



American Pirate in the Consular Court

2014 blog article by Gerald Loftus (former Resident Director of TALIM, the Tangier American Legation Institute for Moroccan Studies)

<https://legation.org/american-pirate-in-the-consular-court/>

1952: The case of the U.S. vs. "Nylon Sid"

Consular Court? Piracy? By an American? Yes, this was Tangier, International Zone. Thanks to Margery King, one of the Legation's steadfast friends, who remembers her father being called to serve as a juror at the Legation, we have this item from [Time Magazine of December 29, 1952](#): Nylon Sid & the Jolly Roger:

The location was the Barbary Coast, Technicolored to perfection in the midwinter sunshine; the set was a makeshift courtroom in the ancient Moorish palace that houses the U.S. consulate in torrid Tangier [yes, that would be the American Legation]. On trial was Tangier's No. 1 manufacturer of nylons and lingerie: dapper Sidney Paley, 32, a spunky ex-G.I. from New Jersey known to his intimates as Nylon Sid. The charge: plotting piracy on the high seas.

From a procession of multilingual witnesses came the story of how an 80-ton privateer (the ex-British Admiralty launch Esme) rammed the Dutch ship Combinatie one night in October and hijacked its cargo of \$100,000 worth of U.S. cigarettes. Masked and heavily armed, the pirates sailed their prize to a cove "somewhere in Corsica." There, they unloaded their booty, and abandoned the Combinatie a few miles offshore, leaving its crew locked below decks.

The leader of the pirates, said the prosecution, was one Elliot Burt Forrest, 29, Bronx-born operator of a Tangier nightclub and now a fugitive from justice. But the brains behind the exploit was Nylon Sid, who was lurking in Marseille waiting to dispose of the loot when the Esme's crew was captured. Spanish cops nabbed Nylon Sid when he skipped to Madrid; last week he faced trial before a U.S. consular court in the internationalized port of Tangier.

Nylon Sid insisted that he and Forrest had chartered the Esme to do a "salvage job" off Malta; anything else that happened was all Forrest's doing because Nylon Sid wasn't there. Besides, said his lawyer, "this is the season of 'Peace on earth, good will to all men.'"

U.S. Consular Judge Milton J. Helmick was unmoved; he found Nylon Sid guilty and sentenced him to three years in prison. Nylon Sid would be allowed out on appeal, said the judge, if he would put up as bail \$10,000 and his cream-colored Cadillac.

I recently came across mention of Nylon Sid in an entertaining book from the Fifties, Turbulent Tangier by [Aleko Lilius](#). Lilius knew a thing or two about pirates. His 1931 book I Sailed With Chinese Pirates was the inspiration for the long running comic strip Terry and the Pirates.

When he arrives in Tangier to cover the Nylon Sid trial, Lilius starts to get the feel of the place: a hotel clerk is wary of talking to him about the "important exporters" (a.k.a. smugglers) who stay at the hotel. He plays cat-and-mouse with Sid to get a photo for Life Magazine, which, like Time, is following this story intently. "The general talk in Tangier was that Lucky Luciano had had a hand in most of these operations" – with hints of the Mafia and "American gangsterism," no wonder people were nervous. A note arrives in his hotel pigeon hole: "Lay off Sydney."

Consul Milton Helmik, "acting judicially" according to notices in the Tangier Gazette, presided over the Consular Court, with Vice Consul Miklos playing bailiff ("Hear ye, hear ye").

In the end, after appeals, Paley was given a suspended sentence and his fine was reduced. Later Nylon Sid tells Lilius that his pirate days are over, and that he would henceforth confine himself to smuggling.

In the 1950s, as Moroccan independence was looming, Tangier continued to have its unique set of institutions, with an American Consular Court at the Legation, but also with an [American judge, Juan Sedillo, on the International Court](#). The city's transition from International Zone to Moroccan city took several years, [described here](#).

By the time I joined the US Foreign Service in 1979, vice consuls no longer got to play bailiff or consular court judge. Lucky for me: my legal duties amounted to "adjudicating" visa applications, for which very skimpy familiarity with U.S. regulations sufficed..

Gone were the days of Nylon Sid at the Consular Court.