

# Confidential

TELLS THE FACTS AND NAMES THE NAMES

August, 1958: p. 10

A rogue's gallery of notorious hoodlums . . .  
and the stories behind their fancy monickers.

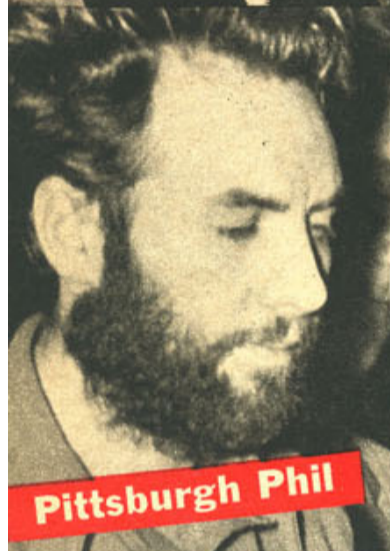


Kid Twist

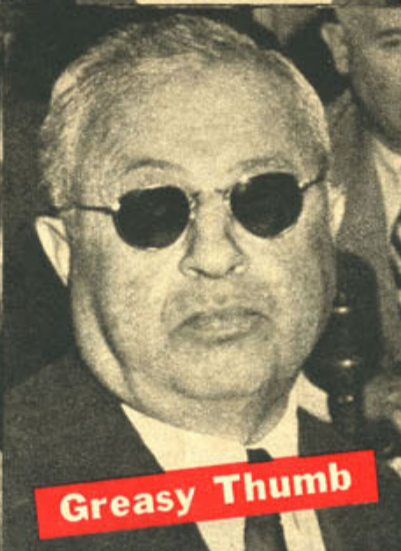


Socks

## Whats in a Name?



Pittsburgh Phil



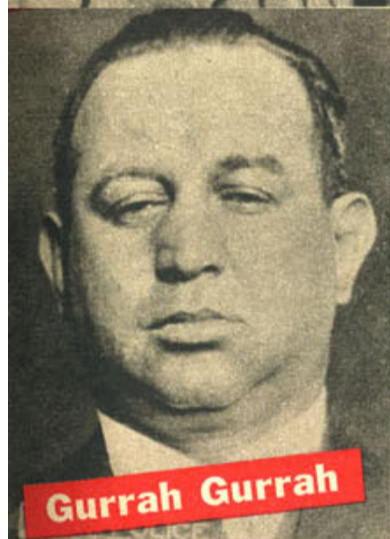
Greasy Thumb



Tick Tock



Cherry Nose



Gurrah Gurrah



Bugsy



Chicken Head



Izzy the Eel

**I**F YOU WANT to start a fight in the pool room next Saturday night, try coming up with *your* explanation of how the elite of the underworld got those colorful aliases. But if any of the "boys" in question happen to be around, better not say anything. They're sensitive, and you could end up in a cement sports jacket.

No two hoods ever agree on the origin of these strange labels. For instance, there's "Socks" Lanza. His square first name is Joseph, and one faction maintains he's called "Socks" because he owns 200 pairs of Argyles. Another group swears it came about because "Socks" never set foot in a sock — wouldn't dream of putting anything into his shoes besides his feet. You can't ask "Socks" . . . he's vacationing in the can, courtesy of the State of New York . . . a little matter of extortion and parole violation.

Then there's "Greasy Thumb" Guzik, out of Chicago. There's a fine name for a fine, upstanding gangster. How did he get it? His mother called him Jake. The law called him a menace, and most of the gang on the shady side of the tracks agree "Greasy Thumb's" tag came from his early days as a waiter, when he served a free thumb with every bowl of soup. Alas, poor Guzik, he's no longer with us, but that pungent name will live on.

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## *Nomenclature*

The all-time favorite of many collectors of fancy monickers is **"Tick Tock."** It has a nice beat. "Tick Tock," whose real handle was Albert Tannenbaum, was a very able and experienced torpedo. Albert was much sought after by shady citizens who wished somebody rubbed out.

According to underworld intelligence, he got the label because at one time he peddled hot watches, and usually had a couple pocketfuls of the timepieces on him, all ticking merrily. It wasn't considered good form to address him as "Tick Tock." He was touchy — and quick on the draw. Not any more, though. "Tick Tock" died of 3,000 volts in 1941. Time: 11:03 p.m.

### **Pittsburgh Off Limits for "Pittsburgh Phil"**

Connoisseurs of fancy aliases are very partial to "Chicken Head." That's what the boys on the inside called Vito Gurino, a very rough gentleman who got 60 years to life for a killing. It's true that **"Chicken Head"** *did* bear, in profile, some resemblance to your neighbor's fowl, but that's *not* how he earned that unusual tag. Seems a couple of the boys came upon him one day, sitting happily in a chicken yard, getting a bit of practice shooting off the heads of frantic cacklers with a .45 at 10 paces. From then on he was "Chicken Head."

Ever hear of **"Pittsburgh Phil?"** A lot of victims of his gun did — too late. He was handy with a rod. That was his business. His real name was Harry Strauss, and he *didn't* come from Pittsburgh. He wouldn't even *go* to Pittsburgh — he was very hot there — hence the nickname. He'd take on a "contract" to rub out anybody, anywhere — except Pittsburgh. He was an artist at his grisly trade. "Pittsburgh Phil" isn't around today. He finally got *too* hot — in the electric chair in 1941.

The gold medal for the oddest alias among the boys of Badville could well go to **"Gurrah Gurrah."** This hardboiled egg had a real name, Jacob Shapiro. He was chief gun for "Lepke" Buchalter, Murder Inc. big shot. "Gurrah Gurrah" was an impatient fellow, and not overly bright. If he wanted to tell somebody to scram, the closest he could come to saying, "Get out!" was "Gurrah, Gurrah!" He never had any other handle to the boys, and he didn't seem to mind. Was quite proud of it, in fact.

Dickens would have loved the handle **"Kid Twist,"** the alias of one of the most unlovable hoods who ever gunned down a brother rat. His real name was Abe Reles, and they say he got that colorful monicker because he always had an angle. That is, until he "sang" for a Brooklyn grand jury. Then, one day, he fell or was pushed from a window of the hotel where cops were holding him. "Kid Twist" fell straight down — no angles at all.

Then there's **"Cherry Nose."** Sounds like Santa Claus, doesn't it? Well, "Cherry Nose" was no Santa by a long shot. He was Charley Gioe, another Chicago hood, and he was sent up for a stretch in the famed Brown-Bioff case. His red-nose sobriquet could have come from overindulgence in the grape, but it didn't. There are many explanations for Charlie's odd nickname, but insiders say this is the McCoy: Two extremely uncouth citizens interrupted Gioe during a pool game, just as he was lining up the nine-

## *Nomenclature*

ball for the corner pocket. They made disparaging remarks, and Charlie took exception to this breach of etiquette.

So one of the intruders bent the heel of a pool cue across Charlie's oversized schnozz. It became quite red. Well, the nose responded to surgery, but the alias stuck. "**Cherry Nose**" ended up with a hole in the head — bullet hole, that is, on Chicago's South Side in 1954.

There's a vault out west with a very distinguished corpse in it. The name on the plaque reads, Benjamin Siegel, but you know him as "**Bugsy**." So did the underworld. But no muscle man in his right mind ever called Bugsy that to his face for fear of lead poisoning. One retired torpedo, asked how Benny came by the alias, said, "He was nuts! Not off his rocker, y'understand. Just screwy. Real wild. He was a good man, though. Knew his business."

Bugsy got the business in Virginia Hill's mansion. A number of rifle slugs did him in. Virginia lammed. It seemed like a good idea at the time.

### **This One Has a Simple Explanation**

How does any man, hood or otherwise, ever collect a name like "**Izzy the Eel**?" Izzy started life as Irving Cohen. It wasn't a good life. He landed in the clink for being mixed up in the \$800,000 Mergenthaler swindle. Now, Izzy was slippery as an eel all right, but that's not how he got that fantastic alias. He just liked eels, that's all. He'd eat them any time of day or night. It's as simple as that.

Shakespeare once said, "What's in a name? . . . A rose by any other name would smell as sweet." The immortal bard had a point, but then he never had to contend with handles like "**Kid Twist**." And we wonder what he'd have thought of "Greasy Thumb?" No matter how you look at them, or what you call them, they could hardly be labeled sweet — and they're certainly no roses. ▲▲▲

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