



**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

**Foreign Places:
The Mediterranean: Corsica**

The Mediterranean

<u>Report</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	Getting Started
2	Arriving
3	Istanbul
4	Rhodes
5	Crete
6	Malta
7	Sicily
8	Sardinia
9	Minorca
10	Corsica
11	Civitavecchia

The Mediterranean Report Ten: Corsica

Corsica was inhabited as early as 555 BC by the Ionian Greeks. Because of its strategic importance and crossroads location, it experienced centuries of warfare between, and occupations by Carthaginians, Romans, Vandals, Byzantians, Lombardis, Moors, Pisans, Genoese, French, Genoese again, French again, British, French again, British again, Germans/Italians, Corsicans (!), and French. Presently, the French are in charge.

June 14, Ajaccio, Corsica, France



Before reporting on the visit to Corsica, I will recount another entertainment provided by the *Minerva II*. Toward the end of the cruise, an after dinner program included a performance of Philippine folk dances by the Filipino crew members. I had been talking to the Filipino waiters about my two-year residence in the Philippines. We discussed Subic Bay, Manila, Baguio, the food, language, and dress of the country. I reminisced about how much I liked watching the Filipinos dance the Coconut Dance and the Tinikling, also called the Bamboo or Stick Dance.

I mentioned my former residency in the Philippines to some of the Filipino waiters. We immediately connected. For the entire cruise, they treated me as if I had a special relationship with them and their culture. We had interesting talks and conversed on a wide variety of subjects, such as pig roasts, the beautiful jungles of their country, and the country's heroes, who did not include Imelda Marcos and her shoe collection.

I had not seen or heard Filipino dances and music since the 1960s. The program included traditional Philippine songs, such as the Coconut Dance, the Tinikling, and a simple, elegant routine called the Candle Dance. The performances were beautifully done and took me back to fine experiences during my stay in the Philippines.

The Tinikling is my favorite Philippine dance: Two persons sit on the floor a few feet from each other. They hold the ends of two bamboo poles in each hand. To the time of music, and in syncopation with each other, they bang the poles to the floor twice...**Clack, Clack**...then raise them up a few inches and bang them together...**Clomp**. The result is a rhythm of **Clack, Clack, Clomp**. Dancers jump into and out of the space between the poles during the **Clack, Clack**. At this time, the Tinikling becomes even more entertaining, because an untalented dancer will step into the space just before the poles go **Clomp**...against the dancer's ankles.



Figure 1. The Tinikling Dance.

An example of this popular dance is shown in Figure 1. It is a dance I tried to perform many times while living in the Philippines, eventually improving to the point of mediocrity. What fine memories this performance had brought forth. I could picture myself back in the Philippines, clacking and ‘clomping,’ just like later times of rocking and a ‘rolling.’

As the dance went on, my recollections of dancing the Tinikling seemed as if they took place yesterday, yet my clacking and clomping took place some forty years ago. True to the adage, “The memory of an old man gets clearer and clearer, the further back it goes,” was holding true during this performance.¹

John Travolta of the Bamboo Dance

The Filipinos executed the bamboo dance flawlessly, then turned to the audience for a human sacrifice. I'm not into sacrifices, especially if the sacrifice is focused on me. It did not matter, one of the dancers, a waitress at the pool bar, pulled me from my chair onto the dance floor, and into several **Clomps**. At least that was what I thought. I was floundering on the floor like a stuck Philippine pig until my dance partner rescued me from the poles and escorted me back to my chair. Then, Reporter Juniorette was selected for the second sacrifice. She acquitted herself better than I.

After I sat down and watched Carol elude the poles, I realized the Filipinos had modified the dance to accommodate us. The rhythm was **Clack, Clack, Clack** but no **Clomp**. Perhaps fearing a class-action lawsuit from a lawyer in the audience, they were not banging the poles together. Had I known this fact while I was on the dance floor, I could have initiated any number of John Travolta routines. Another missed opportunity to excel.

The Internet at Sea

¹ Arthur Schopenhauer, “Religion and other Essays, Psychological Observations,” *Essays of Arthur Schopenhauer*, translated by T. Bailey, 1851, in Leonard Roy Frank, *Quotationary* (New York, Random House, 2001), 502.

The *Minerva II* reserved a place for its passengers to logon to the Internet, shown in Figure 2



(with Holly at a workstation). With the exception of a few business mails, I kept away from the Net on this cruise. Unlike most computer rooms I have seen, this area was in a pleasant sitting, taking up a corner in one of the bars.

"Waiter! The printer is out of paper. While you're at it, bring me an Irish Coffee."

It beat an office cubicle.

Figure 2. The *Minerva II* Computer Room.

Ajaccio and Napoleon's Birthplace

Foregoing a formal tour, I left the ship to stroll around the port city of Ajaccio. Searching for small streets leading to nowhere, I spent the better part of the morning going nowhere, but



Figure 3. A street scene in Ajaccio, Corsica.

enjoying each moment of the meandering. Several larger streets were for pedestrians only, and hundreds of small shops lined these streets, as seen in Figure 3.

Without the guiding hand of a tour guide, I made my way to a museum. It was the Fesch Museum, one of Corsica's best, at least according to the *Minerva II* literature. Pulling out my Euros, I walked to the cashier's table.

Cashier, "Non," making a hand gesture to indicate I was not allowed into the museum. After a bit of English/French interplay, including her repeating "Ferme" several times, I learned the museum was admitting only special groups during this time of day. I noticed some of the people leaving the museum were in a *Minerva II* tour group.

Never mind, I found a café to wait out the tourists and to once again vindicate my mantra, "Living well is the best revenge." To that end, I ordered a French onion soup, a Perrier, an apple, a pear, two stuffed mushrooms, four snails, goat cheese, and a baguette. All French fare; no fried chicken or hot dogs. What is more, I placed my order by insolently pointing to unintelligible entices on the menu.

The disarray of my lunch and the bemused look from my waiter was more than compensated by the succulent soup and cheese. Thus fortified, I began a walk to the house where Napoleon was born in 1769.

I knew something about this man. I recall his name was actually Napoleone, but at some point in his life he lost the trailing "e." As I walked toward his home, I also thought about my name,

Uyless, and about how often on this trip, it was mistaken for Ulysses, yet not once was I asked for my autograph. Anyway, Napoleon's name had come up many times during this cruise. I was eager to learn more about him and to walk through his childhood home.

I arrived at this home, and made the pictures shown in Figure 4. The marble sign above the front door is enlarged so you can read it...if you read French. I suspect this sign was added to the house after Napoleon was born. Whatever the case, once again pulling out my Euros, I walked to the cashier's table just inside the house. Once again, "Non," indicating I was not allowed into the museum. Once again, I learned the house was open only to special groups during this time of day. Once again, I noticed some of the folks leaving the museum were in a *Minerva II* tour group.

Ah, no matter, even though walking through this house was part of the cruise I was especially looking forward to. Napoleon's childhood home is an integral part of French history. Nonetheless, I like unstructured days in foreign cities. I could come back later if I wanted to see the museum and Napoleon's home. I walked to the ship to meet with Carol, Al, and Holly to learn what they had discovered on their visits to Corsica.



Figure 4. Napoleon's home.

The four of us had put away some fine French food on our outings. Carol said, "I feel terrible about fat people, and I'm about to become one!" Amen.

Common Laws and Common Sense

I've mentioned a book several times in previous reports. It deals with the American legal system and is titled, *The Death of Common Sense*. My concern and the concern of the author of the book is the replacement of common sense with laws...and laws...and more laws. I will not repeat myself about this subject. I will try a different slant. Let's take a quiz. Please look at Figure 5,

which contains five photos, labeled one through five. Here is some information to help you with the quiz:

Photo One: A public beach in Minorca.

Photo Two: A shelf of a closed café in Sicily.

Photo Three: A staircase in Rhodes.

Photo Four: An apartment in Sicily.

Photo Five: A public boat tour in Malta.



Figure 5. Not in America.

The quiz: What do these pictures show that would be unlawful in America? Answers:

Photo One: No lifeguards.

Photo Two: Olives not refrigerated and left out overnight.

Photo Three: No staircase railing.

Photo Four: No railing across a balcony door.

Photo Five: No lifejackets.

Does it matter? After all, the laws prohibiting the situations shown in Figure 37 protect us from drowning, food poisoning, and broken necks.

I'll take my chances. *Dear Uncle Sam, reduce my taxes and get out of my life.*

My friends tell me I am an unrealistic libertarian. They also tell me there is a huge downside of allowing people, because of their own misjudgments or ineptitude to die, get sick, or injure themselves: Allowing these mishaps to occur will result in raising insurance rates for everyone. Fantastic. We're altering our once hardy, independent American soul to be frightened, litigious wimps because of a concern for insurance premiums.

But not everything in America's legal system is broken. There is an upside to America's laws in comparison to those in the EU. Our laws have been created to foster free enterprise. And with the

racial and gender barriers coming down, if our country holds true to its course, we can continue our long run of prosperity. We do need to rein-in our debt, and the paperwork associated with government bureaucracy, but that's another story.