jehan was staying in New York City) in the possession of Marcel Francis; so we got a search warrant and went in. It was a beautiful place, owned by an executive of Michelin Tire. So we had to back out."

"Think about it," Waters adds. "Mouren was never identified; Scaglia had been trained by the OSS; and people from U.S. Army Special Forces were involved in the French Connection case."

"By the 1960s," FBN agent Martin Pera explains, "it was obvious that Far East Asian dope was coming to the U.S., and everyone was pre-occupied with the fact that it couldn't happen without SDECE." Pera pauses. "And if it was to CIA's advantage [read Angleton] to have these sources left intact, so be it."²⁵

Back in New York in 1965, Irving Brown's involvement in the French Connection surfaced again when agent Waters learned that Maurice Castellani had been bringing money to his fellow Canard, Francois Scaglia, at Attica Prison since May 1964. As has been noted, Scaglia was convicted in the 1962 French Connection case based on traces of heroin found in Jacques Angelvin's Buick—traces that matched the heroin found in Patsy Fuca's basement in Brooklyn.

Handling the Castellani investigation was agent Mort Benjamin, who in Septem-

ber 1965 learned that Castellani and Irving Brown had arrived together in New York via Air France, and that Brown had been ushered through Customs without having to open his bags.²⁶ Next, Benjamin

powerful Maggadino Mafia family. The agents also noted that American Airlines had no record of Maurice Castellani ever having boarded his flights to and from Buffalo—an omission that reeks of the CIA.

On November 27, 1965, Castellani threw a party for Brown at the Beaux Arts Hotel in New York. Afterward, Castellani met with a few unidentified persons, then returned to Paris. And the FBN dropped its investigation.

So Castellani (who would operate well into the 1970s without ever being arrested on narcotics charges) and Brown were allowed to slip away, at a time when the *guerre sale* had reached a critical point. By the mid-1960s, the U.S. military had decided to occupy South Vietnam, and the CIA had allowed the FBN to make cases on Corsicans in Laos, so that U.S.-backed warlords in South Vietnam could profit from a greater share of the narcotics market.

Within two years, the FBN itself had been abolished and replaced by a new organization, the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, which was more heavily penetrated by the CIA.

In closing, it is worth noting that the CIA element of the French Connection would continue to engage SDECE in

Southeast Asia, even after the so-called French Connection was finally smashed in 1973, concurrent with the ceasefire in Vietnam; a ceasefire negotiated in France. Moreover, the CIA expanded its use of drug smuggling, as an instrument of political warfare, into South America, Nigeria and Afghanistan. Indeed, the doctrine of Low-Intensity Warfare, which emerged as the CIA's post-Cold War strategy in the Third World, has itself devolved, and now has as its main ingredient the *bête noire* known as counter-narco-terrorism.

But is it acceptable for the CIA to smuggle drugs, even under the aegis of national security?

One need only look at the devastation of America's inner cities and minority communities to answer that question. But then again, pacifying minorities and undermining civil liberties are integral parts of the CIA's overall strategy in waging its clandestine campaign of domestic political warfare. ■

MEMORANDUM REPORT		
BUREAU OF NARCOTICS		
DISTRICT NO. 2		
GEN. FILE TITLE: MAURICE CASTELLANI et al.		
CASE FILE NO. REPORT MADE AT: New York, New York DATE: November 17, 1965 BY: Mortimer L. Benjamin Narcotic Agent	RELATED FILES NY:K 1327 NY:S 10787	OTHER OFFICERS Narcotic Agents Francis E. Waters John O'Leary
SUBJECT OF THIS MEMORANDUM Investigation of MAURICE CASTELLANI and IRVING JOSEPH BROWN.		RECOMMENDATION PENDING: CLOSE: FURTHER INVESTIGATION: XXXX
DETAILS (If report is over two pages in length summarize in first paragraph)		
1. Reference is made to memorandum report dated November 8, 1965 by Mr. Ernest M. Gentry, Assistant Deputy Commissioner, concerning the activities of suspect IRVING JOSEPH BROWN.		
2. BROWN, who is connected with the United Nations through his position with the AFL-CIO United Nations Committee, is now known to be closely associated with MAURICE CASTELLANI and other French underworld characters. Both BROWN and CASTELLANI are believed to be periodically flying in and out of this country together, arriving and departing from JFK International Airport.		
3. On November 17, 1965, Group Leader Francis E. Waters, conferred with Customs Agent Julian Zamosky concerning this investigation. Agent Zamosky was informed, that even though BROWN does not have diplomatic status, we believe the possibility exists that at New York, because of his frequent travel during the past 20 years, he may enjoy officially or unofficially courtesy of port privileges. This might enable him to move luggage through Customs unopened. Agent Zamosky indicated that he would discreetly attempt to determine whether or not BROWN did in fact enjoy such privileges. Agent Zamosky agreed that any investigation conducted by his office would be made in a manner showing the utmost discretion.		
4. It is requested that District #17 should, if possible, ascertain BROWN's next arrival date in New York, so that close surveillance can be conducted while he passes through Customs.		
COPY OF THIS MEMO FURNISHED TO BUREAU: 2 DISTRICT NO. 17: 2 US Customs Agt. Zamosky... 1 FILES: X		SIGNATURES Mortimer L. Benjamin (NARCOTIC AGENT) JFB APPROVED: George M. Bolk (DISTRICT SUPERVISOR)

1965 FBN document, implicating Irving Brown.

checked with INS and found that Brown had not filled out the form, and that three forms were missing for that particular flight. Photos of Brown and Castellani were sent to Customs agents and on November 23, Benjamin was notified that the pair had arrived together again at JFK Airport. Benjamin and another agent were told to follow Castellani to Attica, and to record his conversations with Scaglia.

Unfortunately, the visit was scheduled for the day after Thanksgiving, and there were so many visitors making so much noise, that Castellani's chat with Scaglia could not be recorded. The agents did, however, overhear the conversation—in which Scaglia gave Castellani explicit instructions on how to smuggle dope—and learned that Castellani had traveled to and from the prison in a taxicab (with Canadian and American plates) that belonged to a company controlled by a front man for the

24. Interview with Waters.
25. Interview with Pera.

26. *Op. cit.*, n. 1, Report 3.