

# Can It Be That During WWII Fred Lyons Shared a Room in Lyon, France With a Spanish Prostitute? Yes, But Read on . . .

by Fred Lyons, Division Headquarters

To Fred Lyons, there was an especial thrill (let's forget that part about the prostitute for a moment) in October of 1944 to find himself in LYON(s), France. He romanticized that the City could well have been the land of his forbears, for after all, hadn't it often been said that if one were to study the genealogy of the Irish—even of St. Patrick himself—it would lead you back to the continent of Europe?

Also, Fred, now a sergeant in the U.S. Army, was many miles and many thought-years away from his protective custody in Roslindale, Mass.—the home of his immediate forbears. He and his 100th Division were stalwartly headed northward from Marseilles—destination at the time unknown but turning out to be Alsace-Lorraine. So, it turned out to be quite a letdown to have his part of the convoy arrive late in the afternoon in a dreary suburb of Lyon. He never did see any part of the City itself: It was like a white Honkey being bused into the rough Norfolk Street section on the Roxbury-Dorchester line and being told he was in Boston.

At any rate, the quarters for the night consisted of not a little red schoolhouse but a big red (brick) schoolhouse that had previously been commandeered by the U.S. Army. Night after night, different groups of soldiers were being accommodated in that schoolhouse on the theory that they'd be in better condition to travel the next day if they didn't have to bivouac out in the open the night before. Generally speaking, Fred's group would have stayed all together, but for some reason on that occasion Fred's truckful was intermingled with all types of civilian soldiers. Each group was led into an assigned schoolroom (probably on the basis of alphabetically classified last names) where there were, say, 20 bunks: 10 on each side, as in a hospital ward. There was barely room for the one barracks bag that each soldier had lugged upstairs (the other bag having preceded them in the convoy).

Once we were settled, certain blocks of students were told that they would be allowed a few hours off to roam around within certain restricted limits. Most of us were distrustful of the immediate surroundings, having learned to be cautious on our trips to Marseilles during the few weeks we were bivouacked outside that city's limits. But a few others, more daring, were consumed with insatiable desires for B&Bs—not Brandy & Benedictines, but Booze & Broads. We had what is now recalled as being a 10:00 p.m. curfew: Anybody returning to the schoolhouse after that hour would be halted and turned over to the O.D., the Officer of the Day. (Officer of the Night would have been a more appropriate designation, but that is not an accepted Army term.)

Did I refer to other GIs as being more daring? I did, and there was none more daring than a Spanish-speaking line sergeant (that is, a full-fledged infantry sergeant) who was quartered in Fred's schoolroom. He was a dapper-looking fellow sporting a trim Clark Gable type of moustache, most unusual in WWII Army days. He had proven himself to have been more than successful in his B&B search: Picture our surprise, then, just as the clock was striking ten, to have him enter into our sanctuary accompanied by a smiling lady of the night—a Painted, Tainted Rose, as Al Martino would put it. Ten o'clock was, in addition to the curfew deadline, time for Lights Out. This was a well-timed move, therefore, because the guards stationed outside the schoolhouse had received strict and stringent orders: NO ADMITTANCE AFTER CURFEW. However, such orders did not encompass any incident such as this, and curfew wasn't being broken.

After Lights Out, certain jabbering a few bunks away from Fred confirmed that our surprise visitor—our unexpected female companion—was not, as originally assumed, of French but rather of Hispanic derivation. Rapid conversation—later related to Xavier Cugat and his young sixth wife frequently seen on

TV—preceded the inevitable *buenas noches*, and this happy couple was safely ensconced in an Army bunk which was barely wide enough for one person.

Fred had always been a light sleeper, but the cot in question was, say, three bunks down from him, and he fell into a rather troubled sleep, only to be awakened some hour or two later by a searching flashlight. (Most of us had one of those tucked away in our barracks bag, although I doubt at this late date—that they were what was then referred to as Government Issue. In other words, if we wanted to find our way, say, to an outside latrine in bivouac in the middle of the night, that was our problem and not that of the U.S. Army.) The flashlight in question was being wielded by a callow 21-year-old private in the bunk just opposite Fred's, and this poor fellow, in his innocence, tried—according to Fred's count—about three times during the earlier part of the night to clue in to this unusual situation. He seemed to pretend he was searching for some missing article nearby, but suddenly and inevitably the full force of the searchlight would quickly flit towards the overladen cot. What intrigued Fred most about this unexpected diversion was that the youth in question donned his GI eyeglasses before scanning the schoolroom. It is now doubted, and was at the time, that his search was ever worth this effort, for all other GIs, including Fred, enjoyed a well-deserved sleep from around midnight until shortly before 6:00 a.m.

By virtue of the 23 months Fred had already served in the Army, he had learned that, to wash up in the morning and take care of bodily needs, one had to be one step ahead of the crowd. How else could one shave and be ready for whatever the next day portended? So, awakened at dawn, or should one say by the dawn, he automatically grabbed his shaving articles, which then, one might now be surprised to know, included a bristly shaving brush, and headed for the bathroom. A certain distinction must be made in this regard, in that although the Army refers to a "latrine" and the Navy to a "head," we were then after all inside a schoolhouse and it could not conscientiously be referred to as other than a "bathroom." By some indeterminate ESP, however, the lady from Spain decided that this was indeed the time for her promptly to depart.

Fred, carrying all the items needed for his toilet, therefore found himself courteously opening the corridor door so that the lady might precede him. He turned right towards the bathroom, whilst she opted for a quick exit toward the left and vanished hurriedly down the stairs. What Fred will never forget about this episode is this:

As he and the prostitute emerged from the schoolroom, which I may repeat had accommodated some 20 GIs for the night, two other early risers—both young GIs!—were simultaneously coming out of the door on the other side of the corridor, and one of them, looking WIDE-EYEDLY at Fred, said to the other, "Hey, those guys had a girl in there ALL NIGHT!"

So, to sum it all up, not only Fred, but 19 others were guilty that night in Lyon, of mass degradation. For, who was there to prove otherwise(?), whereas in fact the girl had remained true ALL NIGHT to her Spanish Lover!!

Holiday 2004 Association Newsletter