

# Behind the Unplugging

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*"When you work for an intelligence agency, sometimes you have to use means that are not within the normal run-of-the-mill business for the average individual."*

Roger DeLouette

On April 5, 1971, an alert young woman customs inspector discovered 96 pounds of contraband heroin hidden inside a Volkswagen camper bus being imported into the United States from France. The police promptly arrested Roger Xavier Leon DeLouette, apparently a French tourist, who had come to Port Elizabeth, N.J. to claim the vehicle.

The seizure of \$12 million worth of narcotics—and the arrest of the smuggler—was hailed as a major victory in the war against the drug traffic. But as it unraveled, the case would prove to have a deep and dramatic dimension that transcends the ordinary annals of crime.

For DeLouette, a distinguished-looking man of 48

who received a minimum five-year sentence last week, worked for the Service de Documentation Exterieur et de Contre-Espionage (SDECE), the French equivalent of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. And his disclosures, contained in a 368-page interrogation transcript now public, could have far-reaching consequences.

His disclosure that he was functioning under official auspices injects an element of doubt into the Nixon administration's claim that the French government is giving the United States its "fullest cooperation" in the struggle against the illicit narcotics trade.

DeLouette's participation in the drug traffic has also touched off internal squabbles in France among political rivals who periodically point to the repeated scandals involving SDECE to revive long-standing grudges against each other.

Above all, the French agent's revelations underline the extent to which France's official spy organi-

zation has been engaged in narcotic, counterfeit currency and other shady operations, often for political purposes.

Originally called the Bureau Central de Renseignement et d'Action (B.C.R.A.), the espionage outfit was founded during World War II to manage the French resistance against the German occupation of France. In later years, however, it gradually took on an assortment of other activities.

According to Pierre Thyraud de Vosjoli, the SDECE representative in Washington until 1963, the organization was responsible during the Algerian war for the assassination of Algerian nationalists in Switzerland. Vosjoli has also alleged that SDECE agents killed Enrico

Mattiel, the Italian petroleum magnate, whose North African oil holdings threatened French interests. Mattiel died when his private airplane crashed outside Milan in October 1962.

A major scandal trashed SDECE's reputation in 1965, when the organization's agents were implicated in the kidnapping of Mehdi Ben Barka, a leftist Moroccan politician, who had reportedly been earmarked for liquidation by figures close to Hassan II, the king of Morocco.

The disappearance of Ben Barka focused attention on Jacques Foccart, one of de Gaulle's senior aides, who was charged with having assigned various underworld characters to SDECE. Vosjoli has also accused Foccart

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of working for the Soviet secret service.

Soon after his arrest last year, DeLouette said under questioning that his narcotics smuggling gambit had been organized by SDECE's chief of operations, Col. Paul Fournier, who was later identified as Paul Ferrer. A New Jersey grand jury indicted Fournier, but the espionage official refused to face trial. Fournier also refused to take a lie-detector test.

The DeLouette affair, when it broke, inevitably

aroused political passions in France. Col. Roger Barberot, a leftwing Gaullist with intelligence links, asserted that SDECE was deeply involved in narcotics and other operations. His charge was echoed by the prestigious Gen. Pierre Billotte, de Gaulle's wartime chief of staff, who called for the organization's dissolution.

In reply, French Defense Minister Michel Debre defended SDECE, which his ministry manages. Debre claimed that DeLouette had "hurled grave accusations

against his superiors to "lighten the sentence that awaits him." Debre further compared DeLouette's accusations to the stuff from which "fictional serials" are made.

As DeLouette related his story during three days of interrogation in Newark, N.J. last month, he had performed part-time jobs for the French intelligence service as far back as 1946, when he was still in the army.

During those years, DeLouette said, he learned of several of the agency's func-

tions. In 1953, he recalled, SDECE employees in French Indochina transported opium by helicopter "in order to obtain money for operations about which I don't know anything."

On another occasion, DeLouette recollected, he observed intelligence agents at the SDECE headquarters in Paris walking on counterfeit Guinean currency to make it look old. The currency was put into circulation in Guinea, he said, and "the operation was a success."

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children. He also had a mistress, Marie-Jose Robert, who was pregnant at the time of his arrest.

If his testimony can be believed, DeLouette's desperate need for money made him available for unsavory SDECE assignments. As a consequence, he said, he was asked in mid-1970 by Col. Fournier to undertake the job of smuggling more than \$17,000 in counterfeit American dollars from France into Italy.

The aim of this operation, as DeLouette explained it, was to plant the counterfeit currency on an American living in Algeria and alert the Algerian police to its whereabouts to have the American eliminated. The possession of counterfeit currency carries a death sentence in Algeria.

The currency was delivered to DeLouette by a SDECE employee at a rendezvous in a Paris cafe. DeLouette then went to Modane, a Riviera town on the French side of the Italian border, where he was given further instructions by another operative by the name of Marcel.

But when he reached his contact point in Italy, De-

Louette testified, he was met by an Italian agent who advised him that the operation had been cancelled. DeLouette thereupon returned to Paris, where Fournier told him to hold on to the money for a subsequent trip.

DeLouette put the counterfeit dollars in a bureau drawer in his mistress's apartment, where it was found after his arrest in New Jersey in April.

In the meantime, according to his testimony, DeLouette's financial condition was deteriorating. As he told it, his requests for SDECE jobs were repeatedly rejected until Dec. 5, 1970, when Fournier telephoned to offer him a "very special assignment which included certain risks." As DeLouette said afterward: "This was at a time when my personal situation was at its worst and when I would have accepted anything."

DeLouette related that he was told to go to Cafe de Paris on the Avenue des Champs-Elysees, where he would spot a man sitting alone with a pair of gloves placed atop a copy of Paris-Match magazine. The man, when DeLouette met him,



ROGER DELOUETTE

... the touchstone

explained the details of the assignment.

Municipal elections were soon to be held in France and, according to DeLouette's version of the explanation he was given, "some irregular means" had to be adopted to "obtain funds" for politicians associated with SDECE. The funds would be obtained by smuggling narcotics into the United States.

As DeLouette told it, the plan was to smuggle 110 pounds of heroin into the United States concealed in a



MEHDI BEN BARKA

... vanishing act

Volkswagen camper bus, and to deliver the narcotics to an agent who would meet him at a New York hotel. In case of trouble, he said, he was told to call the SDECE representative in New York, Donald McNab.

DeLouette would be paid \$50,000 plus expenses of roughly \$6,000 for the job. He was given the expense money at another cafe rendezvous three weeks later.

In thrifty French style, DeLouette purchased the Volkswagen bus in Switzerland in order to get a 20 per

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cent discount. Not long afterward, he related, he received instructions from Fournier to proceed to the Rambouillet forest outside Paris to meet a man in a new green Chrysler-Simca.

The contact, DeLouette recalled, was a dark, sloppily dressed man who spoke in a lower-class Parisian accent. The man removed the panels of the Volkswagen bus, and transferred 96 of the 110 pounds of heroin into the vehicle, since the entire quantity would not fit.

DeLouette then drove the bus to Le Havre to turn it over to a shipping agent, Pacific Intermountain Express, for transport to Port Elizabeth, N.J. But when he reached Le Havre, DeLouette faced a dilemma. The freighter he had expected was delayed. He would have to leave the vehicle in storage for a week.

Calculating that he would arouse suspicion by returning to Paris with the bus, DeLouette left it at a Le Havre warehouse. On Sunday, April 4, he flew to New York. Next day, he went to Port Elizabeth to claim the vehicle.

As soon as the young woman customs inspector began examining the bus,

DeLouette perceived his potential plight. A screw was missing from the front panel behind which the heroin was hidden. The customs inspector, 21-year-old Lynn Pelletier, inserted her hand and pulled out a bag of narcotics. DeLouette was handcuffed and taken to New York to confront a French police agent, Daniel Hartwig.

On the way back to New York, DeLouette admitted to a U.S. customs agent that he had concealed various items, including a notebook and his SDECE identify card, under the carpet in his hotel room. Possibly sensing another scandal involving the French intelligence organization, Hartwig admonished DeLouette for having revealed his identify "to the Americans."

For seven months after that, U.S. Attorney Herbert J. Stern conducted an investigation that irritated the French authorities on several occasions.

The man identified by DeLouette as the SDECE agent in New York, Donald McNab, refused to appear before a federal grand jury on the grounds that, as a member of the French Consulate, he was protected by diplomatic immunity. Al-

though DeLouette named him in a lie-detector test as the organizer of the smuggling operation, Fournier also refused to face the grand jury.

On November 15, the federal grand jury returned a three-count indictment against both DeLouette and Fournier. And that triggered an ascerbic transatlantic dialogue.

Fournier, in a statement authorized by Defense Minister Debre, told Stern: "If I am guilty, Mr. Stern, prove it. And justice will take its course."

"If you are innocent, Mr. Fournier, come to this country and stand trial," replied Stern from Newark, adding: "If you are innocent, you have nothing to fear. . . . Don't hide behind an anonymous service and an international border."

Expressing surprise that he could be indicted in the United States, Fournier protested: "I have never set foot inside that country."

Responded Stern: "You were not charged with setting foot in the United States. You were charged with illegally shipping 96 pounds of pure heroin into the United States."

Fournier contended that it was his duty to France and

to SDECE to "remain anonymous," and he went on to say that "French justice, in which . . . I place primary confidence has, up to now, neither indicted me nor reproached me."

Last month, during the three-day interrogation of DeLouette, Franco-American relations appeared to be strained somewhat further in exchanges between defense counsel and Gabriel Roussel, the French examining magistrate who had come to New Jersey for the hearing.

At one point, objecting to what he apparently regarded as harassment of his client, DeLouette's lawyer said to the interpreter: "Please tell Judge Roussel . . . that he do his best not to shout, not to throw things like his glasses, and that he perhaps be more calm in asking his questions. . . ."

"I am not getting angry," answered Roussel.

In the final session at the U.S. District Court in Newark, federal Judge Frederick J. Lacey suggested that the revelations that came out of the trial resembled Frederick Forsyth's bestselling "Day of the Jackal." DeLouette had not read it but, he implied, he had lived it.