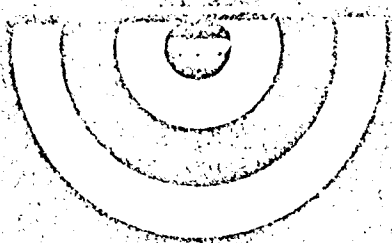


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Fiction Plume

Longuet de Gaulle



THE PRESIDENT

OF THE UNITED STATES

OF AMERICA

JOHN F. KENNEDY

THE PRESIDENT

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THE PRESIDENT

CHAPTER 14

The Mystery Explosive

"Capt. Mertz"

The great problem which still puzzles students of the Pont-sur-Seine assassination attempt is the reason for its failure. Everything had been worked out and organized to guarantee success. Villedomandy had pressed his button at the right moment to within a tenth of a second; ignition had occurred when it should. But the bomb did not explode; the napalm produced a curtain of fire but half-burnt slabs of plastic were found strewn all over the road.

The first idea which occurs to any student of these troublesome times is that a third party had penetrated the circuit and had detonated the bomb. One thinks, of course, of the French secret service, the SDECE, which undoubtedly had wind of the affair and could have intervened.

This story does not hold water. The bomb contained nearly 100 lbs of plastic and was connected to a canister containing twenty litres of napalm. No secret service in the world could have taken the risk of allowing such a device to explode at half-cock beneath the wheels of the president's car. We must therefore look for some other, and infinitely more subtle, form of intervention by the SDECE.

It is best first to eliminate the other theories, in particular that based on the supposition that the detonator failed to function properly. The report drawn up at the request of M. Henry Thoret, examining magistrate in the High Court of the Seine department, by two highly qualified experts is illuminating on this subject. This report by 'national experts' as they are entitled, is signed by Henri Forester, chief engineer of the Paris Municipal Laboratory and head of the Explosives Division, and Marc Willmet, Commander of the Legion of Honour, Doctor of Science and senior lecturer at the Ecole Polytechnique (College of Military Science). This report shows that, when 'empty', the bomb weighed and could only hold a maximum of 150 lbs of plastic. Even with 150 lbs of explosive it was very heavy and considerable effort was required to handle it.

exploded:

'The distance between the bomb and the vehicle is estimated at 4-5 yards. As a result, had the charge functioned normally, it would have been enough to cause serious damage to the vehicle resulting, at the very least, in serious injury to the occupants. Phenomena of this nature do not automatically produce results precisely in accordance with forecasts, however, and the above is stated subject to the proviso that the explosion took place precisely at the moment desired [which it did] and that the results of trials were regarded as entirely valid.'

In other words, and taking into account the probable side-effects described in the report (blast, the 'considerable' effect of fragmentation, stone splinters, crater 20-25 feet in diameter, etc), General de Gaulle would have been killed at Pont-sur-Seine, had the bomb exploded.

But, the report continues, 'the results of the explosion' and in particular the discovery of bomb fragments and slabs of explosive 'prove with certainty that the phenomenon did not follow the lines of the tests mentioned above. . . . There was, therefore, no "explosion" in the proper sense of the word but a process of "deflagration" of the explosive. . . . Part of the plastic "deflagrated", thus disturbing the mechanism of the bomb, projecting non-ignited slabs of plastic, bursting the adjacent jarican and igniting the liquid which it contained. The blast effect was much less than that which would have resulted from an explosion and the displacement of sand was comparatively small. . . .'

The report then analyses the way in which the bomb was fixed using an American electrical detonator. Fusing was 'undoubtedly very defective', the experts say; they stress, nevertheless, that the electrical preparations were 'most thorough' and that the current available was 'more than adequate'.

The experts then attempt to explain the 'non-explosion' of the bomb, referring to an inadequate homogeneous charge, an inadequately resistant casing, etc. They also refer, however, to the 'high coefficient of self-excitation of plastic', this coefficient being determined by the air-space separating two adjacent slabs. They mention tests carried out with 50-grain slabs separated by an air-space of 20 cms which produced three detonations against three 'failures'.

Reading this report with its diffident, though learned, explanations it is difficult to imagine that a perfectly good American detonator, when inserted 'into' nearly 100 lbs of plastic, would not have produced an explosion in view of plastic's 'high coefficient of self-excitation'.

The explanation must, therefore, be sought elsewhere. The clue lies on page 5, line 17 of the report—'dependent on the physical state of the explosive. . . . ' Here lies the real reason for the failure of the attempt of Pont-sur-Seine.

The first step is to consider the highly unusual role played in all this by a highly unusual person—Colonel Fourcaud. His name only appeared officially during the trial of the Pont-sur-Seine conspirators which opened at Troyes Assizes on 29 August 1962.

The press had moulded public opinion and everyone expected to see in the dock a set of vile killers with horrifying faces and boorish manners. What they saw were men of the world—brilliant, polished, elegant, smiling.

In essence they said: 'This was a "phony" attempt. It was organised by the gaullist authorities for the glorification of de Gaulle. Even the arrest of Villemandy was planned—why would he have hung around near the spot if he had not wished to get himself arrested? In any case we were all acting under the orders of "Monsieur Simon".'

In support of their statements one of their counsel produced a letter signed by the mysterious 'Monsieur Simon' in which he admitted that he was acting on government orders and had himself handed the bomb to Manowry. Pursuing its offensive the defence demanded evidence from two of the régime's major dignitaries, Jacques Foccart, secretary-general in the Elysée, and Alexandre Sanguinetti, specially employed in the Ministry of the Interior. For good measure, they also demanded to hear Colonel Fourcaud, long a senior officer of the SDECE, though no longer in the secret service at the time.

Jacques Foccart naturally denied all knowledge of the accused and in particular of persons not present, whose names only were known—Abby, 'Germain' and 'Simon'.

Alexandre Sanguinetti similarly denied all such knowledge. Under pressure from the defence, however, he was forced to admit responsibility for the despatch to Canada of a captain called Mertz with a ticket provided by the Ministry of the Interior. Sanguinetti explained:

'His wife was Canadian and had found him a job out there. Accordingly we jumped at the opportunity and sent him out to get rid of him. If I had a chance of providing a ticket for all the Oas men I know, I would willingly do so.'

Undoubtedly Mertz must have been a highly embarrassing person to meet such an circumstance.

Now Armand Belvisi had made Mertz' acquaintance during his second tour in Penzion. It has since been said that Mertz was sent there to mix with the numerous activists under arrest and try to collect information. It may be thought, moreover, that Mertz, holder of the Resistance Medal and the Legion of Honour, was the sort of man in whom Belvisi might confide—and at that time Belvisi was the possessor of a valuable secret: he was the only man who knew the location, in some Paris street, of the bomb destined for de Gaulle. Even 'Germain' (Bastien-Thiry) did not know.

Colonel Fourcaud who was later to give evidence at the trial, did not concern the judges. There is, therefore, one possibility: Mertz may have succeeded in gaining Belvisi's confidence and Belvisi may have let slip some information on the bomb; Mertz may have told his masters in the SDECE and Colonel Fourcaud. The establishment's craftsmen may then have got to work while Belvisi was still in prison. Once the bomb had been cleverly neutralised Belvisi would have been released in time to pursue the operation in accordance with 'Germain's' plans.

This version is perfectly plausible (more fantastic things have been done). It would explain why the bomb did not 'explode' on D Day. The secret service might then have been prepared to let matters ride in order to increase General de Gaulle's popularity; he would once more be considered to have 'the luck of the devil'.

Looking at the facts, however, this story hardly holds water either. Admittedly, Belvisi was considered to be a somewhat bustling fanatic who might be prepared to divulge secrets if someone had gained his confidence. All his earlier behaviour, however, proves that he was not merely a man committed to 'French Algeria' but that he was also extremely suspicious. His determination to find out the identity of 'Germain' (who proved to be Bastien-Thiry) is enough to demonstrate this.

Armand Belvisi says today: 'I know that all sorts of stories have gone round about my meeting Mertz. In fact I was at Beauvion for three days and I saw a lot of detainees there. We talked. As far as I was concerned, Mertz was undoubtedly a supporter of French Algeria. I could not describe him otherwise. It is possible that we had stool-pigeons amongst us. We knew that and we took care. If I had talked to Mertz about Pont-sur-Seine, the reaction would have been inevitable; "they" would not have taken the fearful risk of simulating an assassination attempt and allowing nearly 100 lbs of plastic to go off five yards from the general's car. "They" ran the risk that we might check and fix the bomb again to ensure an explosion. Then, when the attempt had taken place and had officially failed, "they" would have arrested Bastien-Thiry, the head man, not merely the "extras". It is true that I managed to escape but I paid the price. I should certainly not have been retrieved by the same "organisers" in order to prepare the Petit-Clamart attempt and I was one of the leading lights of that.'

It is at least probable that Belvisi may have indicated that something was up, without giving any names or details. This may have acted as an alarm bell and would explain the feverish police activity in the Pont-sur-Seine. They arrested numerous suspects, including all activist circles and arrested Gingembre on the eve of the attempt; precise date of which they did not know).

...
of the attempt, Metz took an aeroplane for Canada and that his ticket was handed to him by Alexandre Sangarret, then a close associate of Roger Frey, the Minister of the Interior.

Since Metz' role remained obscure, the evidence most eagerly awaited was that of Colonel Fourcaud himself. He brought an air of mystery and adventure into the Troyes trial.

Tall, lean and good-looking, the colonel made a great impression on the jury. He had been deputy director of the SDECE and had known de Gaulle well in London, where he had served him, although he did not like him.

This is clearly provocative action on the part of the authorities, the colonel announced. In my view it was an operation organised to restore de Gaulle's prestige and he was badly in need of it at the time. This is not the first time that this sort of operation has been engineered for political reasons—from the Lims telegram to the Vallant Lomb. I definitely have the impression that the attempt was phoney.

Coming after the mysterious 'Monsieur Simon' the colonel's views dumbfounded the jury. They did not accept the plea of the Public Prosecutor (who was demanding the death sentence) and allowed extenuating circumstances in the case of all the accused.

Manoury was given twenty years' imprisonment, Belvisi and Rouvière fifteen years, Barbance ten years. Cabanne de La Prade was sentenced to life imprisonment in *admiral*.

At first sight Colonel Fourcaud's rôle would seem to be that of a secret service technician who came to give his opinion (tainted with deep-rooted anti-Gaullism). It is in fact far more complex than it appears.

In February 1946 Colonel Fourcaud was appointed deputy director in charge of intelligence in the SDECE. Henri Ribière, deputy for Allier, was nominated director. The same list contains the name of Pierre Sudreau who was appointed deputy director in charge of administration.

Colonel Fourcaud's mother was a Slav. He had been one of the first Frenchmen to instal himself in London in 1940. He was essentially a 'man of the shadows'. His activities were invariably those of a secret agent. During the war he was sent on a mission to France to see certain members of the *Organisation*. He was arrested by the Vichy counter-espionage service and then released. He subsequently fought in the Resistance, was wounded and taken prisoner but then escaped. He was an extremely brave man and had great personal charm but he also had a pronounced taste for intrigue. Fourcaud was counting on becoming sole director of the secret service but he clashed with his chief, Henri Ribière, to who he was continually presenting fanciful plans.

Fourcaud had a hand in the celebrated 'Leak's affair' which, it will be

of a report on fields Order by General de Gaulle. The names of Generals Revers and Mast had been connected with this but Fourcaud had defended them. He was nevertheless forced to leave the service and undoubtedly this still rankled. He still had many secret service friends, however, and subsequently made for himself a sort of parallel career.

Everything indicates that, in the OAS *intrigue*, Fourcaud saw an opportunity to take his revenge when the moment arrived. To prove this, note should be taken of an important document numbered '55' in the OAS secret files and dated 26 October 1961 (in other words six weeks after Port-sur-Schoe). This lifts the veil on Colonel Fourcaud's activities. The document is in fact a report sent to OAS headquarters in Algiers (where it was received and registered) from an ex-graduate of the Ecole Nationale d'Administration (School of Administration). It refers to Colonel Fourcaud, Captain Metz and Laurier, whose dubious rôle in André Oron's planned assassination attempt at Provins has already been mentioned. Each of these people is referred to by a number corresponding to his real name in the official OAS code list.

The following are the significant passages in this report:
'Immediately after his arrest 4372185 [Laurier], through his defence counsel, was able to warn 557-534617 [Madame Martin]. Through her he asked Colonel 81745376 [Fourcaud] to follow the matter up.

'From the outset Colonel 81745376 [Fourcaud] had supported clandestine action on the part of 4372185 [Laurier] who was an old friend, providing him with the first 100 lbs of plastic enabling him to demonstrate OAS presence in Paris. He also assisted with information, personal files and contacts and he finally put at 4372185's disposal the members of what might be called a personal team which had been working with him for a long time—2135 [Joss], Captain 5762 [Metz] and myself.

'Colonel 81745376 [Fourcaud] has agreed to take the place of 4372185 [Laurier]. He has nevertheless asked 557-534617 [Madame Martin] and Doctor 815624 [Victor] for the following:

- 1 Formal appointment
- 2 General directives
- 3 A plan of action if possible
- 4 Opportunity to report

'In view of the precarious nature of communications between France and Algiers resulting in almost total isolation, I have proposed to the colonel that I should try to send him a responsible OAS officer in order to [only the most relevant clauses are quoted here]:

- 2 Report on the structure adopted by Colonel 81745376 [Fourcaud] for the organization under his control.

3 agreement on the advisability of these operations.

8 Organise direct contact between Colonel 81745376 [Fourcaud] and OAS headquarters in Algiers. To establish this contact I have asked 2155 [Joss], who knows him personally, and also the colonel himself to contact Madame 934675 [Gardes] and this he has done.

'Since I am now dealing with material requirements, I report that Colonel 81745376 [Fourcaud] has ordered me to request:

- 1 9 mm guns
- 2 Sten guns to be fitted to them
- 3 Mousers carbines
- 4 Explosives
- 5 Low-covered fuse
- 6 One 60 mm mortar with about ten bombs (the colonel was particularly insistent on this point) . . .

. . . [Other significant paragraphs followed]

1 Colonel 81745376 [Fourcaud] asked me to emphasise that two-way communications should be established (he asks me to report that we have here six suitcase sets but that, if radio communications are to be established, wave-length and frequency must be given).

2 He asks to be informed when he can come and make personal contact. I am busy obtaining papers for him and they will be ready shortly. He says that, if you wish, he could also go to Spain. He asks to be informed where and when contact could be made in Algiers, Oran or Spain.

3 We are extremely anxious [italics in original] to be put in touch with OAS elements now in Paris, particularly Y 08 [Sergeant]. On this subject I will recover from Oran, where I sent them, the documents of which I spoke to Pauline [Dr Jean-Claude Perez] about a so-called OAS brigade. This is probably a provocation, hence the importance of knowing exactly who is accredited by Algiers and of exposing the agents provocateurs.

4 Colonel 81745376 [Fourcaud] asks that his membership of OAS be officially confirmed to him.'

This report, which is authentic, clearly shows that Colonel Fourcaud was unduly in contact with the OAS; he himself asked for membership on 26 October 1961. It also appears that he provided the first 100 lbs of dynamite. Finally the report shows that at that time his OAS contacts were very ill and plastic was provided to camouflage the OAS presence.

1. Conclusion is obvious: it was Colonel Fourcaud who provided the

25. He also provided the first 100 lbs of dynamite (the report is in figure) and he gave them to Manoury via one of his own men, who may well have been Lauzier.

The authors of this book have, moreover, discovered a certain officer who wishes to remain anonymous. This officer was depured by Fourcaud to house the machinegun which was to fire on de Gaulle's car if it escaped the bomb at Pont-sur-Seine. When this man gave Fourcaud full information on the plans for the attempt, he was ordered not to make himself a member of the assault squad—and accordingly he refused. As a result the second section of the Pont-sur-Seine operation (the machine-gun attack) was abandoned by Bastien-Thiry; in this he was advised by Manoury who, unless further information is forthcoming, must be assumed to be the man in contact with Colonel Fourcaud.

Bastien-Thiry relied totally on Manoury for the production of the bomb. Manoury turned to Fourcaud through one of the latter's men. The bomb was manufactured and handed over to the conspirators with Fourcaud's agreement.

There is an important detail here, however: Fourcaud did not wish de Gaulle to be killed. He did not like him but he was loath to assassinate him. In London one day de Gaulle had said: 'Fourcaud, I know that you are devoted to me, but if I asked you to shoot Petain, you would refuse.'

Fourcaud had looked smilingly at de Gaulle: 'That's correct, General,' and he had added, 'The opposite is also correct.'

Fourcaud was probably attracted to the Pont-sur-Seine attempt by the 'Jesson' which it would reach de Gaulle. He hoped to cut him down to size and show him that he was not as invulnerable as he thought. Then he also wanted his little personal revenge. Hence his far-reaching 'Ultranon' with the OAS, his request for 'regular membership' and his participation by proxy in the Pont-sur-Seine operation.

The document quoted above proves indisputably that Colonel Fourcaud possessed neither weapons nor explosive since he was asking Algiers for them. Yet he provided the 95 lbs of plastic used in the bomb. The answer is that he had had this plastic for years; it came from Resistance stocks; it was old and semi-decomposed.

The man commissioned by Fourcaud to provide the plastic and manufacture the bomb was a craftsman. Moreover Forester and Wilmet, the experts, have admitted that the electrical preparations were 'very thorough'. They were unable to establish the 'physical state' of the explosive (their own expression), since the sticks found (some 20 lbs) were partially destroyed or had been affected by the fire.

So Colonel Fourcaud emerges as the *dux et magister*, the man who pulled all the strings from behind. His appearance at the trial, in a commanding rôle, undoubtedly saved the accused from the maximum

Simon, said to be the organizer of the entire party.

'Monsieur Simon', of course, never existed except in the imagination of the accused, though the source of their inspiration was probably a good one. At the time there was nothing so illogical in the existence of this 'Simon'. With striking unanimity the accused stated that 'Simon' had been present at a meeting with Foccart in Sanguinetti's office and that he had decided to mount a psychological offensive to open de Gaulle's eyes to the danger constituted by the OAS. Foccart had asked 'Simon' if he knew of a group which could carry out the operation and it was thus that Manoury was canvassed. The story was not illogical and the support which it received from Colonel Fourcaud paid off.

It seems probable that Bastien-Thiry never knew the precise rôle played by Colonel Fourcaud in this affair. We only know that 'Germain' bitterly regretted having entrusted manufacture of the bomb to Manoury—the latter had always maintained that he was an expert in these devices, whereas in fact he knew nothing at all about them and had to use the services of a mysterious expert who came straight out of Fourcaud's occurrer's hat.

The explanation of the failure of the Pont-sur-Seine attempt is not to be sought in the incompetence or mendacity of some individual; it is to be found in the mind of Colonel Fourcaud who betrayed nobody while betraying everybody.

One final detail to illustrate the rôle played by Colonel Fourcaud at this period. An OAS staff meeting was held in Algiers, as early as August, at which Colonel Godard proposed (the minutes of the meeting exist) that a 'chief' be appointed in France to head all the organisations; he put forward officially the name of Colonel Fourcaud. Godard even sent a long report to Salan in which he guaranteed Fourcaud's loyalty. Salan, who mistrusted the secret service on principle, refused and Fourcaud's OAS career ended there.

Godard's report was dated 20 November 1961—two months after Pont-sur-Seine.

CHAPTER 15

Runners

When Martial de Villomandy pressed the demoniac button of a bomb which might have upset French policy for a long time to come, the fate of Algeria had apparently been decided. By the referendum of 8 January 1961 the principle of self-determination for the Algerian people and the establishment of an executive in Algiers had been accepted. Pursuing his policy of accelerated disengagement, de Gaulle had opened official talks with the Algerian rebels, first in Evian, then in Luceria.

In fact, on coming to power in 1958, even while giving his solemn promise that Algeria would remain French, he had already established secret contact with these same rebels in Tunis. The left hand did not know what the right hand was doing.

Oddly enough, however, one of his problems was the money required for this policy. Under no circumstances could the national accounts include a heading: 'Contacts with the Algerian rebels.' He decided, therefore, to use the secret vote, discreetly entitled 'Special unaccounted funds'. When he opened the till, however, he found that his predecessors in the Prime Minister's office had emptied it. The funds had been used up completely but, since they were 'unaccounted', no one could tell at that.

In fact every year a bizarre, long-established ceremony, generally unknown to the public, takes place in the Prime Minister's study. A great log fire crackles in the huge fireplace. The master of the house receives a group of mysterious functionaries whose duty it is, each in their respective ministry, to keep the accounts of the secret funds. Each has noted outgoings and receipts in his own fair hand. Entries are, for instance: 'Paid to Colonel X—10,000 frs' or 'Paid to Ambassador Y—150,000 frs'. Each of these functionaries is bearing a fully up-to-date list of all monies disbursed. The Prime Minister, flanked by the holders of the accounts, then makes a little speech on the following lines:

'Gentlemen, I have assembled you so that you may present to me accounts showing the use made of the special funds placed at the dis-