

# French Connection

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The **French Connection** was a scheme through which heroin was smuggled from Turkey to France and then to the United States. The operation reached its peak in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and was responsible for providing the vast majority of the illicit heroin used in the United States. It was headed by the Corsican criminals Paul Carbone (and his associate François Spirito) and Antoine Guérini, and also involved Auguste Ricord, Paul Mondoloni, Salvatore Greco,<sup>[citation needed]</sup> and Meyer Lansky.<sup>[citation needed]</sup> Most of its starting capital came from assets that Ricord had stolen during World War II when he worked for Henri Lafont, one of the heads of the Carlingue (French Gestapo) during the German occupation in World War II.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

## From the 1930s to the 1950s

Illegal heroin labs were first discovered near Marseille, France, in 1937. These labs were run by the notorious Corsican gang leader Paul Carbone. For years, the Corsican underworld had been involved in the manufacturing and trafficking of illegal heroin abroad, primarily to the United States.<sup>[1]</sup> It was this heroin network that eventually became known as the "*French Connection*".

The Corsican Gang was closely allied with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the SDECE after World War II in order to prevent French communists from bringing the Old Port of Marseille under their control.<sup>[2]</sup>

Historically, the raw material for most of the heroin consumed in the United States came from Indochina, then Turkey. Turkish farmers were licensed to grow opium poppies for sale to legal drug companies, but many sold their excess to the underworld market, where it was manufactured into heroin and transported to the United States. The morphine paste was refined in Corsican laboratories in Marseille, one of the busiest ports in the western Mediterranean Sea. The Marseille heroin was reputed for its quality.

Marseille served as a perfect shipping point for all types of illegal goods, including the excess opium that Turkish farmers cultivated for profit. The convenience of the port at Marseille and the frequent arrival of ships from opium-producing countries made it easy to smuggle the morphine base to Marseille from the Far East or the Near East. The French underground would then ship large quantities of heroin from Marseille to New York.

The first significant post-World War II seizure was made in New York on February 5, 1947, when seven pounds (3 kg) of heroin were seized from a Corsican sailor disembarking from a vessel that had just arrived from France.

It soon became clear that the French underground was increasing not only its participation in the illegal trade of opium, but also its expertise and efficiency in heroin trafficking. On March 17, 1947, 28 pounds (13 kg) of heroin were found on the French liner, *St. Tropez*. On January 7, 1949, more than 50 pounds (22.75 kg) of opium and heroin were seized on the French ship, *Batista*.

After Paul Carbone's death during the war, the Guérini clan was the ruling dynasty of the *Unione Corse* and had systematically organized the smuggling of opium from Turkey and other Middle Eastern countries. The Guérini clan was led by Marseilles mob boss Antoine Guérini and his brothers, Barthelemy, Francois and Pascal.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

## The 1960s

The first major French Connection case occurred in 1960. In June, an informant told a drug agent in Lebanon that Mauricio Rosal, the Guatemalan Ambassador to Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, was smuggling morphine base from Beirut, Lebanon to Marseille. Narcotics agents had been seizing about 200 pounds (90 kg) of heroin in a typical year, but intelligence showed that the Corsican traffickers were smuggling in 200 pounds (90 kg) every other week. Rosal alone, in one year, had used his diplomatic status to bring in about 440 pounds (200 kg).

The Federal Bureau of Narcotics's 1960 annual report estimated that from 2,600 to 5,000 pounds (1,200 to 2,300 kg) of heroin were coming into the United States annually from France. The French traffickers continued to exploit the

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demand for their illegal product, and by 1969, they were supplying the United States with 80 to 90 percent of its heroin.

Because of this increasing volume, heroin became readily available throughout the United States. In an effort to limit the source, U.S. officials went to Turkey to negotiate the phasing out of opium production. Initially, the Turkish government agreed to limit their opium production starting with the 1968 crop.

At the end of the 1960s, after Robert Blemant's assassination by Antoine Guerini, a gangwar sparked in Marseille, caused by competition over casino revenues. Blemant's associate, Marcel Francisci, continued the war over the next years.

## The 1970s and the dismantling of the French Connection

Following five subsequent years of concessions, combined with international cooperation, the Turkish government finally agreed in 1971 to a complete ban on the growing of Turkish opium, effective June 29, 1971. During these protracted negotiations, law enforcement personnel went into action. One of the major roundups began on January 4, 1972, when agents from the U.S. Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs (BNDD) and French authorities seized 110 pounds (50 kg) of heroin at the Paris airport. Subsequently, traffickers Jean-Baptiste Croce and Joseph Mari were arrested in Marseille. One such French seizure from the French Connection in 1973, netted 210 pounds (95 kg) of heroin worth \$38 million.

In February 1972, French traffickers offered a U.S. Army sergeant \$96,000 to smuggle 240 pounds (109 kg) of heroin into the United States. He informed his superior who in turn notified the BNDD. As a result of this investigation, five men in New York and two in Paris were arrested with 264 pounds (120 kg) of heroin, which had a street value of \$50 million. In a 14-month period, starting in February 1972, six major illicit heroin laboratories were seized and dismantled in the suburbs of Marseille by French national narcotics police in collaboration with U.S. drug agents. On February 29, 1972, French authorities seized the shrimp boat, *Caprice des Temps*, as it put to sea near Marseille heading towards Miami. It was carrying 915 pounds (415 kg) of heroin. Drug arrests in France skyrocketed from 57 in 1970 to 3,016 in 1972. Also broken up as part of this investigation was the crew of Vincent Papa, whose members included Anthony Loria Sr. and Virgil Alessi. The well-organized gang was responsible for distributing close to a million dollars in heroin up and down the East Coast during the early 1970s, which in turn led to a major New York Police Department (NYPD) corruption scheme. The scope and depth of this scheme are still not known, but officials suspect it involved corrupt NYPD officers, who allowed Papa, Alessi, and Loria access to the NYPD property/evidence storage room at 400 Broome Street, where hundreds of kilograms of heroin lay seized from the now-infamous French Connection bust, the missing heroin replaced with flour and cornstarch.<sup>[3][4]</sup>

The substitution was discovered only when officers noticed insects eating all the bags of "heroin". By that point an estimated street value of approximately \$70 million worth of heroin had already been taken. The racket was brought to light and arrests were made. Certain plotters received jail sentences, including Papa. (Papa was later murdered in federal prison in Atlanta, Georgia; several conflicting reasons why have been suggested). The French Connection investigation demonstrated that international trafficking networks were best disabled by the combined efforts of drug enforcement agencies from multiple countries. In this case, agents from the United States, Canada, Italy and France had worked together to achieve success.

Ultimately, the Guérini clan was exterminated in the French underworld. In 1971, Marcel Francisci was accused by police forces in the U.S. Bureau of Narcotics of being involved in the trafficking of heroin between Marseilles and New York City.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

On 16 January 1982, Marcel Francisci was killed in Paris, France. He was shot to death in the parking lot of the building where he lived as he was entering his car.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

## Notable Gangsters in the French Connection

- Joseph Orsini
- Marcel Francisci
- Xavier Francisci

## Gangsters linked with the French Connection

### Unione Corse members

- Paul Carbone, Marseille kingpin
- Francois Spirito, associate of Carbone
- Antoine Guérini, Godfather from Marseille
- Barthélemy Guérini, Antoine's brother
- Paul Mondoloni
- Marcel Francisci, associate of Mondoloni

### Sicilian Mafia members

- Vito Agueci, gangster from New York
- Albert Agueci, Agueci Brothers

### Canadian mobsters

- John Papalia, Hamilton, Ontario, mob boss.
- Vic Cotroni, leader of the Cotroni crime family of Montreal

### American mobsters

#### Lucchese crime family members

- Giovanni "Big John" Ormento, a capo involved in large scale narcotic trafficking <sup>[5]</sup>
- Salvatore Lo Proto, an important member of Big John's narcotic trafficking ring <sup>[6]</sup>
- Angelo M. Loiacano, wholesaler of Big John Ormento's narcotic trafficking ring <sup>[7]</sup>
- Vincent Papa, mastermind of "Who Stole the French Connection" - drugs from the NYPD Property Room
- Anthony Loria, Sr. partner of Vincent Papa, major heroin dealer
- Angelo "Little Angie" Tuminaro, a soldier, involved in narcotic trafficking <sup>[5][8]</sup>
- Pasquale "Patsy" Fuca, nephew to Tuminaro, involved in the narcotic trade <sup>[5]</sup>
- Anthony DiPasqua, was a narcotic trafficker <sup>[5]</sup>

## Films

- William Friedkin, *The French Connection* (1971)
- John Frankenheimer, *French Connection II* (1975)

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