

His only regret—not to have killed de Gaulle

## The real Jackal

By Ted Morgan

PARIS. On the dust jacket of my edition of Frederick Forsyth's "The Day of the Jackal" (now a major motion picture starring Edward Fox) is the following summary:

"His mission: kill President Charles de Gaulle.

"His code name: Jackal.

"His price: half a million dollars.

"His demand: total secrecy, even from his employers."

The blurb goes on to describe the Jackal as "a tall, blond Englishman with opaque gray eyes—a killer at the top of his grisly profession."

Now it happens that the real "Jackal," that is, the man who really tried to kill de Gaulle, is a short, bespectacled, baldish Frenchman with clear blue eyes and the candid, pink-cheeked face of an aging choirboy. His code name was Max, his price was not a penny, and his demand was to put the army in power and keep Algeria French. His real name is Alain de Bougrenet de la Tocnaye. Like the Jackal's, his assassination attempt failed, but unlike the Jackal, he was not killed. He was tried, sentenced to death, pardoned, then amnestied in 1968. He now lives quietly in a two-room bachelor apartment in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower and operates a small trucking firm. I met him recently through friends. Annoyed at the mixture of fact and fiction in "The Jackal," which describes de la Tocnaye's attempt as a prelude to the hiring of the Jackal, he agreed to tell his story "to set the record straight." The point to remember is that the "Petit Clamart" attempt led by de la Tocnaye and graphically described in the novel really happened, but that after its failure, no further attempts to recruit assassins, domestic or foreign, were made. Since fiction borrows from reality, I have returned the compliment by borrowing some of Mr. Forsyth's chapter headings.

### 1. Anatomy of a crime

Aug. 22, 1962, was a cool, overcast day in Paris, more like autumn than summer. That morning, General de Gaulle came into the city from his country retreat at Colombey-les-deux-Eglises to preside over a Cabinet meeting. For some time now, ever since a bomb buried in a pile of sand had gone off along his route, without doing any damage, he had been making the trip by car and helicopter: driving from Colombey 40 miles to the airport of Saint-Dizier, flying 150 miles to the military airport of Villacoublay, and driving with a light escort the eight miles from Villacoublay to the Elysée Palace.

The main topic under discussion at the Cabinet

Ted Morgan is a veteran newspaperman, long a resident of France.



Alain de la Tocnaye revisits the scene of his 1962 attempt to assassinate de Gaulle.





Substance and shadow: Alain de Bougrenet de la Tocnaye, who was freed under a general amnesty in 1968 and today operates a trucking company in Paris, holds the gun he carried during his 1962 attempt to assassinate President de Gaulle. Below, actor Edward Fox as the killer in "The Day of the Jackal," the film based on the abortive plot.



## The plot's co-leader, a brilliant military engineer, went before a firing squad

meeting was still the Algerian question. Algeria had declared its independence from France in July, after an eight-year colonial war, but the country was in a state of confusion, and there were hundreds of thousands of French residents to repatriate. The Cabinet meeting ended in the late afternoon, and the general decided to return to Colombey. At 7:35 P.M. the gates of the presidential palace swung open and two black Citroëns followed by two motorcycle policemen drove out.

Five minutes later, a man calling himself Didier was summoned to the telephone of a cafe in the suburb of Meudon. Didier's caller told him that de Gaulle was in the back seat of a Citroën DS 19, license plate 5249 HU 75, with Madame de Gaulle at his side; the military chauffeur Marroux was at the wheel, and next to him sat de Gaulle's son-in-law and aide-de-camp, Col. Alain de Bois-sieu. In a second black DS 19 were a driver, the military doctor Degas, and two "gorillas" or security agents named Puissant and Djouher. These were followed by two policemen riding Triumph motorcycles.

There are two routes from the Elysée to Villacoublay airport. The first is to follow the right bank of the Seine, cross the Sèvres bridge, and go through the Meudon woods. The second goes past the Invalides, up the Avenue du Maine, into Route 306 through the Porte de Chatillon and past the Petit Clamart crossroads. Five minutes after his first call, Didier received a second call telling him that the presidential party had taken the second route.

Didier left the cafe and stood on the sidewalk, waving a newspaper. Twelve men came out of a nearby building and drove in four cars to the Petit Clamart crossroads, at the end of a long, straight stretch of highway called the Avenue de la Libération, heavily traveled, treeless and lined with one-story houses and a few shops. Didier parked his car, crossed the Avenue de la Libération and stood at a bus stop. A Peugeot van parked near him. Two hundred yards further on, a Renault van parked alongside a hedge, headed away from Paris. The last car, a black Citroën with a white top, parked in a side street at right angles to the Avenue de la Libération, 300 yards from the bus stop where Didier stood. The Citroën was driven by a short, fair-haired man who called himself Max. He and the two other men in the car lowered the windows and inspected the sub-machine guns at their sides.

At 8:10 P.M., under a gray drizzle, Didier saw the presidential motorcade approaching and waved his outstretched newspaper. Poor visibility prevented the driver of the Renault van 200 yards up the road from seeing the signal. Seconds later, he saw two black cars about 30 yards away coming up fast and he shouted to the two men in the back of the van: "Open up." The men fired their light machine guns as de Gaulle's car passed in front of them, and continued firing after it as it sped away.

Up the road, Max, hearing the first burst, was certain he had enough time to maneuver his car into position across the Avenue de la Libération and block the general's vehicle. But because of the delay resulting from the failure to see the signal, Max pulled out from the cross street only to see de Gaulle's car race by, followed by the escort

vehicle. Deciding to give chase, Max slipped in between the escort vehicle and the motorcycle cops. The gunman beside him fired a burst as the car swung into line. The rear window of de Gaulle's car shattered, and the long, familiar silhouette dropped out of sight. "You got him," Max cried.

Max, his foot pressed to the floor, tried to pass the escort vehicle and overtake the general, but his car, stolen a few days before, did not have enough power. At the Villacoublay turnoff, he saw a police roadblock. There was one more small side street to the right he could take. He turned on two wheels, at 60 miles an hour, and got back to Paris before the police had time to set up checkpoints.

### 2. Anatomy of a manhunt

In the apartment of a woman friend in Passy, Max heard the flash on the radio—de Gaulle had narrowly escaped an assassination attempt. As he got into his helicopter at Villacoublay, the general had said: "This time, gentlemen, it was tangential." The presidential Citroën had been struck by six bullets, two in the blowout-proof tires, one through the rear license plate that spent itself in the back-seat upholstery, one through the small panel concealing the gas-tank cap that ricocheted from the trunk to the back seat, one that hit the right front door, and the one that had struck the rear window.

Max started playing "if." If Didier had been closer to give the signal, if they had gotten the Sturmgewehr submachine guns the O.A.S.\* had promised, if he had had a Jaguar instead of a heap running on one cylinder, if they had used the Peugeot van to catch the convoy in a cross fire instead of as a reserve vehicle . . .

Max got rid of the stolen Citroën and checked with the other members of his group, who had all returned safely to Paris. They went into hiding, and began preparing their escape to Spain. By this time, there were police roadblocks all over France. Early in September, a minor member of the group, a young army deserter named Magade, was hitchhiking from Marseilles to Paris after trying unsuccessfully to run the Spanish border. He was traveling with papers under his own name. Magade, whose name was on a list of deserters, was arrested at a police checkpoint in the Rhône valley. When the police questioned him, they treated him like a delinquent, contemptuously. His vanity was piqued, he could not help blurting out: "You shouldn't talk to me like that. I was at the Petit Clamart." The police, seeing they had a garrulous customer on their hands, promised Magade partial immunity. He gave away the other members of the group.

On Sept. 5, Max, still in Paris, had lunch with another member of the group, who, as an act of defiance, continued to drive a white Chevrolet with Algiers license plates. After lunch, at 5 P.M., they were driving in Montmartre when the white Chevrolet was blocked in a narrow street and surrounded by police. Two weeks after the attempt against de Gaulle, Commissioner Bouvier, head of the anti-O.A.S. squad, had caught all but the three members of the group who had fled abroad.

Max turned out to be a 35-year-old army lieu-

\**Organisation de l'Armée Secrète*, a right-wing clandestine group of soldiers and civilians dedicated to keeping Algeria French by any means, including terrorism and political assassination.





The movie de Gaulle (played by Adrien Cayla) stands at attention outside the Gare de Montparnasse, the site of the climactic assassination attempt in "The Day of the Jackal." Below, the real de Gaulle arrives at his village church in Colombey-les-deux-Eglises in August, 1962, a week after the actual attempt on his life.

tenant who had gone underground after serving four years in Algeria, Alain de Bougrenet de la Tocnaye. Didier, identified by Magade, thanks to photographs supplied by Military Security, was Lieut. Col. Jean-Marie Bastien-Thiry, one of the most brilliant French military engineers, credited with an important part in designing the French guided missile SS11. In the French press, he was sometimes referred to as "the French von Braun." He had never seen combat and had never fired a weapon except at target practice.

That the two leaders of a gangland-style rub-out of General de Gaulle should turn out to be two respected career officers, trained in a rigid tradition of discipline and obedience to the state, was not the least surprising aspect of the Petit Clamart. Bastien-Thiry and de la Tocnaye were sentenced to death by a military court in March, 1963. Bastien-Thiry was executed by a firing squad 10 days later, but de la Tocnaye's sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. In 1968, one of the consequences of the "failed revolution" of students and workers was amnesty for all political prisoners. De la Tocnaye was freed by the man he had tried to kill after serving 5½ years of his life sentence.

### 3. Anatomy of a political assassin

Alain de la Tocnaye is a man of mild appearance. He treats people with old-fashioned courtesy, kissing ladies' hands and wearing a hat in order to doff it. He could easily play an 18th-century marquis, powdered and bewigged, in a costume drama. Violence and bravado are the last traits his appearance suggests.

Yet the line of this man's life intersected at

one point with the line of a man he had never previously met, General de Gaulle, and at the point of intersection, at the Petit Clamart on Aug. 22, 1962, one tried to kill the other. Thousands of other Frenchmen were virulently opposed to General de Gaulle's Algerian policy, but none of them chose political assassination as their form of protest. There were also those, and some of them testified at his trial, who approved of what de la Tocnaye had done but who would never have done it themselves.

In Alain de la Tocnaye, family background, character and circumstance were combined in a way that eventually led him to commit one of the most shocking crimes imaginable—the attempted murder of the chief of state.

The de la Tocnays are an old family of Breton nobility through which there runs a current of rebelliousness. One of Alain de la Tocnaye's ancestors fought in a 15th-century rebellion against the Valois king Charles VI. Another was the Breton leader Charette, who led an uprising against the leaders of the French Revolution, and who was captured and executed in 1796. Alain de la Tocnaye was brought up to respect his Celtic origins and the celebrated dissidents in his family.

An only son, he grew up in an austere, tradition-bound, "old France" environment, where there was more respect for the past than for the present. Even as a youth, he says, he was convinced of the "moral decadence" of his own time, and felt an intense longing for the Middle Ages, for the lost era of knights and builders of cathedrals, of man-to-man combat and disinterested sacrifice, of feudal privileges and a living faith, of stained-glass saints and pious artisans.

The de la Tocnays are a military family. Three  
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# Jackal

(Continued from Page 9)

of his ancestors fought in the Crusades, and his grandfather and great-grandfather were generals. His father, however, rebelled against family tradition and became a chemist. In 1936, at the time of the Popular Front, the left-wing coalition, his father, who had founded a small chromium-plating factory, became active in right-wing movements. When the workers started occupying factories, the father got some dynamite and prepared to blow up his plant rather than let the workers take over. His was one of the few factories in Paris that was not occupied.

This is the sort of man his father was: One winter morning he saw a beggar shivering in the street and gave him his overcoat. The next day, he saw the same beggar, shivering again, without the overcoat. Enraged, he pummeled the beggar.

Through the chemistry of acquired influences and inherited traits, Alain de la Tocnaye developed a Manichaean sense of order. His mind knew no gray zones or ambiguities. He worshiped honor and consistency. To him, nothing was more serious than giving one's word. His greatest contempt was reserved for "men like radishes, who are red on the outside and white on the inside." He was drawn to simple solutions, and one of the lessons he learned from his father was that violence or the threat of violence was effective.

He was quixotic in his longing for a system that could never be resurrected, a government of aristocrats, decentralized, feudal, based on merit in battle. His view of history was that "it is made by a few men and a few ideas. The masses don't count, they are always manipulated." He was at the same time ready to give himself entirely to a cause, and was against all isms—royalism, Bonapartism, Jacobinism, Socialism, Marxism, Communism, liberalism and, above all, Gaullism. The intensity of his commitment would make his reaction to what he considered betrayal all the more passionate.

In the midst of growing up, he was traumatized by the French defeat of 1940. The

shame of the debacle, the shame of the rout, were concentrated in a single image, which he says flashed before his mind once again on the evening of the Petit Clamart: an unarmed colonel riding a woman's bicycle away from the front.

"I wept with rage," he says, "when I saw French soldiers decorated for having retreated with their weapons. Our country home was occupied by German aviators. When I saw the Germans, I saw an army. They were always very correct. They stood at attention when they came to visit my grandfather's Napoleonic collection."

"At that time, I admit it, I was drawn to fascism. You see, I hate losers. I wanted a strong government à la Salazar [Dr. Antonio de Oliveira Salazar, dictator of Portugal from 1932 to 1968]. I saw it as the last chance for a defeated Europe, even though I knew that it could lead to ruin."

**I**T was then, when Alain de la Tocnaye was 14, that de Gaulle first came to his attention. The general, in his celebrated June 18 appeal, said that "France has lost a battle but France has not lost the war." De la Tocnaye listened to the speech with his father, who told him: "Never believe that man; he's a demagogue consumed by ambition."

"My hostility to de Gaulle dates from that day," de la Tocnaye says. "I didn't like it that a man in England was telling us what to do. To say those things from the safety of unoccupied England seemed to me a form of cowardice. And when he came back in 1944, there was a terrible repression. Forty thousand so-called collaborators were shot, and maybe 10 per cent of them deserved to be."

After the war, Alain de la Tocnaye became a gentleman farmer, near Mont-Saint-Michel, in his native Brittany. He married, had two children and specialized in the importation of Danish pigs. From his rural retreat, he watched in impotent rage as France gave up Indochina. The abandonment of France's colonial empire seemed a defeat he could help forestall, to make up for having been too young in 1940. In 1956, he volun-

teered for service in Algeria, joining the regular army.

"I was hoping we could keep Algeria," he recalls. "The Algerians did not want independence right away; they would have waited. But we did everything to give it up." On June 4, 1958, de la Tonnaye saw the commander of French troops in Algeria, General Raoul Salan, acclaimed by a dense crowd in the Algiers Forum, step back to give way to General de Gaulle, who opened his arms and uttered the four famous words: "Je vous ai compris." De Gaulle returned to power with the help of the army and made solemn promises to keep Algeria French.

"I knew it was a trap," de la Tonnaye says. "De Gaulle wanted to liquidate the French empire. He was sawing off the branch we were sitting on." In his outpost in the mountains of Kabylia, de la Tonnaye claims he received written orders to organize plebiscites and return a 90 to 95 per cent majority in favor of de Gaulle. Helicopters, he says, picked up sealed urns that contained the votes of babies who had voted with their mothers and dead Moslems who had cast 10 votes.

#### 4. Anatomy of a plot

By 1961, it was clear to everyone that de Gaulle intended to put an end to the Algerian war, which he felt was destroying France. Four generals in Algiers staged a Putsch. De la Tonnaye at once wired his support and told his commanding officer that he was resigning from the army. "It was then I crossed the Rubicon," he says. "I was like a medieval knight breaking his sword." The Putsch failed

two days later, and three of the four renegade generals were arrested. To de la Tonnaye, this meant that the struggle could not be won in Algeria. He came to the conclusion that the only solution was the physical elimination of de Gaulle.

"Now to me," he explains, "the Thomist" theory of tyrannicide is a joke. I believe much more simply that when a man is in your way, kill him. I have no compunctions about eliminating a particularly dangerous man. Killing Pompidou or one of your American Presidents would serve no purpose; they would simply be replaced by someone else. But de Gaulle embodied a policy; he was irreplaceable; killing him meant killing his program and saving Algeria.

"I also believe that when the law is a justification of the *fait accompli*, as it was in the case of de Gaulle's return to power, political assassination is perfectly normal. What is such a government but revolution that has succeeded by illegal means? We had reached a point where the guns were going off by themselves. Killing de Gaulle was only the first step; we would have proceeded with a *coup d'état*. We had our cabinet already picked, and the army was with us. We were ready to arrest de Gaulle's principal collaborators, seize the principal government buildings and the television and radio stations."

De la Tonnaye went into hiding and became a member of an O.A.S. cell in Algiers. One of his first underground acts was to write General de

\*Saint Thomas Aquinas's theory that killing a tyrant is a morally justified act.

Gaulle a letter announcing his intention to kill him. He was later told on the best authority that the general had received the letter, which said: "Now that you have betrayed the army and the French people and given away Algeria, the only solution I see left is to kill you, and that is what I propose to do. You call yourself the Guide of the French people, but you are a bad Guide, and in any case it does not take a man of great morality to be the head of such a people."

"I like to announce my colors," says de la Tonnaye. The letter helps explain the hidden motives that may have determined de la Tonnaye, given the sort of man he was, bred on family traditions of dissidence, at the same time rebellious and hungry for authority, admiring the manorial justice of the Middle Ages, intransigent, extreme, and attaching an almost mystical importance to the pledged word.

In this context, a friend of mine who dabbles in psychoanalysis has suggested that de la Tonnaye transposed the Oedipal relationship to the betrayal of the nation by its leader. According to this facile but tempting theory, what was de Gaulle but a father figure, who called himself the Guide (a symbol de la Tonnaye accepted, since in his letter he said: "You were a bad Guide")? The chief of state was the father, and the nation, symbolized by the female figure of Marianne, the republic, was the mother. The nation's most cherished son, whose function it was to protect her under the father's orders, was the army. But the father, in abandoning Algeria, had betrayed the mother and made the army impotent by preventing it from accomplishing its mission of protection. While the army was winning on the battlefield in Algeria, de Gaulle was making secret deals with the Algerian rebels to end the war. De la Tonnaye, the son, the army officer, betrayed and made impotent by the father, carried out his Oedipal mission by deciding to kill his father to save his mother and recover his potency. It is significant that the image that flashed before his eyes on the night of the Petit Clamart was one of double impotence — an unarmed officer (first impotence), riding a woman's bicycle (second impotence). It is also significant that in the standard interpretation of the myth, Oedipus's marriage to his mother is synonymous

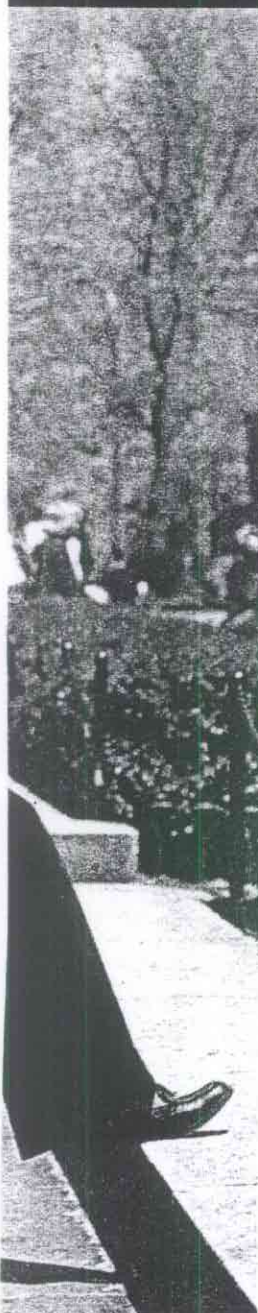


Louis de la Tonnaye, grandfather of Alain, with his collection of military medals and mementos of Napoleon III.



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De la Tonnaye was disappointed by what he found in the O.A.S. It seemed made up largely of second-rate hoodlums, chronic conspirators, and dilettantes who bragged about their achievements to B-girls in night clubs. He was disgusted by the "puerile terrorism" of the O.A.S., the plastic bombs and the killing of helpless Moslems. He kept insisting that "we must strike at the head."

His clandestine activities were interrupted in June, 1961, when his hiding place was given away to the police by a rival O.A.S. clan and he was caught and shipped to the Santé Prison in Paris. Now, to escape from Santé Prison is unheard of, and in any case, since he was not charged with anything more serious than "irregular absence" from the army, de la Tonnaye was sure of a suspended or light sentence. But his Scarlet Pimpernel side prevailed.

Only members of the family could obtain permanent visitors' permits. There was a small office to the right of the main gate, like a concierge's loge, where visitors left their identity cards and had their permits marked with a crayon. In Cell Block 6, where de la Tonnaye was awaiting trial with other political prisoners, the guard on duty kept the permit and returned it when the visitor left.

Permanent visitors' permits were delivered by the examining magistrate, a colonel. A young woman friend of de la Tonnaye pleaded with the colonel for two permits for relatives too old to come and ask for the permits themselves. The "organization" forged identity cards bearing the names of the fictitious relatives on the permits.

On Jan. 31, 1962, de la Tonnaye's "uncle" came to visit him. During visiting hours, from 2 to 5 P.M., the visitor was allowed to be alone in a cell with the inmate. The cell-block guard sat at a desk down a flight of corkscrew stairs. The "uncle" left his ID card at the gate and handed his permit to the cell-block guard. Under his coat (visitors were seldom searched), he had a makeup kit and a pair of elevator shoes.

With a few strokes of eyebrow pencil, a false mustache, the shoes and the "uncle's" hat and dark glasses, de la Tonnaye was a different man. When the guard came to unlock the cell at 4:50 P.M., de la Tonnaye had the second permit in his pocket and was

sitting with his back to the cell door, pretending to write something to avoid turning around so the guard would get a direct look at him. "This is the address you wanted," he said and handed the paper to the "uncle," who left and went downstairs to reclaim his permit, leaving the cell door open.

De la Tonnaye hid in a recess in the stairwell until the guard was occupied and got past him to find himself face to face with a second guard. "Are you a visitor?" the guard asked. "Yes, I'm Lieutenant de la Tonnaye's cousin," he replied, showing his permit. A heavy iron key turned in a lock and he was out of Cell Block 6, leaving behind the "uncle," who was still occupied in retrieving his permit. There were five more control points before reaching the courtyard. De la Tonnaye walked slowly to give his



De la Tonnaye and his book: "How I Didn't Kill de Gaulle."

"uncle" time to catch up. He was in the courtyard, wondering what to do next, when the "uncle" came running behind him, saying: "Don't trouble yourself, my dear friend, I will get your identity card." He disappeared into the little office, and when he came out handed de la Tonnaye the forged ID card he had brought with him. They passed the final control at the postern without any problem. De la Tonnaye asked the guard at the Santé door for the time, shook hands with his "uncle," and walked away.

A few days later, the prison director received a letter postmarked London that said: "I regret that I could not salute you before leaving, but since my doctor recommended a



change of air, I took the first opportunity that came along." Again, the juvenile Scarlet Pimpernel side. As a result of his escape, visits in cells at Santé were replaced by visits across grilles.

De la Tonnaye was not in London, but in an apartment not far from the Santé, plotting de Gaulle's assassination with another officer he had met through the "organization" — Bastien-Thiry, who told him on their first meeting: "I think we both have the same determination to put an end to the harm de Gaulle is doing."

Bastien-Thiry thought of himself as a staff officer of high purpose and impeccable credentials who had decided to suppress a dictator leading the country to ruin. Contrary to de la Tonnaye, he believed in the Thomist reasoning that "the tyrant is seditious . . . those who deliver the people of a tyrannical power are worthy of praise." A deeply religious man, Bastien-Thiry had confided his plan to a right-wing military chaplain, who had told him it was justified.

Bastien-Thiry's military life had been spent at the drawing board. He had served two years in Algeria, but at a guided-missile center. He had never led men into combat. He had never taken part in a military operation.

De la Tonnaye's feelings about Bastien-Thiry were mixed. "When I met him," he recalls, "I was surprised. He didn't look like a colonel, he looked like a librarian. His face was puffy. I wondered what that type of fellow was doing in our type of action. He was a brilliant engineer, a graduate of the Polytechnique, but in our operation he made terrible errors of judgment.

And he wouldn't come out and say we were going to kill de Gaulle—he preferred to call it a kidnapping." At the same time de la Tonnaye found in Bastien-Thiry a kindred spirit, another medieval knight willing to risk his neck for his convictions.

They began to meet regularly to discuss the *modus operandi*. De la Tonnaye was against bombs. "It's scientific," he said, "it's clever, but at the last moment there's always something that goes wrong." He was also against the kamikaze-style action of an isolated assassin. "I believe an officer should be at the head of his troops," he said. "I would never give an order sending a man to be killed."

They decided on an ambush along the route "Charles the Temporary," as they had begun to call him, took during his frequent trips between Colombey and the Elysée. Bastien-Thiry had informants inside the Elysée who told him de Gaulle's times of departure but not his route, which the general chose only once he was under way. An agent had to be placed at the point where the two routes diverged to let them know which one had been taken.

The next problem was finding men, weapons, cars and money. By May, they had a dozen volunteers, recruited mainly from the ranks of the O.A.S., except for three Hungarians who had fought in 1956 in the Budapest uprising against the Communist regime and were led to believe that killing de Gaulle was a way of combating international Communism.

Most notable among the recruits was Georges Watin, nicknamed "the limper" because of a childhood accident,

an ugly giant of a man, and one of Algeria's biggest landowners. He had been a member of a terrorist organization called the Red Hand and was famous in Algeria for vigilante actions against Moslems suspected of rebel sympathies. "He had a small defect," recalls de la Tonnaye; "he collected the ears of the fellaghas (rebels) he had killed and kept them in a glass jar. His fondest wish was to add de Gaulle's ears to his collection." It was Watin whose firing broke the rear window of de Gaulle's car. Despite his deformity and size, he was never captured.

In view of the sympathies the O.A.S. claimed to have within the army, the government and the business community, it is odd that the "commando" group had so much trouble finding logistic support. Months were spent finding weapons. On one occasion, four automatic weapons earmarked for the "operation" were stolen by a rival O.A.S. faction. Money from the O.A.S. treasury, supposed to be arriving from Spain, was sidetracked along the way. Bastien-Thiry, and de la Tonnaye each spent what amounted to several thousand dollars of their own to finance the operation. Cars had to be stolen because they could not afford to keep renting them.

At first, they thought their best chance was to attack the presidential convoy in Paris itself, where it respected traffic regulations. In May and June, there were a dozen abortive attempts. They either arrived too late or took the wrong route. The tactic was for two vans with machine guns in the back to start moving in traffic on the route the general was expected to take and wait for the convoy



De la Tonnaye's assassination attempt as staged in the movie "The Day of the Jackal."

to catch up. Once de la Tonnay was one car away from the general's, on the Avenue du Maine, near the Invalides, but he says he did not give the order to fire because too many bystanders would have been killed.

There were other unsuccessful attempts at the Petit Clamart and in the Meudon woods. Each time, the members of the commando group had to be rounded up, more cars had to be stolen, the weapons had to be packed, and they had to wait during interminable hours for the telephone call that was their cue. By the time of the Aug. 22 attempt, there had been 17 dress rehearsals. A feeling that it would never work had begun to undermine the group. The faith of the early days was shaken. They went through their motions mechanically. On that gray, drizzling Aug. 22, the accumulated discouragement of months may have been as important a factor in their near-miss as the weather.

### 5. Anatomy of a captured and pardoned political assassin

In September, 1962, nine months after his escape, de la Tonnay found himself once again in Santé prison. One of his visitors was Marcel, his father's butler at the family estate in the Nièvre. "I thought it was you, Monsieur Alain, when I read about it in the papers," Marcel said. "Do you remember, when you were a little boy, how you used to race your bicycle into stone walls?"

The trial began on Jan. 28, 1963, before a military court sitting in Vincennes, and lasted until March 4. The three fugitives, including Watin, were tried *in absentia*. The 10 defendants called more than 100 witnesses, and for weeks the courtroom echoed with emotional statements and the sobs of witnesses who had broken down.

De la Tonnay delivered a long philosophical treatise on the state of France and Western civilization, the army, Algeria, and his own state of mind. He quoted the 17th-century preacher and writer Bossuet: "Life is not a flowered garden where birds live in peace but a struggle in which beauty arises from sacrifice." His lawyer summed up: "What determined de la Tonnay was that in Algeria he was asked to commit perjury. [By this the lawyer meant that de la Tonnay had given his word as an officer to keep Algeria French.] He

had the reaction of an honorable man, and that is his crime — an obsolete attachment to honor."

Bastien-Thiry was more violent. His trial statement was an indictment of the Gaullist regime, and an apology for tyrannicide. He challenged de Gaulle's right to govern, calling him "the *de facto* chief of state." He claimed "the right of free citizens who are living under a dictatorship and who are no more bound by the laws of the republic than is a simple citizen who defends his sister menaced by a rapist." He compared de Gaulle to Hitler, accused him of "genocide," "treason," and "crimes against humanity."

At the same time, he continued to argue that he had only wanted to kidnap de Gaulle, and that a house had been made ready where he would have been kept under arrest and tried by a military court. "What would you have done if he had resisted?" asked one of the judges. "We would have removed his glasses and suspenders," Bastien-Thiry replied. For the only time during the trial, the courtroom rang with laughter, and de Gaulle was for a moment reduced to the status of a mere mortal.

Bastien-Thiry's lawyers are convinced that what cost him his life was not his participation in the Petit Clamart, but his arrogant censure of the regime during his trial. As one of the military judges was overheard to say: "He talked too much."

The chief prosecutor, Gert-hoffer, asked for the death sentence for Bastien-Thiry, de la Tonnay, and one other member of the group. "Bastien-Thiry," he said, "appears to have been the leader of the commandos. The crime he committed was extremely grave . . . his responsibility is crushing. My painful duty is to ask for the death sentence. Bougrenet de la Tonnay is also one of the leaders. He too is blinded by hatred . . . Against him, I also have the sad obligation, the sad duty of asking for the death sentence."

On March 4, after two hours and 40 minutes of deliberation, the military judges, who ranged in rank from sergeant-major to major general, brought in death sentences for Bastien-Thiry, de la Tonnay, and a third member of the group, Jacques Prevost, as well as for the three fugitives.

De la Tonnay and the others were transferred to death row at the Fresnes prison, which, in an uncon-



cious gem of black humor, is called the National Center for Orientation. He decided that even if he did not have much longer to live, he would not allow himself to appear discouraged. "I have always admired the British Indian officers," he says; "they were always, how do you say it—very smart. At the C.N.O. they wouldn't let us have neckties, so I made my own out of curtain strips. We had good treatment, our meals were served by a convict in a white coat. But we had to shave in front of a guard, and the light was kept on in our cells all night. You know the old story that the condemned man is supposed to get his last wish? I decided that when they asked me what I wanted I would say: To learn Chinese."

On March 8, a lawyer representing the three condemned men was received by General de Gaulle. The lawyer spoke for 20 minutes. He said he hoped one military man could find it in his heart to pardon other military men. De Gaulle listened and did not say a single word.

On March 11 at 4 A.M., de la Tournaye in his half-sleep heard police sirens and knew what they meant. Soon he heard the sound of steps in the long corridor, coming closer, then passing his cell. They had come for Bastien-Thiry, who was taken under heavy guard to Ivry fortress, where he was tied to a post with his hands behind his back and shot by a firing squad at 6:46.

De la Tournaye's death sentence had been commuted to life imprisonment. He is convinced that he owes his pardon to the letter he wrote de Gaulle. "De Gaulle knew where I stood," he says, "but Bastien-Thiry operated in the shadows."

Sent to the maximum security prison of Ensisheim on the lower Rhine, de la Tournaye spent 18 months in solitary confinement. Because he had not been given the status of a political prisoner, he refused to mix with the other convicts. He announced that he wanted to study law and was allowed to have textbooks and a work table and to keep his light on until 10 P.M. It was at Ensisheim that he passed his first exams. Examiners came from Strasbourg University to question him in his cell.

There was no escaping from Ensisheim. The warden, on the theory that an O.A.S. commando might try to rescue him, had cables drawn

across the top of the prison courtyard to prevent a helicopter landing. After 18 months, he was transferred to Saint-Martin-de-Ré prison, on an island off the coast of Brittany. In 1968, with more than five years of prison behind him and no hope of parole, de la Tournaye began to crack. By this time there were only 10 O.A.S. leaders left in prison, four of whom had been at the Petit Clamart, "and I knew I would be the last. I didn't want anyone to see me break, so I asked the warden to put me in solitary."

In May the students revolted, the Sorbonne was occupied, workers all over

France went on strike, and the Gaullist regime was nearly toppled. De Gaulle made a secret trip to Germany to see Gen. Jacques Massu, the former head of the paratroops in Algeria who had been transferred to command French occupation forces in West Germany. In return for the promise of Massu's support, de Gaulle granted amnesty to the last O.A.S. prisoners. De la Tournaye was freed in June, thanks to the people he most detests, the ones he calls "leftist agitators, terrorists of the Fourth International, overexcited adolescents who believe in nothing."

A year later, a book recounting his experiences and called "How I Did Not Kill de Gaulle," was published. De la Tournaye threw himself into its promotion, traveling across France to sign copies in bookstores. He gave a press conference, during which he was asked: "Did you consider when you carried out your operation that Madame de Gaulle was also in the car?" Unrepentant, he replied: "She married him for better or for worse, didn't she?" His publisher, alas, went bankrupt.

Today de la Tournaye is a normal citizen with normal rights, except that he has lost his military pension and was

reduced to a private's rank. His first job after leaving prison and before starting his trucking firm was training salesgirls in a big department store. "They expected a dangerous gorilla, but they saw I was urbane," he says, "and soon they were asking me to autograph my book." He has never received an insulting letter. People tend to feel he has paid his debt to society. When he founded his trucking company, "because I wanted to be my own boss," he had no trouble obtaining financing from banks. He was listed as a good credit risk. He remains unrepentant. "My only regret is not to have killed de Gaulle," he says. "If one does things according to one's conscience, why should one feel repentant?"

At the same time he doesn't think he will try to act on his political convictions again. He is fed up with France, "a nation of lawyers and shopkeepers. I have little respect for them. They have lost the last flicker of heroism. I like a man like Lafayette, who was an aristocrat and fought for freedom, because he understood that the Americans were trying to found an aristocratic republic. But the French today have base instincts, they are easy to seduce, they have a past but no future. They are obsessed with their little privileges. I fought for them but I want nothing more to do with them."

Recently, he returned to the Petit Clamart, where the Avenue de la Libération has been renamed Avenue du Général de Gaulle. "You can't win," he said. The café "Au Trianon" has been renamed "Au Trianon de la Fusillade." De la Tournaye went in, ordered a glass of wine, and asked with a falsely innocent air:

"Say, why did you call your café that? Was it the Germans who killed somebody during the war?"

The café proprietor, in shirt-sleeves, was indignant. "The Germans! It's when they shot de Gaulle."

"You don't say. When was that?"

"Where have you been? In '62. They shot up my whole terrace. They reimbursed me. I should add. But the cops wouldn't leave me alone. Must be 3,000 customers have asked me why the café's called that."

"You're begging the question by calling it that," de la Tournaye said.

"It's good for business," the café proprietor replied. ■



"Max." photographed in prison two weeks after his attempt to kill de Gaulle failed